

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – ‘LET THEM RETURN’
REINSERTION PLAN**

(No. B/235) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Chagos Archipelago, he is aware of the ‘Let Them Return’ reinsertion plan, designed to allow the Chagossian community to return on the Salomon and Peros Banhos islands, and the content thereof, and if so, will he state the actions Government proposes to take in relation thereto.

(Withdrawn)

FLOOD VICTIMS – FUNDS COLLECTED

(No. B/236) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that funds have been or are being illegally collected in the name of the flood victims, islandwise, and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

MAURITIUS TURF CLUB – TOTE COMPANIES - COMMISSION

(No. B/251) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Mauritius Turf Club, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Club, information as to –

- (a) the size of its budget;
- (b) the commission charged by the Club to the Totalisator companies since 2000 to 2007, on a yearly basis, and
- (c) the reasons as to why the commission basis was changed in 2007, indicating its financial impact on the two Tote companies and the Club.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the agreement between the Mauritius Turf Club (MTC) and the totalisator operators is one between private parties. As such, it would not be appropriate to provide the information sought for by the hon. Member.

The Gaming Authority, in its regulatory role has access to highly confidential and sensitive information regarding the operations of the bookmakers and other stakeholders which must remain privy to the Authority.

However, I wish to inform the House that the Gaming Regulatory Authority Act (section 33:2.a) provides that a horse-racing organiser, in this case the MTC, in its agreement or contract with a licence holder, be it a bookmaker or a totalisator operator, for payment of any charge, shall give equal and fair treatment to holders of the same type of licences and ensure that the terms and conditions are fair and reasonable.

Furthermore, Section 158 of the act makes provision for any person who is aggrieved by any act or omission in respect of any activity regulated by the Act to make a complaint in writing to the Authority.

RODRIGUES – EX-LA VOIRIE WORKERS - REDEPLOYMENT

(No. B/263) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether, in regard to the redeployment of the ex-La Voirie workers of Rodrigues who went on a hunger strike, he will state where matters stand.

Reply: As the hon. second Member for Rodrigues may be aware, my colleague, the Attorney-General met the ex-La Voirie workers who went on hunger strike in December last in Rodrigues and undertook on humanitarian grounds to, *inter alia*, facilitate their redeployment or help them to undergo training through the Empowerment Programme to enable them to obtain jobs in sectors other than their previous one or help them to start businesses with the help of other institutions like SEHDA.

The assistance of the Employment Division of my Ministry was enlisted with a view to helping in the redeployment of these workers in collaboration with the Commission responsible for labour and employment issues in Rodrigues.

I am informed that the Rodrigues Employment Information Centre is making every possible effort to find employment opportunities for them and discussions are ongoing with the private sector especially with firms like A. J. Maurel & Co. for possible employment.

FUEL S.E - ASPHALT PLANT – ENVIRONMENT IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(No. B/264) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to an asphalt plant, installed by the firm Best Luck on a plot of land owned by FUEL Sugar Estate, he will state if an Environment Impact Assessment has been carried out and, if not, the reasons therefor.

Reply: I would like to thank the hon. Member for having drawn my attention on this issue. My Ministry is investigating into the matter with a view to taking appropriate measures.

DUPONT STREET, BEAU BASSIN – TELECOMMUNICATION ANTENNA

(No. B/265) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if, on or about 19 March 2008, he has received a letter from the inhabitants of the region of Dupont street, Beau Bassin, in relation to the effects on their health and their television sets of a telecommunication antenna which was recently installed in the region thereof and, if so, the remedial actions he proposes to take, if any.

Reply: My Ministry has received a letter to that effect. The letter was also addressed to other relevant authorities such as the information & Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA), Ministry of Health & Quality of Life and the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill.

A letter has been issued to the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill and ICTA to look into the matter and take remedial measures deemed necessary.

I am also informed that the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill has entered a court case against Emtel Ltd for carrying out a development in a planning area without a Building and Land Use permit. The case will be coming for trial on 18 June 2008.

CEB - TARIFFS – PRICE INCREASE

(No. B/266) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the Central Electricity Board tariffs, he will state if he has been advised by the Board that the main reason for the increase in the price thereof on 01 April 2008, was due to the increase in the cost of heavy fuel, and if so, if it is proposed to review same, in view of the reduction in the price of heavy fuel by 20% on the local market after the last automatic pricing mechanism review exercise of the same date.

(Withdrawn)

BEIJING - OLYMPIC GAMES – ATHLETES PARTICIPATION

(No. B/267) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether, in regard to the athletes who will be participating in the forthcoming Olympic Games to be held in Beijing, he will state –

- (a) the names of the athletes who have obtained the minima to participate therein, indicating their respective sports discipline, and
- (b) the incentives which are being provided to them.

Reply: With regard to the participation of Mauritius in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games scheduled from 08 to 24 August, I wish to inform the House that as at to date five athletes have obtained their qualification for participation in the games. They are Arnaud Casquette and Stephan Buckland in athletics, Bruno Julie and Richarno Colin in boxing, and Véronique D’Unienville in archery. 13 other athletes are still in competition with a view to securing a qualification before the relevant date limit.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I would like to inform the House that as from the beginning of this month until August 2008, my Ministry is providing a special financial assistance of Rs15,000 monthly to the five athletes who have already qualified for the games and Rs10,000 monthly to the 13 other athletes who are in the process of securing a qualification for the games. The monthly assistance for those athletes who would succeed to qualify for the games would be revised from Rs10,000 to Rs15,000 from the date of qualification.

This assistance is an additional incentive to the athletes concerned to encourage them to put up maximum effort to achieve excellence.

I would like to point out that this special assistance is in addition to the normal assistance provided to athletes under the High Level Sports Assistance which ranges from Rs1,000 to Rs15,000 monthly depending on the level performance of the athletes.

All the athletes who have secured or who are trying to secure a qualification for the games are also benefiting from the following –

- (i) participation in international competitions either to fine-tune their specific preparations or to secure qualifications. For instance, my Ministry is meeting the cost of air ticket and pocket money for the participation of Antonio Vieillesse, Jonathan Chimier, Thierry Guillaume, Stephan Buckland and Arnaud Casquette in the 16th African Athletics Championships from 30 April to 04 May 2008 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
- (ii) training camps and “*stages*” both abroad and locally;
- (iii) transport facilities for training, and
- (iv) follow-up by the Sports Medical Unit of my Ministry.

**NESTLÉ PRODUCTS LTD.
– GENERAL MANAGER - COMPLAINTS**

(No. B/268) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether he will state if his Ministry has received any complaint against the Chief Executive Officer of Nestlé Products Ltd. and, if so, the actions that have been taken in connection therewith, if any.

Reply: In fact, two complaints have been received at my Ministry over the last two years against the General Manager of Nestlé Products Ltd.

Verbal representations were made at my Ministry in July 2006 to the effect that the General Manager had unilaterally changed the conditions of employment of the employees by implementing longer working hours and that he was making use of improper language towards his employees.

An enquiry was carried out by the officers of my Ministry who were informed by both management and the employees that the issue regarding hours of work had been settled.

As regards the use of improper language, the General Manager was verbally cautioned and his attention drawn to the provisions of Section 55A of the Labour Act relating to workplace violence.

He tendered his apologies which were accepted by the employees who then indicated to the officers of my Ministry that they did not wish the Ministry to institute any action against the General Manager and proposed that the General Manager be given time to change his attitude.

On the advice of the Ministry, working sessions were held between management and the employees. The company also set up a Management and Welfare Committee to address the grievances of the employees. During a follow-up visit by officers of my Ministry on 23 November 2006, it was found that the state of industrial relations was normal and the employees had no further complaints against the General Manager.

During a follow-up visit effected in August 2007, it was noted that the state of industrial relations was still good except for a problem between the Sales Manager and the General Manager. The Sales Manager complained of tense relations between himself and the General Manager, but indicated that the matter was being dealt with at top management level through the intervention of a third party facilitator.

On 14 December 2007, the Sales Manager informed my Ministry that he had lodged a plaint with summons at the Supreme Court against the General Manager claiming damages for harassment. I am informed that the case has been fixed for 15 May 2008.

On 21 January 2008, the Sales Manager registered a formal complaint at my Ministry to the effect that he had been suspended from work since 21 December 2007. The parties were convened by my Ministry on 29 January 2008 to discuss the matter.

My officers were informed by counsel of the employer in the presence of the Sales Manager that he was directly liaising with the counsel appointed by the Sales Manager with a view to finding a common date for the meeting of a Disciplinary Committee.

The first meeting of the Disciplinary Committee was, in fact, on 21 March 2008. Since then the committee met on eight other occasions and hearing is still proceeding. The next meeting is scheduled on 16 April 2008.

During another follow-up visit effected by officers of my Ministry on 15 April 2008, some members of staff complained of the autocratic way of management of the General Manager which was led to a tense industrial relation climate. The complainants pointed out that there was an improvement in the attitude of the General Manager following the intervention of my Ministry last year, but he has again changed his attitude negatively.

The state of industrial relation is being viewed with concern by my Ministry and the situation is being closely monitored. If the need arises, actions as appropriate will be taken.

FLOUR – BAKING TESTS

(No. B/269) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to flour recently imported, he will state if he has now received complaints in relation to the quality thereof and, if so, the remedial measures that are being taken to ensure the quality of bread and other bakery products.

Reply: I am informed that as at today, no complaint has been received either at the level of the Ministry of Commerce, the State Trading Corporation or the Consumer Protection Unit.

I wish to inform the hon. Member that prior to the sale of flour on the local market, tests are carried out by the Mauritius Standards Bureau. Furthermore, independent baking tests are carried out on a regular basis.

I am informed that reports of baking tests indicate that flour on sale on the local market is of good quality.

PLANTERS (SMALL) - FLOODS – COMPENSATION

(No. B/270) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the small planters whose crops have sustained damages as a result of the recent floods, he will state if any compensation will be paid out to them.

Reply: Following the heavy rainfalls on 25 and 26 March 2008, field visits and surveys have been conducted by the Agricultural Research & Extension Unit of my Ministry and the Small Planters Welfare Fund. It has been established that the excessive rainfall had caused varying degrees of damage to food crops (ranging from 0 to 100 per cent) depending on the regions, crop and crop stage.

In fact, it has been estimated that around 170 hectares of sensitive crops like bean, cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, tomatoes and creepers have been affected with a yield loss ranging between 20 to 65 per cent. Damage to newly planted crops was estimated to range between 30 to 60 per cent and was more significant in areas prone to water logging and erosion.

Government, after taking cognizance of the situation, had immediately decided to launch a loan scheme through the Development Bank of Mauritius to assist affected planters. The maximum loan amount is Rs75,000 with an interest rate of 3 per cent repayable over four years.

Subsequently, I had two meetings with the representatives of associations of vegetable growers on 2 and 10 April 2008 to take stock of their problems and to decide on ways and means to come to their assistance.

In agreement with the planters, the following decisions have been taken –

- (i) the loan facility at DBM will be extended only to genuine registered planters. A Crop Damage Declaration Form certified by AREU or SPWF would be issued to affected planters to that effect;
- (ii) seeds will be made available to planters free of charge to start replantation;
- (iii) AREU will provide appropriate advice to planters on future cultivations, pest and disease control and drainage of water in water-logged areas;
- (iv) a request will be made to the FAO for onion seeds for distribution to planters;
- (v) AMB will apply the Potato Boost Up Scheme as from the first planting season;
- (vi) SPWF will arrange for the early payment of indemnity to affected insured planters;
- (vii) The Consumer Protection Unit will be requested to ensure that there is no price hike regarding agro-chemicals; and
- (viii) A request will be made to the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development for funds to repair roads which have been badly affected.

My Ministry has, additionally, decided to allocate state land to cooperative societies for plantation of onion seeds at Plaisance Experimental Station and Richelieu Agricultural Station and for potato cultivation at Côte d'Or. Land preparation services similar to those presently being done for cane planters will be extended to vegetable growers. The State Trading Corporation also proposes, upon request from the Federation of Cooperatives, to import fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides for resale at cost price.

Most of the measures which I have announced are being implemented -

- AREU has received applications from some 1,600 planters for the Crop Damage Declaration Form for loan application purposes and 1,033 certificates have already been issued. AREU is also holding four regional workshops to sensitize planters on pest and disease management and future plantations

- SPWF is submitting a second and final assessment report to SICOM this week following which necessary indemnity under the Insurance Scheme would be paid to insured planters affected by the heavy rainfall.
- The DBM has set up a fast track procedure for examination and approval of loan applications. By Wednesday last, 214 applications for loan have been received for a total amount of Rs8.7 m. 45 applications have so far been approved.

I would also like to inform the House that the associations of vegetable growers have made a series of requests to assist them to modernize cultivation and increase food crop production especially in the context of food security. My Ministry has accordingly worked out a list of incentives and facilities to be offered to the agricultural community and these have been transmitted to the Ministry of Finance for consideration in the next budget.

CEB – EMPLOYEES - PRODUCTIVITY BONUS

(No. B/271) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether in regard to the employees of the Central Electricity Board, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board, information as to if they have been paid their productivity bonus for the past year, and if not, why not.

Reply: I am informed by the CEB that the productivity bonus has not been paid to its employees since 2006. This is due to the difficult financial situation of the CEB. In fact, the CEB registered an operating deficit of Rs1.14 billion during 2006. Its bank overdraft stood at Rs1.2 billion and its total debt at Rs7 billion as at December 2006.

The financial statements for 2007 are under preparation and provisional figures indicate that the net loss for the year would be around Rs200 m., while the bank overdraft stood at Rs1.7 billion and its total debt at Rs6.9 billion as at December 2007. With the new increase, it is expected that the Central Electricity Board will cumulate an operational loss of Rs870 m. and its overdraft will be reduced from around Rs2.9 billion to around Rs1.1 billion.

Prior to 2001, a productivity bonus was being paid, subject to Board's approval, as per an agreed formula based on the reduction of losses of electricity. This bonus was negotiated in the mid eighties in order to ensure to the employees an additional bonus over and above the amount of end of year bonus payable, if any, enacted by Government when the 13th month principle was not firmly anchored in the Mauritian culture as it is now. For the period 2001 to 2005, a bonus equivalent to one month's salary, as approved by the Board, has been paid to all eligible employees.

However, following the implementation of the Collective Agreement in 2005, the basis of payment has been replaced by a performance based productivity bonus based on CEB's performance in lieu of the existing one (a bonus equivalent to one month's salary in lieu of the one based on reduction of losses).

As per the Collective Agreements, signed with the Unions in February 2006, "where targets have been met, an annual Productivity Bonus shall be paid to the staff subject to their conduct and performance being good." Pending the successful implementation of a PMS, the quantum of the bonus to be paid would be decided by the Board based on the ratio of electricity sold to staff costs. In this scheme, the minimum bonus payable will be the equivalent of half-month salary and the maximum the equivalent of one and a quarter month.

I am informed by the CEB that the issue for the payment of productivity bonus was submitted for the consideration of the Board at its last meeting in March 2008. However, a decision on this matter has been deferred.

SCHOOL ROAD, DAGOTIERE – DRAIN AND RESURFACING WORKS

(No. B/272) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government whether in regard to the drain and resurfacing works of the school road at Dagotière, he will state when they will be carried out.

Reply: I am informed by the Moka/Flacq District Council that the resurfacing of school road, Dagotière and construction of drain thereat is in the list of projects to be implemented by the National Development Unit during the next financial year.

MOKA HEALTH CARE CENTRE – RENOVATION

(No. B/273) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in regard to the Moka Health Care Centre, he will state when it will be operational.

Reply: The Moka Community Health Centre was closed in September 2007 to enable necessary renovation works to be carried out. These are expected to be completed in one month's time and the centre will become operational by mid May 2008.

L'ESPÉRANCE – SCHOOLS - PTA REPRESENTATIONS

(No. B/274) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the pre-primary and primary schools of L'Espérance, he will state if he has received representations from the Parent Teachers Association thereof, in relation to the renovation and painting of its buildings and, if so –

- (a) when works will start, and
- (b) the expected date of completion.

Reply: I wish to point out to the house from the outset that upgrading works in schools including painting of school buildings are a priority for my Ministry. At the beginning of each Financial Year, a list of works to be carried out in a number of schools islandwise is drawn up. Some works are targeted for implementation during school days while others are scheduled for implementation during the school vacations.

As regards L'Espérance Government School, I am advised that no representations from the PTA have been received either for the pre-primary school or the primary school at my Ministry. However, I wish to inform the House that arrangements and procedures for external painting are presently being made by my Ministry. Those works will involve both the pre-primary and primary school buildings. The works are expected to start at the beginning of June 2008 and be completed by the middle of August 2008.

Moreover, several other works are scheduled to be carried out at the school in the near future namely -

- (i) tiling works in the computer room which started yesterday and will be completed after three days;
- (ii) Electrical works in the computer room which are scheduled to start by end of April 2008 and be completed by the middle of May 2008;
- (iii) repairs to the blockwall fencing which have been scheduled to start at the beginning of May 2008 to be completed by the middle of June 2008;

I should also like to inform the House that renovation works have been carried out at the school in the recent past. Indeed, comprehensive re-roofing works and replacement of false ceiling were carried out during the financial year 2004/2005.

TROU AUX BICHES HOTEL – EXTENSION

(No. B/275) Mr N. Bodha (First Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether in regard to the project for the extension of the Trou aux Biches Hotel, he will state if it has been approved and, if so, if it comprises a social component.

Reply: I am informed that the project relating to the extension of the Trou aux Biches Hotel was approved by Government in December 2007, subject to the EIA and all necessary clearances being obtained from the authorities concerned.

With regard to the second part of the question, I am informed that the project comprises the following social components –

(a) Construction of the following buildings –

- A post office
- A dispensary
- A craft shop for handicraft produced by craft-women in partnership with the *Fondation Espoir Développement*.

The Beachcomber group has agreed to provide these facilities following meetings with stakeholders. These above amenities will obviously contribute to upgrading the quality of life of the residents of the region.

(b) Implementation of a three-fold Regional Empowerment Programme (REP) consisting of the following –

- The training of 300 young people from the villages of the North over a period of two years, through the *Projet Employabilité Jeunes* and with the collaboration of the Beachcomber Training Academy.
- A literacy programme for the benefit of some 150 people, including employees of Trou aux Biches Hotel. The aim of this programme is to contribute to reducing illiteracy and bridging the digital divide.
- A full-fledged small enterprise support programme with the aim to help launch and support 20 to 25 small handicraft enterprises. Special attention will be granted to women wishing to launch their own handicraft activity.

Furthermore, the project will involve the creation of some additional 500 direct employment opportunities at the operational stage as well as substantial indirect employment as a result of the development of peripheral activities such as –

- Car hiring and taxi services

- Restaurants
- Boating and other water sports services
- Production and sales of tee-shirts, pareos, handicrafts, model ships, etc.

Moreover, I wish to inform the House that these above projects will be implemented over and above the other social projects carried out by “*Fondation Espoir Développement*” of Beachcomber Group, under their Corporate Social Responsibility Program.

I am also informed that since last year, the Beachcomber Group has increased its contribution of Rs10 m. per annum to Rs20 m. per annum for the financing of social projects under its Corporate Social Responsibility Program.

RICE – PRICE

(No. B/276) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to rice, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the STC, information as to the precautionary measures that are being taken to prevent a drastic increase in the price thereof.

Reply: I take it that, while referring to rice, the hon. Member meant ration rice. As indicated in my reply to PQ B/105, the STC has sufficient stock of rice to supply the local market up to August 2008. Fresh tenders will be sought from various sources before June 2008.

As regards price, the hon. Member surely knows that price of rice on the world market is not determined by STC or the Government. For years 2007 and 2008, STC has earmarked more than Rs1 billion as subsidies on flour and rice.

Regarding food security, the House may wish to note that Dr. the hon. Rashid Beebeejaun, Deputy Prime Minister, is chairing a Ministerial committee.

PLANTERS - DBM FINANCING SCHEME

(No. B/277) **Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he is aware of the difficulties the small planters are encountering when applying for loans at the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd., after the recent floods and, if so, will he for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank information as to the remedial actions that will be taken, if any.

Reply: Following the recent torrential rains, I made an announcement on Saturday 29 March regarding the setting up of a special concessionary financing scheme by the Development Bank of Mauritius to assist planters whose crops had been damaged by the heavy rainfall.

Under the loan scheme, these planters would be eligible for a loan of up to Rs75,000 in order to rehabilitate their plantations rapidly. The loan carries a concessionary interest rate of 3 per cent per annum.

Insofar as vegetable, fruit and flower growers are concerned, the loan is repayable over a period of 4 years, including a 6 months moratorium period. Regarding small sugarcane planters, the loan is repayable over a period of 5 years, including a one year moratorium period. The security for the loan is a simple floating charge.

Disbursements would be made to the eligible planters on submission of a certificate from either the Agricultural Research and Extension Unit for vegetable, fruit and flower growers, whereas for sugar cane planters, they require to submit a certificate from the Farmers Service Corporation regarding the extent of damage to the crop.

Following my public announcement, the Ex-Lola Flood Rehabilitation Loan Scheme was immediately launched in the morning of Monday 31 March 2008. The scheme was also widely publicised in several newspapers. On the other hand, to provide prompt assistance to the planters, the DBM has set up fast tract cells at its Headquarters and in all its seven regional branches over the island, namely at Curepipe, Rose Hill, Flacq, Goodlands, Mahebourg, Triolet and Montagne Blanche.

Furthermore, the officers of the DBM have since established a permanent communication line with AREU and FSC to iron out any problem that planters could face in respect of certificates of damages and quantum of disbursement.

In the ten working days following the launch of the scheme, nearly 1,000 planters have called at the DBM and its branches for information and the Bank has registered 350 applications. DBM has already approved more than 200 applications for which certificates of damages have already been received.

The loans approved aggregate to an amount of Rs10 m. that will be disbursed in the course of this week. The remaining loan applications have already been examined and will be approved for disbursement once the certificates of damages are received by the Bank.

As the House will note, the DBM, its branches, the AREU and the FSC are fully involved so as to facilitate the planters to have quick access to their funding requirements.

PSSA – BOARD MEETING - WALKOUT

(No. B/278) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the PSSA, information as to if, at its meeting of 02 April 2008, several members of the Board thereof effected a walkout and, if so, the reasons therefor.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/259)

STUDENTS – AUTOMATIC PROMOTION

(No. B/279) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the automatic promotion in schools, he will state if Government proposes to abolish same and, if so, what will become of the students who fail their examinations.

Reply: I refer the hon. Member to the reply made to PQ B/47 where I stated the stand of my Ministry with respect to the issue of automatic promotion, namely that my Ministry will review the practice of automatic promotion in a holistic manner in the context of the ongoing reforms.

In term of the present legislation we do have age criterion which apply to the progression of students from one stage to another as well as to an upper age limit until when the child can stay in primary school. As and when the practice of automatic promotion is revisited, the age restriction will also have to be considered.

CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES – NUMBER, FINAL ACCOUNTS & BALANCE SHEETS

(No. B/280) Mr D. Rucktooa (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Registrar of Co-operative Societies, information as to –

- (a) the number of co-operative societies registered prior to 10 June 2005 which have –
 - (i) amended their rules to comply with the law, and
 - (ii) submitted their final accounts and balance sheet, and
- (b) if there have been timely submission of their audit reports.

Reply: The Co-operative Act 2005 came into force on 10 June 2005. I am informed that, as at July 2005, 470 active co-operative societies were four to five years in arrears regarding submission of accounts, making a total of around 2,000 final accounts and balance sheets.

Appropriate measures were initiated by my Ministry to deal with this situation. In fact, as at today, 457 co-operative societies had amended their rules to comply with the Co-operative Act and they have also submitted their final accounts and balance sheet.

As requested by the hon. Member in part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that the final accounts and balance sheets of these co-operative societies have already been audited.

I am also informed that actions have been initiated against 13 other co-operative societies that have still not complied with the provisions of the Co-operative Act, with regard to submission of accounts.

HAJJ COMMITTEE – REPRESENTATION

(No. B/281) Dr M. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Arts & Culture whether, in regard to the Hajj Committee, he will state if consideration will be given to allowing hon. Members of the Opposition to sit on the Committee.

Reply: I am informed by the Islamic Cultural Centre that the Hajj Committee is one of the sub-committees of the Islamic Cultural Centre Board. As such, it does not comprise any hon. Member of the National Assembly.

However, any hon. Member of the House, be it from Government or Opposition, as well as members of the public, may forward suggestions, in writing, to the Islamic Cultural Centre.

ALBION - CLUB MED - SOCIAL PROJECTS

(No. B/283) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the Club Med Albion Project, he will state the amount earmarked by the promoters for social projects to be implemented thereat, indicating –

- (a) the amount already disbursed;
- (b) the number of projects undertaken, giving details thereof, and
- (c) the implementation schedules.

Reply: I am informed that an amount of Rs25 m. has been paid to the Tourism Fund by the Promoters of Club Med for the implementation of social projects at Albion and the following projects have been identified under the first phase –

- (i) construction of a Fish Landing Station;
- (ii) upgrading of Albion beach;
- (iii) fencing at Albion Research Centre, and
- (iv) upgrading of sports facilities.

The tender with regard to the “Construction of the Fish Landing Station at Albion” has already been awarded on 21 March 2008 and the work is expected to be completed within 12 weeks from the commencement date.

Concerning the “Upgrading of the Albion Beach” project, the tender documents have been submitted to the Central Procurement Board for approval. The contract is expected to be awarded by beginning of June 2008.

As regards the “Fencing at the Albion Research Centre” project, the survey has already been completed and tenders will be launched by the end of May 2008.

With respect to the “Upgrading of Sports Facilities” project, the design and tender documents are being finalised and will be ready by end of May 2008.

Since the projects are at an early stage of implementation, only an amount of Rs46,240, representing fees paid for the survey and levelling works for the “Upgrading of Albion Beach” project, has been disbursed.

MAURITIUS TOURISM PROMOTION AUTHORITY – CHAIRPERSON – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/284) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the overseas missions undertaken by the Chairperson of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority since his appointment, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Authority, information as to the number thereof, indicating in each case –

- (a) the countries visited, and
- (b) the amount of money spent in terms of airfares and *per diem* allowances.

Reply: I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

PLAZA THEATRE - RENOVATION

(No. B/285) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Local Government whether, in regard to the project for the renovation of the Plaza Theatre, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Beau Bassin and Rose Hill, information as to when works are likely to start.

Reply: I am informed by the Municipality of Beau Bassin/Rose Hill that the bidding documents for the renovation of the Plaza Theatre have already been forwarded to the Central Procurement Board for approval and floating of tenders.

RODRIGUES REGIONAL ASSEMBLY (ALLOWANCES AND PRIVILEGES) ACT - AMENDMENT

(No. B/286) Mr A. Nancy (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Allowances and Privileges) Act will be amended to allow the Commissioners to use their petrol allowances for both official and private purposes.

Reply: I wish to refer the hon Member to the reply I gave to PQ/72. I did inform the House that the Chief Commissioner had reminded all the Commissioners not to use the Government vehicles for private purposes. I had further stated that there may, if necessary, be a need to review the provisions of the RRA (Allowances and Privileges) Act.

The relevant provision is being examined in view of aligning it, if necessary to what is available in Mauritius, where petrol allowance is meant for both official and private purposes.

TORRENTIAL RAINFALLS – MARCH 2008 – HEALTH MEASURES

(No. B/287) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to epidemic diseases such as malaria and chikungunya, he will state the sanitary and health measures his Ministry is taking to prevent the surge thereof, following the torrential rainfalls which occurred on Wednesday 26 March 2008.

Reply: Following the recent torrential rainfalls which occurred in the country on Wednesday 26 March 2008, there have been flooding and accumulation of water in a number of regions, particularly in the northern and eastern parts of the island. As these are potential breeding places for vectors of infectious diseases such as malaria and chikungunya, my Ministry has immediately adopted a multipronged approach to deal with the situation. The following measures, in collaboration with all stakeholders concerned, have been taken –

- (i) larviciding and disinfection activities were started the very next day in the flood-prone areas of which we have a record. Secondly, a survey was also initiated on the very next day to identify the new breeding sites after the rains. This survey was completed on Friday 28 March 2008 and the new areas were included in the larviciding/disinfection activities which targeted, *inter alia*;

- a. all health and educational institutions, and
- b. residential premises along and in the vicinity of riverbanks.

The workforce in the eastern and northern parts of the island was reinforced by teams from other least affected regions. In fact, all the affected areas have already been covered and these activities will be carried out on a regular basis;

- (ii) fogging activities have been carried out around schools and health institutions to eliminate the adult mosquito population;
- (iii) an intensive media campaign has been launched – communiqués on all MBC channels and private radios, scroll message on MBC/TV, TV and radio spots on MBC and press communiqué on prevention of proliferation of mosquitoes and regular interventions by officers of my Ministry on MBC/TV;
- (iv) surveillance at the level of the hospitals has been stepped up and doctors have been requested to notify cases of high fever and associated symptoms, suggestive of vector borne diseases. Thirteen sentinel doctors of the private sector have also been requested to notify such cases to the Ministry;
- (v) thirty eight thousand tubes of mosquito repellent cream and twelve thousand units of mosquito coils have already been distributed as a precautionary measure, and
- (vi) a sensitization campaign in collaboration with the community health leaders has also been organised in schools and other community outlets on preventive measures against the proliferation of mosquitoes. The collaboration of major stakeholders, such as l’AHRIM and the private sector, has been enlisted.

The last epidemic of chikungunya was a traumatising experience for the population. However, we succeeded in eliminating the disease by adopting a multi-sectoral approach and through extensive targeted vector control activities coupled with social mobilisation and aggressive media campaigns. We are presently adopting the same strategies.

I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry has taken all necessary measures and is leaving no stone unturned to prevent the resurgence of infectious diseases including those transmitted by mosquitoes.

CUREPIPE & MIDLANDS – LAND SURVEY EXERCISE

(No.B/288) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to identifying available State Land in the Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands, he will state if his Ministry is conducting a land survey exercise and, if so –

- (a) table a list of the regions where such surveys are being carried out, and
- (b) state if any land for agricultural purpose has been identified at Mon Bois, 16 Mile.

Reply: No specific survey of State Land is being carried out in the Constituency No. 17, Curepipe and Midlands or any other region. However, my Ministry undertakes survey for Government Projects on State Land for purposes other than agricultural.

In regard to part (b) of the question, my Ministry does not survey land for agricultural purposes. This exercise falls under the purview of the Ministry of Agro-Industry & Fisheries.

STATE LAND – BUILDING SITES - SALE

(No B/289) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & BlackRiver) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to State land, he will state if he will consider the advisability of selling the building sites thereof of an extent of less than 10 perches to the occupiers thereof.

Reply: Since the amendment of the State Land Act in April 2007 to enable 19,300 families to become owners of the State Land on which stand their ex-CHA houses, the Government has already started exploring the possibility of selling building sites, including those of an extent of less than 10 perches. We have already surveyed the number of building site lessees and we are looking into the modus operandi of such measure. We are seeking the views and advice of all stakeholders including the State Law Office.

Sir, this Government will spare no effort and will continue to explore each and every avenue to democratise the economy and to have land accessible as a useful resource to empowering the nation.

CITE EDC RIAMBEL – LAND PURCHASE

(No. B/290) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the selling of the ex-CHA estate sites to the occupiers thereof, he will state if his Ministry has processed any application from the occupiers of the ex-CHA Estate of Riambel and, if so, indicate the number thereof.

Reply: Assuming that the hon. Member is referring to the Surinam ex-CHA Housing Estate commonly referred to as “Cité EDC Riambel”, I am advised that out of the 54 applications received for purchase of land, from the owners of the ex-CHA houses at Riambel, 25 applications have been processed.

However, in March this year, the Survey Division of my Ministry requested that the said applications be kept in abeyance to enable further investigation on the status of land.

As the House is aware, land found on Pas Géométriques and on Pas Géométriques proclaimed as villages under Section 18 of the Pas Géométriques Act of 1982 do not fall under the provisions of the State Land (Amendment) Act 2007, wherein owners of the ex-CHA Houses are able to purchase the portions of State Land on which stands the owner’s house.

According to the Pas Géométriques Act there are only 3 villages located on Pas Géométrique in the District of Savanne namely Souillac, Riambel and Ruisseau des Creoles Villages. No mention is made of Surinam Village.

However, the Riambel Village does not appear on the records of State Land. Surinam Village is recorded as being on State Land.

I wish to point out that Surinam Village has been proclaimed in 1906 as being part of the former Village of Riambel and that in the description of Surinam Village, Riambel figures as one of its bounds.

Sir, the Honourable Member will appreciate that the status of this plot of land has to be cleared “a priori”. In this context, my Ministry has kept in abeyance all applications received from ex-CHA house owners of that housing estate.

My Ministry is in the process of determining whether the Ex-CHA Housing Estate is within the Pas Géométrique or on State Land, to decide whether to proceed further with the applications received for the purchase of the land.

FLOOD VICTIMS – GRANT OF RS5,000 - BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/291) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether, in regard to the grant of Rs5,000 to the victims of the recent floods, she will state the number of families who have benefited therefrom, regionwise.

(Withdrawn)

NHDC - FLAT OWNERS – EVICTION ORDERS

(No. B/292) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether, in regard to the eviction orders issued to the flat owners of the National Housing Development Company Ltd., since July 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Company, information as to the number thereof and the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)