

MAURITIUS FOURTH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION

Debate No. 5 of 2009

Sitting of Tuesday 21 April 2009

**The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Louis,
at 11.30 a.m**

The National Anthem was played

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

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MAURITIUS

Fourth National Assembly

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PAPERS LAID

The Prime Minister: Sir, the Papers have been laid on the Table –

A. Prime Minister's Office -

Certificate of Urgency in respect of the following Bills –

- (a) The Hindi Pracharini Sabha (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2009);
- (b) The Electronic Transactions (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2009); and
- (c) The Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Bill (No. VI of 2009).

B. Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment -

- (a) The Annual Report of the Financial Intelligence Unit for the year 2008.
- (b) The Annual Digest of Statistics 2007.

C. Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reforms Institutions -

The Statutory Bodies Pension Funds (Amendment of Schedule) Regulations (Government Notice No. 40 of 2009).

D. Ministry of Consumer Protection and Citizens Charter -

The Rodrigues Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 8) Regulations 2009 (Government Notice No. 41 of 2009).

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

INFLATION RATE & SALARY COMPENSATION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the inflation rate for 2008-2009 and the salary compensation to be paid to employees of the public and private sectors as from 01 July 2009, he will state –

- (a) the estimate for the inflation rate, and
- (b) if Government proposes to make provision for a full salary compensation to be paid in the forthcoming budget and to introduce appropriate legislation in that respect for the private sector.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, the inflation rate for 2008/09 is estimated by the Central Statistical Office at 7 percent. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, last year, for calendar year 2008, because of the soaring energy prices and surging food prices we were expecting double digit inflation. But, we finally ended the year with a lower than double digit inflation. Similarly for the financial year 2008/09, the inflation rate will be lower than expected due to a combination of factors, including right policy approach. First, Government has in the second half of 2008, taken measures to reduce the price of flour by 15%, that

of bread of 100 gram by 5.7% and that of LPG by 5%. These reductions and their positive impact on related goods have contributed to lower the inflation rate. Moreover, due to the success of reforms, causing a record surge in foreign direct investment, the rupee did appreciate at a time when oil and food prices were surging, thus abating to some extent their impact on domestic prices. Since October of last year we have been coordinating with the Bank of Mauritius to align monetary policy with the fiscal stance of Government to stimulate demand. This has led to a cumulative drop of 150 basis points in the key repo rate of the Central Bank. This policy has also had a major impact on reducing the mortgage interest payments which have reflected on the inflation rate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as it is well-known, inflation rate differentials between countries is a major cause of loss of competitiveness. And policies to curb inflationary pressures are very often in contradiction with policies to achieve higher growth rates and higher employment. In the past year, most countries have put their policy weight on stimulating demand and growth at the risk of higher inflation. In Mauritius, we have been doing the same since June 2008 to ward off the adverse impact of the worst global economic recession since the 1930s.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have gained on many counts. In fact, along with maintaining the economy on a higher growth path, with record levels of FDI and unprecedented high levels of employment creation, we have also kept inflation under control and caused it to go down. On a financial year basis, we are anticipating inflation to go down from 8.8% in 2007/08 to in fact 6.9% in 2008/09, and we expect inflation to be at 4% at December 2009. It is clear that we are putting inflation on a definite downward trend, that is, giving greater protection to purchasing power.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, it is important to assess the global backdrop to policy decisions in the coming months. This is crucial because we are an exporting platform and tourism and textiles/clothing are very important pillars of our economy. The global economic outlook is the bleakest we have seen in the past 70 years. Exporting countries like Germany, Japan and Singapore stand to suffer the most from this global slide in demand and, Mauritius, in spite of its remarkable resilience in 2008, will have to especially watch its competitiveness. Our policy priority, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to protect employment in one of the most uncertain and precarious global situations in many decades and this is no time for policy errors. In fact, the crisis has swept the world in four phases. First, a financial turmoil; second, recessions

in developed countries, some countries even collapsing. Now, it is in the third phase which is a spread of the impact of the recession to the entire globe from developing countries to emerging economies. The fourth phase is the labor market crisis which is now unfolding. Countries around the world are losing jobs in the millions. According to the ILO, the crisis would wipe out more than 40 million jobs worldwide by the end of 2009. Here are some examples, Mr Speaker, Sir. US employers have cut more than five million jobs since the start of the recession, sending the unemployment rate to an unprecedented 8.5 per cent. And there was bad news even for people in work, since the monthly jobs data showed that employers have been cutting the number of hours available, further adding to the pressure on household budgets.

In March 2009 alone, the US lost 663,000 jobs. The unemployment rate in the US is now the highest since 1983. With companies cutting back in response to depressed demand conditions, the length of the working week fell to 33 hours in March, the lowest on record in US history.

China has already lost some 20 million jobs.

India has trimmed its workforce so far by 10 million people.

Holland is directly paying for the wages/salaries of private firms.

In Singapore, a very robust economy until recently, wages are linked to productivity, 36 percent of companies will freeze salaries this year. A few companies are planning to cut jobs, reduce temporarily pay of top management by up to 15% and by 5% for other salaried workers and even close office temporarily for one day a month and staff are being encouraged to take one additional authorized leave every month.

California – one of the richest states in the world - is resorting to drastic labour policies, including shorter work week, encouraging workers to take leave without pay and shifting to more part time employment.

In Hong Kong, companies are freezing salaries.

In Japan, employees are taking cuts in their salaries.

Reuters reported last week that a global survey showed that one quarter of the world's companies and 40 % of US companies plan to freeze salaries this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, from evidence worldwide we can see that there is a collective wisdom that the emphasis must be on saving jobs and protecting

people even if it means a cut in salaries, in hours of work, and in longer leave without pay.

We have said it last year and we need to remind ourselves that our economy is resilient but not immune. We must stand on our guard. And as the Prime Minister of Singapore has said recently, I quote:

“It is better to have your job with a lower wage than an increase in salary that undermines competitiveness and then lose your job and your salary.”

This very accurately describes the state of mind of policy-makers world wide.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is whether any country can go against this trend. So far, there is no country that we know that are taking that kind of risk especially in a world where competition is getting tighter and there is greater risk of protectionism gripping the world.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in recent years we have reformed our labour market to make it more flexible and we have reviewed the wage determination and compensation system – something which has been on the menu of Governments for many years.

In 1986, Professor Roberts and Robinson questioned the basis on which cost of living allowance is awarded.

In 1994, Mr Arai recommended the setting up of a National Pay and Productivity Council that should take into account performance in determining wage award.

In 1998, Zafar Shaheed studied the various issues and proposed a Pay Advisory Council which would make informed recommendations to the PRB and NRB on “performance-sensitive percentage increases” that would link pay determination to labour productivity.

In 2002, Professor Lim was invited by Government to conduct a study of the existing legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks governing wage determination in Mauritius. Professor Lim’s report highlights, in a very articulate manner, the various weaknesses of the current wage determination system. Some of the shortcomings are its rigidity and its lack of uniformity in basic policy fundamentals.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the established practice prior to the setting up of the National Pay Council as being to provide compensation based on the inflation of the previous year. However, all Ministers of Finance and all

Governments have also factored in the state of the economy and the ability of firms to pay compensation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, full compensation has never been provided in the past due to the need to protect jobs in the weaker sectors and the obvious tapering of wage increases granted on a sliding scale.

Since 2007, it is the National Pay Council, an independent tripartite body, established along ILO principles and standards that makes recommendations on salary compensation. In making its recommendations, the National Pay Council takes into account four specific criteria, which are in strict accordance with ILO principles -

1. Rise in consumer price index, which is a proxy for inflation.
2. National ability to pay, which is a proxy for capacity to pay.
3. National productivity and competitiveness, which is a proxy for global competitiveness.
4. Employment and unemployment rates, which is a proxy of the impact of any subsequent increase in wage on employment and unemployment.

Mr Speaker, Sir, today, the stark choice is between a reckless wage policy that will lead to massive lay-off and a prudent and responsible one that will save jobs, protect people, preserve purchasing power and protect families. We have to make the intelligent choice.

In that context, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me conclude by referring to two statements made by hon. Bérenger, Minister of Finance in 1982 and 1983. First in 1982, I quote -

“The painful choice is between protecting fully the purchasing power of those who have a job and creating jobs for the vast number of jobless.”

Let me delete “creating” and I put “preserving” and let me delete “jobless” and replace it “by those working”.

“Unfortunately, we have to strike a balance between resources required for *la relance économique* which is the key factor in the creation of jobs, and the sustainable level of the deficit.”

Second in 1983, I quote again, Mr Speaker, Sir -

“*Toute revendication déraisonnable de compensation salariale entraînera automatiquement des pertes d’emplois énormes.*”

Mr Speaker, Sir, if these two statements were true in 1982 and 1983 when there was no seismic financial crisis, no international banking cyclone, and no global economic tsunami, one can only imagine what it would be today with the longest, deepest and the broadest world recession since 1930's and the sharpest decline in global trade since the second world war.

Mr Bérenger: To start with part (a) of my question, the hon. Minister of Finance said that the Central Statistical Office estimate of inflation for 2008/2009 is 7% and then he quoted 6.9%. Can I know where that figure comes from and whether we have any estimate from the Bank of Mauritius?

Dr. Sithanen: I have rounded it to the next decimal. The actual figure which is given by the Central Statistical Office is 6.9%. Let me explain, Mr Speaker, Sir, the difference between the figure given by the CSO and the Bank of Mauritius. There are two ways of calculating inflation. One is a 12-month average that tracks what has happened over a 12-month period. This is the method that is used by the CSO and this is the method that has been used in order to award compensation until now by the NPC. However, increasingly, the Bank of Mauritius believes that they need to take, what is called year on year inflation. The difference between year on year inflation is that, for instance, you take April 2009 over April 2008 whilst the other one, you need to take April 2008 to April 2009 or April 2007 to April 2008 compared to April 2008 to April 2009. So, one, you take a 12-month average and the other one you take a one month average. Most countries in the world, Mr Speaker, Sir, including the USA, UK, Australia, they believe that inflation is a very dynamic parameter and they are using the year on year, which is, in fact, a month on month indicator of inflation to make policy decisions on monetary issues while the CSO is using the old traditional method of using an average of 10 months. In fact, that is why, I have given the CSO figure. If I were to give the figure of the Bank of Mauritius, which is year on year, in fact, the rate of inflation is about 4.2%

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, we were given a wrong figure of 7%. Will the hon. Minister of Finance agree with me that, in fact, within that figure, food inflation is more than doubled that figure and full inflation hits, first of all and above all, the poorest members of the society? Can I ask whether Government is keeping that in mind?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, since we introduced the inflation index, we have always taken into account average inflation. This and the average inflation is based not only on food prices, but also on many other prices. True it is - I think, in the first six months of this financial year -

prices did go up because of the oil crisis and also because of the food prices. Since then it has eased considerably. We have taken some policy measures, Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to support purchasing power. I indicated in my reply that we brought down the price of flour, the price of bread and the price of LPG, even though, this was not warranted by international prices. We have also brought down the price of telecommunications. This has had an impact. Interest rates also have come down. We have always taken the average inflation in order to compute the CPI Index and this is what is used as a percentage to determine wage compensation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Employers' Federation has requested *un gel de salaire*. The hon. Minister of Finance made reference to policy errors, but quoted at length on several occasions Singapore as a reference. Will he tell us whether the MEF request is Government policy and that, therefore, there will be not only no complete wage compensation, but no wage compensation at all as requested by the MEF?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain very clearly that the priority of this Government is to save jobs and to protect people. We have introduced a system that is flexible and that take into account several factors. Inflation is one of them, the capacity to pay, the competitiveness of the industry and employment and unemployment. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me be very candid with the Leader of the Opposition. This particular year, if I were to choose which of the four criteria which should drive wage compensation, I would say the potential impact of any wage policy on job losses. This is what everybody is doing across the world. Having said that, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have already replied to what the MEF has said. In fact, the president made a speech, I was there, and I said: "Look, those that can afford to pay, should pay". All of them are facing difficulties, but the degree of difficulties that they are facing varies from sector to sector. I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition will agree with me that some of the sectors that are operating in the most vulnerable part of the economy: textile, SMEs, small hotels. The objective of all policymakers across the world is to save jobs, Mr Speaker, Sir. I give the statement from the Prime Minister of Singapore. So, the policy of Government is to encourage those firms that can afford to pay. Even though it is a difficult situation, they should pay, but we need to think of those people who are likely to lose their job. There have been cases, Mr Speaker, Sir, where in the past, because of policy mistakes, 45,000 people have lost their job. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me give one figure for the enlightenment of the House. As regards female employment,

we have created 6,300 jobs for female on a yearly basis over the last three years. This figure was only 1,000 for the five years preceding 2005. I am not trying to play politics. What I am saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, reforms have yielded results for unemployment among women and for employment among women. It is the first time for ten years, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have created 19,200 jobs. We have created 36,000 jobs. The priority of priority, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to preserve this asset that we have built over the last three years, which is jobs for people, protection for our compatriots, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that the annual salary compensation has always been a minimum and until this year Government was requesting private firms who can pay to pay more than the minimum. I take not that now the language has changed completely; the stand has changed completely. What I heard the hon. Minister say is that only the firms that can pay that will pay any salary compensation. Therefore, can I interpret that as meaning that there will be no national minimum salary compensation as in Singapore and as the Mauritius Employers' Federation has requested and that it will be left to individual firms to pay any salary compensation, if any?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say three things. We have created jobs. We have created 36,000 jobs as a result of policy. Before that, unemployment was rising at an accelerated pace. Hon. Cuttaree said: « *On perdait des emplois à une vitesse vertigineuse* ». We cannot, Mr Speaker, Sir, be blamed for job losses and, at the same time, the hon. Member is trying to tell us that we should initiate policies that would actually have this impact, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are not in the business of shooting at our own foot. We are not in the business of cutting off our nose to spite our face. It is not written 'stupid' here, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me tell the hon. Member ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Sithanen: Let me tell the hon. Member, Mr Speaker, Sir, we all want employees to receive compensation. Last year, this Government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, gave 100% pay for the PRB, Mr Speaker, Sir. What we are saying, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have set up an independent tripartite forum. This is the National Pay Council. They are going to meet and they are going to decide in their own independence, taking into account these four criteria, what will happen, Mr Speaker, Sir,

and we will continue to be a responsible Government and not to have one language in the Opposition and one language in Government.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, this country will take note that we are not given any guarantee that there will be a national salary compensation. Can I ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether Government has taken into consideration, before coming to that conclusion, that for the past two years, there has not been a full salary compensation for wage earners and on top of that, this year, 1% is being deducted from their salaries?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me inform the hon. Leader of the Opposition that there were years when he was Minister of Finance. There was no recession. The sea was calm. The sun was shining. The wind was not blowing, Mr Speaker, Sir. There was no recession and yet, this same hon. Leader of the Opposition did not give a full compensation even to those people at the lowest rung of the ladder, Mr Speaker, Sir. Mr Speaker, Sir, he is trying to put words in our mouth. Neither the Prime Minister nor the Minister of Finance, nor my good friend, the Minister for Labour, has said that there were not to be compensation. He is trying to put this so that in the evening he is going to harangue the mass to get more people for 01 May. We are not saying that, Mr Speaker, Sir. What we have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is an independent institution. The Labour Party and the Alliance believe in the independence of institutions, Mr Speaker, Sir. We have set up the institution. The institution will meet ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Sithanen: The institution will meet, Mr Speaker, Sir, and they will decide in their wisdom, in their judgment and after taken into account these four factors, Mr Speaker, Sir. And let me tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Government is doing better when there is a recession battering the world than they were doing when we were in Government, when there was no recession at all, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that out there, there is the perception of *deux poids, deux mesures*. On the one hand, wage earners have 1% of their salaries deducted, and do not get adequate salary compensation. On the other hand, through the Additional Stimulus Package, firms in the private sector are to receive more than Rs1 billion, as stated by the hon. Minister, of public funds. Is Government fully aware of that perception, and how dangerous it can get?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, when you are in Government, you have to make policy choices; you have to take decisions. We have taken decisions that have created 36,000 jobs. Let me repeat it, Mr Speaker, Sir. The best way to fight poverty, to preserve purchasing power is to maintain the jobs of people. It is this Government that has given two, three jobs per family. Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Order! I said order!

Dr. Sithanen: We understand this, Mr Speaker, Sir. There are many decisions that have been taken by this Government, in order to protect purchasing power. We are going to keep only one language: the same language in Government as in Opposition! Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is mentioning Rs1 billion as Stimulus Package. There are conditions attached to this. We did not, overnight, change the law, in order to give *six milliards à cinq familles!*

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have not been given the guarantee that there will be a national salary compensation. Can I ask whether, at least, the weakest members of society, that is, old age pensioners, widows, orphans, handicapped, those benefiting from social payments will be taken into consideration and that there will be no wage freeze as in Singapore or as requested by the Mauritius Employers' Federation here?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, we inherited an awful economic mess. Awful! We turned it around through determination, courage, which they did not have. We have done exceptionally well under extremely difficult circumstances. The hon. Leader of the Opposition reads everything that is happening around the world, and should know what is happening. *La priorité des priorités* of this Government is to save jobs. And we are, obviously, making an appeal to companies to preserve jobs. As to what is going to happen to wage compensation, let's wait for the meeting of the NPC and its recommendation, Mr Speaker, Sir! We believe in institutions that should function. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is trying to tell us that we are not protecting the workers. He never met *les syndicalistes*; he never presided over *tripartites* when he was Minister of Finance! This is what we condemn. They need to be a responsible Opposition. I have also challenged the Opposition to produce ten pages of what they will do, Mr Speaker, Sir! They cannot produce ten pages of what they will do!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, since reference has been made again and, before that, the hon. Minister made lengthy references to the NPC, is he aware that the National Pay Council has no credibility at all, and that is why all the trade unions have requested changes to its composition and attributions? Is Government considering that?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance, subsequently...

(Interruptions)

Let me reply!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Mrs Perrier, order, please!

(Interruptions)

I am calling the hon. Member to order!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Cuttaree, order!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, various reports were commissioned by the previous Government, and also by my Government before that, on what reform must be brought to the wage determination system. They all know about that, because all of them recognised that there was a problem in awarding compensation solely on the basis of inflation, disregarding ability to pay, competitiveness, unemployment and employment. They did not do anything, Mr Speaker, Sir! We had to make this change, and we have seen the result, namely 36,000 jobs. We have followed the guidelines, the benchmark, the principles and the norms of ILO, in terms of the composition and remit of the NPC. If all of them want to tinker with the system, we have no problem! But, it is very clear that we cannot afford to pay compensation solely on the basis of inflation, disregarding what would be the impact of such wage determination policy on employment and unemployment.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister confirm whether the weightage that was ascribed to food item in calculating inflation has now changed, so that there is lesser weightage to food item?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a simple law in economics, which is called Engel's curve. Engel's curve says that the share of income

that is spent on consumption goes down as you become rich. Let me give an example for the enlightenment of the hon. Member. In America, people...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! The hon. Minister has been put a question. Let him explain! Does the hon. Member want me to stop him?

(Interruptions)

That's his right! Unfortunately, ...

(Interruptions)

The Standing Orders provide for 30 minutes. I cannot do otherwise! Does the hon. Member want me to say who prepared it?

(Interruptions)

Mr Cuttaree: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir. Obviously, the hon. Minister can answer any question if he wants to and the way he wants to do it! But, he certainly cannot patronise Members of Parliament the way he is doing.

Mr Speaker: That is not correct. The hon. Minister can answer the question the way he wants, provided he sticks to the point raised!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, in America, an average consumer spends less on food item than in Africa. In Mauritius, a rich person spends less, as a percentage of income, on food, basically compared to a poor person. Since GDP per capita has increased over the years, it is abundantly and manifestly clear and obvious, and beyond reasonable doubt, that the share of food item in the basket will decrease, just like the share of technology...

(Interruptions)

Dr. Sithanen: ...just like the share of technology will increase. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is done every five years. There is no interference with the independence of the CSO. They do that every five years, and it is very clear that the pattern of consumption of individuals changes over a five-year period.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has referred to 1982-83, when the country had suffered the worst calamity after the mismanagement of the economy by the outgoing Labour Government leading to depreciation of the rupee...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order now! Hon. Dulloo, you cannot make a statement. You have to put the question.

Mr Dulloo: It's the background which the Minister gave to us.

(Interruptions)

May I ask him then...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: If this continues, I am going to suspend the House.

Mr Dulloo: Then, the country was on the verge of bankruptcy. Since Government has been talking of early harvest, bumper crop, may I ask the hon. Minister what measures he is contemplating, especially for those workers who cannot maintain their standard of living and cannot pay their house mortgage? What measures would he put in place in the light of what he has stated before in this House in order to ensure that those workers are not faced with seizure, and that they can maintain their standard of living?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I hope the hon. Member did not misinterpret the two quotations I made. The two quotations I made were not meant to make a political mileage out of it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said, order!

Dr. Sithanen: What I was trying to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1982, when there was no world recession, no financial tsunami, he said that we could not give compensation that would endanger and imperil jobs.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: The point that I was trying to make, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that if you compare the calmness of the sea at that time, and how rough it is now, how can he come and say now that we have to give compensation that does not take into account basically what is going to happen in the labour market? With respect to ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: With respect to the point raised by hon. Dulloo, I'll maintain ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Sithanen: I'll maintain, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the best way to preserve jobs ...

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the best way to preserve jobs, the best way to protect people is what we have done by creating 36,000 jobs in three years, compared to 4,000 jobs per year that they were creating.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodhun, last question! Very short questions!

Mr Soodhun: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Vice-Prime Minister himself mentioned that there are four conditions attached to the payment of the compensation and that two of them are based on productivity and the capacity to pay. Can I, therefore, ask him how we can define "the capacity to pay"? Can he also assure the House that all the companies are going to tell the truth about the exact situation? It is really impossible.

Dr. Sithanen: This is a very fair question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please! Time is running out!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, what we have said is that, consistent with the recommendations of ILO, there are four principles, not conditions.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Vice-Prime Minister has already said that.

Dr. Sithanen: What we are saying is that CPI is very clear. There are ways and means of measuring productivity. Let me inform my hon. friend that productivity increases, whether it is labour, capital or total productivity. It is measured in this country, Mr Speaker, Sir. Global competitiveness can also be created. What we don't know is how within a particular sector, it varies from sector to sector, and that's why, in addition to the minimum that has been prescribed by the NPC, we encourage, at firm level, negotiations to take place so that those firms that are in a position to pay can pay. Even today, if you look at the tourism sector, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are some companies that can still afford to pay, but there are other companies that are facing more difficulties.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, therefore, that Government representatives on the NPC will, at least, be given directives, support, salary compensation for the wage earners, - and especially the lowest paid – and adjustment in benefits for all those benefiting from social benefits, old age pensioners, handicapped and so on to that effect?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know whether the hon. Leader of the Opposition did that when he was the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me reiterate to this House that we all want workers to be better off. We all want the working population of this country to have a good purchasing power, but we are not in the business of cutting off our nose to spite our face. The same people, who have criticised them for not taking enough measures to make sure *qu'il n'y ait pas de licenciement*, are the same people who want to pave the way to hell for this country to go in the ICU or the IMF, Mr Speaker, Sir. We want workers to be compensated, but we want them to be compensated and not, at the same time, to lose jobs, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister! Hon. Lauthan!

POLICE INFORMATION AND OPERATIONS ROOM - EMERGENCY TELEPHONE LINES

(No. B/256) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Police Information and Operations Room, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to -

- (a) the telephone numbers available thereat, indicating the ones available on a 24-hour basis,
- (b) if breakdowns on the telephone number 999 have been registered and, if so, the remedial measures that will be taken to avoid same.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that that there are four emergency telephone lines

available to the public in the Police Information and Operation Room. These lines are 208 0034, 208 0035, 999 and 112. They are available on a 24-hour basis.

All the telephones at the Police Information and Operation Room are operated by Police officers on a shift system on a 24-hour basis and all calls and requests are dealt with promptly.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that since the beginning of the year there were five breakdowns on the line number 999. All these breakdowns were repaired within one hour of their occurrence by the Mauritius Telecom.

I am given to understand that in view of the number of breakdowns occurring on line 999, consideration is being given by the Police to have a new 999 Emergency Service Operation Management System, including a new PABX system and a new voice recording system to strengthen the technological infrastructure of the Police Information and Operations Room and to make the service even more effective.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister is saying that the repair is effected within one hour, but people have told me that they called in the morning and even by mid-day - three to four hours later - they were told that line 999 was still under repair. How can he explain this?

The Prime Minister: That's the information I have from the Police. But, as I said, there are four lines and I gave the numbers just now. They are putting a new system in place - in any case.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can enlighten the House as to the number of calls, on an average, which are registered and whether the messages are registered?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the messages are registered. There is a voice recording system which is not working very well and that's why they want to change the system. It is an old system that has been there for years.

As to the number of calls recorded, for the year 2009 up to 15 April, there were 2,329 requests.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I suggest to the hon. Prime Minister to request the MBC to sensitise the public, because for the general public the number is 999 and they are not even aware of the number 112, and the more so 7-digit figures are difficult to remember? Will the MBC sensitise more the public on the 3-digit figures?

The Prime Minister: That is a very good suggestion, Mr Speaker, Sir. I'll try to ask the MBC to advertise it more.

Mr Bhoda: Mr Speaker, Sir, from the figures given by the hon. Prime Minister, it seems that there are about 200 calls a day. May I ask him how do we response to those 200 calls per day?

The Prime Minister: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the response is on a 24-hour basis. The Police tell me that they deal with these requests as promptly as possible.

ELECTIONS – CODE OF CONDUCT

(No. B/257) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether he will state if Government proposes to amend the law to provide for a Code of Conduct to complement the legal provisions in force regarding the holding and conduct of elections in Mauritius.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Sachs Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform has recommended that adequate provision should be made in the Representation of the People Act to empower the Electoral Supervisory Commission to formulate a model Code of Conduct which political parties and candidates should observe during the election campaign. The Commission has stressed that this Model Code of Conduct should be evolved after maximum possible consensus has been arrived at with all the major political parties and, once published by way of Regulations, they should have the force of law and any violation thereof should be visited with appropriate penalties to be imposed by the Electoral Supervisory Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is also aware that following the observations and recommendations made both by the Supreme Court and the Privy Council in the case of Raj Ringadoo v/s Ashok Jugnauth, the Electoral Supervisory Commission drew up a Code of Conduct in connection with the by-election of the Constituency No. 8, Quartier Militaire and Moka.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ No. B/1191 in November last, I stated that I believe in a Code of Conduct that has teeth and which can bite. I also stated that we would have to see whether we have to consider amending the law for that purpose, after consultation with the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission who have the responsibility for the conduct of elections.

Mr Naidu: Will the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether this will be taken on board along with the long awaited electoral reform?

The Prime Minister: I mentioned, last week - if I am not mistaken - that this is something that we have to talk with the major political parties and discuss. I am sure that we will come to an agreement on this reform.

Mr Bérenger: I heard the hon. Prime Minister say that legislative action will be taken after consultations with the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Supervisory Commission. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has had consultations with both the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Commission on the issue?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have told them that – we haven't actually met – we are going to meet first and then we'll have to talk to all the major political parties.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, it is envisaged to look beyond election time and try to include in the code of conduct a clause to restrict crossing the floor for Members who have been elected under the banner of a particular party?

The Prime Minister: I personally feel very strongly about this, Mr Speaker, Sir, because some people get elected by votes from one party and then they switch vote. It is difficult. There is no easy solution. But that is something that I believe we should look at also.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dulloo: *Et nou pas l'époque* Labour Party *de 76 au 82!* *Transfuge entre 76 et 82 was* Labour Party Government. This is Labour Party culture !

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order, please!

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether in the course of this exercise he will consider suggesting provisions to give powers to the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the Electoral Commissioner for the enforcement of those provisions, especially this code of conduct, during the electoral campaign, that is, from the moment the writ for the election is issued till the moment the elected candidate is declared officially returned?

The Prime Minister: This is precisely why I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I believe in a code of conduct, that is, action can be taken.

EBENE CYBER CITY – ILLEGAL CAR RACING

(No. B/258) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether he is aware that illegal car racing activities, known as ‘runs’, take place on Saturday nights or early Sunday mornings at the Ebène Cyber City and are causing inconveniences and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the remedial measures taken as at to date to address the issue.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that only one case of illegal car racing which took place on 28 March 2009 at Ebène has been reported. The Police have already booked one person for “Illegal Road Racing”. The enquiry into the case is still ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as a preventive measure, the Traffic Branch has, since August 2008, implemented a new highway policing strategy called “Daily Highway Patrol Scheme” whereby Traffic Field Officers provide mobile patrol along the motorway from SSR International Airport, Plaisance up to Grand Bay roundabout throughout the night, starting around 18 00 hours and finishing in the early hours of the morning.

Furthermore, Divisional Commanders have been directed to conduct their own operations using resources available at their level, such as the Divisional Support Unit, the Emergency Response Service, the Police du Transport and Divisional CID, and to carry out vehicle checks during the night at staggered hours at strategic places within their respective Divisions.

Crackdown operations are also carried out by personnel of the Traffic Branch on Saturday and Sunday nights throughout the island to discourage, *inte-alia*, drunken driving, dangerous driving and other driving related hazards on our roads.

Mr Speaker, Sir, consideration is being also given for necessary amendments to be brought to the Road Traffic Act to increase the penalty for this offence, which at present carries a fine not exceeding Rs1,000.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Prime Minister aware that in order to avoid Police vigilance, those involved in illegal car racing don’t go to the same places. In fact, they go to La Marie, Beau Plan, *Morcellement* St. André, Mon Choisy, Grand Bassin, Midlands Dam, among other places,

and not necessarily at night, but also during the day in isolated places. Therefore, the question is: would the hon. Prime Minister consider the advisability of having a car racing track with international norms as car racing is creating much *engouement* among youngsters? Would he consider legalising this kind of racing in proper track, especially now that we are going to have Apollo Hospital for *médecine de pointe* and further promoting the tourist industry in Mauritius?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would be the first person to agree with the hon. Member.

Mr Bérenger: This is very serious, because I was very surprised to hear the hon. Prime Minister say that, according to the Commissioner of Police, there has been one case at Cyber City. I think we all know that there have been many cases, at Cyber City itself, but also in the places mentioned, including Chamarel in the middle of the night and according to my information, apart from car pseudo-races, motorcycle races also are being organised illegally at all sorts of hours of the night. Will the hon. Prime Minister reconsider the whole question?

The Prime Minister: The problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there have been no reports except that one case has been reported and that has been dealt with. We should encourage people to report it. For example, I suppose, in a place like Chamarel, there is nobody who is bothered to report because it is a way out. Even at Ebène, I am told, there are not many houses there, people maybe have not reported the cases, but increased vigilance is taking place, the Police is aware of the problem. As I also said, we want to strengthen the law as well because the fine of Rs1,000 is probably not enough to discourage people.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can look with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the Road Authority that repeated requests have been made by responsible persons to have this specialised track and even site visits have been effected? These applications are pending at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the Road Authority to finalise matters. Can the hon. Prime Minister ask the proper Ministry to look into the matter?

The Prime Minister: I just want to get a clarification from the hon. Member when he is talking about this specialised track. Does he mean a track for racing purposes?

Mr Bhagwan: Many of the young amateurs people use the specialised park, not the big racing cars like Ferrari and so on, although we have Ferrari in Mauritius. The youth of Mauritius can buy cars and have these cars reassembled. They have applied to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. They have made site visits and these are pending. This is why they are doing it illegally.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that there have been applications, but I will ask the hon. Minister concerned, but we'll certainly look into that.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know that all those cars have their engines modified so that they can be used in those illegal car racing and those cars are used daily on our roads. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister what type of control is being effected by the authorities to look into those cars which have their engines modified?

The Prime Minister: And not just the engines, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I also believe that the silencers also are modified. This is causing noise pollution. This is something that is already governed by the law. We have to make sure that the law is applied.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, coming back to this problem of car racing at Ebène Cyber City, I am a bit surprised that the hon. Prime Minister has talked about one case because from where I live in Rose Hill, I regularly hear the car racing every Saturday night and in the early morning. I am a bit surprised that the Police don't hear that because I live near the Police station. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he could look into this matter once again? Because there is really a big problem of car racing and even from the Cyber City up to the Link Road to Vandermeersch, near CEB and so on. They come up to here doing the racing. So, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will look into this matter again?

The Prime Minister: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the problem is people have also to report the cases. I suppose the hon. Member herself has not reported the case. She heard the voice, but she didn't bother. It happens. I totally agree. The Police are increasing their checks, as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Prime Minister say whether he is aware that this problem of illegal car racing is also linked to illegal betting and, if he is not aware, whether he can ask the Commissioner of Police to inquire into that?

The Prime Minister: I suppose the hon. Member means illegal betting on the illegal race itself. I will ask the Commissioner of Police to look into that.

PRISONS – CAPACITY

(No. B/259) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether in regard to the prisons, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to if they are overcrowded and, if so, the remedial measures that Government proposes to take.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Prisons that the Prison Service, including the Correctional Youth Centre and the Rehabilitation Youth Centres, in Mauritius and Rodrigues, has a total capacity of 2,280. The prison population as at 17 April 2009 stands at 2,294, out of whom 1,591 are convicted detainees and 703 are on remand.

In April 2001, Mr Speaker, Sir, it was decided to construct a new prison complex on a plot of land situated at Rose Belle. Two plots of land to the extent of 15 *arpents* and one *arpent* respectively, situated at Rose Belle, were vested in the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens and Reform Institutions. An additional adjoining plot of 10 *arpents* was vested in the same Ministry in June 2004 for the extension of the project.

Open tenders were launched for the appointment of a consulting architect on two occasions by the CTB in August 2002 and May 2003, but no appointment was made as they failed to comply with the requirements of the tender.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a long story; I want to cut this long story short. But, in September 2004, it was decided not to go ahead with the project, as the land identified at Rose Belle was found to be unsuitable for the construction of a prison.

A new site has been identified at Melrose for the construction of a prison that could accommodate about 750 detainees. A plot of land of an extent of 37 *arpents* has been acquired for this purpose. Professional services have already been enlisted for architectural and structural designs. Tenders will be launched shortly, and construction works are expected to start in October or November 2009.

Mr Dullo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has just indicated that the prisons are operating beyond their full capacity and has indicated the figures for those on remand, that is, more than one third. May I ask him whether he would consider taking up this point with the Commissioner of Police? Because these days there are a lot of young offenders, especially for larcenies, who are being kept for a long period on remand in jail; some of them are unable to pay for their bail and so on. I would like to ask him whether we should not discuss this with the Commissioner of Police for him to reconsider the policy of objection of Police for the release on bail of persons who are detained pending inquiry, and that the whole question of remand be looked into?

The Prime Minister: The question of whether they would get bail or not is guided by strict conditions, Mr Speaker, Sir, and does not just depend on the Police, as the hon. Member knows. Sometimes, there are criteria. For example, there are things like no address. That is something that happens. It's not a question of crowdedness. If you look at the figures, it is actually 14 more than the capacity. That is why we are having a new prison complex being built. That was decided in 2001 but, for various reasons, it was not completed.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether arrangements can be made for detainees on remand to have early trials in Court?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: I was about to say that it is not for me! If you read 'L'Express' this morning, you would have seen that they said that I want to do everything. But it is not for me to decide whether somebody is guilty or not. I suppose the hon. Member meant early trial. I can say that this is something that the hon. Chief Justice is well aware of, and he is doing a lot of work to ensure that trials are taken up earlier. In fact, the length of time people are waiting has already been cut, and I know he is doing a great work in trying to reduce the time.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we can agree that the project of building a modern new prison started in 2001, and we are now in 2009 - eight years later. I don't want to blame any Government. But will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that this is an urgent matter? Because the problem is not just overcrowding, but non discrimination between first offenders, light offenders who are stuck in the same prison as hard

offenders, habitual criminals and so on and that, therefore, this is an urgent matter?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Leader of the Opposition. This is a good example, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I don't blame the previous Government. But, look how the system is, Mr Speaker, Sir. In 2001, the Government then decided to construct this new prison complex. Open tenders were made twice; in August 2002 and May 2003. Because they failed to comply with the requirements of the tender, the Central Tender Board said that new tenders should be launched a third time. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, when the CTB advised that new tenders be launched, the Prime Minister's Office remarked that it would make arrangements for the appointment of a Security Adviser, consultant for the project. I understand perfectly why; because of the delay. The MPI was to ensure early completion of the design. The architectural design was thus entrusted to an Indian architect, Mr Sarkar, who was employed on a contract basis by the MPI at that time. I suppose that this was done precisely to get matters going quicker. The first preliminary designs report for the prisons incorporating all the details was approved by the Commissioner of Prisons on 01 December 2003. Several meetings were held, but the proposal was not approved, as then it was found that the site was not suitable for the construction of a prison. They gave various reasons why the site was not suitable. That is what has caused the delay. A new site has been identified and, as I said, tenders are about to be launched, and they should be starting work either in October or November of this year.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, by the time the new prison is built, it is more or less expected that the prison population is going to be much more than it is now. Therefore, I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister what interim measures does Government propose to take, to deal with the increasing prison population given the risk that this entails as well?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I personally hope that the prison population will decrease, that people will respect the law and that they will not have to go to prison. But, we are looking at remedial measures. One of the measures that some countries have taken – the hon. Member was just mentioning Germany but this is so as well in the UK - is to see whether community service will not be something that could be applied more often. That is something...

(Interruptions)

It could be applied more rigorously to the less difficult cases. And that is something I know the Judiciary is also looking into.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in its latest issue, the Central Statistics Office, under item ‘Convicts admitted to prisons by length of sentence’, that is, undefined convicts, gives the definition of convicts sentenced to imprisonment for non-payment of fines. They either stay in prison for a specified period or are released as soon as they pay the fines. They total a number of 972 out of a population of 2,713, and represent 35.8%. Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House what is being done so that those people, at least, don’t overcrowd the prisons? Because, they stay for a period less than a day or less than a week in prison.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, one of the things that they could do is to try to pay their fines in the first place and avoid getting into a situation where they have to pay a fine and then pay it promptly. But we also have to make sure that the law is respected, and those who are fined have to pay their fines. As I have said earlier, we are looking into how this can be managed, so that less people stay less time in prison. It is not just Government, it has also to be taken up by other people in other sectors, the Judiciary, the Commissioner of Police and the Commissioner of Prisons.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the prison situated at Phoenix is fully operational? Because, at some point in time, it was closed.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no indication that it is not fully operational, and I see that there are, in fact, prisoners in it.

PLACE MARGEOT, SIR VIRGIL NAZ STREET & MOKA ROAD - ACCIDENTS

(No. B/260) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of accidents that have occurred, since January 2007 to date, at –

- (a) the Place Margéot, Rose Hill, and
- (b) corner Sir Virgil Naz Street, Moka Road, Rose Hill.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, since January 2007 to 16 April 2009, 17 cases of road accidents at Place Margeot,

Rose Hill, and two at the corner of Sir Virgil Naz Street and Moka Road, Rose Hill, have been reported to the Police.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has information about the total number of fatal accidents out of these 17 cases?

The Prime Minister: I think there are two fatal cases, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the situation is becoming more and more chaotic at this place. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has discussed with the Commissioner of Police about measures that are being taken to ensure more security for the users of this place?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was looking at the statistics, and it has not increased. It appears a lot. Of course, one would be too many. But it has not increased dramatically. In fact, it is decreasing, if anything. But, the Police are taking preventive measures. For example, the Police are covering more areas by mobile patrols between 2000 hrs and 2330 hrs, and the number of mobile patrols has increased for *Place Margéot*. The corner of Sir Virgil Naz Street and Moka Road is, as you know, a busy road, and two Police officers use to perform fixed point duties daily during week days from 0800 hrs from 0930 hrs. Since mid-February of this year, the Moka Road has been temporarily closed, Mr Speaker, Sir, because of excavation works and, therefore, no Police officers were posted there. However, the Police are looking into the matter to see whether something can be done to have more Police officers there.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding the corner of Sir Virgil Naz Street and Moka Road, there is a pedestrian crossing when you turn out of this road, and these two accidents occurred particularly on this pedestrian crossing. Since this road will be in use again soon after major works, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether something can be done regarding the placement of this crossing? Because, it is the cause of the accidents there.

The Prime Minister: I can pass on this message to the authority concerned, so that maybe we could look at moving the pedestrian crossing somewhere else.

**GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY - DECEMBER 2000 -MAY 2008 –
NEWSPAPERS – AMOUNT DISBURSED**

(No. B/261) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home

Affairs whether, in regard to Government publicity in newspapers since December 2005 to May 2008, he will now state the amount of money paid to each daily and weekly.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I invite the hon. Member to refer to the reply given to Parliamentary Question Nos. B/186 and B/190 last week.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken cognizance of the reply. Since 2005, after the general election, I have raised this issue on many occasions. Each time, the hon. Prime Minister stated that he is coming with new criteria, and nothing has been done for years. Now that we are on the eve of this mandate, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether, at least, *il y a une lueur d'espoir qu'il va y avoir une certaine justice*, and that new criteria will be set up?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member. In fact, I did say that we were looking at the media law in general, including criteria for this. The report for the media law by the eminent lawyer, Geoffrey Robertson, has already been done. We are looking at that report and we are having discussions with him. Whether we should bring it as quickly as possible is another matter. But don't worry about the mandate; it is a long time to go. If I don't do it in this mandate, I will do it in the next.

Mr Bhagwan: I have gone through the figures, Sir, and I am sure that the hon. Prime Minister has gone through the list. I won't speak of '*Le Militant*', as we are immune. So, we don't have any problem. We are immune; we are resilient. This is public money. *Le public a droit à l'information à l'île Maurice*. There are very important press notices which the public has a right to take cognizance. But there are newspapers, like '*Le Socialiste*', and I'll ask the Prime Minister to go and ask his people

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No, please, hon. Bhagwan!

Mr Bhagwan: Not even 50 of these newspapers are sold per day, let alone 10! They are subsidised by Government, and we know people ...

Mr Speaker: No! The hon. Member wants to know whether there is some sort of balancing. He should come to the question.

Mr Bhagwan: This is a waste of public money.

Mr Speaker: Now the hon. Member is going a bit too far. He should put the question.

Mr Bhagwan: Millions of rupees are given to other newspapers.

The Prime Minister: First of all, if the hon. Member wants to listen to the answer, I would like to say that I am very glad to hear that '*Le Militant*' has plenty of people who give it money, so that it can survive ...

(Interruptions)

Good financing, and that's very good for '*Le Militant*'. If you remember, in a reply some time back, two or three years ago I think, I said that even the Labour Party had a paper, and I said we were going to produce another. We will not ask; I don't think it is fair for a paper which supports a party to ask for publicity.

(Interruptions)

No, we are going to have a paper soon, but we are not going to ask. I can say that, even if we qualify, we are not going to ask. We did not ask in the past.

(Interruptions)

I don't think it is fair, because as the hon. Member says, it is public money. We have an obligation to ensure that public money is spent properly. I don't think the hon. Member should have said what he has said about '*Le Socialiste*'. Some people do read '*Le Socialiste*'. They have a right also, and we believe in democratization.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/265 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn. Questions addressed to Ministers!

MRA – OFFICERS – KENYA & BANGKOK - VISITS

(No. B/275) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to if one of its officers visited Kenya in 2007 and, if so, indicate –

- (a) who sponsored the visit, and
- (b) if the officer also attended a meeting of the World Health Organisation, held in Bangkok in 2008.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows.

During the year 2007, eight officers of the MRA attended different official workshops, conferences and meetings in Kenya, which were sponsored by the following institutions: WTO Secretariat, Swedish International Development Cooperation, Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators, COMESA Secretariat and British American Tobacco (BAT) Mauritius.

According to records available at the MRA, in 2007, among the eight officers, one officer did form part of a delegation to Kenya to participate in discussions regarding classification of cigarettes, wastage percentage and leaf processing stage, which was sponsored by British American Tobacco (BAT) Mauritius.

I am informed that he also formed part of a delegation, which attended the second meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP), organised by the Framework Convention on Tobacco held in Bangkok from 30 June to 06 July 2007, but not in 2008 as stated in the question.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he can have a look at the file and, later on, give the information? The same person is at the Tobacco Board as well as at the Ministry of Health, and while encouraging the production of tobacco, the Ministry of Health is, at the same time, asking for a reduction. There are cases of conflict of interests. Can I ask the hon. Minister to look into the matter and let us know?

Dr. Sithanen: In fact, when I got this reply this morning, I was trying to figure out what was the motivation of the Member when he asked this question. What he says is the obvious one. So, I will ask for explanation, and I will give it to the hon. Member.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I heard, there has been quite a number of occasions where BAT has financed, sponsored public officers to this or that conference. Is that a fact and, if that is the case, is this in order at all?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know what is the meaning of sponsor here, Mr Speaker, Sir, and whether they actually pay for the airfare and *per diem*. I will check for this. I certainly agree with hon. Leader of the Opposition that, to avoid conflict of interests, we should not accept sponsorship for this type of meeting.

(Interruptions)

This has been going on for a very long time.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister just to check whether this officer has replaced the Chairman in missions. The Chairperson has now resigned following an allegation. Can he check whether that officer has headed this delegation?

Dr. Sithanen: I don't know. I will check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

TOURIST ARRIVALS - MARCH 2009

(No. B/276) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to tourist arrivals, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof for the month of March 2009;
- (b) their nationality for the months of January, February and March 2009, and
- (c) if there is any delay in the release of the statistics for the months of January and February 2009 and, if so, the reasons thereof.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, the statistics on tourist arrivals for the month of March have now been compiled and released. According to these statistics, 77,324 tourists have visited the country in the month of March this year.

This figure represents a decrease of 13.3% as compared to March of last year. However, I am informed that a sizeable part of this fall is attributable to the fact that the Easter holidays for this year have taken place in April whereas for the last year, it took place in March.

Furthermore, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind the hon. Member that the figures for January and February 2009 have been released now as follows -

<u>Period</u>	<u>Tourist Arrivals</u>
January 2009	a fall of 3.7%
February 2009	a fall of 13.5%

Mr Speaker Sir, I wish, however, to point out that in spite of this result we performed better than our direct rival destinations, namely

Maldives and Seychelles which have both recorded a substantial declines in tourist arrivals for the months of January to March as follows -

	<u>January 2009</u>	<u>February 2009</u>
Maldives	-4.8%	-13.9%

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can I remind the hon. Vice-Prime Minister that I have edited this question on purpose, because last week when the hon. Vice-Prime Minister was talking on the Stimulus Package, he has given all this information. So, I edited the question because the information was already available.

Mr X. L. Duval: I did not know for what purpose. Now, I know! Shall I continue? It is very short, anyway.

	<u>January 2009</u>	<u>February 2009</u>	<u>March 09</u>
Seychelles	-12%	-16%	-17%

Regarding part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the statistics on tourist arrivals are not normally compiled on the basis of nationality but rather on the basis of country of residence.

Concerning part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to confirm that there has been not only a delay in the release of statistics for the months of January, February and March 2009, but also the breakdown per country of residence is not available.

I am informed that this is due to transitional problems encountered during the implementation, as from 01 December 2008, of a new immigration and border control system. The problem principally relates to the slot reserved for residential address which are not being completed by visitors.

Sir, I am advised that it has been found necessary to effect certain changes to the design of the disembarkation card as well as the system software to make the system fully functional and operative.

I am further informed that necessary action is being taken and that a new system is expected to be in place in June this year.

Mr Speaker, Sir, finally, I wish to inform the House that the objective behind the new system is to facilitate and reduce the processing time on departure and arrival. Under the new system, the disembarkation card has been highly simplified and only foreigners and not Mauritians are required

to fill the card. Mauritians, therefore, do not complete any disembarkation card, except for those coming from disease prone areas who are required to complete a health card. Embarkation cards had been abolished for foreigners and Mauritians alike.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he had received recent representations – there are so many - by the association of inbound operators and the small owners concerning the months to come, because they are *inquiets*? May we know whether he has met these people in the recent past just to reassure them on this issue?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I meet them regularly. I must say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we are doing everything possible. Right at the moment, we have a major – and this is particularly important for the small operators – campaign in Reunion which is bearing fruit. Sir, thousand seats are being sold at less than 200 euros on the Reunion market, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are also looking at the whole air access situation. We are doing our best, Mr Speaker, Sir.

VANDERMEERSCH STREET – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/277) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the traffic congestion at the Vandermeersch Street, between Beau Bassin and Rose Hill, especially in the morning, he will state the remedial measures Government proposes to take.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Vandermeersch Street is a classified road and falls under the jurisdiction of the Road Development Authority. It is a main traffic carrier which links the roundabout of Beau Bassin to the roundabout at the exit of Rose Hill bus station.

On average, Vandermeersch Street is six metres wide which permits only a two-lane traffic movement opposing each other. Along its left hand side, as we move towards Beau Bassin, there is an average of three metres wide grassy platform with a tarred-surface walk-away off-street. This strip has already been earmarked to accommodate the proposed mass transit system. There are two traffic lights along the road with one located at its junction with Malartic Street. At this juncture, the heaviest local traffic from the side of Balfour Garden accedes onto Vandermeersch Street through Malartic Street. As at present, with this heavy flow of traffic, the set of traffic lights has already attained its capacity. Police mans the lights during

the morning and afternoon peak hours. The main activities along this street concern colleges such as the Queen Elizabeth College, the Loreto Convent College and light commercial/office operations.

I am informed that congestion occurs along this street between its junction with Malartic Street and its junction with Ebène/Vandermeersch Road near CEB. The congestion which is mostly observed during both morning and afternoon peak hours are due to the following factors, among others –

- (i) with the opening of the Ebène-Vandermeersch Link Road, the traffic volume along Vandermeersch Street has increased as more vehicles by-pass the Port Louis/St Jean Road and use this street;
- (ii) the traffic lights at the intersection which Vandermeersch Street makes with Malartic Street has already been saturated for the peak hourly traffic;
- (iii) right turning movements for vehicles, moving into the Queen Elizabeth College from Vandermeersch Street, block the one lane which in turn creates a backlog;
- (iv) the roundabout near the CEB is presently operating under forced-flow conditions because of the indirect effect of Vandermeersch Street when it gets congested, and
- (v) at some stretches of the street, road side parking of vehicles has been noticed and this results in long queues when overtaking becomes very difficult and the other lane is full of vehicles.

To remedy the situation, it is feared that traffic management measures only will be negligible. For example, although the signal phases of the set of traffic lights are increased; that is, increasing the green times, although banning right turning movements at Queen Elizabeth College, although placing more Police officers to control traffic at some spots during the peak hours, the effect onto the current congestion problem will still be present. We should move towards a more holistic solution. In this connection, my Ministry is looking into the possibility of providing an additional lane along Vandermeersch Street. Thus, the best solution will be to increase the width of Vandermeersch Street along its whole length by taking some 1.5 metres from the strip of land reserved for the Mass Transit System so that three lanes are obtained. Lane availability will be designed in a similar layout as along the main road at Coromandel. Thus, at all approaches to junctions,

including the roundabout near CEB, two lanes will be provided, one for the left turning. This will create a pull-in effect onto the peak hourly traffic so that queues will be rapidly dissipated. In the meantime, the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of my Ministry has been requested to re-time the traffic lights and mark yellow lines where the need is so required. Police will also be requested to increase its presence to control traffic during peak hours.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister tell us the time frame for the implementation of all these measures?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, instructions have already been given to the Road Traffic Management Unit and the Road Development Authority. Work is likely to start within three to four weeks.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he will agree with me that there is scope for much better planning of closures of roads especially in areas like that? The fact that the Moka Road is closed for road works has made matters ten times worse than they were already. Can the hon. Minister improve on the planning? May we know when this road is going to be closed what is going to happen elsewhere?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, to be very frank, it is a very complicated issue. In fact, officers of my Ministry are working on that region daily. I hope that we will come with certain solutions. But the best solution for the time being is just to have a third lane in that region, that is, Vandermeersch Street – that is firstly. Secondly, we will try to find some other solution also.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether these Police officers controlling the traffic in the classified roads have got proper training?

Mr Bachoo: I don't doubt the competency of the officers.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a citizen of that town, I strongly object. I am just making my view. If the hon. Minister plans to take even a part of the Roland Armand Street, there will be riot.

(Interruptions)

I am saying 'riot' not in a negative ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Member put his question?

Mr Bhagwan: This is the only place. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister knows that place.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: No remark!

Mr Bhagwan: It is better to have proper planning than to have easy solutions, Sir. The *Promenade Roland Armand* is the main jogging park of Beau Bassin and Rose Hill.

Mr Speaker: You mean to say this will cause prejudice to the inhabitants.

Mr Bhagwan: Instead of going ahead rapidly, there can be problems.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, one thing that I can hardly understand is that that site has been earmarked for the Transit System by the previous Government. If tomorrow the Transit System is coming, this part will have to be removed anyway. Secondly, there is no solution as such in that particular region. It is so congested, so limited. So, we have to find certain ways, some sacrifice has to be made.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, we don't even know when this Mass Transit System is going to happen or it is not going to happen. But if you are going to do it now, without any justification, you will have lots of problems. Mr Speaker, Sir, if the hon. Minister cares to have a walk round this place - I realise it is difficult for Ministers to walk in public places...

(Interruptions)

...but if they would care to do that, they will see what this place is.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker Sir, to be very clear, everybody knows that it is humanly impossible to improve on those existing roads unless and until we enlarge it, but, at the same time, they don't want any action to be taken. So, we are helpless.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members must put questions; they must not make statements.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has stated that Police officers - I won't go into the details, we reside there; we spend our time there - come at the junction at one particular point in time for official or whatever reason. If you want to do proper planning - with the resumption of schools - you need to have Police officers on a longer period and earlier. They come at only one particular time. I know what I am saying.

Mr Bachoo: I would convey this to the Commissioner of Police, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

At 1.02 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.33 p.m. with the Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/280, B/287, B/291, B/292, B/303, B/310, B/312 and B/329 have been withdrawn.

NTC – FINANCIAL SITUATION

(No. B/278) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the National Transport Corporation, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to its financial situation, and
- (b) state if there is any plan for the privatisation thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the National Transport Corporation that it suffered an operational loss of Rs83.4 m. in the financial year 2007-2008. For the period July to December 2008, the operational loss stood at Rs68 m.

Insofar as the question of privatisation of the Corporation is concerned, this is not on the agenda at all.

Mr Naidu: Are there any measures to restructure the NTC at present, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are taking a series of measures in order to put NTC on a strong financial standing.

Mr Naidu: Will the hon. Minister ensure that while doing so no employee loses his job?

Mr Bachoo: Those who are involved in corrupt practices will definitely lose their jobs.

Mr Naidu: I appreciate what the Minister says and while the restructuration process is on, will he also make sure that workers' voice is taken on board?

Mr Bachoo: I'll see to it that all those who are contributing for the smooth running of the Corporation, the security of employment will be assured.

AIR MAURITIUS LTD. – CHAIRPERSON - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/279) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to Air Mauritius Ltd., he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to if a new Chairperson has been appointed thereat and, if so, indicate his or her terms and conditions of appointment.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the reply is in a negative. However, Mr Raj Ringadoo, a member of the Board of Directors, is currently acting as Chairperson. He receives no additional remuneration, nor benefits.

(PQ No. B/280 – See after PQ No. B/281)

LA VIGIE/SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT – DRAINS

(No. B/281) Mr J. R. Speville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware of the flooding problem on the motorway, from La Vigie to the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam International Airport, especially around the roundabout at the junction of La Rosa, L'Escalier/Souillac, and if so, the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Road Development Authority that the roadside drains from La Vigie to SSR International Airport is regularly maintained and cleaned to cater for surface runoff from the motorway and adjoining areas. Flooding around the roundabout at the junction of La Rosa and L'Escalier roads is mainly due to the accumulation of debris, which obstructs the metal gratings in the area.

The RDA is ensuring the regular cleaning of the metal gratings to evacuate water following heavy rainfall.

The Deputy Speaker: Next Question, please!

Mr Bodha: PQ No. B/280.

The Deputy Speaker: This question has been withdrawn.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I had withdrawn PQ No. B/280 because the hon. Minister was not here in the morning, but as he is here, will you please allow me to put the question?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, I'm sure the hon. Member can put it.

MOBILE PHONES - TARIFFS

(No. B/280) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Information & Communication Technology whether, in regard to communications by mobile phones and the ADSL links, he will state if it is proposed to decrease the tariffs thereof and, if so, when.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that back in 1998, under the then Labour Government, a policy decision was formulated to allow Mauritius becoming a signatory of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the World Trade Organisation.

This crucial policy decision led to the liberalisation of the Telecommunication sector. The objectives set were, *inter alia*, to bring innovative telecommunication services and technologies to the general public at affordable costs.

The present Government has, therefore, set the right policy, legislative and regulatory framework to foster competition in the Telecommunication sector.

As a result of the competition policy introduced in the Telecommunication sector, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a continual reduction in the cost of telecommunication services, in general, due to the market-oriented policy that has driven the sector.

As regards the mobile services, I am informed by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA) that, as at December 2008, the cost of mobile calls has undergone a 35% decrease. We even have mobile calls costing 80 cents per minute currently offered by one of the mobile operators.

I am further informed by the ICTA that, it is in the presence of one fresh application for a mobile licence, which is being examined. In this regard, the entry of another mobile operator will result in further bringing down the tariff of mobile communication while offering a better quality of service to the public.

As far as ADSL is concerned, as at December 2008, the tariffs have undergone reductions of up to 50%.

I am further informed by ICTA that there have been other alternative technologies such as the HSDPA (High-Speed Downlink Packet Access), which is a 3G (third generation) mobile telephony, resulting from the competition policy, which we brought in, to access the Internet at lower tariffs. As further competition builds up in terms of technologies and subscribers' base, we expect further reductions in the tariffs, as a consequential course of the economics of the market. Indeed, we are expecting further players to come into this segment.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the decrease in prices have already been impacted on the cost of the communication links between the mobile phones?

Mr Dulull: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

DEVELOPMENT BANK OF MAURITIUS – LOANS

(No. B/282) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the customers of the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., who had contracted loans up to Rs200,000, before April 2003, and who are entitled to the special measures as announced in the Budget 2008-2009, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof, and
- (b) the total amount of money they represent, indicating the amount for Rodrigues.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, and as I stated in the 2008-2009 Budget, a special scheme has been set up to facilitate the settlement of arrears by borrowers who have raised loans of up to Rs200,000 before April 2003. This amnesty expires on 30 June 2009.

I am informed by the Development Bank of Mauritius that there are 7,014 such borrowers who are eligible under the Scheme.

Insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, I am given to understand that total liability amounts to Rs625 m. out of which Rs17 m. is in respect of 377 borrowers in Rodrigues.

I am also informed that, so far, 528 borrowers from Mauritius and 11 from Rodrigues have benefited from the scheme with waiver amounting to Rs37 m. and Rs150,000 respectively,

Mr Spéville: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether he is aware of the vast difficulties that many SMEs in Rodrigues are facing actually? And, in line with this policy, will he contemplate finding ways of erasing some of their loans?

Dr. Sithanen: This is one of the ways of doing it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. We have waived penalty and interest accumulated and for the first Rs50,000 or for those up to Rs50,000, we are waiving 50% of the capital. With respect to other SMEs, there are schemes available not only from the budget, but also under the Additional Stimulus Package where all enterprises, be it in Rodrigues or Mauritius, can take advantage of these incentives.

Mr Dulloo: I have a supplementary question, Sir. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, in view of the difficulties that some people who have, in all good faith, tried to benefit from the scheme, but have not been able to pay or raise enough capital in order to fulfill the undertaking under the scheme, whether he will consider those cases which are still pending and to extend the scheme further to enable them to benefit? Because, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, some of them run the risk of their properties being seized and sold by levy.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have given a one-year period for the scheme to be operational. People also have to show responsibility. We have acted with a lot of consideration and understanding on this particular issue and if my understanding is right, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have seen a notice in the paper informing people that the scheme will run out in June. So, my appeal to all these people - there is still two months to go - is to make use of this scheme. Otherwise, the scheme will run out and they will have to pay the penalty and interest.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask one more supplement question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Government was fully aware of the special circumstances. They are saying *ad nauseum* the financial and economic crisis we are going through. The purchasing power of some of those people has come down in spite of their willingness to settle these debts. So, in the special circumstances of the global economic crisis affecting Mauritius also, would he not consider trying to extend it for those people who are in difficulty?

Dr. Sithanen: That's what we are saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have got another two months to do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question! Hon. Spéville!

**PUBLIC OFFICERS – RODRIGUES/MAURITIUS
ESTABLISHMENT – TRANSFER**

(No. B/283) **Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms whether, in regard to the public officers who have applied for permanent transfer and who have been granted same from the Rodrigues establishment to the Mauritius establishment and *vice versa*, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof for period -
 - (i) January 2000 to December 2005;
 - (ii) January 2006 to date, and
- (b) their job title, indicating their respective previous and present posting.

Mr Hookoom: I am informed that, following a Government decision and with the approval of the Public Service Commission in April 2003, 22 public officers have been transferred from the Rodrigues establishment to the Mauritian establishment and six officers have been granted permanent transfer from the Mauritian establishment to the Rodrigues establishment for the period January 2000 to December 2005.

For the period January 2006 to date, 19 officers have been granted permanent transfer from the Mauritian establishment to Rodrigues establishment and two officers have been granted permanent transfer from Rodrigues establishment to the Mauritius Establishment with the approval of the appropriate Service Commissions.

Mr Speaker Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I am tabling the information.

**RODRIGUES - ACTION PLAN OF THE EMPOWERMENT
FOUNDATION**

(No. B/284) **Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Action Plan of the Empowerment Foundation, he will state the number of projects earmarked for 2008 and 2009 for Rodrigues, indicating –

- (a) the amount of funds transferred to the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., as at to date in relation thereto and
- (b) the beneficiaries thereof, indicating the amount of money disbursed.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the objective of the NEF in Rodrigues is to empower the Rodriguans so that they engage in sustainable income generating activities and become financially independent. In particular, in-lagoon fishers are finding it difficult to earn their living in a sustainable manner from their fishing activity as the lagoon is already depleted.

In this context, a survey carried out by the Empowerment Programme in January 2008 revealed that around 1,000 fishers had showed interest in moving out of in-lagoon fishing and to engage in alternative income generating activities in various sectors with the support of the Empowerment Programme. This Programme is currently being implemented by the National Empowerment Foundation.

A special scheme was accordingly worked out by the Empowerment Programme whereby fishers as well as other unemployed could benefit from technical assistance, including training/mentoring and from a soft loan scheme to set up a small business. The beneficiaries are entitled to loans of up to a maximum amount of Rs150,000 per beneficiary with an interest rate of 6.5% per annum, without any fixed charge, to be refunded over a period of seven years with a moratorium of up to one year. The loans are disbursed by DBM to two Co-operative Credit Unions for onward lending to the beneficiaries. The Co-operative Credit Unions are also responsible for collecting the repayments.

Furthermore, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a Steering Committee has set been up to ensure a speedy processing of applications. The Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and other stakeholders is mandated to evaluate and recommend projects for implementation.

With regard to part (a) of the question, an initial amount of Rs75 m. was transferred to DBM Ltd. to assist the Rodriguans, in particular the in-lagoon fishers, so that they can set up a business.

The House may wish to note that the NEF office became fully operational in Rodrigues in December 2008. To date, some 700 beneficiaries

have submitted projects proposals out of which 243 are fishers. 51 projects have already been approved for a total Project Value of about Rs5 m. Disbursement is being effected in respect of the 51 projects in a phased manner, depending on the progress of implementation. Up to now, a sum of Rs1.5 m. has been disbursed to the beneficiaries.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether the information he has given us, explains the refusal by the Ministry of Finance to agree to this project of the Rodrigues Local Government to give financial assistance to those who want to opt out of lagoon fishing?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are approximately 2,000 fishers. Some will continue to fish in a sustainable manner and some will give up their cards and will be compensated. The disagreement that existed between Central Government and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is on how that money would be used.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - let me be very candid about it - we were in favour of those who are above 60 years old to be given compensation in return for their cards. And for the others we are in favour of empowering them, and basically what we mean by empowering them is that we would grant them some money and, at the same time, we would give them a soft loan so that they can start a new activity. This is where the disagreement lies, it is on the cut off date and basically on what is the amount. We have met last week; they have submitted new proposals. There have been some counterproposals made and I think that if there is goodwill on both sides, we should be able to reach an agreement. One, for those who are going to give up their cards, and two, for those who will continue either with sustainable fishing activity or will go into alternative activities. We have suggested also, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the sum of Rs187 m. earmarked from the Food Security Fund has been earmarked in Rodrigues. So, some of the alternative activities could be funded from by the Rs187 m. that we will save for Rodrigues.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether, in the Ministry of Finance's, in Government's reading of the law, those who will hand over their fishermen card will not be allowed to fish in any way, at any time, or is it that they lose the benefits which the card will give, especially bad weather allowance?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that's a very fair question. This is also one area that we are looking into. Definitely, for the second one,

they won't get it. It is understood, from a meeting that I have had with the Chief Commissioner of Rodrigues, that they will stop fishing. One of the reasons is because we want to have sustainable fishing activities, especially outside the lagoon. If they will continue to do it, then we are back to square one.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether the State Law Office has been asked if this can be done in practice, and whether it would be an offence for somebody to go fishing? We have thousands of amateur fishers in Mauritius. If that is the mindset, I don't think it can be done.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is the proposal from our friends of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. Otherwise, if they continue to fish, it will defeat the purpose of the measure. I am sure that the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows what the problem is. So, that will defeat the purpose.

Mr Von-Mally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the problem is that we want to reduce the number of fishermen in the lagoon. Being given that we all want to reduce this number, and that there are 700 demands for the money given by the Empowerment Programme, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister tell us whether he will make sure that matters are speeded up? Because, in fact, there are 700 demands, and only a few have benefited from this help yet?

Dr. Sithanen: Let's be fair. We could not reach agreement for a long time, and one of the reasons was the point raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. We have made some proposals, and we only received the counterproposal last week. We are in the middle of two Budgets. I have a proposal on my table, which was given to me this afternoon. At tea break, I will look at it, and try to expedite matters.

Mr Spéville: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the objective of the NEF in Rodrigues was to reach 300 projects for 2008 and, from the hon. Minister's reply, I think that this has not been met. Can I know from the hon. Minister what have been the obstacles to attain the objective?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't want to be dragged into local politics in Rodrigues. I know where my hon. friend is trying to get me. Let's look at what will be in the interest of our brothers and sisters in Rodrigues. There were some problems on who should manage this Fund. Even in Mauritius, it is not the Ministry of Finance which does it. We have entrusted it to people who know what is happening on the ground. This is

the proposal made to Rodrigues. I think we have made some headway. Let's look at the future rather than being dragged into what happened in the past.

PETIT CAMP - FOOTBALL GROUND - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/285) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a football ground at Petit Camp, Phoenix, he will state where matters stand.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that our consultant, namely Luxconsult, has already effected a site visit on 30 March 2009 at Petit Camp, Phoenix, accompanied by the Parliamentary Private Secretary, Mr Pradeep Peethumber, and respective Members of Parliament, namely Ministers Kasenally, Chaumière and hon. Dr. Hawoldar. The preliminary design has already been submitted, with cost estimate to the tune of Rs6,956,521.74. It is now being examined, and will be finalised in due course.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the contract for the construction of this football ground was already given in 2004, and that the work was expected to start by end of 2005? Why is it that the project has been kept in abeyance for all this time?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sure that the hon. lady, who was then PPS for the constituency, would perhaps be aware that, due to some reasons, probably - I am not saying this for sure - the contract had to be cancelled. Now that there is a consultant, the work has been done. If the hon. lady will bear with us, I can assure her that, within the next two weeks, it will be finalised and, hopefully, we will all be there for the laying of the foundation stone.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The hon. Minister mentioned that the contract was cancelled. The new contract was already given by end of 2005. I wonder what has happened to that contract. Why do we have to issue a new contract now?

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what I said is that I understand it was cancelled; I was not sure. I took the precaution of saying that I was not sure.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I then ask the hon. Minister why is it that he did not enquire about the contract? How

come that a new contract is about to be issued, a site visit has been effected and, yet, there is nothing known about what has happened earlier? I suppose the present Minister should be aware of it.

Mr Bundhoo: I shall certainly inquire into the matter, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. As I said earlier, I assure the hon. lady that whatever has been done in the past is behind us. Let's look at the future, and we are all going to lay the foundation stone of the stadium.

MEDICAL COLLEGES - SETTING UP

(No. B/286) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to the operation of Medical Colleges in Mauritius, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Tertiary Education Commission, information as to if it is in presence of any new application, and if so, the number thereof, indicating where matters stand in each case.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) that, out of six applications received for the setting up of Medical Colleges in Mauritius, three have not been processed further due to failure on the part of the applicants to submit additional information required.

These applicant institutions, all from India, are as follows -

- (i) Jain College of Medical Sciences Ltd.;
- (ii) Holy Mary Institute of Technology and Science, and
- (iii) Sumandeep Vidyapeeth Deemed University.

Regarding the other three, the Chitkara Educational Trust and DYP Worldwide Ltd. have, on 24 February 2009 and 27 February 2009 respectively, been allowed by TEC to set up a Medical College in Mauritius for the running of programmes leading to the award of degrees by University of Technology, Mauritius (UTM). The application for registration of the institutions and accreditation of their programmes are being processed. It is to be noted that additional information has been sought from the two institutions on 08 April 2009 and is being awaited.

The third application being processed by TEC is from Manipal Universal Learning Private Limited for the setting up of a Medical College with degree awarding powers. The application, which was submitted on 08 January 2009, was followed by a revised application on 19 March 2009.

TEC, which has sought for additional information from the applicant on 07 April 2009, is awaiting a response.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister when these institutions are expected to start operation?

Dr. Bunwaree: There are procedures going on. If the hon. Member has heard me well, all of these institutions have been asked to submit further information. It is a bit up to them. As soon as they submit the information, the process will go on very actively.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the Sri Ramachandra Medical University for medical studies is also among those which have already received clearance to operate?

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes. In fact, two medical colleges have already registered. One is the SSR Medical College, which we know, and the other one is the off-shore campus of the Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know when the Sri Ramachandra University will be ready for operation?

Dr. Bunwaree: The information I have is that it was registered on 29 January 2009, and has not yet started operation. It is expected to start operating in the academic year 2009-2010 to offer MBBS programme to be awarded by the Sri Ramachandra University, Chennai.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House whether the three institutions are fully recognised by India?

Dr. Bunwaree: Last week, I tabled a set of rules/regulations, and the procedures they have to go through. I think it was very clear, and I submitted them last week.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, last week, I asked the hon. Minister this question and he said he was going to check. I wanted to know what are the bodies in India that certify for any institutions to be implanted in other countries and whether there is a condition imposed by TEC to all the institutions which have applied to set up a branch or university here to be recognised.

Dr. Bunwaree: It all depends. Concerning the two cases which I mentioned, they are going to be under the aegis of the University of Technology, Mauritius, and there is an International Committee which looks into the matter. When it comes to universities that are already well

established in India, of course, we go according to the regulations that are there and the regulations of TEC as well.

Mr Jugnauth: I want to be specific on this issue. TEC has got a certain criteria whereby it will request any applicant to furnish proof of its recognition in India. I want to know from the Minister, especially with regard to the institutions from India, what are the bodies that are required to provide a certification?

Dr. Bunwaree: I can submit it because there is a list of a variety of cases in India, but we all go according to what is officially recognized there.

Dr. Hawoldar: May I ask the hon. Minister with regard to the new medical colleges which are planning to set up a branch in Mauritius will they be using our hospitals for clinical medicine or are they interested in setting up teaching hospitals on purpose?

Dr. Bunwaree: For the time being, they are going to use our hospitals, but we are impressing on them either to upgrade our hospitals, which will be in the benefit of Mauritius in any case, or to set up their own hospitals.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for other institutions that have settled in Mauritius there was a requirement of getting the University Grants Commission Certification. For institutions coming from India, it is the University Grants Commission Certification that is required. We just wanted to clear out whether these three institutions have obtained that particular certification from India?

Dr. Bunwaree: We have to consider one by one case, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. If it is an obligation in India, then we take it board here.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the degrees that are going to be awarded are going to be valid only for Mauritius, or whether those who are going to have those degrees will be able to go for specialisation outside Mauritius?

Dr. Bunwaree: Well, we are going to do our level best so that these degrees are recognised also outside Mauritius. When the awarding body is a body which is recognised in India, there is no big problem. When the body is another one then we have to be very careful. I agree with the hon. Member, but we are going to see to it before accepting, that the degree is going to be recognised abroad.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether, in terms of seats allocation from these colleges, there is certain quota reserved for Mauritian students, because actually we know what are the difficulties facing our Mauritian students with respect to SSR Medical School?

Dr. Bunwaree: It is not a fixed or definite quota, but we impress upon them, of course, and I am even seeing to it that the conditions are slightly different for Mauritian students than what they are for overseas students.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House how will the privacy of patients be ascertained in the hospitals which will be used for these purposes?

Dr. Bunwaree: All this is taken care of, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because, of course, it is important to keep the question of privacy, but this is a well-established criteria.

LE MORNE – PLEASURE CRAFTS OPERATORS

(No. B/287) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he is aware of the difficulties being faced by the small pleasure crafts operators operating at Le Morne, and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

CITE LA CURE – ELECTRICITY & WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/288) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities whether he is aware that some 20 families living at Cité La Cure, behind the NHDC Housing Estate, have not been supplied with electricity for years and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to –

- (a) the reasons therefor, and
- (b) the remedial actions that will be taken, if any.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission I will reply to PQ Nos. B/288 and B/336.

I am informed that since May 2007, Government has approved the relocation of beneficiaries of building site leases at *Cité La Cure* behind NHDC Housing Quarters to a new site in Roche Bois.

The Central Electricity Board (CEB) and Central Water Authority (CWA) will supply electricity and water to the families as soon as they move to the new site.

However, I am informed by the CWA that it has, on humanitarian grounds, provided water connections to beneficiaries of building site leases who are close to the CWA network, pending their relocation.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le vice Premier ministre, je n'ai pas trop bien compris. Vont-ils être délocalisés vers un autre site?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been a problem of squatters there. I have had a parliamentary question before on squatters and we find that the number quoted is sometimes 20, 40 or 61 and now 20 again. What we are doing, on a humanitarian ground, till they are relocated, we will provide whatever facilities there can be. When they are near the site of CWA network, water is being provided. Unfortunately, there is difficulty in getting access inside, because there is no way to get in. I hope, in the interest of every one, that a decision will be taken firmly to relocate them to appropriate housing conditions.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, je trouve inacceptable, qu'en 2009, des gens vivent dans de telles conditions. Est-ce que le *Deputy Prime Minister* ou le ministre d'alors avait fait un *site visit* pour voir dans quelles conditions vivent ces gens ? J'ai appris dans les journaux que, même à Agalega, les habitants ont l'électricité et l'eau 24 heures sur 24. À l'île Maurice, quand les membres du public font une application pour un morcellement il y a des critères à respecter mais, dans ce cas précis, pourquoi le gouvernement n'a-t-il pas respecté des critères avant d'allouer un bail à ces personnes qui habitent à *Cité La Cure*?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am sorry, I am not aware of what goes on in Agalega, but I certainly do know what goes on here. I'll make an appeal. The problem of squatters has been with us for decades. It's not new, we have not invented it, neither has the previous Government. Decisions are taken as and when required and, in this particular case, I gather that provision was made for relocation and I think the Members of the Constituency should encourage them in that direction. We must not forget that there have also been reactions from

other quarters, of people living around who would like to see them relocated. So, I would not like enter into a discussion on the merits or demerits. Yes, I agree with the hon. Member that we should provide better living conditions to our citizens, but there should also be some degree of respect for law and order when it comes to the application of the law.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, j'aimerais faire une requête au *Deputy Prime Minister*. Peut-on organiser un *site visit* avec les députés de la circonscription No. 4, parce qu'il y a même des cas d'enfants malades et ces familles ont besoin de l'électricité. C'est urgent. Il faut voir dans quelles conditions ces familles vivent, M. le président. Je fais, donc, un vibrant appel au *Deputy Prime Minister* pour que le nécessaire soit fait le plus tôt possible.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the lady who represents the constituency has made the same appeal to me. I would only be too happy to accompany the hon. Member and the other Members of the constituency to visit the site which he has mentioned. But, I insist again, we must not just go and visit sites, we must also provide solutions and sometimes there are solutions which are acceptable, sometimes not acceptable and others which can be discussed and improved upon. So, let's put our heads together if need be and provide better conditions.

Mr Jhugroo: Can I know the time frame when all these facilities will be available to the people living there?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the last thing I want to do is to put a time frame to any action, but if the hon. Member is agreeable, we can arrange for a site visit and go this week.

LA CHAPELLE ROAD, L'ESPERANCE, QUARTIER MILITAIRE – DRAIN WORKS

(No. B/289) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether he is aware that the drain works at La Chapelle Road, l'Espérance, Quartier Militaire, have not yet been completed and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the contract for the construction of a drain along La Chapelle Road, L'Esperance, Quartier Militaire was awarded as far back as 2001.

However, due to way leave issues the project could not be completed. I have requested the consultant of National Development Unit to propose an alternative solution.

Mr Dayal: I would like to impress upon the hon. Minister to speed up matters, because really the situation there is very deplorable.

Mr Bundhoo: That will be done, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

STC – DOUBLE-HULL VESSEL – PURCHASE

(No. B/290) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise & Co-operatives whether, in regard to the proposed purchase of a double-hulk vessel by the State Trading Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to where matters stand.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the STC has not envisaged to purchase a double-hull vessel.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, Please! Hon. Bundhoo, please!

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the STC has received any unsolicited bid from a promoter who is offering services to the STC for such a project?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government has agreed in principle for a company named Betonix to purchase a double-hull vessel.

Mr Ganoo: Has there been any bid for that?

Mr Gowressoo: There has been an expression of interest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister give the details of the expression of interest?

Mr Gowressoo: These are technical matters, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister then table a copy of the expression of interest?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the expression of interest was launched for the public. There were about 400 bidders and only one replied to them.

Mr Ganoo: When was the expression of interest publicised?

Mr Gowressoo: It was in 2007, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there has been any visit effected by the Chief Executive of State Trading Corporation with any advisor from the Ministry?

Mr Gowressoo: I am not aware, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, please address the Chair!

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not aware.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether there have been 400 tenderers?

Mr Gowressoo: There were 400 firms which were contacted.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the state of this vessel, can I know from the hon. Minister the age of the vessel according to the conditions he has set up? Can I know in which age bracket it is?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there have been 400 companies who were contacted and it is a brand new vessel.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Minister table the names of the 400 people who have been contacted by STC?

Mr Gowressoo: I can. There is no problem.

Mr Jugnauth: I am a bit puzzled, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because I heard the Minister say that there was an expression of interest and that people were contacted. May we know what procedure was adopted by the Ministry in order to receive those 400 bidders who came forward?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as I know there has been a request for the company to purchase a double-hull vessel and, at that time, for transparency there has been an expression of interest.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Will the hon. Minister confirm whether at no point in time was the Mauritius Shipping Corporation involved in that whole process?

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just replied that, at that time, Government, through MSC, requested the purchase of that ship.

MT - EMPLOYEES – VOLUNTARY EARLY RETIREMENT SCHEME

(No. B/291) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Information & Communication Technology whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Telecom, information as to if it has recently implemented a Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme for its employees and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the reasons therefor;
- (b) the terms and proposals thereof, and
- (c) the number of employees who have retired under the Scheme.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ganoo, I understand that this question was withdrawn.

Mr Ganoo: At some point in time, true it is, I indicated to the Chair that I will withdraw my question because the hon. Minister had told us he would not be present in the House. So, since he is here, I am sure....

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, he is here.

Mr Dulull: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that no Voluntary Early Retirement Scheme has recently been implemented by the Mauritius Telecom. However, in 2003, a Voluntary Early Release Scheme was introduced to be implemented over 3 years whereby 200 employees took advantage thereof.

As from the beginning of March 2009, Mauritius Telecom has revisited the Voluntary Early Release Scheme in line with its new corporate strategy, namely -

- (a) to streamline its operations through the rationalisation of its workforce, and
- (b) to attract new talents with modern skills and competencies required to face the challenges of a fast changing business environment.

Mauritius Telecom has recently communicated the revisited Voluntary Early Release Scheme to eligible employees who can opt to apply until 31 December 2009. Thus, the Voluntary Early Release Scheme will allow eligible employees to voluntarily retire from the company, subject to their application being approved on the basis of exigencies of services and retention of essential skills.

As regards part (b) of the question, the terms and proposals of the VERS are as follows –

- (a) eligibility: employees should be aged from 50 to 57 years old;
- (b) the VERS comprises three main elements namely –
 - (i) a lump sum compensation for past services;
 - (ii) an incentive bonus equivalent to 20% of the lump sum, and
 - (iii) pension benefits in accordance with the pension rules.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, insofar as part (c) is concerned, I am informed that as at to date, no employee has retired under the revised Voluntary Early Release Scheme.

Mr Ganoo: Does the hon. Minister have any idea of how many employees that the Mauritius Telecom hopes will be interested in the scheme?

Mr Dulull: Well, up to now, the Mauritius Telecom has not conducted any intention survey.

TERRE ROUGE-VERDUN HIGHWAY PROJECT – RETENDERING EXERCISE, COST, ETC.

(No. B/292) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the Terre Rouge-Verdun Highway Project, he will state where matters stand, indicating if Government –

- (a) will consider a retendering exercise thereof and, if not, why not, and
- (b) has taken cognizance of the estimated cost of the project submitted by the Road Development Authority

(Withdrawn)

IVTB, NICOLAY ROAD – STUDENTS

(No. B/293) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East)** asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to each of the courses run by the Industrial and Vocational Training Board Centre at Nicolay Road, since its coming into operation to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to a list of the students enrolled, indicating their respective addresses.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IVTB Centre at Nicolay Road, Port Louis was handed over to the IVTB in June 2008 after its acquisition by Government. This building houses a major IVTB Training Centre, known as Knowledge-Based Training Centre (KBTC). The aim of this Centre is to provide vocational training as well as apprentice courses to students from different parts of the country to enhance competency skills of our human resource to contribute constructively to the development of the country.

I am informed that 10 courses are currently being run for some 414 students who registered in December 2008 following a press advertisement issued in November 2008.

However, I do not consider it proper, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, to provide a list of students enrolled and their respective addresses but I am arranging to lay on the Table of the National Assembly a breakdown of the number of students in respect of each course, district-wise.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to draw the attention of the hon. Minister to the fact that only last week when the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance was talking about the Additional Stimulus Package, he did mention that this centre was set up to cater particularly for students of the region – using his own words. If the hon. Minister is not prepared to give the addresses, could he, at least, provide the number of students from the region? I mean, not only Plaine Verte, but Roche Bois, Cité la Cure, Ste Croix, Vallée Des Prêtres, Vallée Pitôt, Tranquebar, that is, the periphery of Port Louis, at least?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a centre which caters for the entire country. There are courses that are run there and only there. Certain courses are run only in this centre and in no other centres. So, we cannot limit it only to the region. But, I must tell the hon. Member that, in any case, out of 414 enrolments, we have 117 from Port Louis. The hon. Member has mentioned a few places and I'll try to look into the matter. But

I want to draw the attention of the House and of the hon. Member that we cannot deprive people from other places in the country to come and follow courses which are obtained only there.

Mr Lauthan: I am taking the words of the vice-Prime Minister where it is mentioned “to cater especially for children of the region”. There is a federation of 35 NGOs in the region which raised the issue that, according to their information, only a hand few of students come from the region.

Dr. Bunwaree: I agree. Of course, people around Port Louis are privileged, I must say. In fact, I am informed that all applications from the region of Port Louis have been taken on board.

Mr Lauthan: Can the hon. Minister lay on the Table of the Assembly a breakdown of these regions I have mentioned?

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am submitting the information, but then maybe the regions which the hon. Member has mentioned are not precisely there. The hon. Member has mentioned a few regions, we will look into that.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, hon. Lauthan!

FERRARI ROAD, CIRCONSTANCE, SAINT PIERRE - REINSTATEMENT

(No. B/294) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware of the bad state of the Ferrari Road at Circonstance, Saint Pierre, and if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Moka/Flacq District Council, information as to the remedial measures that will be taken.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that due to frequent heavy rainfalls, the wearing course of the Ferrari Road at Circonstance, St. Pierre, has been worn out resulting in the formation of pot holes.

I understand that hon. Surendra Dayal has effected a visit in that area some time back.

I am informed that reinstatement works will be undertaken to the road in the third week of this month.

EDGAR QUIRIN ROAD, PHOENIX – REINSTATEMENT WORKS

(No. B/295) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether he is aware of the bad state of the Quirin Road, near the Phoenix Rovers Club, in Constituency No. 15, La Caverne and Phoenix and of the existence of stagnant water caused by a deficient drainage system thereat and if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have been advised by the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix that reinstatement works are presently being carried out at Edgar Quirin Road, Phoenix.

I would also like to inform the House that, in the aftermath of the torrential rain in September 2008, the Municipal Council of Vacoas/Phoenix, with financial assistance from the National Development Unit, has already constructed a drain over a length of 110 metres along Edgar Quirin Road, Phoenix. The drain passes in front of the Phoenix Rovers Club.

As regards the problem of stagnant water, a cross drain is being constructed to connect the newly constructed drain to an existing absorption drain in front of the club.

The whole project is expected to be completed by the end of April 2009.

Mr Soodhun: Sir, I just want to put it on record that I thank the PPS, hon. Peetumber for that.

NEW BORN BABIES – LOW BIRTH WEIGHT

(No. B/296) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he is aware that the percentage of low birth weight of newly born babies has increased from 14% in 2000 to over 17% in 2007 and, if so, will he state if any study has been carried out to identify the causes thereof and if so, indicate the findings thereof.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there has been an increase in the percentage of low birth weight (less than 2.5 kg) of newly born babies from 14.3% in 2000 to 17.3% in 2007 in public hospitals. In fact, there has been a constant increase in the low birth weight babies as from 2002 to 2007, except for 2006. However, in 2008, the figure has come down to 16.7%.

I am further informed that a study was carried out in 1996 by the Mauritius Institute of Health on the factors associated with Low Birth

Weight in Mauritius. The study revealed that the causes leading to low birth weight babies were –

- (i) inadequate antenatal follow up, that is, pregnant mothers were not attending antenatal clinics early and regularly during pregnancy. This was due to the increasing number of working pregnant women;
- (ii) short stature of mothers, that is, short mothers were giving birth to low birth weight babies, and
- (iii) hypertension problems during pregnancy.

Following that study, the Antenatal Care Services were reorganized at the level of all health regions and arrangements were made for antenatal clinics to be conducted on a weekly basis by obstetricians in all Health Centres. In addition, pregnant women were encouraged to attend antenatal follow up as early as possible through an aggressive health education campaign.

Furthermore, the setting up of two Neonatal Intensive Care Units (ICU), one at Victoria Hospital in 1998 and one at SSRN Hospital in 1999 have contributed significantly in the better management of low birth weight babies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to inform the House that a Technical Committee chaired by the Director General Health Services and composed of Gynaecologists, Paediatricians, Neonatologists, Nutritionists and Community Physicians has been set up by my Ministry to monitor the situation closely and to come up with a Plan of Action to address the issue of low birth weight babies.

Moreover, a study will be undertaken in June 2009, with the support of the WHO, to reassess the various causative factors responsible for low birth weight in order to take timely and corrective steps to redress the situation.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have got a supplementary question. Could the hon. Minister inform the House when was the technical committee set up?

Dr. Jeetah: This has been set up recently, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Soodhun: Can the hon. Minister inform the House if, after obtaining the report from the technical committee, this will be used to educate the population through the television and the media?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. This is a matter of great concern I must say. I must thank the hon. Member for having raised this issue so that everybody becomes aware. As I said, we have set up a technical committee and we are also conducting a study with the help of the WHO to make sure that we take appropriate measures to redress the trend.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I agree with the Minister that sensitisation should be done but, however, much we do sensitisation, if we do not have the cooperation of employers, mainly for those who work in factories, it won't work. Can the Minister say whether he has made any approach with employers so as to release women for specific time and dates when they need to attend the ante-natal clinics?

Dr. Jeetah: Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a very valid point. I shall certainly pass on the message to the hon. Minister of Industry. I must also say that we have now set up a mobile clinic and we have set a target of 100,000 people to be screened within a year.

Mr Varma: Is the hon. Minister aware that, according to a survey carried out, 40% of women working in the *Zone Franche* are anaemic which is also a strong contributory factor to the low weight of the babies?

Dr. Jeetah: I have given the reasons why we have this difficulty, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I did mention that. I do not have that parameter as a cause for low birth rate, but through this mobile clinic we shall certainly have a better idea of the state of health of our population.

GLOBAL RECESSION - IMPACT

(No. B/297) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the global recession, he will state if a survey has been carried out to assess the impact thereof on the poorer households, including the nutrition and schooling of children in poor families and, if so, indicate the safety net programmes Government proposes to take to bail out the poor.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the global economy has been sliding into a recession since mid 2007. But, over the period mid 2007 to December 2008, there has been no recession in Mauritius. On the contrary, while economies around the world have been contracting and some of them even collapsing, ours was growing at a pace of around 5.3 percent per annum. In the 18 months ending December 2008,

our economy has actually created an unprecedented number of jobs around 23,000 and attracted a record amount of FDI, totalling some Rs17 billion. The unemployment rate has gone down to 7.2%, its lowest level in eight years and per capita income has increased by around 8 percent. There was no recession in Mauritius during that period and, in fact, the number of men and women in jobs has never been higher. All these are positive developments that have a major positive influence on poverty alleviation.

Moreover, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, anticipating a worsening of the global economic situation as far back as May 2008, we took a number of actions in the 2008/2009 Budget to stimulate demand in the economy and to protect the population. For instance, we have provided Rs395 m. for the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme. This includes a programme to ensure that no child of pre-primary school age from absolute poor families is left out of school, and a second programme to support, in an integrated manner, the 7,157 families living in the 229 pockets of poverty across the island. Indeed, following a survey conducted by the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups in September last, it was noted that some 544 children living in pockets of poverty were not attending pre-primary schools. The Eradication of Absolute Poverty Committee, with the collaboration of the NGOs and private sector, offered, on a pilot basis, a package of incentives to encourage these poor children to attend school. This year, out of 544 children, some 316 are still going to pre-primary school. These children are being provided a free meal, school fees where necessary, transport where necessary, as well as school materials. The annual average expenditure per child, excluding transport, amounts to Rs12,000.

The EAP Committee has, in the light of the feedback received, reviewed its policy, and is now taking on board children from absolutely poor families who are outside the identified pockets of poverty. Currently, the EAP is screening some 270 additional requests for inclusion in the project.

After the Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we took further actions to support families with modest income. In October 2008, we reviewed the Automatic Pricing Mechanism for petroleum products to allow consumers and businesses to realise quicker gains from the decline in prices. The subsidies on rice and flour on LPG were maintained so as not to exert pressure on the poor.

In 2007, as a caring Government, we intervened to keep the price of flour at Rs6.90 per half kg, preventing it from rising to Rs10.20 per half kg.

The subsidy amounted to Rs683 m. Similarly, for LPG, without a subsidy, the price of LPG would have been around Rs550 per 12 kg cylinder. The price to the consumer has been kept at Rs315 because of a subsidy of Rs614 m.

In spite of the huge accumulated losses by the STC, due to the high level of cross subsidies on flour and cooking gas, we took steps to ensure that the population benefits from falling international prices. As a result, the price of flour was reduced further by 15%, that of bread of 100 gram by 5.67% and that of LPG by 5%.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, four months after the Additional Stimulus Package, we have saved 1,700 direct jobs. Considering that many enterprises are heeding our call for laying-off workers only as a last resort, we can estimate that we have saved many jobs from the adverse impact of the global recession, and these include men and women who have to look after their children. There are more such results to come in the future.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister give information concerning the number of families being involved and the amount spent so far? How much has been spent so far, and how many families have been benefiting from this scheme?

Dr. Sithanen: For the EAP, which is an absolutely important component of our eradication of poverty, I have given the figures. There were 544 children last year, and 316 this year. I have also indicated to the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the EAP is currently screening 270 additional requests for inclusion in the project. As I stated this morning, in my reply to the PNQ of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, there are 18,000 more women that have been employed for the three-year period 2005-2008 and, these are either prime breadwinner or second breadwinner. And such employment would help financially the families of these breadwinners.

Mr Guinness: Apart from the children that the hon. Minister is targeting, that is, 544 last year and 316 this year, can I know whether there is any specific targeted measure for these poor families? I think there are 29 pockets of poverty which have been surveyed.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a whole range of measures. First, there is training, which is extremely important, because very often in these poor families, one of the problems is lack of training and adequate education in order to allow them to enter the market. So, there is a lot of training being given by the Empowerment Programme. There is also the scheme that we inaugurated last week in Bambous, where about 200

families which come from extremely poor backgrounds, are getting house at a subsidised rate. The children are going to school, the women and the men given training. We have enlisted the support of NGOs and of the corporate sector in the region to make sure that this is a sustainable project, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Ganoo: Can I come back to this question of pre-primary schools and children not attending school? The hon. Minister will remember that, in his Budget, he mentioned the figure of 5,000 such children roaming about in the country and who would be attended to. Can he, therefore, explain why the figure is different today?

Dr. Sithanen: It is a fair question. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to work at times from proxy. With regard to the figures on the absolute level of poverty and also on the relative level of poverty, I indicated to the House that, approximately 27,000 of our compatriots are in relative poverty, and we identified these areas. There are probably some exaggerations in the figures, because I have asked the same question. We started with a first batch of 500, and work is still being done to identify children who are three or four years old. I have requested the Chairman and the Committee of the EAP Programme to give priority to these poor kids who are aged three and four, and to make sure that they go to school. At the same time, we need to have a *politique d'accompagnement* to make sure that we help their families also to understand the values of education. They will also have training and they can better look after their children subsequently. So, there is some gap. We are looking into this, and we are also discussing with some other players that will help us to identify these kids. It is not an easy task, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Government knows how to do certain things in terms of investment in infrastructure but, *nous avons besoin de relais sur le terrain pour identifier les gens qui sont très pauvres*. We are in the process of enlisting the support of NGOs and private companies in these areas. They also have a corporate social responsibility programme, and we will use them, as well as other networking bodies, to identify all these children.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister also announced that the EAP Programme will be partly financed by the contribution of the private sector up to a level of 30%. Can the hon. Minister give to the House an indication whether the private sector has come up to its pledge?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this also is a fair question. They have suggested that we need to have a detailed programme. We are in

the process of finalising the programme, but with some of them we have an undertaking that, whatever expenditure has been incurred by Government, barring infrastructure, which is obviously our responsibility, they are willing to contribute 30%.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning what the hon. Vice-Prime Minister mentioned earlier, can I ask him whether any survey has been carried out in the region of *Cité La Cure*, Ste. Croix and in the vicinity, where some children are not going to school, because there are of very poor families?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I did indicate, in a question that was asked by one hon. Member, that there are 229 pockets of poverty. It starts from the poorest which is in the Constituency of my friend, hon. Ganoo, to one which is the richest which is in Constituency No. 18. We have the list. I have no problem giving this list to the hon. Member. It starts with the poorest vicinity to the highest in terms of human development index.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance just mentioned that the poorest are in Constituency No. 14 and, in spite of the training that we may give to these people, they don't get employment because employers do not want to provide transport to these people to come to work on this side of the island. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has any scheme for these people? Because employers do not want to pay transport for somebody who comes from, say, Chemin Grenier to come to work in Quatre Bornes?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what the hon. lady has said is not borne out by evidence. I have just mentioned this morning that we have created 36,000 jobs in the last three years. Let me also inform the hon. lady that the 36,000 jobs is net job creation. It is gross job creation less job loss. The actual number of jobs created is much higher. We have never had so many jobs created for a very long time. It is not true to say that these people are not receiving jobs. The second point that I would like to inform the House is that from the Empowerment Programme, out of the various Training Schemes 7,000 people have received training or placement and many of them have gone on to get a job.

As far as the other issue is concerned, where do we stop it? If someone resides in Rivière du Rempart and gets a job in Mahebourg, is the hon. Member suggesting that Government should fund for the transport? It is the responsibility of the enterprise that recruits people to make sure that

transport is provided. At the end of the day, what is required is that, in terms of the spatial development that we have enterprise that are located across the country, so that it is easier for people in the region to get a job, without having to travel far.

The Deputy Speaker: A last question. Hon. Ganoo!

Mr Ganoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since we are speaking of the poorest of the poorest - I am asking a question concerning the fishermen and this falls squarely within the framework of this question ...

(Interruptions)

I am sure the hon. Minister will agree with me. One of the *revendications* of the fishermen has been that when they buy their diesel or other petroleum products, they have been asking a subsidy for that. I have been told that it is the Minister of Finance who has been personally against this proposal. Is it not fair to review this demand?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, why they did not do it when they were in Government?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please!

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have responsibility. When they were in Government, they did not do anything. They left the country in a mess. And now, they come and make proposals that we cannot afford.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, please!

WORKFARE PROGRAMME – UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

(No. B/298) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the unemployment benefits, especially for the vulnerable groups and the women, he will state if Government is considering introducing a minimum amount thereof to supplement the Workfare Programme.

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions (Mrs S. Bappoo): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

Sir, the question of introducing additional unemployment benefits for vulnerable groups and women to supplement Workfare Programme does not arise on account of the following reasons –

Government has initiated several policies to help vulnerable groups and women in gaining a decent living instead of just remaining jobless. Although the unprecedented world economic situation, in only one year, that is, 2008, the Government created some 19,400 jobs, which by far, outnumbered the number of jobs created by the previous regime during the four-year period 2002 to 2005, and as was mentioned this morning by the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment, over the last three years, 36,000 jobs have been created.

The unemployment rate went down for the last three consecutive years from 9.6% to 7.2% and the total unemployment has been brought down to around 25% since 2005. It is worth noting, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that out of the 9.6% of the unemployed most of them are women.

The present Government has taken bold initiatives to devise schemes, especially targeted to women and, as a result of which, we brought a considerable increase in the number of women in economic activities, mostly, some 6,300 women in employment on a yearly basis.

The philosophy of this Government is to empower vulnerable groups and women for sustained livelihood in keeping with the Chinese wisdom which postulates that it is better to teach someone to fish than to give him or her a fish to eat.

My Ministry, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, has itself so far implemented an array of schemes for the benefit of vulnerable groups and women as follows –

- There are various social aid schemes which include, of course, since the last budget, a special allowance of Rs700 per child paid to single mothers to place their children in Day Care Centres to enable them to take up employment.
- More recently, the new Workfare Programme which has been set up under the Employment Rights Act provides, *inter alia*, the payment of the TUB, that is, the Transitional Unemployment Benefit to laid-off workers. And, as to date, 262 laid-off workers have been paid, which includes 40% of women beneficiaries. Moreover, any person may apply, under

the Social Aid Scheme, to the Ministry of Social Security on account of insufficiency of income.

I need also to mention that the following relevant schemes are operated by other Ministries and organisations for vulnerable groups and women –

- (i) this year, the Human Resource Development Council has provided additional assistance for training and re-skilling for some 117 laid-off workers, including 91 women;
- (ii) since 2005, the Small Enterprise and Handicraft Development Authority (SEHDA) has created some 4,590 new jobs in some 2,181 newly operational small and medium enterprises;
- (iii) under the National Empowerment Foundation, some 3,342 unemployed persons have been placed in employment as at February 2008. Moreover, some 560 women are being trained in different sectors;
- (iv) the National Women Entrepreneur Council has as at to date some 1,700 women entrepreneurs registered and are contributing in economic activities;
- (v) the DBM is implementing two loans schemes to support vulnerable groups and women entrepreneurs, namely the Micro Credit Finance Scheme through the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups and the second one is the Special Booster Micro Credit Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs. Under the Micro Credit Scheme, the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups had approved some 880 projects for a total sum of Rs29 m. to enable vulnerable families and mostly women to increase their household income by undertaking income generating activities.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, under both these schemes, the percentage of women entrepreneurs who have availed themselves of loan facilities, account to 40%, that is, 500 women.

With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the details on all these different schemes and facilities mentioned in my answer for the benefit of the House.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my point is that being given that many textile industries are closing down and the vulnerable workers are women of the age of 35-40 and it is very difficult for other employers to employ these categories of workers, I'm just making an appeal to the Government and the Minister concerned to look into the matter because there is a lot of cases which will keep coming because of the prevailing situation. I make an appeal that special attention be given to these categories of workers.

Mrs Bappoo: I have already mentioned in my reply, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that under the new Workfare Programme, 40% of laid off workers are women, they are benefiting from this scheme and they are not remaining penniless.

Mrs Perrier: The Minister just listed a number of programmes and schemes to encourage women to work. But is she aware that up to now single mothers with children attending schools who benefit from social aid for their children have to earn not more than Rs1,400 per month to keep this social aid for their children? Will she review this and encourage more women to get employment?

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a new scheme and I think, by now, we already have been having some forty to forty-five single mothers benefiting from these schemes. They have to undergo and respect the criteria that have been worked out. They keep their social aid. Never in the history of social aid when someone is having social aid, that person is allowed to take up a job. It is for the first time; keeping the social aid, but having small children, she is allowed to place the children in a pre-school and Government gives another special allowance of Rs700. We are having a few of them as, I just said, some forty women have started benefiting this scheme.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, last year I congratulated the Minister when she announced the new scheme, but, I repeat, the single woman has to earn only Rs1,400 to still benefit from this social aid. So, Rs1,400 for two children attending school, plus Rs1,400 as salary, it's a very poor earning for a single mother to cater for her children and all expenses in the house.

Mrs Bappoo: I do understand the situation of these women, but those women who have already benefited from this scheme, their social aid, the Rs700 per child to be placed in a school, pre-school 3 to 5, plus the job that they may be earning, they might be doing 2 or 3 part-time jobs and it does

give them the basic financial budget in order to cater for her needs and her children.

Mrs Perrier: They cannot earn more than Rs1,400 to benefit from the scheme. I have two cases and I went personally to the Social Security of Bambous, because we talked about it last year together and I congratulate the hon. Minister for the new scheme, but the salary should not exceed Rs1,400 per month to be still eligible for the social aid. They can still benefit from the social aid for their children. More than that they are denied the social aid for the children!

Mrs Bappoo: I don't think this is correct, because if you have any special case where this has been requested by any local social security office, the hon. Member can give it to me and I will enquire further because we have reviewed the conditions together with the Ministry of Finance and it is working perfectly well.

Mrs Perrier: I will ask the Minister to check and make a statement, because I can give her specific cases.

Mrs Bappoo: I can't check if I don't know the case. The names must be submitted to me personally and I will look into the matter and I will inform the hon. Member, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether she would consider reviewing the threshold for eligibility for that scheme?

Mrs Bappoo: I will first check and then I will keep the House informed.

COASTAL ROAD, RIAMBEL – ACCIDENTS

(No. B/299) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware that numerous accidents have taken place and are still taking place along the Coastal Road of Riambel, and if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, information as to if a survey on road safety thereat was carried out in 2005, and if so, indicate the findings thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is a fact that there have been quite some accidents along the coastal road at Riambel. The House would recall that last week in my reply to PQ No. B/247, I explained that the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit (TMRSU) of my Ministry carried out a road safety assessment along Black River and Savanne Coastal Road

on the stretch Riambel and Rivière des Galets and I enumerated the recommendations contained in the report.

Since then, a series of measures have been implemented. The TMRSU has provided reflectorised bend signs and multiple chevron signs on the approaches to the bends and at the bends to alert the drivers. I am informed by the Road Development Authority (RDA) of the following –

- (i) Mauritius Telecom and CEB have relocated poles at places which are accident-prone;
- (ii) it has already carried out the necessary road markings;
- (iii) protruding branches and bushes have been lopped alongside the road, and
- (iv) action has already been initiated for the fixing of guardrails at the appropriate locations and it is expected that this work will be carried out by next month.

I shall personally visit that part of the coastal road in Riambel and I shall ensure that the necessary measures are identified and implemented. I would like to add that at least two road humps would be installed in that region.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for his reply. I should like to ask through him to his colleague, the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether he can request the Forestry Department to have a follow-up of branches along this road which are a source of potential danger.

Mr Bachoo: We will look into this issue.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he is agreeable to put a speed breaker on that narrow road. This road is very narrow. We would like to know if the hon. Minister can envisage placing a speed breaker on that road?

Mr Bachoo: I have already answered this. I have already mentioned that, at least, two speed breakers will be installed in the region.

Mr Ganoo: Can we make sure, as MP's of this constituency, that the speed breakers are, in fact, placed where there are the habitations, the *Cité* of Riambel, because this is the place where these accidents have taken place?

Mr Bachoo: This is what exactly we are going to do.

Mr Ganoo: Can I also ask the hon. Minister whether in the report there is any plan to pursue the construction of pavements along the road?

Mr Bachoo: As the hon. Member is just mentioning that the road is a bit narrow, let's first have a look at it. If it is possible to put up footpaths, I do not have any objection.

CASE NOYALE – SQUATTERS – RELOCATION

(No. B/300) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the relocation of the squatters at Case Noyale, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a survey has revealed the presence of 42 families squatting over part of the *Pas Géométriques* Case Noyale (karo Kalyptis). I have been informed that the land has been squatted upon since the end of 1999. As the subject site has potential for touristic and other economic development, it has been decided to relocate the squatters to an alternative site.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that the process of relocation of squatters is a lengthy, delicate and cumbersome one due to the scarcity of State lands in the region. Moreover, for the relocation process to be successful there is a need to obtain agreement and acceptance of all stakeholders including the inhabitants of the immediate neighbourhood.

The suitability of a number of sites to accommodate the squatters has been looked into and in this context, several sites were identified, but no consensus could be reached with all the stakeholders. However, a plot of State land which suits the requirements has now been identified at Grande Case Noyale. A survey of the land is presently being carried out and the squatters will be relocated there once the exercise is completed.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before the 2005 election a lot of work had been done to identify land at Case Noyale by the sea. These squatters are *pied dans l'eau*. A lot of effort has been put and lands swap had been worked out with the sugar estate in the region. We had gone a long way. Can I know why that that scheme that has gone a long way was given up?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will say very frankly that there has been a lot of *levée de boucliers* of the people in the neighbourhood. Since I have taken over, we are looking at this carefully at the Ministry. For this plot of site I think it is suitable and they have had a wide consultation

with the stakeholders. But the problem with the stakeholders is that they agree, at one time, and at another time they are up at arms. But I hope we shall overcome this time.

Mrs Hanomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, to take on what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has just said, initially land had been identified at Case Noyale by the former Government. Can we know to what use this land has been put?

Dr. Kasenally: If a substantive question is put to me, I shall inquire and answer it. I would say also one thing.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, sometimes it happens that these people, as they say, are *pied dans l'eau* and they are reluctant to relocate. But, I think that an effort is being made.

Mr Ganoo: Do I understand the hon. Minister to have said that in the past there was no consensus on the alternative sites but now, the squatters are agreeable to move to the new site proposed at Grande Case Noyale and there is sufficient land to accommodate all of them?

Dr. Kasenally: This is what I have been given to understand by officers of my Ministry.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, before the relocation of these squatters, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House that there is a proper water and electricity supply?

Dr. Kasenally: Excuse me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I didn't get the last part of the question.

Mr Jhugroo: I would like to know whether there is a proper water and electricity supply given to these squatters before the relocation.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Kasenally: There is too much talking, I'm sorry, I cannot hear.

Mr Jhugroo: *De l'eau ek la lumière!* 'Putting People First' - give them a proper water and electricity supply!

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is policy of this Government - in fact, of every Government - to ensure that people who are relocated get the site and the services. This is the policy of my Ministry.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the Minister give a time frame for the relocation of these squatters at Case Noyale?

Dr. Kasenally: It is difficult to give a precise time frame, but I shall endeavour to ensure that this is done as expeditiously as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Next question, hon. Guimbeau!

**GAMMA COVENTA - WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT –
TENDERING EXERCISE**

(No. B/301) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Waste to Energy Project of Gamma Coventa, he will state if any tendering exercise was carried out and, if not, why not, indicating if direct negotiations were resorted to for the award of the contract.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has been no tendering exercise for the waste to energy project of Gamma Covanta.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply to a Private Notice Question on 22 May 2007 when the House was informed that in 2006, based on the demand and supply forecast for the period 2006-2013, the Central Electricity Board had to make arrangements to ensure that adequate and timely supply is put in place to much electricity demand.

Consequently, CEB started working on different scenarios to meet the demand requirements. At that time and in the context of the economic reform, which advocates measures to attract Foreign Direct Investment in the country, the Board of Investment was in presence of a number of proposals for the setting up of power plants, under section 13 of the Investment Promotion Act 2000.

Based on its requirements the CEB commented on the proposals and in the light of the CEB's comments, BOI issued a Letter of Intent to Gamma Covanta Ltd. on 05 May 2006. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Letters of Intent were also issued to Suzlon Energy Ltd., CT Power and CT SAV3 in December 2005, April 2006 and November 2006 respectively, all unsolicited proposals.

One of the numerous conditions of the Letter of Intent issued to Gamma Covanta was that a Power Purchase Agreement between the CEB

and the company should be signed with respect to purchase of electricity from the company. Subsequently, the company entered into negotiations with the Central electricity Board and the Ministry of Local Government. The negotiations are still ongoing.

Mr Guimbeau: We are talking about equal opportunity, good governance, *Maurice Ile Durable* and transparency, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I would like to ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether he will go into a new tender exercise so as to give a chance to everybody to have a quote nationally and internationally on this issue?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thought my reply included opportunities for everybody. Everybody who applied was given a Letter of Intent, including CT SAV3, Suzlon, all of them. So, where is the missed opportunity?

Mr Guimbeau: That means that there has been a tender exercise, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir.

The Deputy Prime Minister : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there has not, and as I have said, it is not for the first time. For the information of the House, there are no IPPs today that have been done on an open tender exercise. All the IPPs have been done by negotiations. So, let's not start again on this devil.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister state whether there is any contract with the Local Government for the waste disposal? Is there any arrangement?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course. The discussion will be with Local Government and CEB separately and then conjointly.

Mr Guimbeau: A last question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, whether *Maurice Ile Durable* funds are going to be used in that project?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We will come to that. No final decision has been taken. The answer is partly yes.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether there is another project concerning the same technology before the one proposed by Coventa?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am not aware of one before, but I am aware of one after.

The Deputy Speaker: Next question, hon. Guimbeau!

**GAMMA COVENTA – WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT –
STATE LAND -**

(No. B/302) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Waste to Energy Project of Gamma Coventa, he will state if it will be located on State land and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the extent of land leased,
- (b) the location thereof, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of the lease, including the yearly rental per *arpent*.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in regard to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the Waste to Energy Project of Gamma Coventa will be located on a plot of State land of an approximate extent of 23 ha, that is 54A49P, at La Chaumière in the District of Black River.

With regard to part (c) of the question, Gamma Coventa holds an industrial lease for its Waste to Energy Project. The rental is Rs500,000 per annum for the whole site of 54A49P. This rental is being claimed for the period of December 2006 to July 2008. Thereafter, the annual rental will be adjusted as per the provisions of the Finance (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008 – at the rate of 3% of the market value of the land as assessed by the Valuation Department. The period of the lease is from December 2006 to expire in June 2026 with a clause which provides renewal for four consecutive periods of 10 years each at a rental reflecting the market value.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now that the hon. Minister has confirmed that the Gamma Coventa will be located on a piece of State land, can he confirm to the House whether there will be no nuisance or pollution to environment?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this aspect is taken on board by the Ministry of Environment, and I understand that an EIA licence was obtained on 16 November 2007.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, if there is an EIA, can the hon. Minister tell the House whether there will be no pollution?

Dr. Kasenally: This is what I have just said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. An EIA licence has been issued in November 2007.

Mr Guimbeau: Is the Minister aware that, in other countries, Coventa has been condemned and had to pay fines concerning dioxin and furan?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I think there is a lot of misinformation about the emission of dioxin. As far as my knowledge is concerned, because I was involved when I was Minister of Public Utilities, mitigating measures are being taken to prevent the spread of dioxin. I can confirm that, even in the city of Vienna, there are such *usines* in the middle of the city. Only two days ago, I saw two of them right in the middle of the city of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would just like to table some information on those fines. Since it is situated on State land, can the hon. Minister confirm to the House and the public in general that there will be no pollution?

Dr. Kasenally: It would be difficult, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to confirm that there will be no pollution. There may be some form of pollution, which is controlled pollution or controlled emissions rather, that will not be deleterious to the health of the people in the surrounding areas and to the environment.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister just agreed that it's very difficult to confirm that there will be no pollution in that project. We all know that the Ministry of Environment has a very poor human resource to monitor that the EIA licence is really applied and respected. Can the hon. Minister inform the House how he can reconcile the project and the statement he just made with the concept of *Maurice Ile Durable*?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I better correct myself. When I said pollution, I immediately corrected myself and said emissions which are controlled. Of course, we can reconcile that with the philosophy of *Maurice Ile Durable*, because it also means that we are releasing less by incinerating our waste. We are saving on gas emission at Mare Chicose. It is a balancing act, and this is probably the best one in modern waste management to incinerate where you can regenerate a lot of other subsidiary activities, which will be beneficial to the country.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is clearly stated in the State Land Act and, if you will allow me, I will just quote what it says -

“All leases of State land shall be subject to the condition that the land lease shall not be so utilised so as to constitute any nuisance or to cause any detriment to or pollution of the natural resources and the environment.”

So, the Minister confirms that!

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Planning Division forms part of the Ministry of Housing & Lands, which will concert with the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Tourism. There are multi-ministerial committees which look into all these aspects, to ensure that there is as little if not no nuisance value of any of these industries which are planted.

BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION, SOCIAL AID & CARER’S ALLOWANCE – ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

(No. B/303) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the Basic Invalidity Pension, the Social Aid and the Carer’s Allowance, she will state if Government will consider the advisability of reviewing the eligibility criteria laid down and the allocations earmarked therefor, in view of the changes in the pattern of ill-health.

(Withdrawn)

THERMOPLASTIC SPEED BREAKERS

(No. B/304) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the project for the installation of thermoplastic speed breakers, in replacement of the road humps, he will state if –

- (a) adequate feasibility studies have been carried out;
- (b) a survey has been carried out amongst the road users, prior to the finalisation thereof and, if so, indicate when it was carried out, and
- (c) Government proposes to do away with road humps.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir undeniably, Government is firmly committed to implement road safety engineering measures to curb down the incidence of road accidents. One of the means to deter speeding is the construction of road humps at accident-prone areas and near schools.

However, it has been found that the traditional road humps carry along a lot of inconveniences.

Consequently, it was felt that some other physical speed-calming device needed to be identified that would be –

- (i) cheaper in its provision and maintenance;
- (ii) easily and rapidly provided and removed;
- (iii) an effective and reliable speed reducing device, and
- (iv) visible to road users at all times under any climatic conditions and would not cause discomforts to vehicle users.

The Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit worked on the matter, and came up with two new speed-calming devices; one to replace the normal hump, and the second one to replace the normal hump cum pedestrian crossing. They are known as the “Normal Mode” and the “Pedestrian Mode” rails respectively. In fact, the normal mode is made up of three thermoplastic transverse yellow strips at 1.5 m. interval of 200 mm large and 20 mm thick, fitted with double-sided reflectorised studs, which ensure the coaster-roller effects. The pedestrian mode is made up of two similar strips on each side of a pedestrian crossing.

The new device was installed on a pilot basis along Palma and Petite Rivière Roads. The Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit closely monitored the behaviour of the new devices over a period of nearly two months. After evaluation, the reliability and effectiveness of the new devices have been ascertained and confirmed. Besides, during the period 13 to 20 March 2009, a roadside survey was carried out, and the response from road users was positive.

To validate the findings of the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit, expert advice was sought from one Mr Gopinath Menon, a Traffic Engineering Consultant of international repute. He has confirmed, in writing, that the two new speed-calming devices are superior to the existing ones. Hence, it has been decided that the new devices will be installed, where warranted, instead of the traditional hump.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his elaborate answer. I have three supplementary questions. Has the Minister been made aware that one has to stop almost completely at these thermoplastic speed breakers prior to restart to drive over them?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, from all the information that I have with me, when the engineers of my Ministry conducted a survey in the regions, I get the feeling that people are happy. Secondly, it is a fact that one has to slow down. Instead of going at a speed of, lets say, 25 Km, one has to slow down to 10 Km, and this is what the speed breakers are meant for.

Dr. Ramloll: What I mean to say is that, when one comes to this hump, one has to stop completely.

The second question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is with regard to speed breakers in general. Will the hon. Minister inform the House if a survey has been carried out amongst car dealers, bus industry, service stations, wheel balancing companies road humps causing mechanical defects to shock absorbers and wheels? If no, I would like to ask him whether he will come back to the House with the information in the near future.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have just put up a few such speed breakers. It is premature at this stage for me to request all these institutions to conduct surveys on the issue. We just have hardly four or five such speed breakers. Let's try to put up additional ones, and then we will look at it. As at now, it is very difficult. But, from the report that I have from the technicians, it's more or less satisfactory that the speed breakers are working.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister just said that road sites surveys have been carried out. I don't know whether a survey has been carried out scientifically or not, and if the Minister is aware that taxi drivers along Palma Road are not at all happy with this, because they say that their cars are being damaged. They use the road at least 30 times a day and there is a big uproar amongst the taxi drivers using Palma Road.

Mr Bachoo: I have not received anything officially up till now. But, as I have just mentioned, I have contacted a few members of the *Forces Vives*, including the president of the *Forces Vives* and he was happy with the system. I would sincerely say that, in principle, we are against putting up such humps throughout the country, except in places where the need is felt. You know very well what the situation was in Palma; once these humps were removed, there was hue and cry amongst the members of the public. We were bound to install those humps. But, we are going to monitor and see if certain adjustments have to be made. For example, they have made a request to reduce its thickness, say, by 10 mm; we will look into it.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I see that opinions vary as far the new speed breakers are concerned. I am sure the Minister must be aware that there is a problem with regard to the humps where there are pedestrian crossings on the humps and especially for the disabled people on wheelchairs, they are unable to cross the road safely. Will the Minister look as a matter of priority to removing those kinds of humps? I don't know whether to put new ones, but anyway to alter them.

Mr Bachoo: That is exactly the reason why we are introducing the new mode; the new mode is flat while the other one is a bit oval shaped. I hope that, in the near future, we are going to have old ones replaced by the new ones.

Mr Bodha: As the Minister is aware, there is a street lamp just above every speed breaker and, in many cases, the lamp is not working. May I ask him to give a special attention to this, because in many cases while driving at night we will find ourselves just facing the humps and that is going to be very dangerous?

Mr Bachoo: With the new system those lights won't be required, but in the places where lights are needed I will request the Local Authority to look into the matter.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Varma!

Mr Varma: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I heard the hon. Member speaking about the interest of drivers. Could the hon. Minister confirm to the House that when placing these humps there will be a balancing of the interests of pedestrians and that of drivers?

Mr Bachoo: Of course, that is the reason why we are putting those humps.

The Deputy Speaker: The Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/309, B/313, B/314, B/319, B/320, B/321 and B/322 have been withdrawn. Time is over!

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF SO 10(2)

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

Mr X. L. Duval rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

At 4.23 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.00 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded the following Bills were read a first time -

- (a) The Hindi Pracharini Sabha (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2009);
- (b) The Electronic Transactions (Amendment) Bill (No. V of 2009),
and
- (c) The Occupational Safety and Health (Amendment) Bill
(No. VI of 2009)

Second Reading

THE CENTRE DE LECTURE PUBLIQUE ET D'ANIMATION CULTURELLE BILL (No. II of 2009)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, the purpose of the Bill is to set up the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle (CELPAC)* in order to encourage and promote reading through artistic, cultural and educational activities especially among those persons for whom access to reading activities is practically inexistent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1994 and 1997 my Ministry signed two Conventions with *the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)* formerly known as the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique (ACCT)* to set up a network of *Centre de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle* known as CLAC in the rural areas in Mauritius and Rodrigues with a view to providing library facilities, promoting cultural activities and sensitising the population on a wide array of topics and themes of common interest and also on the ills affecting the society. The cultural activities include conferences, theatrical and musical performances, training sessions in drawing and painting as well as workshops on literacy and story telling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the CLAC project which started in 1994 has now a network of 16 units - 12 in Mauritius namely at Rivière du Rempart, Grand' Baie, Triolet, Montagne Longue, Saint-Pierre, Bel Air, Mahebourg, Chemin Grenier, Grand Bois, Abercrombie, Cottage, and Petite Rivière and four in Rodrigues at Grande Montagne, Malabar, Rivière Coco, et La Ferme. Apart from cultural activities, the CLAC units place at the disposal of CLAC users a wide range of books, magazines, and newspapers. The public response has been very good and it is even envisaged to extend the network to other remote areas.

The CLAC project receives support in the form of reading materials, equipment and part funding from the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* while the Mauritian side provides premises, human resources, logistics and funding for artistic and cultural activities. The CLAC is being managed on a cost-sharing basis.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the 12 CLAC in Mauritius operate in buildings placed at our disposal by: the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, the Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart and the Black River District Councils and the four in Rodrigues within the premises of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. The centres are operated by staff of my Ministry, the Sugar Industry Welfare Fund, the Black River District Council and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

These centres are responding to the literary needs of the inhabitants of the rural communities. Each CLAC is equipped with a collection of more than 3000 books and these are issued continuously with newspapers and magazines. Cultural activities are organised either within CLAC premises or in space provided by the other supporting Ministries and District Councils. The CLAC project has been very successful. Just as an indication, the number of subscribers and users have, on an average, increased by almost four-fold in a span of five years. This is a positive signal as there is a perception that Mauritians read less.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 2007 the OIF, informed of the imminent termination of the CLAC programme and proposed to integrate Mauritius within its programme '*Appui aux Politiques Nationales de lecture Publique* requiring the CLAC to be converted into a new structure, namely the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle (CELPAC)*. This proposal of the *OIF* was made in view of its satisfaction with the performance of

CLAC in Mauritius. In this context, the OIF has proposed to disburse an amount of euros 170,000, that is, around Rs8 m. over a period of three years to set up the new structure. In addition the *OIF* also intends to equip the *CELPAC* with pedagogical tools such as computers, CDs, DVDs, games and cinema kits.

However, the proposals of the *OIF* was conditional to the new venture being operated by specific independent structure responsible for the promotion of public reading as is the case in other countries like Burkina Faso, Burundi, Haiti, Lebanon, Madagascar and Mauritania. According to the *OIF*, *CELPAC* is an improved tool for the promotion of grassroot level. The culture of reading will thus be given a new boost.

To give effect to the new proposal from the OIF for the integration of Mauritius in its new public reading programme, that is, *Appui aux Politiques Nationales de Lecture Publique*, and to provide for the affairs of the new structure to be managed by an independent body, prerequisites of the OIF, it has become necessary to set up this new structure by way of an Act of Parliament.

Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, in response to the requirements from the *OIF*, my Ministry has worked out the draft *CELPAC* Bill based on the model of the President's Fund for Creative Writing in English. With this proposed model, the *CELPAC* will be managed by a Committee established under an Act, instead of its management directly by my Ministry, as is presently the case. The personnel, logistics, and running costs will continue to be provided by the same public authorities. Additionally, besides receiving donations and grants from the *OIF*, the *CELPAC* will be in a position to tap other sources.

Coming to the Bill itself, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to point out that its main provisions focus on the objects of *CELPAC*, namely –

- (i) make reading materials easily accessible to the public;
- (ii) encourage and promote reading, and
- (iii) organise artistic, cultural and educational activities

In order to fulfill its objects effectively, the *CELPAC* will, besides reading materials, also lend audiovisuals to its subscribers. Moreover, the *CELPAC* network will gradually be extended by the opening of new centres both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

Activities such as lectures, seminars and conferences in artistic, cultural and educational fields will continue to be included in the programme of *CELPAC*. *CELPAC* will maintain its collaboration with the OIF and cooperate and establish links with other institutions having similar objects to those of *CELPAC*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill provides for the *CELPAC* to fix and levy fees or charges and raise funds and incur expenditure.

The *CELPAC* will be managed by a committee comprising a Chairperson, representatives from my Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, the Ministry of Local Government, Rodrigues and the Outer Islands, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare, the National Library, *L'Alliance Française*, a local writer and a person having experience in matters related to artistic creativity and cultural events.

Mr Speaker, Sir, presently the personnel of CLAC units work under the supervision of an Adviser, Mrs Chasle, who is the *Responsable Nationale* and a Culture Officer acting as the CLAC Coordinator. Given that the running of the CLAC programme has been a success, the present arrangements in terms of personnel will be maintained. The set-up will further be straightened with the coming into force of the *CELPAC*.

In fact, the legislation provides for the Supervising Officer of my Ministry to designate a public officer to be the Officer in Charge of *CELPAC* and such number of public officers as the committee may require in the performance of its functions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, once the *CELPAC* Bill is passed, a new Convention will be signed between the OIF and my Ministry for the implementation of this new venture.

This Government Mr Speaker, Sir, is perfectly aware of the importance of inculcating reading habits in the Mauritian population and has thus committed itself vis-à-vis the OIF to enact the *CELPAC* legislation. Government considers reading an important skill that needs to be developed particularly in children because it fuels their imagination, encourages quick learning, widens their views, expands their horizons and stimulates their curiosity. It is, therefore, imperative for children to know that reading is not only essential for survival in the world of schools and universities, but in adult life as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, reading should be viewed as a pleasurable activity, which expose people to a wide range of vocabulary and opportunities like developing one's self confidence and public speaking skills.

Moreover, as children tend to imitate the world around them, carefully chosen stories and books not only have a position influence on them but also sensitise them to cater for the needs of others. For example, books can encourage children to develop moral values such as being more cooperative, sharing with others, being kind to people and animals or respecting the environment.

Reading can also enhance children's social skills. Although reading is essentially pictured as a solitary activity, in certain circumstances reading can be a socialising activity. For example, a parent or grandparent reading a story aloud, can be a great opportunity for adult and child to share some quiet and relaxed quality time together, away from the rush and stresses of the business of daily living. They can spend a few minutes of precious time by sharing ideas that are contained in the story.

Parents need to inspire their children to read. There are so many ways in which reading can be an important source of knowledge and pleasure that can last a lifetime. This desire to read should at all times be nurtured in children.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, despite all the advantages that reading brings, yet it is unfortunate that today's generation seem to prefer the digital culture to the writing and reading culture. Nowadays it is a pity that children spend more time watching television, browsing the net, downloading games or films, text messaging and on audio and e-books. Research has shown that there is a decline in reading habits among the youngsters. This has led most children with learning disabilities to have problems with reading and related language skills. Children with poor reading skills end up receiving poor grades, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behaviour problems, seem to dislike school and often fail to develop to their full potentials. Our children need help to develop the ability to read so that they can comprehend subjects better at school.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is why Government is laying much emphasis to boost up reading habits in the Mauritian population. The *CELPAC*, like the *CLAC*, will continue to play a crucial role in carrying out an aggressive campaign to motivate people and students from all corners of Mauritius, particularly the rural areas to make optimum use of *CELPAC*. Just as the *CLAC*, the *CELPAC* will continue to be stuffed with a whole gamut of

reading materials such as books, magazines, *bandes dessinées* and audiovisuals that will suit the tastes of one and all. The magic of reading opens up a whole wonderful world full of literature where adults and children can enjoy side by side.

The aim of the Government is to instill in the population, particularly the most vulnerable groups of the society, a sense of discovering pleasure in reading and widen their knowledge in different fields.

My Ministry with the collaboration of the Early Childhood Care and Educational Authority has initiated a programme specifically to sensitise kids of pre-primary schools on the importance of reading. This will help bridging the gap between the levels of pre-primary and primary schools children.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with a view to boosting up reading habits among primary level students, the *CELPAC* will be called upon to organise training workshop with primary school teachers and Parent Teachers Associations found in the *CELPAC* vicinity, with a view to sensitising them on the benefits of a reading culture and to show to them how to arouse the interest of a child to read through the organisation of a cultural activity.

As such, Mr Speaker, Sir, *CELPAC* will continue to organise cultural activities at their respective centres –

- to mark important events such as National Day, Abolition of Slavery, Christmas, *Journée de la Francophonie*, World Theatre Day, World Book Day, *Fête du Pain*, Dance Day and Music Day,
- to hold talks on important subjects such as *la Francophonie*, the Lomé Convention, the ACP and SADC groups of countries;
- to sensitise the population on social problems affecting the society like negative effects of smoking and taking illicit drugs, health problems such as SIDA;
- to hold exhibitions on the lives and achievements of important personalities like Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and
- to organise various types of competition such as reading poem, painting, song, dance and quiz.

The *OIF* lays emphasis on the holding of cultural activities as it helps to attract a great number of people towards the reading centres. Apart from

enjoying the show, the inhabitants are invited to effect a guided visit of the centre to sensitise them on its aims and objectives. In so doing, the centres welcome new adherents while retaining the existing ones.

M. le président, si vous permettez, j'ajouterais maintenant quelques mots en français.

L'Organisation Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (OIF), qui vient de fêter ses 36 ans, a, comme objectif principal, la promotion de la langue française dans les 63 états et gouvernements qui constituent son espace géographique.

La francophonie qui se veut un espace de partage culturel a pour but de préserver et promouvoir la diversité culturelle dans tout l'espace francophone. Je dois souligner que le projet CLAC à Maurice a rencontré un grand succès grâce à l'appui de l'OIF. Je tiens à remercier l'OIF pour son soutien au programme CLAC et aussi son apport dans l'implantation de la nouvelle structure CELPAC et sa dotation en termes d'équipements et de financements.

Le CELPAC, M. le président, offre un éventail de services propres à promouvoir le plaisir de lire à travers un fonds important d'ouvrages soigneusement sélectionnés par les services de l'OIF (encyclopédies, dictionnaires, romans jeunes et romans adultes, bandes dessinées pour jeunes enfants et adolescents, livres éducatifs et ouvrages de références tels que livre de cuisine, de couture, de jardinage, etc). Complémentairement, car, bien sur, rien ne saurait remplacer l'objet-livre. CELPAC offre des services propres à promouvoir le plaisir de lire à travers des animations culturelles autour du livre. Ces animations sont ponctuelles et ont pour but d'attirer des lecteurs potentiels et de garder ceux déjà inscrits ; elles sont d'une grande importance et très appréciées de la population.

Comme vous le savez, M. le président, la lecture est la clef du développement humain. Elle stimule et renforce notre pensée et doit être pratiquée dès la petite enfance. Ainsi, dès son plus jeune âge l'enfant exposé à la lecture trouvera dans les fables, contes et légendes racontés à voix haute par ses parents, ses proches et ses enseignants des valeurs morales qui stimuleront son imagination et lui permettront de devenir un citoyen à part entière.

M. le président, je souhaiterais terminer mon discours en citant Jean de La Bruyère, un grand penseur et écrivain français du 17^{ème} siècle. Je cite –

‘Quand une lecture vous élève l’esprit, et qu’elle vous inspire des sentiments nobles et courageux, ne cherchez pas une autre règle pour juger l’ouvrage ; il est bon, et fait de main d’ouvrier’.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Faugoo rose and seconded.

(5.20 p.m.)

Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE): Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that we must encourage reading in the country. We all agree that from the very early childhood, we must encourage pre-primary children to read books, novels, poems. When the Minister was introducing the Bill, he said that the *CELPAC*, that is, the Bill, which is in front of the House, was a recommendation made by the OIF in the year 2007, whereby we had some 170,000 euros, that is, Rs8 m. which will be spent over the three coming years towards the conversion of the existing CLAC into a structured organisation, that is, the *CELPAC*. But I am afraid, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we have been a bit slow in this endeavour. Let me remind the Minister that when he mentioned year 2007, there was a Cabinet decision on 15 December 2006 - nearly two years ago - wherein it was clearly stated that Cabinet has taken note that the CLAC would be converted into the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* following a recommendation by the OIF, initiator of the CLAC project. In the communiqué of 15 December 2006, it was said –

“As the project is being phased out, and in view of the satisfaction expressed by *OIF* on the status of the project in Mauritius, the OIF has proposed to integrate Mauritius within the countries benefiting from its programme “*Appui aux Politiques Nationales de Lecture Publique*”.

The 170,000 euros will be spent over a three-year period and will be operated by a specific structure. The communiqué of the Cabinet even stated that among other countries that will benefit, there were Burkina Faso, Burundi, Haïti, Lebanon, Madagascar and Mauritania. Therefore it is good, even though we are late by so many years, that now we are coming with this Bill to convert the *CLAC* into *CELPAC* with a structured organization. Later on, I will talk about the composition of the Board, whether it is a good thing to have a Board of only civil servants when we are willing to encourage reading in the rural areas. But before I go further, I see that the objectives of *CELPAC* are more or less the same objectives as that of CLAC project. But,

I don't understand why one of the objectives, which was in *CLAC*, does not appear in this present Bill. The objective reads as follows -

“to provide facilities for the development of the rural community in the fields of education, health, technology, literature, etc.”

The Minister, himself, said - I heard him well - that *CELPAC* will organise talks, lectures, seminars on themes like HIV and AIDS, on health and technology issues. This was one of the objectives of *CLAC*, which I do not see in this Bill. When we see the objects of *CELPAC*, this has been deleted completely despite the fact that the Minister said that it would deal in the sensitization programme of the population on health issues.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we have one staff, and we have been told that most of the *CLAC* are found in social centres, but we know also that social centres are not that conducive to reading. We have quite a good number of activities going on around; there are people going in and out in these centres, and therefore it is not so conducive to reading. These social welfare centres have remained, for a number of years, as the Gian Nath Computer Centre. It was a good idea to have introduced it. But it has taken more time to make it operational. Therefore, as far as *CELPAC* is concerned, we must give a proper training to the people who are working there. We must think about providing appropriate buildings. Money has to be set aside for appropriate buildings in rural areas. And I think we must take on board the local authorities and the district councils, which can provide assistance to the *CELPAC* Board in providing appropriate buildings, which are conducive to reading, activities dedicated only to *CELPAC*. As it is now, all sorts of activities are carried out in these *CLAC* centres during the whole day. I think we must take on board the district councils, which can provide assistance in this field.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has said that more *CELPAC* centres will be set up in several areas. We must think of those really deprived areas where people do not have the means to travel long distances. The Ministry of Finance, has identified, in its eradication of absolute poverty programme, 229 areas where deprived people live. The officers operating these centres should move towards these people. While organising cultural and educational activities, they must go towards these people. Instead of the people coming in the centres, I think there is a need for *CELPAC* to be more proactive; they should go towards these underprivileged areas, where there are poor people who do not have the means to travel in order to go to these centres. The Minister has said that there has been an increase, but he has not

given the figures as to how many adults, teenagers, young children regularly go to these centres. For example, if we see in Madagascar - I went on the web to see how *CLAC* is operating there - in the year 2007, 250,000 people benefited from the *CLAC* activities there. In Niger, 3,500 women and children living in underprivileged villages benefited from the activities of *CLAC* centres. The Minister did not give the number of people - if he has the statistics on a yearly basis - young, adults, children who go to these *CLAC* centres. We must be more proactive and set up these *CELPAC* centres in the deprived rural areas. We must also take on board the different NGOs because you have good NGOs in rural areas willing to work for the advancement and the promotion of education, for the promotion of cultural activities. I think *CELPAC* should take them on board, should ask for their collaboration so as to do good jobs. We have also the different cultural centres that have been set up in Mauritius, namely, the Tamil Cultural Centre, the Telugu Cultural Centre, etc. We must work in close collaboration with all these centres.

As far as the composition of the Board is concerned, I see representatives of different Ministries, but we don't have stakeholders, for example, the representatives of these cultural centres who can help in organising cultural activities, as one of the functions of *CELPAC* is to organise cultural activities. There is no representative from the Association of Professional Librarians who could have formed part of this Board. Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, in order to benefit from the aid of the *OIF*, I think it is high time that *CLAC* be converted into *CELPAC*. The Minister has said that *CELPAC* will set up more centres in rural areas, this is good. But we must make sure that we set up good centres, that we go towards the people mainly in deprived areas so as to encourage more reading. Throughout the country, but mainly in the rural areas, we can feel that there is a need for the setting up of such centres so as to encourage reading and to encourage people to participate in cultural activities. These days when there is nothing to do, people just get into all sorts of *fléaux*, like alcohol, drugs, etc. These centres, if used judiciously, I am sure, will help to eliminate these *fléaux* in our society.

Thank you.

(5.34 p.m.)

Mr M. Peetumber (First Member of Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac): Mr Speaker, Sir, I situate the *CELPAC* Bill in the context of democratisation in the field of education and culture, similar to the

construction of the junior secondary schools in the 70s, the decision to grant free secondary education in 1977 which was another step in the same direction and to round it off, the granting of free transport to the students community way back in 2005. I, for one, have got a very positive bent on mind. Where appreciation is due, where praise is due, I make it a point to place on record my appreciation and congratulations for the efforts that are being done to extend these reading facilities to the rural areas or to those areas where such facilities do not simply exist. So, of course, I'll seize this opportunity to congratulate the Minister for coming up with this measure and, in the same breath, all his close collaborators who have spared no efforts in taking decisions that go in the right direction to democratise this culture of reading. As the Minister mentioned at present this facility is provided by CLAC in ten or twelve centres, but now they are even more ambitious to extend these facilities in those areas where such facilities simply do not exist.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the objects of the *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* Bill are to encourage and promote reading especially where reading centres are practically non existent, to make reading materials easily accessible to the public. I would like to underscore the words 'easily accessible to the public' and to promote artistic, cultural and educational activities are indeed commendable ones. By creating a reading culture in every important centre of the country, Government is giving an important signal to the population to return to the basics. In an era of liberalisation and globalisation, our traditional way of life is threatened with erosion. We are leaving no stone unturned, Mr Speaker, Sir, to overcome this digital divide. Nevertheless, even within the framework of a society governed by information technology, the book remains and preserves its importance for its intrinsic virtues. There is a wealth of human intelligence that lies in man's imagination, a word which is not heard very often nowadays; the imagination, which is enriched by reading has a creative energy, which construes new people, new emotions through fiction. The adolescent's world must be made up of the real and the fanciful, the rational and the supra rational. Our schools must develop the taste for reading in our youth. It is not enough to feed our adolescents exclusively on a diet of knowledge meant to be examined. Our teachers must assume their role as leaders for character formation. Reading builds character, because it helps to have access to the best minds that have found the best thoughts. However, Mr Speaker, Sir, reading can be beneficial to our adolescents in more ways than one, even from the examination point of view. To start with, reading consolidates

language acquisition which is the *sine qua non* condition for success in our education system. Reading gives us the power to juggle with words, to express our emotions effectively, to give vent to our ideas with precision and accuracy and to ventilate our thoughts powerfully. These are the qualities that the examiners look for in the answers of students. Besides, to secure maturity, to acquire wisdom, to gain knowledge, to keep abreast of the ways of the world, to understand human nature, to come to grips with the complexities of life, we cannot depend exclusively upon our first-hand experiences.

This is so, because our life span of say 60/70 years will be too short a period of time to accumulate first-hand experiences relating to all kinds of situations people are normally confronted with in life. It is equally impossible to acquaint ourselves, through first-hand experiences, with brave warriors, eminent statesmen, renowned social reformers, astute politicians, reputed economists, mighty kings, celebrated scientists, inspired researchers and the like. Such characters are more often than not, Mr Speaker, Sir, outside the range of our daily experiences. So, we must necessarily resort to vicarious experience. What is vicarious experience? It is learning through the experience of others. In this case, it is learning through the experience of the authors, the playwrights, the columnists, the critics, the caricaturists who, in many cases, symbolise the loftiest minds with the most elevated thoughts. So, exposure to a whole gamut of characters from various walks of life and to complex life situations, depicted in works of literature can only enhance our experience and wisdom and make us more alert, and richer on the cultural plane. Stripped of such inter-actions and exposure, we may be likened to the frog which, confined to the well since birth, labours under the delusion that the well is the entire universe and that no life exists beyond the well. This is the limitation or the inadequacy of the frog, which suffers from a very restricted vision in view of the claustrophobic world to which it has been confined since the start of its existence. What is true for the frog, Mr Speaker, Sir, can also be true to an extent for the individual who is totally cut off from the works of literature, from the world of books, newspapers and magazines.

Mr Speaker, Sir, pleasure, entertainment, amusement, excitement, thrill cannot be derived merely by watching a Liverpool, Manchester United, Chelsea or Arsenal Football Match nor by merely viewing Amitabh Bachchan, Shahrukh Khan, Jim Carrey or Brad Pitt's starrers. It can well be achieved by reading Swift's 'Gulliver's Travels', Robert Greene's 'Power', Shiv Khera's 'No Freedom is Free' or 'You Can Win', Shakespeare's

'Macbeth', Milton's 'Paradise' or lighter stuffs like Tintin, *Oui-Oui*, *Les Quatre As*, Lucky Luke, among others. Books, Mr Speaker, Sir, can be a source of real entertainment and pleasure. They can keep us away from a world of stress and strain and can be a real boon in our lives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, through this Bill, Government is linking up areas in Mauritius and Rodrigues where reading centres are non-existent. While poverty has always been treated from an economic angle and never from a cultural viewpoint, we are bridging another important gap to alleviate cultural poverty. We are attending to the cultural enrichment of those localities, which are cut off from the culturally more advanced parts of the country.

Let us understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that, today, the think global and act local philosophy has given way to think local and act global attitude. We must be deeply rooted in our culture, but we should behave like citizens of the world, the universal or international man, someone who has transcended the barriers of ethnicity, geographical considerations or religious fanaticism. The *Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle* will create the link between the local and the global. This is the mark of cultural enrichment. Native culture is the lifeblood of our identity, but if we want to survive in today's globalised world, we cannot rest content with an ethnocentric or even national culture. Culture is that osmotic agent, which attracts congenial elements of different cultures, and transforms them to make them its own. Our Mauritian culture has absorbed many foreign cultural traits and yet it has not lost its intrinsic quintessential identity. The *CELPAC* will expose our culture to the francophone culture and, through it, to other cultures. We are better Mauritians, in spite of our exposure to our cultures; we have chosen to remain Mauritian.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would hasten to add, it is a beautiful thing that all these efforts have been put up by the Minister, the Ministry, the officials, the close collaborators. A lot of efforts have been invested into this exercise. It is important that all these efforts bear fruits. It is important that all the efforts that are put up to extend certain services to the general public, to the inhabitants of the rural areas, are executed in the sense that these services, these facilities are taken advantage of by the inhabitants who are targeted by this Bill. I understand that if these facilities are already there in the rural areas or in those areas where they simply do not exist at the moment, if we do not resort to a sensitisation campaign, if we do not increase the awareness of the people that such facilities are there, and the people in question do not take advantage of these facilities, this will result in a waste: waste of human

resources, waste of financial resources, waste of materials that will be needed to make these centres operational. A word of caution here; when all this is being done, it is equally important that we launch a sensitisation campaign to increase the awareness of the people regarding the existence of these facilities in those areas. Not only adolescents, not only school children, but, as the Minister rightly pointed out himself, these facilities must be extended to the population in general. We should not only encourage school children, the adolescents to improve their minds and expand their horizons. All the inhabitants, all the population should be encouraged to read and take advantage of the facilities that are put at their disposal. I understand that some kind of effort will be done in this direction, so that people who are targeted take advantage of these facilities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, no place in Mauritius is so unimportant as not to find itself in the mainstream Mauritian culture. The Labour Party has been instrumental in bringing about an equitable progress at all levels in Mauritius, be it in terms of infrastructure, in the field of education or industrialization. In all forms of progress; every little town or village has known advancement. The *CELPAC* adds yet another jewel to the crown. This is precisely why I congratulate the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources and, by extension, the Prime Minister and the Government, for presenting the *CELPAC* Bill to this august Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(5.50 p.m)

Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands): M. le président, le projet de loi qui nous est présenté aujourd'hui au Parlement, se situe, à mon humble avis, dans la juste logique de la continuité des choses.

Après le CLAC, le Centre de Lecture et d'Animation Culturelle, qui a vu le jour dans les années 90, place maintenant au CELPAC, le Centre de Lecture Publique et d'Animation Culturelle qui, à travers ce projet de loi, vise deux principaux objectifs.

Le premier est celui d'encourager et de promouvoir les pratiques artistiques, culturelles et éducatives en créant au besoin des centres de lecture dans des endroits où ceux-ci n'existent pas.

Deuxièmement, initier et promouvoir la coopération avec des partenaires qui partagent ces mêmes objectifs, principalement ici, l'Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

Ce partenariat, avec l'OIF, M. le président, est révélateur de plusieurs choses, notamment de la considération dont jouit notre République au sein de cet organisme par rapport à la diffusion de la langue française, car si l'OIF a choisi d'aider notre pays, ce n'est certainement pas par hasard.

La popularité de la langue de Molière au sein de notre République, l'utilisation quotidienne et quasi-spontanée que nous en faisons, avec bien sûr des expressions et des locutions qui nous sont propres et propres à notre particularité insulaire et mauricienne, qui la rendent si attachante et si unique, sa présence presque tangible dans les mots de la langue créole largement inspirée – vous le conviendrez et tout le monde ici j'en suis sûre - du français, fait de notre peuple un vecteur privilégié de la diversité des expressions culturelles et de leur protection, telle que ratifiée par les pays membres de l'OIF à travers la Convention Internationale sur la protection et la promotion de la diversité des expressions culturelles, entrée en vigueur le 18 mars 2007. Cette Convention prévoit, en effet, d'intégrer la culture dans le développement durable.

Or, quoi de mieux que la lecture pour propager la culture, M. le président? La lecture est non seulement un soutien efficace pour l'éducation d'un peuple, mais elle est aussi un des moyens les plus fructueux de conserver la mémoire du monde, de la propager, de la partager avec les autres. Elle ouvre la voie à l'égalité des chances dans un monde qui, malgré nos lois, en souffre cruellement.

Les vertus de la lecture, M. le président, ne peuvent être mises en doute. La lecture est à l'esprit ce que la nourriture est au corps. Quand elle est de bonne qualité, elle le nourrit, le fortifie, le rend apte à se surpasser. Lire permet aussi d'augmenter son vocabulaire, d'avoir plus d'aisance, de dialogue, d'entamer une conversation, de développer un esprit critique et d'analyse, et j'en passe. Pour toutes ces raisons, et pour bien d'autres, nous ne pouvons qu'approuver cette initiative qui vise à étendre les centres de lecture et d'animation culturelle à travers tout le pays.

Il serait en effet hypocrite de se voiler la face. De nos jours, il existe un grand nombre de personnes vivant dans notre société pour qui l'accès aux livres pour le plaisir demeure un luxe qu'ils ne peuvent se permettre. Des jeunes, pour qui la lecture, en dehors des livres de classe, est non pas interdite, mais, du moins, presque du domaine de l'inaccessible. D'abord, par rapport à son coût ; un bon livre de nos jours coûte cher. Vous n'êtes pas sans savoir que le prix des livres peut être très onéreux et qu'avec la situation économique, les priorités de beaucoup de familles sont autres, mais

aussi, et souvent également, par rapport à la difficulté d'accès aux centres de lecture publique qui se trouvent principalement en zones urbaines. Car, quoi qu'on le dise, M. le président, et je prends en cela ma propre circonscription comme exemple, il est difficile pour un habitant de Dubreuil, par exemple, de payer plus de R 80 pour un transport - un seul aller-retour - rien que pour se rendre à Curepipe et consulter un livre à la librairie Carnegie, bibliothèque pourtant ouverte à tous.

En ce sens, M. le président, le CELPAC viendra corriger une anomalie. A sa manière, le CLAC a accompli un très bon travail préliminaire. Dans les régions où il a été implanté – et le ministre l'a dit tout à l'heure - ce programme a connu un franc succès. La lecture, mais aussi l'animation culturelle autour du livre suscitent un enthousiasme qui ne s'est jusqu'à présent, fort heureusement pas démenti. Ce n'est pas Mme Chasle, responsable nationale du CLAC, une des chevilles ouvrières de ce projet, dont le travail force l'admiration, que je tiens publiquement à féliciter, qui dira le contraire.

En effet, M. le président, les quelque trois milles livres de chaque centre du CLAC sont utilisés quotidiennement par les habitants des localités qui les abritent. Pour parodier Victor Hugo : « On accomplit de délicieux voyages, embarqué sur un mot ». De même, les ouvrages disponibles au CLAC font chaque jour des heureux qui découvrent outre le plaisir de lire, tout un monde de connaissances.

Le livre est en cela un outil magique, un outil de liberté qui permet également une plus grande ouverture sur le monde du réel comme de l'imaginaire. Lire c'est être curieux. Et la curiosité ouvre les yeux sur tellement de choses. Chacune de nos lectures laisse une graine qui germe, disait Jules Renard. Et qui sait en quoi cette graine peut se transformer?

C'est pourquoi, M. le président, j'en viens à la clause 4 du projet de loi ci présenté qui veut encourager les activités artistiques, culturelles et éducationnelles à travers la lecture. Il serait bon, M. le président, que ces centres puissent également promouvoir non seulement la culture d'autres pays mais aussi des éléments locaux. En cela, je sous-entends la promotion d'auteurs mauriciens dont bon nombre écrivent en français, création qui va dans le sens de la promotion francophone et épouse parfaitement les objectifs de la Francophonie, un des principaux soutiens de ce projet. Je fais un appel en ce sens au ministre. Nous avons, à travers ce projet, une occasion unique de promouvoir les livres de nos auteurs locaux qui souffrent si cruellement de sous-exposition au palmarès des œuvres littéraires. En

cela, le CELPAC serait une opportunité non négligeable de consolider et de propager la réputation de nos auteurs sur notre propre sol et dans tous les coins et recoins de l'île. On pourrait imaginer encore mieux, qui sait ! Quand on a encore la capacité de rêver et les moyens de concrétiser le rêve, tout est possible.

Cependant, M. le président, une autre interrogation me vient à l'esprit, notamment par rapport à la clause 10(1) de ce projet de loi qui stipule –

“The Supervising Officer shall designate a public officer to be the officer in charge of the CELPAC”

Dans cette phrase, c'est le mot '*designate*' qui m'interpelle. M. le président, un projet tel que celui-ci, pour être mené à bien, doit être pris en charge par une personne qui possède bien sûr les qualifications requises pour cela. Il s'agit, ici, de mener à bien un projet qui comprend la prise en charge quotidienne de nombreux centres, – le nombre n'est pas mentionné – et cela dépendra certainement du financement obtenu, mais il est fort à parier que, vu le nombre de régions qui ne comptent aucune librairie publique, que ces centres peuvent être nombreux.

Or, nulle part dans la section 10, il n'est stipulé les qualifications et les compétences professionnelles de celui ou celle qui sera en charge de la politique quotidienne du CELPAC. Si on traite ce projet avec le sérieux qu'il mérite, pourquoi laisser ce choix à une désignation et non pas à une candidature ouverte, même si cette ouverture doit se limiter aux officiers de la fonction publique, avec des critères de qualifications et compétences bien définis ?

Nul doute que cette opportunité donnée à ceux qui se sentent aptes à diriger un projet de cette envergure serait un bon pas dans la consolidation de la foi en l'efficacité de la loi sur l'égalité des chances – *l'Equal Opportunities Act* - votée dans cette même Chambre il y a quelques mois de cela, et sur laquelle ont débattu un grand nombre de mes collègues présents aujourd'hui même dans cette Chambre.

Une désignation et la non définition de critères de sélection du candidat choisi reviendraient, M. le président, à concéder ou du moins à créer la perception que ce choix peut être réduit à une appréciation subjective, voire préférentielle d'un candidat au détriment d'un autre plus compétent qui n'aurait pas eu la chance de faire acte de candidature pour le poste. Il serait souhaitable, en ce sens, que cette clause soit revue afin d'ouvrir des possibilités au ministère, à travers le *Supervising Officer*, d'opter pour le meilleur candidat possible.

Pour conclure, M. le président, nous réitérerons ici notre soutien à ce projet. Comme tous les autres avant nous et comme nous l'avons dit, nous sommes en faveur de tout ce qui promeut le goût de la lecture, mais aussi son accessibilité auprès de la population mauricienne, du plus jeune au plus âgé. Espérons que nos suggestions, notamment par rapport aux auteurs mauriciens et à la désignation de la personne en charge du CELPAC, seront prises en considération.

Je vous remercie, M. le président.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like, first of all, at the outset of the summing-up speech, to thank the Members on both sides of the House for their contribution and, of course, for their keen interest and positive intervention on this Bill.

I am happy to note - as I was expecting, in fact - that unanimity has prevailed and how could it be otherwise on the necessity to accede to this request of the *Organisation Internationale De La Francophonie*, to convert the (*CLAC*) *Centre de Lecture et D'Animation Culturelle* into the (*CELPAC*) *Centre De Lecture Publique et D'animation Culturelle* by way of this legislation.

I appreciate the cooperative spirit of hon. Members in this endeavour. Mr Speaker, Sir, all of us have felt the level of consciousness of Members, of the dire necessity to extent library facilities particularly in the rural areas of the country. This endeavour will not only encourage students from pre-primary to tertiary levels but also - as has been said by my friend, hon. Peetumber - the adult population to have access to different types of reading materials, to enhance the general knowledge; reading and writing skills and also to undertake research work. I am sure, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the enactment of *CELPAC*, coupled with - as you felt it from the speeches of hon. Members - a proper sensitisation campaign, it will boost up the reading capacity of our rural population essentially, but also the population in general I must say, to the extent that Mauritius can aspire to become a 100% literate island in the years ahead. Efforts will be optimised. The House can rely upon me to attract the public towards the library materials of each *CELPAC*, that is, books, reference materials, magazines, newspapers, *IT* and audio equipment as well.

To respond, Mr Speaker, Sir, to a few of the queries or questions put during the course of the speeches of hon. Members, I am fully aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we cannot have it all over the island. In fact, we are going to try to extend as far as possible, but there could be difficulties for people to

have access to the centres. We are going to take this as one of the priorities when we decide where and how we are going to allow this *CELPAC* to be implanted and to operate. The question was raised I think by hon. Guinness about the social welfare centres not being conducive. We thought about it. In fact, people before me thought about it; they exist, either in social centres, in a separate corner or in a specific room. This is the way that those who have been responsible for the setting up these centres have tried to give them some possibilities to be conducive to reading. Of course, it is a question also of finding means to be able to do it. We will try to speak to the Local Authorities whenever possible, and try to improve whenever they are going to set up these and use these criteria to give the people a specific and appropriate place where reading is, in fact, more conducive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think hon. Guinness spoke about the lateness in coming with this project, but I must say that, in fact, the structure proposed by the Mauritian Authorities to the *OIF* to give autonomy to *CELPAC* had to receive the agreement of the *OIF*. The *OIF* was more inclined at the beginning, for the setting up of a new parastatal body, which would have required much more funding. So, we had to take all of this into consideration; it is not a question of doing it on purpose, but we had to consider all this and when we were ready we did not lose time to come forward.

There was a question raised also by hon. Guinness about the number of users. I can give the figures - we got them. For the year 2007, there were 137,645 users and for the year 2008 there were 154,629 users. I said in the Second Reading of my speech that the number had increased within the last five years forefront. So, you get an idea. In fact, I must congratulate Mrs Chasle who has been the responsible person. She has been working very actively and everybody is happy with what she's doing. In fact, she will continue to do the work with, of course, the new structure. I wish to take this opportunity to thank her and congratulate her as well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a question of Board Membership also that has been raised. I must say that besides the Board, the *CLAC* is managed by a *Comité de Soutien*. I mentioned it very briefly in my speech just now - in fact, *CLAC's* works with the NGOs. We will be surprised to see the interaction of the NGOs and *Forces Vives* of the region wherever *CLAC* is implanted. We are going to continue with this close collaboration and it will be further strengthened. I will do all I can to make it as strong as possible and as interactive as possible.

The National Library, Mr Speaker, Sir, is represented on the Board. Insofar as cultural centres are concerned, the point was made, I think, by hon. Gunness. We have to agree that there are too many cultural centres for them to be represented individually or even by small groups. But the representative of the Ministry of Culture, in fact, covers the large spectrum and conveys the responsibility of cultural centres on the Board. The question of qualification or competence of the officer-in-charge was just raised by hon. Mrs Martin. She can rely upon us that we are going to find the most competent person. In fact, she has been so appreciative of Mrs Chasle. She can rely upon us that the work will continue in the same direction with the whole *CLAC* Board and the *Comité de Soutien* working together where people can deliver the goods.

Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as training to officers of the centres is concerned, I must say that this is provided by the *Organisation Internationale De la Francophonie*. A senior official of this organisation comes to Mauritius quite occasionally for that specific purpose. Besides, the *Responsable Nationale* and the *CLAC* coordinator also provide training to the *CLAC* officers. And there also, it is a point that is very interesting and important and I would like to inform hon. Members that I will give my special attention to this question of training, because I really believe in it. There is also consultation with all stakeholders, staff, district council officers and others. There have been lots of discussions with them for the implementation of this Bill. We also want it to be a financially like structure. This is one of the reasons why we have come forward with the way it has been drafted and the presentation we have made.

Before ending, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to say two things, one to correct a possible misinterpretation. We should not believe that CLAC, or CELPAC now, is going to cater only for the French Language. Cela est très important. Il faut savoir, qu'afin de respecter la diversité culturelle et linguistique de nos populations, et conformément aux desiderata de l'OIF, elle-même, nos centres, outre un important éventail d'ouvrages en Français, offrent une sélection de livres dans toutes les langues pratiquées sur notre territoire, telles que l'Anglais, le Créole, le Mandarin, l'Urdu et l'Hindi. Bien entendu, il y a une concentration en Français parce qu'on est aidé par la Francophonie, mais ce n'est pas limité à la langue Française. Le nombre d'ouvrages, répertoriés dans les langues que je viens de mentionner, dépendent bien souvent du lectorat de l'endroit où se trouve implanter un CLAC. Par exemple, les livres d'Abercrombie ne seront pas les mêmes que ceux de Bel Air, ou ceux de St. Pierre. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous

avons également un système de rotation des livres entre les différents centres. Ces ouvrages, M. le président, soigneusement sélectionnés, sont achetés par mon ministère qui dispose d'un budget mise à la disposition du CLAC, bientôt CELPAC, pour leur acquisition. Il s'agit principalement d'auteurs Mauriciens et on va continuer d'aller dans ce sens.

Je remercie l'honorable Mme Martin pour avoir fait le point en ce qui concerne les autres auteurs, Anglais et Américains, pour les ouvrages en Anglais. La Chambre peut compter sur le gouvernement pour faire la part belle aux auteurs locaux qu'on voudrait encourager autant que possible.

I think there is also the question of involving the education sector, which hon. Guinness has raised as a critical point. In fact, the thing is that education and culture are under the same Ministry now. First of all, the education system is taking on board cultural activities. The hon. Member himself is a teacher and educator, he must be knowing that there is, since the month of January this year, a renovation that has started in schools where there is an activity period for educators and all resourced persons to be called upon to go for co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, like theatre, music and art. In fact, arts and culture are being used as a medium to improve the level and standard of education in our schools. So, *CLAC* is going to be more - as has been mentioned by members - interactive with NGOs, *les Forces Vives* and the local population around the place where *CLAC* or *CELPAC* is implanted to give them more energy to work in that direction. The education will, of course, continue to go in the same line, as I have just mentioned. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure that the enactment of this Bill is going to be a good thing for education in general and reading in particular. I must make it very clear that in addition to library facilities, the cultural component will be maintained and further strengthened so as to encourage interaction in the community, as I have just mentioned. Insofar as the *Comité de Soutien* has been very helpful in providing the support in the organization of cultural activities in *CLAC* centres when it was existing until now, and the managing committee of *CELPAC* will see to it that this arrangement is consolidated as cultural events attract both readers and nonreaders of those who are unrolled at the *CLAC*.

Mr Speaker, Sir, competitions and initiation sessions will continue to be held to popularize games that will be available to *CELPAC*. Additionally, audiovisual materials, I repeat, I mentioned it at the beginning, would be another means to attract *CELPAC* users as these will provide to leisure, education, information and culture. Other ways to democratize information will also be through Internet and IT facilities. Nowadays, it is a

natural evolution for all libraries to be equipped with such facilities and it will be ensured that each *CELPAC* will be supplied with such equipment.

Last but not least Mr Speaker, Sir, the *CELPAC* will serve as a springboard for projects at community development. Information relating to health, education and environmental problems amongst others will continue to be disseminated to the public through its various centers existing and those which will be set up in the near future. This is yet, Mr Speaker, Sir, another vivid example to demonstrate the firm wish of the Government to facilitate access to reading materials to the most vulnerable groups of our society in particular. Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

The Centre de Lecture Publique et D'Animation Culturelle Bill (No. II of 2009) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Centre de Lecture Publique et D'Animation Culturelle Bill (No. II of 2009) was read the third time and passed.

Second Reading

THE COMBATING OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS BILL

(No. III OF 2009)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I beg to move that the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill (No. III of 2009) be read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the objects of this Bill are -

- (i) to give effect to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons;
- (ii) prevent and combat trafficking in persons, and
- (iii) protect and assist victims of trafficking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons in 2003. The Protocol requires the enactment of legislation that criminalizes trafficking in persons and provides for prevention of such trafficking, prosecution of traffickers in persons and protection of their victims.

The protocol requires that the problem of trafficking in persons be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Effective actions need to be taken to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, especially women and children. Furthermore, the victims of such trafficking should be protected and assisted with respect to their full human rights. The protocol also calls for cooperation among State parties to meet those objectives. It is important to note that the protocol has been signed by 117 States and ratified by 110 States.

As far as Mauritius is concerned, the Child Protection Act 1994 was, in fact, amended in December 2005 to make better provision for the prevention, suppression and punishment of trafficking in children and to provide for tougher penalties for the offence. However, in spite of that amendment, our legislation is not yet fully compliant with the provisions of the Protocol. That is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is necessary to have specific legislation providing for trafficking in adults, as well as children.

The Bill which is before the House today will enable us to meet our outstanding international obligations arising from the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. This Bill will also enhance the image of Mauritius in the international community as it will demonstrate our commitment to combat trafficking in persons.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius was placed in Tier 2 in the 2008 Report of Trafficking in Persons published by the US Department of State. Tier 2 refers to countries whose Governments do not fully comply with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with these standards. These minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons relate to the prohibition of trafficking, punishment of instigators of trafficking and prevention of trafficking. In February last, the Reports Officer for Africa, at the US Department of State, visited Mauritius and confirmed that the enactment of legislation by Mauritius specifically prohibiting human trafficking would result in Mauritius moving to Tier 1 in the US assessment methodology.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has also launched a Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, also known as UN.GIFT. UN.GIFT aims at mobilizing State and Non-State actors to eradicate human trafficking by reducing both the vulnerability of potential victims and the demand for exploitation in all its forms. It also ensures adequate protection to victims while, at the same time, supporting the effective prosecution of the criminals involved. The Bill which emphasizes the prevention of trafficking in persons, protection of victims of such trafficking and prosecution of traffickers in persons, is a strong response to such global initiatives in the fight against trafficking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, trafficking in persons is a form of modern days slavery. It is an evil trade, a crime which deprives human beings of their freedom, their dignity and their rights. Unscrupulous traffickers exploit the poverty, the hopes and innocence of the vulnerable and it is our duty as a responsible Government to provide protection and assistance to those who can become victims of coercion, force or deceit.

My Government is conscious of the fact that the impact of human trafficking is not only destructive, but also totally unacceptable. That is why we have focused on protective and preventive efforts. The Police Family Protection Unit and the *Brigade des Mineurs* are two Units in the Police dealing with child protection. A Community Child Protection Programme was launched in August 2007 to ensure that local communities are also involved in the prevention of child abuse, including commercial sexual exploitation.

The Ministry of Tourism, Leisure & External Communication is also addressing the problem of child prostitution and those involved in the Tourism Sector are being sensitised. In this struggle against child prostitution, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare, with the assistance of Police and the NGOs organises sensitisation campaigns to explain to youngsters as well as to adults the nature of the problem of trafficking and to involve civil society in the fight against child trafficking.

It is also true, Mr Speaker, Sir, that trafficking in persons have a close link with the problem of poverty. The eradication of poverty has been one of the major objectives of the economic policy of my Government. In our relentless fight against poverty, we have been focussing on education, training, housing, health, integration, job opportunities as well as empowerment. Through the Empowerment Programme we have been

reintegrating those who have been left at the margins of development. The National Empowerment Programme is expanding its reach to the broadest areas of socio-economic inclusion by training the unemployed, re-skilling those who have lost their jobs in declining sectors and providing financial and technical support to entrepreneurs.

We have been intensifying our efforts to foster broader socio-economic empowerment so that men, women and children do not get trapped in these social ills because of poverty. We have also continued our endeavour to help those who are the most needy and vulnerable through the Trust Fund of the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups. The Fund attempts to alleviate poverty through community-based projects initiated and implemented through Non-Governmental Organisations and empowers the poor through this micro credit scheme with a view to integrating the vulnerable in the mainstream of social and economic development. In this connection, since July 2005 to date, 3,895 housing units for the total sum of around Rs200 m. have been constructed and 830 micro credit projects for a total sum of Rs29 m. have been approved.

Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me now to outline on the salient features of the Bill.

Clause 2 of the Bill includes the definition of trafficking.

Clause 4 of the Bill aims at providing suitable, temporary accommodation, safety, counselling, rehabilitation, education, training and integration of victims of trafficking. Centres for victims of trafficking shall be set up for that purpose. In this context, the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development & Family Welfare has already earmarked a plot of land at Grand River North West for the construction of a drop-in centre for the victims of trafficking. This residential drop-in centre will be used to provide support services to victims to ensure the successful rehabilitation and reinsertion in society.

Clause 6 provides for the Minister to allow a victim of trafficking who is a non-citizen, regardless of his status, to remain in Mauritius for a non-renewable period of not exceeding 42 days, that is, six weeks and that period does not depend on whether the victim of trafficking cooperates or not with the Authorities.

Clause 7 provides for a temporary visitor's permit to be issued to a victim of trafficking who is in Mauritius and who has agreed to cooperate in investigating and prosecuting Authorities in relation to a case of trafficking.

That person is then placed in the care of a centre or any authorised person or institution. This visitor's permit may be extended on humanitarian grounds.

Clause 8 of the Bill provides that a non-citizen victim of trafficking will not be returned to his country of origin or the country from which he has been trafficked without his consent, unless consideration has been given to his safety during the repatriation process and in the country to which he is to be returned and the possibility that he may be harmed, killed or trafficked again.

Clause 9 of the Bill provides for the return to Mauritius for the victim of trafficking who is a citizen or a permanent resident of Mauritius. If the victim is a minor, he shall be escorted home by an adult at the expense of the State of Mauritius and will be referred to the Child Development Unit for assistance. If the victim is an adult, he will be referred to the Centre for Victims of Trafficking.

Clause 11 establishes that any person who traffics another person or allows another person to be trafficked, shall commit an offence irrespective of whether the victim has consented to the act intended to constitute trafficking. Further, any person who knowingly leases a room, house, building or establishment or sub-leases or allows it to be used for the purpose of harbouring a victim of trafficking or advertises, publishes, prints, broadcasts, distributes or causes the advertisement, publication broadcast or distribution of information which suggests or lures to trafficking by any means, including the use of Internet or the Information Technology, shall commit an offence.

An Internet Service Provider who fails to report to the Police forthwith any side of his server which contains information which suggests or lures to trafficking by any means, including the use of the Internet or the Information Technology shall also commit an offence. Any person who knowingly benefits from the services of a victim of trafficking or uses or enables another person to use such services shall commit an offence. All these offences, Mr Speaker, Sir, under Section 11 are punishable by penal servitude for a term not exceeding 15 years.

Clause 15 provides for the Courts of Mauritius, in certain circumstances, to have extra territorial jurisdiction to hear a case of trafficking in persons. Even when the offence has taken place outside Mauritius, for example, where the accused is a citizen of Mauritius or

ordinary resident in Mauritius or is arrested in the territory of Mauritius or in its territorial waters.

Clause 16 provides that the court may order payment of appropriate compensation not exceeding Rs500,000 by convicted person to a victim of trafficking.

Clause 19 provides that the court may order payment of compensation to the State by the convicted person in compensation for expenses incurred in connection with the accommodation, transportation, care or repatriation of the victim of the offence.

Mr Speaker, Sir, trafficking in persons is, today, unfortunately, a tragic reality. As Mr Antonio Maria Costa, the Executive Director of the United Nation's Office in Drugs and Crime writes, I quote:

“Slowly and painfully a picture is emerging of the global crime that shames us all. Billions of dollars are being made at the expense of millions of victims of human trafficking. Boys and girls who should be at schools are coerced into becoming soldiers, doing hard labour and sold for sex. Women and girls are being trafficked for exploitation, forced into domestic labour or prostitution.”

As a civilised and an enlightened nation, we have a moral obligation to support all initiatives against the heinous crime of human trafficking. Certainly, it is a problem that is complex and has international ramifications. It, therefore, requires a global response. Mauritius being a nation with deep respect for the fundamental human rights and freedom cannot but join forces with international community to stamp out the scourge of human trafficking.

Through this Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not only fulfilling our international obligation but we are also reaffirming our total commitment as a nation to uphold and protect human dignity everywhere and to be part of the global alliance standing against human trafficking.

With these words, I commend the Bill to the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) rose and seconded.

(6.28 p.m.)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger): Mr Speaker, Sir, I welcome this Bill and, in fact, as the hon. Prime Minister himself has said, we are duty bound to come forward with the measures contained in the

present Bill after having ratified the United Nations Protocol which prevents, suppress and punish trafficking in persons.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Prime Minister had to say and he gave us the date when Mauritius, as a sovereign State, ratified the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. But, in fact, we are dealing with three different things here. I would wish that when he sums up, the hon. Prime Minister gives us information on the two other things to which I will refer. Because, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, in the year 2000, the United Nations adopted the Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime. This is what I would call the mother convention.

It is supplemented by two protocols and the one we are dealing with here is only one of the two protocols. So, we ratified the mother Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

I would wish to know what has happened as far as the second protocol is concerned. The second protocol is a protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air and I understand that when we adopted and ratified the convention, we are duty-bound to act also as far as the second protocol is concerned, the protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air. It is also a very important protocol because the protocol aims at the protection of rights of migrants and the reduction of the power and influence of organised criminal groups that abuse migrants and it also provides for migrants to be treated humanely. I am very interested to know whether we have ratified this second protocol also and what action is going to be taken in relation thereto.

When concluding, the hon. Prime Minister made reference to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and, in fact, quoted the Director-General. In fact, the protocol that we have ratified and that now we are acting to put into practice, the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons falls under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. And it is interesting to note that the United Nations Office on drugs and crime is not responsible only for organising, supervising, encouraging action against trafficking in persons, it is also responsible for other duties to combat crime in general, drug trafficking in general, terrorism and even corruption. It is, in fact, the custodian - as in the case of the protocol we are implementing today - of 2003 United Nations Convention against corruption also. And it should be placed on record that Mauritius, and especially my friend, Ivan Collendavelloo, played a crucial role in 2003 in having the United Nations adopt this Convention against

corruption. Coming back to the protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, it is interesting, I think, Mr Speaker, Sir, to note that the official title says: protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children. To protect women and children against forced labour and prostitution, and it is a good thing that the Bill before us, today, underlines that the Child Protection Act is not repealed by the present Bill. On the contrary, the present Bill supplements the Child Protection Act.

Having said that, I welcome the Bill - I am sure everybody does. There are three areas where I am not sure whether the present Bill does all that is necessary to implement, *pour traduire dans les faits*, the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons. So, I stand to be enlightened on that. The protocol requests that legislation voted by our Parliament and other Parliaments, should cover, amongst other things, the issue of suspending parental rights of parents where it has to be so. Because some parents, unfortunately, take part in the crime of trafficking in children. Therefore, the UN Protocol specifically says that provisions must be made in the law to suspend parental rights when required. I have not seen any section of the Bill that covers that. If it is, I will be all the happier, but I would like to be enlightened on that.

Secondly, yes, protection is provided to victims of trafficking, but I am not sure that what the UN Protocol requires is fully complied with insofar as the protocol requests that our legislation, any country's legislation, must ensure that trafficking in persons are not punished for any offence or activities related to their having been trafficked such as prostitution and immigration violations. Again, I have gone through the Bill that is before us. I am not satisfied, at this stage, that this is fully covered. But, if it is, so much the better.

My third remark is, yes, the Bill provides for penalties against persons who take part in human trafficking. But, again, the UN Protocol makes the request that there should be specific provisions that deal with complicity by State officials, not people guilty of being involved in human trafficking, in general, this is provided for, that there should be specific provisions to deal with officials for complicity by State officials in trafficking. So, I will wish to have some enlightenment as far as these three requirements of the UN Protocol are concerned.

As far as the Bill itself is concerned, the centre to be set up, the Bill says that the centre or centres will be set up. I heard the hon. Prime Minister

talk in the plural. *On doit commencer quelque part*. And the centre is - I am a bit puzzled – to be managed by an investigation officer. I wonder why this title, the investigation is one thing, running a centre for victims of human trafficking, I would think is a different matter. So, why make an investigation officer in charge of the centre? The centre or centres in the plural if there is more than one. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that before the centre or other centres are set up, there will be need to pre-train people to run such centres and there, as usual, I am sure that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime can extend assistance.

I did not hear anything either from the hon. Prime Minister as far as the screening mechanism mentioned in section 5 is concerned. Section 5 says –

“The Minister shall take steps for the setting up, with the assistance of one or more investigating officers and such authorities as he thinks fit, of a screening mechanism to determine whether person who travel to Mauritius from a country referred to subsection (1)(a) or persons who travel from Mauritius to a country referred to subsection (1)(b) are victims of trafficking.”

I would like to know a bit more about this screening mechanism to be set up. The hon. Prime Minister made reference to what is provided for in section 6 subsection (1), which reads –

“Notwithstanding any other enactment, the Minister may allow a victim of trafficking who is a non-citizen, regardless of his status, to remain in Mauritius for a non-renewable period not exceeding 42 days.”

I have two questions: why 42 days, and, secondly, is it prudent to tie our own hands? Because we are voting a piece of legislation where it is a non-renewable period, not exceeding 42 days. What if we reach that time frame of 42 days and a genuine case of trafficking has not been fully investigated? We tie our own hands. That person has to be deported; he has to leave the country. The wording, I think, should be more careful so that in genuine cases we don't tie our own hands and if there is a need to renew that period of 42 or any other number of days, we should have that possibility.

Then, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is one point, again, where I would seek clarification. It is at section 13 - Reporting of trafficking, subsection (1) –

“Any person who believes that a person is a victim of trafficking shall forthwith report the matter to the Police”

We know the concept of *non-assistance à personne en danger*, I go along completely. But I don't see an offence provided for in relation to that. If a person doesn't do what that piece of legislation says, he must do, and rightly so, unless, again, I have missed it, I have gone through it, but I don't see a penalty - not an offence - for somebody who would go against that section of the Bill that is before us.

And finally, which is not a major point, but at section 16, it is very good - and the protocol makes that request - that compensation to victims of trafficking is provided for. But subsection (2) of section 16 says –

“An order made under subsection (1) may award compensation not exceeding 500,000 rupees”.

For somebody who has been truly a victim of trafficking, I don't think the ceiling of Rs500,000 would be adequate. I would rather see that amount increased, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With these remarks, as I said, I would wish to know more about the second protocol, whether it is already ratified and, if yes, whether legislation is going to be brought before the House to implement that second protocol. Both are important, especially these days, we know the big issue of migrants trafficking and the way migrants are treated in certain countries. The second protocol is also important. Of course, we agree, I agree fully with the Bill before the House subject to the points which I have raised.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(6.45 p.m.)

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Mr J. F. Chaumière): Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there is broad consensus on the fact that this is a very important Bill being given the nature of the Bill itself, the objectives that it wants to achieve, that it should be consensual. The Leader of the Opposition has merely asked for some clarifications.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a Bill which sets up the framework to cater for certain persons where there is likelihood that these persons have been victims of trafficking as provided for by the present Bill. It contains procedures to be followed the moment the alleged victims of trafficking have been identified as it is provided for in section 5 (2) and it provides the subsequent steps to be followed regarding, for example, suspension of deportation, temporary residence and so on.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the introduction of this Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill is another vivid testimony of this Government's commitment to take effective action to combat the exploitation of persons. Through the adoption of this Bill, Government will be, as the hon. Prime Minister rightly said so, in compliance with the United Nations Protocol to prevent, to suppress and punish trafficking in persons.

History is moving fast, Mr Speaker, Sir. At the start of the 21st Century, recent events have unleashed ways of change with the new information and communication technologies, the new global rules and the accelerating global economic integration.

This new context opens unparalleled new opportunities, but it also gives rise to new threats to human security and human freedom. Mr Speaker, Sir, by preventing trafficking in persons, we are securing basic freedoms and human dignity that are both essential for human development. Human Rights, Mr Speaker, Sir, express the broad idea that all people have claims to social arrangements that protect them from worst abuses and deprivations and that secure the freedom for life of dignity. By adopting these protective measures, we are consolidating the advancement of human development so that each person can live a life of respect and value.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when human rights and human development advance together, they reinforce one another, thus expanding people's capabilities and protecting their rights and fundamental freedoms. Mr Speaker, Sir, a crucial element of the definition of trafficking in the Bill, is its purpose, namely exploitation, which is specifically defined, to include, *inter alia*, forced labour, which is an affront to human dignity. Freedom from forced labour is one of the most important human rights coming within the sphere of the ILO.

Within the ILO mandate, the two Conventions on forced labour, namely the Forced Labour Convention 1930 No. 29 and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention 1957 No. 105 and, most particularly, Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999 adequately cover trafficking in person for labour exploitation. These Conventions form part of the 8 core Fundamental Rights Convention of the ILO. Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has ratified all the 8 Conventions.

The overall goal, Mr Speaker, Sir, is to promote opportunities for decent work for women and men in all countries. Decent work encompasses work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security at the workplace and social protection for families as well as better prospects for personal

development and social integration. It implies freedom for people to express their concerns and equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to inform the House that in order to optimise the benefits that can be drawn from the ILO Corporation Framework, the ILO, in collaboration with my Ministry, is embarking on the preparation of a decent work country programme. Providing everyone with full and freely chosen decent work can attack the root causes of trafficking. In addition, the promotions of gender equality can be considered as one of the most important means to reduce trafficking since there is a strong link between woman's employment status, child labour and trafficking. Indeed, gender discrimination in society and in the labour market is one of the main root causes of trafficking.

As far as child employment is concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, the law in Mauritius already prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16, that is, under the age of completion of compulsory education. The law provides that any infringement of such provision may render the person liable to a fine not exceeding Rs10,000 and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year. Thus, the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill, by its very object, is yet another step towards full observance of the provisions of Convention 1(a)(ii), inasmuch as children constitutes the most vulnerable group among victims of trafficking.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bill also refers to recruitment. Taking into consideration the growing role of private employment agencies, Government has come up with appropriate measures to better protect migrant workers against fraudulent and abusive practices, including trafficking. Private employment agencies have to satisfy a number of conditions before being granted a recruitment licence, which is valid for two years. Such agencies have to offer a deposit of Rs200,000, which will be used to repatriate workers in difficulties abroad, in case the workers or their employers are unable to pay for their tickets. The employment division regularly carries out visit at licence recruitment agencies to ensure compliance with the Act. All cases of reported illegal recruitment are investigated and referred to the Police as appropriate.

One way of combating trafficking in persons, to offer credible alternative means of labour migration. As you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, for example, Government, my Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is actively participating in circular migration and labour migration projects.

The International Organisation for Migration has opened a liaison office in Mauritius, and works closely with us and with other stakeholders, such as the National Empowerment Foundation and the Ministry of Finance, to implement labour migration project. We ensure that the maximum safeguards are offered to our citizens, even before they leave the country. Thus, we and our partners, for example, look at return tickets, remittances, lodging, leave, visas, morality certificates, pre-departure orientation, language training, monitoring trips after departure from Mauritius, conditions of return, etc, and, upon the return of the workers, we will help them to settle back.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a few weeks ago, I think you will remember, there was a press report that one Mauritian national was subjected to a most reprehensive treatment by his employer abroad, equivalent to forced labour. The torture of this single person raised unmitigated public outcry. Mr Speaker, Sir, all Members of the House will agree that this august Assembly has a duty to ensure that such acts do not occur in our country, and this legislation focuses in that direction. Furthermore, this new legislation will indeed compliment and further consolidate existing laws and regulations relating to trafficking in persons.

Let me end up, Mr Speaker, Sir, by congratulating the hon. Prime Minister to bring in this Bill.

Thank you.

(6.55 p.m.)

Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill): Mr Speaker, Sir, believe me, it is not at all an easy task to intervene on a Bill presented by the hon. Prime Minister and when you have, among other interveners, the Leader of the Opposition, a hon. Member of longstanding experience. But, Mr Speaker, Sir, I will try to the best of my ability to make my points.

Trafficking in persons, Mr Speaker, Sir, is not at all a new phenomenon. It is, indeed, an old and global phenomenon. It exists in every part of the world, and each country, to the best of its ability, tries maximum effort to ensure that the rights, needs and interests of its individual are being protected, because trafficking in persons is, indeed, a violation of human rights. Throughout history, trafficking in persons has taken place in different forms, such as, exploitation, forced and child labour, illegal removal of organs and all forms of slavery.

May I, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the risk of stating the obvious, say that any legislation that assists in bringing better justice and protection of individuals is always welcome! Indeed, we, on this side of the House, welcome the Bill; it is a good step forward. The present Bill, that is, the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill, is an important piece of legislation which safeguards and upholds fundamental rights of people.

Let me now, Mr Speaker, Sir, come to the objects of the Bill. If you have gone through the Bill, you would have seen that the Bill has three objects –

- (a) to give effect to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons;
- (b) prevent and combat trafficking in persons, and
- (c) protect and assist victims of trafficking.

Let me tackle the first object. The present Bill, Mr Speaker, Sir, is no doubt in line, as has been rightly pointed out by the hon. Prime Minister, with the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. It is interesting to note that the preamble of the United Nations Protocol rightly and expressly put more emphasis on women and children. It, in fact, prevents the trafficking in persons, especially, women and children. More emphasis is expressed on women and children, due to the fact that the United Nations and the world community have realised that women and children have always been the most vulnerable and victims in the trafficking of persons. So, my question is: does the present Bill give similar emphasis on the vulnerability of women and children? Presumably, Mr Speaker, Sir, the idea behind bringing the present Bill before the Assembly is, among other things, to prevent and better protect and assist victims of trafficking, especially, women and children.

During the past four years, Mr Speaker, Sir, you have witnessed how Members of the Opposition have regularly addressed questions to the hon. Prime Minister and other Ministers to better protect women and children. Protection of women and children must be the top priorities of successive Governments. Each Government must be in a position to offer every child of this country the chance to survive and develop in a caring environment, free of sexual abuse and development. In Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, trafficking in persons in the form of sexual exploitation is quite alarming.

My last point, Mr Speaker, Sir, will be about prevention. Finally, inasmuch as the object of the Bill is to prevent the trafficking in persons,

there should be a clause that particularly deals with prevention before punishment.

The hon. Prime Minister and other Ministers should also sensitise the public in general, but particularly those who are most vulnerable including women and children as to their rights. People should be encouraged to report matters relating to trafficking in person to the Police by affording them the protection of denouncing certain cartels anonymously. Vulnerable individuals should also be educated so that they do not fall victim to trafficking in person and should also be educated to the effect that they are not exploited.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I will end here by saying once more that the Bill is a good step forward. I think that with time the Bill will be amended when and where necessary so that we could better protect the citizen of Mauritius and, at the same time, combat trafficking in person specially where women and children are concerned.

Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, first of all, I want to thank hon. Members who have participated in the debate on this Bill. I am glad that this Bill has been welcomed. Some points having been raised, I should try to answer them, Mr Speaker, Sir.

First of all, as regards the second Protocol against smuggling of migrants, this has been gratified by Mauritius. Mauritius is a contracting party. Consideration is being given to enacting the legislation to give effect to the Protocol. This Protocol against smuggling is a different subject matter. What I said in my opening remarks is that the reporting officer for Africa from the United States Department indicated on his visit to Mauritius that, unfortunately, we have not satisfied the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act fully and this is what is preventing us from going to Tier 1 because we have done everything that have to be done and therefore this will move us from Tier 2 to Tier I and that is why we have done this. But for the other Protocol, consideration is being given to enacting legislation to give effect to it.

As for suspension of parental rights, in fact, this matter is dealt with at Clause 21 of the Bill by way of amendment to Section 13(a) of the Child Protection Act. As for the complicity by State official, the offence of complicity Mr Speaker, Sir, is already provided for under our Criminal Code and it applies to all persons, including in this case. The court in sentencing the accomplice will take into account whether it was supposed to prevent the

occurrence of such offence or whether he was a State official. First of all, concerning the centre, I should say, we have already earmarked land, I think as I might have mentioned, at GRNW and it is at the process of design at the moment, but the centre is to be managed by Investigating Officer. In fact, the definition of Investigating Officer means, a Police officer or a public officer designated by the Minister; that is how it has been labelled.

As for the period of 42 days, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was listening to the hon. Leader of the opposition. In fact, I asked the very same questions that he asked: why 42 days? And, in fact, the Protocol does not provide for any specific period during which the victim may be allowed to remain in that territory; it is a matter of policy but, generally, it has been six weeks, that is, 42 days. I also asked the question as to whether we are not tying our hands because sometimes with investigation going on we are not getting the information we need, 42 days might come and go, so to speak. We have a clause, in fact, if that is the case - the clause 7 - that provides for conditions in which the victim may be granted a visitor's permit which may be extended - and this humanitarian ground is important - in appropriate cases.

As for section 13(1), failure to comply with Clause 13 does not amount to a criminal offence, Mr Speaker, Sir. Therefore, I suppose this will be taken into account as an aggravating matter when the court is looking at it. As for the screening mechanism to determine whether persons who travel to Mauritius are for Mauritius a victim of trafficking this is provided for by the Passport and Immigration Office through the profiling of passengers on departure, arrival and transit. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, they check whether a passenger is at the right holder of a passport, whether it reflects identity and nationality. They check whether the person travelling is travelling in a group, speak the same language and they check the relationship of minors and young persons being accompanied. They check the demeanour and physical appearance of passengers. They verify suspected names on list. We cooperate with the Interpol on this. I was asked one question in Parliament, I did say that we are accelerating this profiling that we have already and we also have, where suspicion exists, a system for monitoring which I would rather not go into details, Mr Speaker, Sir, but it is not just a passport and immigration office but also other sections of the Police deal with this.

As for the compensation of Rs500,000, this also I made the remark that it might be - it is a maximum compensation of Rs500,000 under sub-clause 2 of Clause 16 which has to be used in conjunction with the sub-clause 6, which provides that the victim may enter civil action to recover the

excess where the amount of damage injury or loss suffered, in fact, exceeds an award made by the court. Hon. Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo asked the question about exploitation. First of all, she mentioned about the survey for child prostitution. I answered a question in Parliament; we are going to try to set up a survey. In fact, I think that it would be a good thing, because the survey we had is a long time ago and we need to have a proper survey. The definition of exploitation is based on the definition in the Protocol and is non-exhaustive. The word 'includes' as opposed to 'means' is used for the definition of exploitation. As for trafficking in person the word 'allows' - I think the point was raised - whether the word 'allows' is constitutional. It is not, in fact, infrequent in our criminal law. It is meant to embrace any form of active or passive participation, which facilitates the condition of the friends of trafficking in persons. I think these were the main points that were raised and I thank hon. Members for participating.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

The Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill (No. III of 2009) was considered and agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill (No. III of 2009) was read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Prime Minister: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 28 April 2009, at 11.30 a.m.

The Deputy Prime Minister rose and seconded.

The House stands adjourned.

At 7.21 p.m. the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 28 April 2009 at 11.30 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MURDER/MANSLAUGHTER CASES – 2000-2005

(No. B/262) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the offence of murder/manslaughter, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof committed between -

- (a) 2000 to 2005, and
- (b) 2005 to date, indicating in each case, the number thereof that have been elucidated as at to date.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that –

- (a) between 2000 and 2005, 148 cases of murder and manslaughter were committed, and
- (b) between 2005 and 16 April 2009, 129 cases of murder and manslaughter were committed.

I am also informed by the Commissioner of Police that for the respective periods -

- (i) 142 out of 148 cases have been elucidated – 95.9%
- (ii) 127 out of 129 cases have been elucidated – 98.4%

DRIVING LICENCE - ISSUE

(No. B/263) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the driving licence, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of persons who, since 2006 to date –

- a) have undergone oral and practical driving tests;
- b) have been issued same, and
- c) are over 60 and whose driving licence have been renewed.

Reply: The information requested by the hon. Member as provided to me by the Police is as follows -

Year	No. of candidates examined	No. of candidates who have been issued a driving licence	No. of persons above 60 whose driving licences have been renewed

2006	38,193	12,297	14,539
2007	37,706	13,674	17,807
2008	37,199	14,806	23,700
2009 (15.04.09)	8,960	3,507	5,356

Further to a question by hon. Dr. Hawoldar, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping is currently finalizing a review of the regulations with a view to extending the validity of driving licences from 60 to 65 years.

FAST TRACK COMMITTEE – PROJECTS – INVESTMENT

(No. B/264) Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Fast Track Committee set up to steer projects in Mauritius, he will state the number of projects –

- (a) deposited, indicating in each case –
 - (i) the names of the promoters;
 - (ii) their nationality, and
 - (iii) the investment value thereof.
- (b) which have been -
 - (i) approved, and
 - (ii) not approved, indicating the reasons therefor.

Reply: The Fast Track Committee has so far considered a total of 15 projects in different sectors of the economy, representing a proposed investment of around Rs68 billion.

Out of the 15 projects considered by the Committee, five are in an advanced stage of implementation, representing a total investment of Rs19.2 billion and the expected creation of around 3,380 jobs on full completion. Four projects are awaiting statutory permits and two others are awaiting policy decisions. Of the remaining four projects, two have been put on hold, the other two will not be pursued further as they were to be implemented in

areas located either within the core and/ or the buffer zones of the Le Morne Mountain and the Aapravasi Ghat World Heritage Sites.

I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member in respect of each of the projects.

MBC – PEPSI HUNGAMA PROGRAMME – EXPENSES

(No. B/265) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the expenses incurred in connection with the Pepsi Hungama Programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to if –

- (a) the Chairperson of the Board thereof has refused to sign cheques pertaining thereto and, if so, the reasons therefore, and
- (b) any amount of money has been taken from the Welfare Fund to pay therefor.

(Withdrawn)

MBC – SENIOR NEWS PRODUCER/PRODUCTION ASSISTANT - INCIDENT

(No. B/266) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if any incident took place thereat, on or about 22 January 2009, between a senior news producer and a production assistant, and if so, the reasons therefor.

Reply: I am informed by the Acting Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that no such incident has been reported at the Corporation.

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS - PUBLIC PLACES - PROHIBITION

(No. B/267) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the prohibition to drink alcohol in public places, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police,

information as to the number of persons booked, since the coming into force of the Regulation in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since 01 March 2009, date on which the Public Health (Prohibition on Advertisement, Sponsorship and Restriction on Sale and Consumption in Public Places of Alcoholic Drinks) Regulations 2008 came into force, to date, 123 persons have been booked.

VEGETABLES - LARCENY - INQUIRY

(No. B/268) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to the larceny of vegetables, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof, since July 2005 to date, indicating the outcome of the inquiry carried out in each case.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to 16 April 2009, 1,292 cases of larceny of vegetables have been reported, out of which -

- 175 cases are still pending enquiry;
- 62 cases are pending Court;
- 13 cases have been dismissed by Court;
- in 100 cases, the accused have been fined;
- in 21 cases, the accused have been sentenced to imprisonment, and
- 921 cases have been classified as accused have remained unknown.

BOMB THREATS - CASES

(No. B/269) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to bomb threats, since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof, indicating the outcome of the inquiry carried out in each case.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that, since July 2005 to date, thirty-eight cases of bomb threats have been reported to the Police. Out of these -

- (i) twenty-nine cases have been filed in view of the fact that the accused have remained unknown;
- (ii) one case is pending in Court;
- (iii) in one case, one accused has been sentenced to pay a fine of Rs3,000 plus Rs100 costs; and
- (iv) seven cases are pending enquiry.

CREVE COEUR - LANDSLIDING

(No. B/270) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the landslide which occurred in Crève Coeur last year, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if statements have been made by some inhabitants thereof to the effect that their respective residence were damaged as a result thereof and, if so, if inquiries have been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that no case of landslide occurring in the region of Crève Coeur last year has been reported to the Police. However, I am given to understand that two inhabitants of Crève Coeur made a complaint to their Village Council regarding damage to roads and buildings due to soil erosion. The matter was subsequently examined at the Works and Planning Committee of the Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart District Council.

Given the complexity of the problem, the Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart District Council has referred the matter to the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit for remedial action to be taken.

I have requested my colleague, the Minister of Environment & NDU, to liaise with all stakeholders to find a prompt solution to this problem.

PEDESTRIANS - LARCENY

(No. B/271) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to larceny, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof perpetrated by snatching of jewels, handbags and other personal items during daylight from pedestrians, since

January 2008 to date, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken to avert same.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that from January 2008 to date, 274 cases of larceny committed by snatching jewels, 170 cases by snatching handbags and 235 cases by snatching personal items during daylight have been reported to Police. So far, 114 persons have been arrested in relation to these cases.

Police has taken preventive measures to address the problem. At the Force level, preventive patrols and crackdown operations are conducted by the Special Mobile Force, the Special Supporting Unit, Anti-Drug and Smuggling Unit and the Central Investigations Division. The Police Crime Prevention Unit carries out regular sensitization campaigns on crime prevention. Since 2008 to date, the Crime Prevention Unit has sensitized around 93,000 persons and has distributed 25,000 brochures and 13,500 booklets to raise awareness among the public on protection of property.

At the Divisional level, Divisional Commanders, with the assistance of other Units of the Police Force, conduct operations such as manning of vehicle check points during the day and also at night at strategic places within their Divisions with a view to checking motor vehicles and arresting suspects involved in criminal cases.

At the station level, visible police presence is provided near markets, banks, hotels, restaurants, bus stands, schools, jewellery shops and commercial centres. Through the Police Public Partnership Policing, cooperation between Police and the local community is enhanced.

I also wish to add that with the coming into operation of the Close Circuit Television (CCTV) System in Flic-en-Flac, Port Louis and Grand Bay, a better monitoring of street activities will be provided with a view to protecting members of the public.

TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS - CASES

(No. B/272) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to trafficking in persons, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases thereof, since January 2005 to date.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2005 to date, two cases of child trafficking have been reported to Police. In the first case, three persons were arrested and advice from the

Director of Public Prosecutions is awaited. In the second case, the Director of Public Prosecutions has advised no further action.

Mauritius ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons in 2003. The Protocol requires the enactment of legislation that criminalizes trafficking in persons and provides for prevention of such trafficking, prosecution of traffickers in persons and protection of their victims.

In December 2005, the Child Protection Act 1994 was amended to make better provision for the prosecution, suppression and punishment of trafficking in children and to provide for tougher penalties of the offence. However, in spite of that amendment, our legislation is not yet fully compliant with the provisions of the Protocol. We have to meet our obligations arising from the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. It is precisely for this purpose that the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill has been introduced in the House.

MBC - POLITICAL RALLIES - COVERAGE

(No. B/273) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to the coverage of the political rallies on the Labour Day and the news items broadcast by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, since May 2000 to May 2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the duration of each -

- (a) item for each of the political parties/alliances, and
- (b) insert for each item which was broadcast and each insert of every political leader.

Reply: The information requested is being compiled.

ADVISERS & PRESS ATTACHES - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/274) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs whether, in regard to each of the Advisers and Press Attachés appointed by Government, he will state -

- (a) since May 2008 to date, their -
 - (i) names;
 - (ii) terms and conditions of employment, and
 - (iii) qualifications, and

- (b) if their terms and conditions of appointment have been reviewed, following the PRB Report 2008 and, if so, table copy thereof.

Reply: I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member. In fact, since May 2008 to date, 26 Advisers have been recruited by the Government.

However, I wish to point out the fact that the total number of Advisers and Press Attachés appointed by this Government is 175, and this is far less than the 277 Advisers and Press Attachés recruited during the period September 2000 to June 2005, some of them on terms and conditions far more favorable than those of Senior Advisers recruited by the present Government.

OLD GRAND PORT ROAD, QUARTIER MILITAIRE - DRAINS

(No. B/305) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he is aware of the frequent flooding of the area at the Old Grand Port Road, Quartier Militaire, and if so, will he state when works will start in respect of the project for the construction of drains thereat, indicating the project value thereof.

Reply: The road under reference is not classified and does not, therefore, fall under the purview of the Road Development Authority.

I am informed by the National Development Unit that following the flash flood of 26 March 2008, the project to construct a drain at Old Grand Port Road in Quartier Militaire (near Quartier Militaire College) has been included in its Emergency Rehabilitation Programme.

Lux Consult (Mtius) Ltd is presently carrying out a survey and is expected to come up with potential solutions to address the flooding problem in the region. The proposals of the consultant are still awaited

RIVERSIDE LANE, QUARTIER MILITAIRE - TARRING

(No. B/306) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Riverside Lane, opposite the Labourdonnais Street, at l'Espérance, Quartier Militaire, he will state if urgent consideration will be given for the tarring thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that the first 50 metres of Riverside Lane opposite Labourdonnais Street at L'Esperance, Quartier Militaire is a public road and already tarred.

I am also informed that the next 200 metres of the lane is water bound and is still a private access. Consequently, the Council will not be in a position to undertake the tarring of this stretch of the road.

SRI LANKA – TAMIL POPULATION - PLIGHT

(No. B/307) Mr J. Cuttaree (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration & International Trade whether, in regard to the plight of the civilians of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka, he will state if Government has raised concerns thereon and, if so, indicate the various human rights and international organisations to which these concerns were expressed.

Reply: The situation in Sri Lanka has so far not been on the formal agenda of the Human Rights Council and the UN Security Council – the appropriate International fora to address the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

The matter was raised during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Sri Lanka held on 13 May 2008. Mauritius, along with other members of the Human Rights Council adopted the report on the UPR of Sri Lanka which contains, *inter alia*, recommendations to address the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka.

Mauritius is concerned with the plight of civilians, their security and the deep humanitarian crisis unfolding in the country.

We welcome the humanitarian pause announced by the Government to allow the civilians to leave the conflict areas on 13-15 April. We believe that this cessation of hostilities should be extended to allow trapped civilians to leave for secure areas.

We appeal on all parties to ensure that those wishing to leave the conflict areas be allowed to do so and take steps to save civilian lives. We also condemn any attempt to use civilians as human shields.

PUBLIC OFFICERS – PRB REPORT – RETIREMENT PENSION

(No. B/308) Mr J. Cuttaree (Second Member for Stanley & Rose Hill) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the retirement pension of public officers, he will state the reasons as to why the conversion point chosen for

the alignment thereof with the PRB Report 2008 is not based on the actual pension drawn, but rather, on a lower sum, thus resulting in lower pension retirement benefits to which the retirees would have otherwise been entitled.

Reply: I am informed that the conversion point chosen for the alignment of the retirement pension of public officers is based on a point-to-point conversion of the salary of the pensioner at the time of his retirement and not on a lower sum as claimed.

I am further informed that such was not the case before 1987 when the pensions of retired officers were not adjusted in the wake of salary reviews. Pensioners were compensated periodically for an increase in the cost of living. However, the salaries commissioner, Mr D. Chessworth in his Report of 1988 recommended that pensions of retired officers be computed on the basis of the revised pensionable emoluments of the relevant grades as from the date of implementation of new salaries.

In its 2008 Report, the PRB again recommended that, as in the past, pensions of retired public officers should continue to be recomputed on the basis of the revised pensionable emoluments as from 01 July 2008.

I am also advised that on this issue, a representation was made by pensioners and the matter was considered by the PRB in the wake of its 2008 exercise for the review of salaries and conditions of service.

In this context, the recommendation made at paragraph 20.10 of the PRB Report 2008 is very clear.

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS – LINGUISTIC & CULTURAL RIGHTS

(No. B/309) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources whether, in regard to the primary and secondary schools students, he will state if Government is contemplating implementing measures to ensure that equal opportunities be provided to all of them, on the basis of linguistic and cultural rights.

(Withdrawn)

GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM TECHNOLOGY - OPERATION

(No. B/310) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Information & Communication Technology whether, in regard to the Global Positioning System Technology, he will

state if it is currently being used and, if so, since when and, if not, the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

MAHEBOURG HOSPITAL – METHADONE THERAPY UNIT

(No. B/311) Mr Y.Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the project for the setting up of a Desintoxication/Rehabilitation Centre at the Mahebourg Hospital, he will state if he has received any request for its setting up from the “*Groupe Renaissance De Mahebourg*” and, if so, where matters stand.

Reply: The Methadone Substitution Therapy was introduced by my Ministry as a priority measure of harm reduction strategies to combat HIV and AIDS among Injecting Drug Users. The programme started in November 2006 at the National Methadone Substitution Therapy Centre in Beau Bassin and the policy of my Ministry is to decentralize the service so as to make it accessible to more clients. So far, 1284 clients have been induced.

At a meeting of the National AIDS Committee chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister on 08 April 2009, which was attended by Dr. Catherine Gaud, *Médecin Chef de Service de l’Unité D’Immunologie Clinique* of Reunion Island, as well as representatives of NGOs, amongst others, it was decided to set up regional Methadone Substitution Therapy Centres to target a larger number of drug users.

I have to confirm that a group of persons from the *Groupe Renaissance De Mahebourg* came to see me on 09 April, 2009 and the problem of drug addiction in Mahebourg was raised. I informed them about the policy of decentralization of my Ministry and of the proposal to set up a Methadone Substitution Therapy Unit in the region of Mahebourg.

I also informed the representatives of the *Groupe Renaissance De Mahebourg* about the various steps involved for clients to be put on Methadone Substitution Therapy Programme, particularly regarding the preparation and the psycho-social support of the clients by a NGO, prior to and after the induction phase.

Taking into consideration the various steps required for the opening of a Methadone Therapy Unit, it is expected that the programme may be operational in Mahebourg in some six weeks’ time.

MAHEBOURG/QUEEN ELIZABETH COLLEGE

- SCHOOL BUS ROUTE

(No. B/312) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware of the request made for a direct school bus route from Mahebourg to the Queen Elizabeth College and back, and if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Authority, information as to if same has been turned down and, if so, the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

NTC - SALARIES AND WAGES

(No. B/313) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the losses incurred by the National Transport Corporation for the period 2007-2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to if the increases in the salaries and the wages, as a result of the implementation of the recommendations of the National Remuneration Board and of the Pay Research Bureau, account therefor.

(Withdrawn)

NTC – BUSES - PURCHASE

(No. B/314) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the buses of the National Transport Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to the -

- (a) number thereof purchased yearly, since 2003 to date;
- (b) maintenance cost thereof, and
 - (i) for each of the years 2005 to 2008, indicating in each case the amount of money spent on tyre replacement;
 - (ii) since 2008 to date;
 - (iii) the amount earmarked therefor for 2009, and
- (c) number of engine replacement effected on buses purchased in 2007.

(Withdrawn)

**SUGAR INDUSTRY REFORM - EUROPEAN UNION -
ACCOMPANYING MEASURES**

(No. B/315) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production & Security whether, in regard to the accompanying measures granted by the European Union for the reform of the sugar industry, he will state the amount of money disbursed -

- (a) since 2005 to date, specifying the amount dedicated for budgetary support, and
- (b) presently being spent for the projects being implemented.

Reply: (The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance & Economic Development): As the House is aware, under the EC Accompanying Measures for Sugar Protocol Countries (AMSP) (2006-2013), Mauritius is entitled to 19.4% of the global envelope of € 1.284 billion being made available to the 18 ACP Sugar Protocol countries. This represents roughly an outright grant of € 250 million to which Mauritius may be eligible, provided it fulfills all the performance indicators to be agreed in future consultations with the EU.

As regards part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that to date a total amount of € 39.8 million has been disbursed by the EU under Accompanying Measures for the Sugar sector Reform in Mauritius. In Financial Year 2006/07, a first amount of € 6.5 million was disbursed, followed by € 33.3 million in Financial Year 2007/08.

The financial resources under the Sugar Accompanying Measures are in form of General Budget Support for the implementation of the economic reform programme of Government, which includes the sugar sector reform but need not be restricted to spending in the sugar sector only.

With respect to part (b) of the question, the amount of money presently being disbursed are -

Disbursement under Sugar accompanying measure from the Government budget.

1. Disbursement to the Sugar Reform Trust (SRT) for payment of VRS2, ERS and Blue Print to agricultural and factory workers of the sugar Industry

To enable the implementation of the scheme in favour of employees concerned by the VRS 2, the ERS and the Blue Print, a Sugar Reform Trust was set up. The Trust is entitled to raise a government guaranteed loan of up to 94M€ and so far it has raised € 77.1 million as loans to meet social costs already incurred. All this amount has accrued to employees. The interest on this loan is refundable by concerned Sugar Companies including Rose Belle, the SIT and the SLDC. In 2007/8, an amount of € 36 million was disbursed by Government to the SRT to enable it to service its debt.

In all, 7,349 workers and employees have been able to voluntarily terminate their contract of employment and obtained their compensation as determined under the Sugar Industry Efficiency Act.

2. Field Operations and Irrigation Projects (FORIP).

Under Sugar Accompanying Measures, funds have also been disbursed from the Government Budget to finance free de-rocking of small planters lands and irrigation projects, all implemented by the Mauritius Sugar Authority. Total amount disbursed to date stands at Rs609 m., equivalent to € 14.8 million, broken down as follows -

For FY 2006-2007 : Rs309 m.

For FY 2007-2008 : Rs185 m.

For FY 2008-2009: Rs115 m.

Total area of land de-rocked in various parts of the island amount to 2,394 *hectare* belonging 2,179 small planters. The 2,394 ha are expected to produce an additional 145,000 tonnes of cane annually and in a sustainable manner for a period of 7 years. This is equivalent to 16,000 tonnes of sugar, which at Rs17,500 per tonnes represents a revenue of Rs277 m.

3. Equity Participation of Planters/Sugar Industry workers in the investment in the sugar industry

As Members of the House are aware, the Government has been able to obtain 35 percent participation of planters and sugar industry workers in the share capital of the sugar industry as part of the global deal with the MSPA.

In budget FY 2007-2008 Government has disbursed Rs94.5 m. (€ 2.2 million) as equity participation of planters and workers in a new sugar refinery.

The overall EU disbursements to Government of Mauritius as general budget support stands at € 39.8 million whereas disbursements from the budget for the sugar reform stands at € 53 million. The beneficiaries are

exclusively sugar industry workers and employees, and the non corporate planters, especially the small ones.

NTA - SUPPORT FUND

(No. B/316) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to the Support Fund created for bus transport companies, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Transport Authority, information as to -

- (a) the amount of money earmarked, and
- (b) the beneficiaries thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the National Transport Authority that no support fund has been created when increase of 28% in bus fares was worked out to come into effect on 12 May 2008. It was agreed that the National Transport Authority in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development would work out a formula to make up for a shortfall of Rs192 m. from the proceeds of the BCRA itself. The then beneficiaries are the National Transport Corporation, United Bus Service and Triolet Bus Service.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH & QUALITY OF LIFE - SPRAYMEN – POSTS

(No. B/317) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the posts of spraymen in his Ministry, he will state if they have been filled in the current present financial year and, if so, indicate –

- (a) when;
- (b) the number thereof, and
- (c) the criteria laid down and used for the selection.

Reply: The reply is in the affirmative. Concerning parts (a) & (b) of the question, 54 vacancies have been filled during this financial year, 19 in July 2008 and 35 in April 2009.

With regard to part (c) of the question, the criteria for selection are for selection are as specified in the Schedule of Duties. These include, *inter alia*, I quote -

- (a) Candidates should be holder of the Primary School Leaving Certificate/Certificate of Primary Education or an alternative qualification acceptable to the Public Service Commission.
- (b) They should be of a strong physique and a sound health.
- (c) Those who have previous experience in insecticide spraying work, though not holding the qualifications at (a) above, may be considered for appointment as Insecticide sprayermen.

MATERNAL DEATHS - NUMBER

(No. B/318) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to women who have passed away, following delivery or related complications, he will state the number thereof, since January 2006 to date.

Reply: I am informed that the number of women who have passed away in public hospitals following delivery or related complications from January 2006 to date is as follows -

Year 2006	:	6 cases
Year 2007	:	8 cases
Year 2008	:	6 cases
Year 2009	:	3 cases
(Jan to April)		

The leading causes of maternal deaths are postpartum haemorrhage followed by eclampsia.

Presently, maternal deaths in the private sector are reported to the Civil Status Office through the Death Certificate. My Ministry intends to monitor closely the situation in the private sector too.

I wish to assure the House that all cases of maternal deaths are fully investigated by a Technical Team of my Ministry comprising the Director Health Services responsible for hospitals services, the Regional Health Director and a Consultant in the field.

It is most unfortunate that women lose their lives while giving birth. Indeed one maternal death is too many. I view this situation with serious concern. In this connection, in January this year, a High Level Technical Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Director General Health Services. The objectives of the Committee were to look into the

causes of maternal deaths and to propose remedial actions with a view to curbing down the present trend.

This Committee has submitted its recommendations which include, *inter alia*, the following -

- The establishment of a protocol for referral of antenatal cases from AHC to tertiary centres.
- A planned delivery for all high-risk patients, that is, pregnancy induced hypertension, diabetes, placenta praevia.
- A coordinated multidisciplinary approach to all complicated cases.
- Regular and updated training on the signs and symptoms of critical illness from both obstetrics and non-obstetrics cases to all health professionals.

Appropriate action is being taken for the implementation of these recommendations.

Furthermore, Government has set up a Ministerial Committee to look into cases of maternal deaths as well as cases of alleged medical negligence and the recommendations of that Committee are expected shortly.

MAURITIUS REVENUE AUTHORITY - ARREARS

(No. B/319) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the arrears on revenue, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the amount thereof in relation to the –

- (a) Value Added Tax;
- (b) Gaming Tax;
- (c) Sales Tax, and
- (d) Companies Division, indicating the steps taken to recover same.

(Withdrawn)

FISH & FISH PRODUCTS - TESTING

(No. B/320) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Agro Industry, Food Production and Security whether he will state if Government has entered into an agreement with a private laboratory for testing fish and fish products and if so, indicate

-

- (a) when, and
- (b) the amount of money paid out as at to date.

(Withdrawn)

SOLIDARITY LEVY – AMOUNT COLLECTED

(No. B/321) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the Solidarity Levy, he will state the amount of money collected for each of the last three years, indicating how these sums have been used.

(Withdrawn)

ALIMONY - NON-COMPLIANCE

(No. B/322) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Attorney-General whether he will state if he has received complaints from the public, especially mothers, for non-compliance with arrangements in respect of alimony and, if so, indicate the measures he proposes to take.

(Withdrawn)

SEHDA - RESTRUCTURING

(No. B/323) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise & Co-operatives whether, in regard to the Small Handicraft Enterprises Development Authority, he will state if he will consider a complete restructuring thereof with a view to rendering it more proactive and supportive of the small and medium enterprises, having regard to their potential for employment creation.

Reply: My Ministry is presently working towards a complete restructuring of the SME sector in Mauritius with a view to enhance their potential for employment creation and thus increasing their contribution in the economy of the country.

As the House is aware, the SEHDA Act 2005 caters only for small enterprises, i.e. enterprises with up to 10 employees. My Ministry is coming up with a new legislation for the SME sector to, *inter alia*, broaden the scope of jurisdiction to include the medium enterprises. Clear definitions for small and medium enterprises will be spelt out therein.

Under the provisions of the new legislation, it is expected that a boost will be given to the SME Sector, through the creation of a more responsive framework thus enhancing their productivity and potential for employment creation.

ST. PIERRE & QUARTIER MILITAIRE - MARKETS - RENOVATION

(No. B/324) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the St. Pierre and Quartier Militaire public markets, he will state if Government proposes to renovate same.

Reply: I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that both the Saint Pierre and Quartier Militaire market fairs have already been renovated.

With regard to the St. Pierre Market Fair, the following works were undertaken in March 2008 -

- Provision of six stalls for fish and meat.
- Construction of thirteen new stalls for food and cake sellers.
- Construction of block wall at the first floor.

As far as the Quartier Militaire Market Fair is concerned, works were carried out in January 2009 as follows -

- (a) waterproofing and painting of the building;
- (b) construction of 100 stalls for haberdashery and 35 stalls for vegetables;
- (c) extension of building to cater for five stalls for fish and meat;
- (d) construction of drain;
- (e) fixing and construction of enclosure for security reason;
- (f) upgrading of lighting network, and
- (g) extension of works at the front of the building to house all cake sellers.

ADDITIONAL STIMULUS PACKAGE - CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS – TAX CONCESSIONS

(No. B/325) Mr P. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the construction projects which have started since 01 January 2009 to date, he will state the number thereof, which are eligible to concessions on the Land Transfer Tax and Registration Duty granted through the Additional Stimulus Package.

Reply: I am informed by the MRA that since 01 January 2009 to date, three construction projects have been registered with the Authority, namely-

- (a) construction of a showroom and service repairs workshop for Toyota (Mtius.) Ltd. at Riche Terre on 14,677 sq mts of land for a total investment of Rs169 m.;
- (b) residential development of Les Allées d'Helvetia at Moka on 22,136 sq mts of land for a total investment of Rs350 m., and
- (c) residential development of Springfield Residence at Grand' Baie on 9,961 sq mts of land for a total investment of Rs100 m..

These projects which would exceed Rs50 m. during period 01 January 2009 to 30 June 2011, would thus benefit from the exemption of registration duty and land transfer tax as provided under the Additional Stimulus Package.

NATIONAL PAY COUNCIL - MEETINGS

(No. B/326) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment whether, in regard to the National Pay Council, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Council, information as to -

- (a) if its terms of reference has been amended, and
- (b) the number of meetings of the Council held since July 2008 to date.

Reply: I must inform the House that the terms of reference of the NPC are determined by Government. No amendments thereto are envisaged.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that no meeting of the Council has been held since July 2008. I am further informed that a meeting of the Council has been scheduled for 07 May this year.

TROU D'EAU DOUCE - TUCK SHOPS - RENTAL

(No. B/327) **Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE)** asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the rental of the Tuck shops at Trou D'Eau Douce, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Beach Authority, information as to if a tender exercise has been launched and, if so, give details thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Beach Authority that an invitation to bid for the rental of one tuck shop at Trou D'Eau Douce public beach has been launched on 08 April 2009. The closing date for submission of bids has been fixed on 30 April 2009.

INTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE GROUP TRUST FUND - PROJECTS

(No. B/328) **Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Empowerment whether, in regard to the funding of projects under The Trust Fund for the Integration of Vulnerable Groups, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Fund, information as to -

- (a) the types thereof, and
- (b) the eligibility criteria laid down therefor.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that one of the main objective of the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups is to implement projects with a view to assisting vulnerable and needy families in improving their living conditions so that they can better integrate the mainstream of the society.

Accordingly, with regard to part (a) of the question, the Trust Fund has been implementing the following projects/schemes.

Firstly, community based projects which are initiated and implemented through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and where emphasis is placed on people's participation. In this respect, the Trust Fund focuses on the provision of –

- (i) needs in terms CIS housing units and related facilities;
- (ii) social infrastructure to improve the immediate surroundings of the community, and

- (iii) education support to school children in terms of school materials, uniforms, shoes and related items.

Secondly, there is a micro-credit scheme to enable the vulnerable households to increase their revenue through income generating activities.

Thirdly, there is a loan scheme to needy students pursuing their tertiary education at the University of Mauritius, University of Technology, IVTB or the Technical School Management Trust Fund.

Furthermore, in my reply to Pq No. B/49, I informed the House on 31 March 2009 that a Programme, known as Eradication of Absolute Poverty (EAP), has been put in place which focuses on the 229 pockets of poverty. The EAP Programme which is being steered by a Committee set up under the Trust Fund is adopting an integrated approach within the identified pockets of poverty in partnership with the private sector, government agencies and NGOs in order to eliminate absolute poverty. The objective for this Financial Year is to assist some 500 families in these pockets of poverty.

In the meantime, the Committee has developed a scheme to ensure that no child of pre-primary school age from vulnerable families is left out of school. Children living in the pockets of poverty who are not attending pre-primary schools are encouraged through a package of incentives to attend school regularly. These children are being provided a free meal, school fees, transport (if required) as well as school materials.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, the eligibility criteria for each type of project are being tabled.

HEALTH CARE ASSISTANTS - RECRUITMENT

(No. B/329) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if Health Care Assistants have recently been recruited and, if so, table a list thereof.

(Withdrawn)

POSTER PANELS - INSTALLATION

(No. B/330) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the poster panels, he will state -

- (a) the number thereof, constituency-wise, indicating their respective location, and

- (b) if he proposes to increase the number thereof temporarily, in view of the forthcoming Labour Day and, if so, indicate their proposed location constituency-wise.

Reply: I am informed that a total of 361 poster panels have been installed. Out of these, 88 have been installed by my Ministry and the remaining 273 by local authorities around the island. These are, in addition, to the 200 temporary poster panels which were installed in the Constituency No. 8 of Quartier Militaire/Moka in connection with the recent by-elections.

The installation by my Ministry of some additional 90 poster panels is in progress.

I am arranging for a list of the localities, where poster panels have been set up, to be laid in the Library of the National Assembly.

Moreover, my Ministry is presently arranging for the installation of a total number of 100 pairs of specially designed poles for affixing banners countrywide.

Concerning part (b) of the question, my Ministry has, at this stage, no plan to provide additional poster panels in view of the costs involved and specially having regard to the fact that these structures will be used temporarily only while the additional permanent ones are already being set up across the country.

I shall invite my colleagues to encourage the use of these popular and eco-friendly modes of publicity for the forthcoming Labour Day and other similar events.

DR. A. G. JEETOO HOSPITAL AND QUEEN VICTORIA HOSPITAL - SERVICES

(No. B/331) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will state if he has effected site visits at the Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital, Port Louis and the Queen Victoria Hospital, Quatre Bornes to assess the services provided to the patients thereat and, if so, the improvements he proposes to bring thereto.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that I am regularly visiting all public hospitals in Mauritius with a view to assessing the services provided to patients and to ensure that remedial measures are taken promptly wherever required.

In fact, over the last few months, I have visited Victoria Hospital, Dr. Jeetoo Hospital and other health institutions on several occasions.

As far as Dr. Jeetoo Hospital is concerned, this hospital covers a catchment area of 322,000 inhabitants. Last year, two million patients attended the hospital, Area Health Centres and Community Health Centres of the region compared to 1.9 million in the year 2007. I have to inform the House that the implementation of Stage I of the new Dr. Jeetoo Hospital is in progress. This new hospital will cover a surface area of 37,000 sq mts and will provide all the facilities of a modern hospital including MRI and CT Scan and various other high tech medical services. In order not to disrupt the continuity of services, appropriate arrangements have been made at the hospital level, bearing in mind the safety and comfort of both patients and personnel.

As regards Victoria Hospital, I wish to inform the House that this hospital covers a catchment area of 356,000 inhabitants; 1.9 million patients attended the hospital, AHCs and CHCs of the region in the year 2008 compared to 1.8 million in the year 2007. In view of the limited operating capacity presently available, a New Operating Block comprising six operating theatres and an ICU Ward with a capacity of 10 beds will be constructed shortly.

Moreover, as part of the modernization project, Victoria Hospital is now equipped with a brand new MRI Machine costing Rs34 m., a new cobalt machine for the treatment of cancer patients at the cost of Rs36 m., a new X-Ray machine at the cost of Rs2 m. and a new C-Arm at the cost of Rs4.3 m.

Following my visits to the hospitals, actions have also been initiated for -

(a) Services

- (i) The waiting time at the Accident & Emergency Department not to exceed five minutes for genuine emergencies and 20 minutes for a first consultation, and
- (ii) Extra sessions to be effected after normal working hours to reduce waiting time for surgeries.

(b) Security

- (i) Police officers and security guards to be posted at all times at the Accident & Emergency Unit, and
- (ii) an alarm system and a Close Circuit Television (CCTV) systems to be installed at risk areas as a deterrent.
- (c) **General Cleanliness and Hygiene**
 - (i) Rodent Control Services to be contracted out, and
 - (ii) the cleaning of wards and upkeeping of the yard to be improved.
- (d) **Personnel**

5 Medical and Health Officers/Senior Medical and Health Officers to be posted during peak hours at the Accident and Emergency Unit of Victoria and Dr. Jeetoo Hospitals.

With a view to enhancing customer satisfaction, my Ministry is embarking on the implementation of the MS ISO 9001-2008 in all hospitals and AHCs and CHCs as well as other health services.

PUBLIC OFFICERS - CUSTOMER CARE SERVICE - TRAINING

(No. B/332) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms whether, in regard to customer care service, he will state if public officers who are in regular contact with the public have undergone training therein, since 2006 to date and, if so, indicate -

- (a) the number of officers
 - (i) trained
 - (ii) remaining to be trained
- (b) the monitoring put up to ensure that the acquired skills are put into effect, and
- (c) if new measures for the improvement thereof are being contemplated.

Reply: This Government not only believes in “Putting People First”, but is also committed and determined to translate this principle into reality. The vision of my Ministry is to create a modern and efficient Public Service, ensure good governance and achieve excellence in the delivery of public services.

To make this a reality, there is no better way than to focus on training and development of our human resources to make them more efficient and more skillful in their job. My Ministry acts as a driver, a catalyst and a facilitator for the training and development of public officers. However ambitious we are in our vision and mission, there is a limit to what we can achieve given our scarce and limited resources.

My Ministry is responsible, among other matters for training and staff development, particularly for officers of the General Services Cadre and the Human Resource Management Cadre. My Ministry also assists other Ministries and Departments in mounting and conducting training programme that cut across the Civil Service.

In this context, my Ministry set up a specialized training programme in Customer Care and invited all Ministries and Departments to nominate public officers. Following that invitation, some 2,700 nominations were received and my Ministry has trained all these officers during period 2007-2008.

I also wish to point out that a module on customer Care is included in most of the other training programme, as well as induction courses for new entrants, thereby ensuring that a maximum number of public officers is sensitized on this area of service delivery.

I am informed that since 2006 a total around 8,570 officers have followed and completed training in Customer Care organized by my Ministry and other Ministries and Departments.

Training is an ongoing process and my Ministry attends to requests for such training as and when Ministries and Departments formulate the same to us. It is our policy to encourage continuous training for all officers, especially those who are the interface between the Organisation and the citizen/client. One recent case in point is the training in Communication and Customer Care organized jointly with the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life for hospital telephonists and receptionists.

With regard to parts (b) and (c) of the question, each Ministry and Department does the monitoring of its own services. However, my Ministry

also assists Ministries and Departments to adopt a customer centric approach by implementing simple measures to enhance delivery of counter and customer services. In this context, “Guidelines on Improving Counter and Customer Services” have been published in the form of a booklet and widely circulated, as well as posted online on the website of my Ministry.

As yet, another means to evaluate the level of public service delivery, my Ministry has introduced a new reform initiative, commonly known as ‘Mystery Shopping’. Through this initiative, the standards and level of service delivery of public organizations are assessed from the viewpoint of customers. Key aspects evaluated are Staff Behaviour and Service Delivery by front desk officers, Waiting Areas and Waiting Experience of customers.

Further, my Ministry, under the Improvement of Counter Services Scheme, assists Ministries and Departments to upgrade and modernise their counter services. I need to point out that since 2006 to date, my Ministry has funded to the tune of some Rs5.4 m., 50 projects relating to improvement of counter services in various Ministries/Departments which have regular contact with the public.

CUREPIPE AND MIDLANDS – FLOOD PRONE AREAS

(No. B/333) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Environment & National Development Unit whether, in regard to regular flood prone areas in the Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will state the –

- (a) number thereof falling under the purview of his Ministry, and
- (b) remedial measures Government proposes to take, giving details of each project, especially in terms of cost and time frame.

Reply: The information sought, which will be tabled in due course in the National Assembly, comprises the following lists:

- (i) flood prone areas listed in GIBB’s Report of 2003;
- (ii) drain projects completed since financial year 2007/2008 to date;
- (iii) ongoing projects since financial year 2007/2008 to date, and
- (iv) drains projects in pipeline.

Further I would also like to inform the House that bids for the dredging of rivers, clearing and consolidation of river banks in the region of

Curepipe was invited by the Environment Division of my Ministry on 23 March 2009 with closing date on 02 April 2009.

The contract for the works has been awarded on 6 April 2009.

**CHASTEAUNEUF, DR REID AND MAINGARD, BEAU-BASSIN
- SEWERAGE WORKS**

(No. B/334) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities whether, in regard to the sewerage works being carried out at the Chasteauneuf, Dr. Reid and Maingard region, Beau Bassin, he will state -

- (a) when was the contract allocated;
- (b) the expected date of completion thereof, and
- (c) the number of houses to be connected.

Reply: I am informed by the Wastewater Management Authority that house connections in the regions of Chasteauneuf, Dr. Reid and Maingard in Beau Bassin are being carried out under contract WW151Z which pertains to the design and construction of sewer reticulations, house connections and maintenance works in the already severed areas of the Plaines Wilhems District. The contract was awarded on 23 September 2008 for a duration of two years and is expected to be completed in October 2010.

As regards the last part of the question, the total number of applications received for house connections in this contract is 594 and 250 houses have already been connected.

61 applications for house connections were received from the regions mentioned, out of which 59 are technically feasible and can be connected to the sewer network. To date, 41 connections have already been completed.

**ANAHITA WORLD CLASS SANCTUARY - BEAU CHAMP -
PUBLIC SERVICE VEHICLE (TAXI) LICENCES**

(No. B/335) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether he is aware that the National Transport Authority has issued notice for the granting of Public Service Vehicle (Taxi) Licences on transfer to operate from the Anahita World Class Sanctuary - Beau Champ and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the

Authority, information as to if many surrounding localities have been omitted from the list, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken.

Reply: I am informed that a Press Communiqué was issued by the National Transport Authority on 04 April 2009, inviting applications for the grant of eight Public Service Vehicle (Taxi) Licences on transfer to operate taxis from Anahita World Class Sanctuary – Beau Champ.

I received representations from my colleague, hon. L. Bundhoo, Minister of Environment & National Development Unit to the effect that some localities situated in the vicinity of the Anahita World Class Sanctuary had been omitted.

I caused the matter to be looked into by the National Transport Authority and it was found that a technical error occurred and certain localities had been inadvertently omitted.

Necessary corrective action has been initiated and a fresh communiqué will be published shortly in order to allow holders of Public Service Vehicle (Taxi) licences from the localities, which had been missed out to submit their applications for consideration.

CITÉ LA CURE - WATER SUPPLY

(No. B/336) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy & Public Utilities whether he is aware that some 20 families living at *Cité La Cure*, behind the NHDC Housing Quarters, have not been supplied with water connection for years and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Water Authority, information as to the reasons thereof, indicating the remedial measures that will be taken.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/288)

ASSEMBLÉE DE DIEU - COMPREHENSIVE PAPER

(No. B/337) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Attorney-General whether, in regard to legislation for the incorporation of the *Assemblée de Dieu*, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed that the substantive Attorney-General is looking into the matter and is preparing a comprehensive paper on this issue. He will inform this House in due course of the stand to be adopted.

PLAINE VERTE GARDEN – UPGRADING WORKS

(No. B/338) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware of the bad state of the Plaine Verte Garden, from the swimming pool to the Paul et Virginie Street and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Port Louis, information as to if consideration will be given for the upgrading thereof, indicating if provision will be made for -

- (a) an increase in the number of -
 - (i) benches;
 - (ii) lighting points;
 - (iii) dustbins;
 - (iv) entrances, and
- (b) repairing of -
 - (i) existing benches;
 - (ii) lighting points, and
 - (iii) fencing thereat.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipality of Port Louis that the following upgrading works have already been undertaken to the Plaine Verte Garden -

- (i) construction of a jogging track;
- (ii) renewal of fencing;
- (iii) fixing of 16 benches;
- (iii) provision of 20 new lighting points;
- (v) upgrading of alleys;
- (vi) construction of a new kiosk, and

(vii) levelling and planting works.

I am further informed that the Municipal Council envisages to carry out the following works -

- Fixing of twelve additional benches and three metals bins.
- Provision of four additional entrances.
- Fixing of additional lighting points.
- Upgrading of the pond whose specifications are being finalized.