

Debate No. 35 of 28.11.2006

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

BRIGADE DES MINEURS – POLICE OFFICERS

(No. B/1484) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) 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 “*Brigade des Mineurs*”, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of Police officers attached thereto, indicating the number of Women Police officers and their respective grades and,
- (b) if they have been given any special training.

(Withdrawn)

KARO KALYPTIS – MRS D. – EVICTION ORDER

(No. B/1485) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether, on or about 11 November 2006, the Police Force has had recourse to rugged citizens in the region of Karo Kalyptis, to implement an eviction order against the D. family at Benitiers Street, Roche Bois.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 11 November 2006 between 1200 hours and 1300 hours, a Police team provided assistance to two Ushers of the District Court of Port Louis in the execution of an eviction order against Mrs D. from a private property situated at Bénitiers Street, Roche Bois.

I wish to point out that in the execution of an eviction order which is on a private property, the role of the Police is only to provide assistance to Ushers and to prevent any breach of peace. The responsibility for removal of all personal belongings of the defendant rests with the plaintiff. According to the Police, no incident occurred during and after the eviction order.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, fortunately, no incident happened, but I visited the family and the neighbours were saying that maybe the owner had hired people under the influence of alcohol and they were thinking that there could have been problems. That is why I am appealing to hon. Prime Minister to avoid such situation where people are hired by owners to remove their furniture. It could give rise to violence.

The Prime Minister: I understand what the hon. Member is saying, but, unfortunately, when there is an eviction order, the responsibility for the removal of personal belongings rests with the plaintiff. All the Police can do is to ensure that there is no breach of peace.

PQ No. B/1486 - see 'Written Answers to Questions'

CLIMATIC CHANGES – GLOBAL WARMING FILM & STERN REPORT

(No. B/1487) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to climatic changes, he will state –

- (a) if his Office has approached the United States Authorities to make available to the MBC and the media a copy of the film produced by Mr Al Gore, former Vice President of the United States in relation thereto,
- (b) if he has taken cognizance of the Stern Report and, if so, table a copy thereof, and
- (c) make a statement thereon.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, during the second annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative held in New York in September last, to which I was invited to participate, the film produced by Mr Al Gore, former Vice-President of the United States, on Global Warming was screened and I had the opportunity to interact with him on the issue.

I should like to inform the House that arrangements have been made to obtain a copy of the film produced by Mr Al Gore.

Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as part (b) of the question is concerned, I have taken cognizance of the Stern Report and a copy is being tabled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Stern Report on the economics of climate change is an independent in-depth exercise commissioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to assess the evidence and build understanding of the economics of climate change.

The Review first examines the evidence on the economic impacts of climate change itself, and explores the economics of stabilising greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The second half of the Review considers the complex policy challenges involved in managing the transition to a low-carbon economy and in ensuring that societies can adapt to the inevitable consequences of climate change.

I have asked the National Climate Change Committee to study the report and submit its views and recommendations. These may eventually be integrated in the National Climate Change Action Plan, if that is deemed necessary.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I make a request to the hon. Prime Minister, that this film be shown to Members of Parliament? It is very important for our Parliament to have a special view of this film.

The Prime Minister: Does the hon. Member want a copy of the film?

Mr Bhagwan: Can we have a projection of the film for Members of Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I will see if they can do that, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister mentioned a Climate Change Action Plan. As this issue is of national importance, can the hon. Prime Minister see to it that this national climate change committee, which is chaired by the Secretary of Home Affairs, meets as often as possible and not only once, to prepare the yearly activities of the meteo and other items? They should, at least, meet regularly, so as to take cognizance of technical issues which are being brought to the attention of Government, discuss them and come with an Action Plan, especially with regard to beach erosion, which is one of the major problems we are having and which is linked to the climatic change issue.

The Prime Minister: They meet as often as they can. The problem is that the Secretary for Home Affairs has other functions, but I will pass on that recommendation.

MARE D'ALBERT - ACCIDENT

(No. B/1488) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if, on or about 15 November 2006 an accident involving several vehicles occurred at Mare d'Albert and, if so –

- (a) the circumstances of the accident;
- (b) the measures taken by the Police to enable traffic flow, and
- (c) if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

(Withdrawn)

PUBLIC OFFICERS – EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE MINISTRIES & GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

(No. B/1489) Mrs L. D. Dookun- Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) 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 some public officers offer their services, during office hours, to institutions other than Ministries and Government departments and if so, will he ascertain the number thereof, indicating the posts held by these officers in the public service.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the practice of authorising some Public Officers to offer their services during office hours to institutions other than Ministries and departments, under approved schemes, subject to the exigencies of the service and subject to approval of the supervising officer is a long standing one.

As regards the number of officers involved and their posts, the information is being compiled and will be laid in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister, while compiling the information, to make sure that we get the list of public officers working in other Government and departmental offices? Because this was the way I had set my question, but it has been modified without having informed me.

Mr Speaker: As a matter of principle and according to our Standing Orders and practice of the House, the hon. Member should not raise this matter here, but should have done so with me before personally.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to make sure that, when officers from the public sector offer their services during office hours to other institutions, this, in some way or the other, does not affect the discharge of their duties in the institutions where they have been appointed or recruited.

The Prime Minister: I am sure it is a question of priority, Mr Speaker, Sir, because we have 24 hours in a day. If they are going somewhere else, obviously, this is subject to the approval of the supervising officer. He decides whether it is better for the person to go there or to stay here.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether it is according to the PRB regulations?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Considering there is a large number of people who are without employment in the country, would it not have been better to allow recruitment of these people, instead of allowing public officers to moonlight?

The Prime Minister: I don't know whether the hon. Member realises the cost just for paying wages in the service. It is quite high already. We are trying to put order in the system. This has been a long standing practice. It is not something new that is happening now.

Mr Speaker: On the point that has been raised by the hon. Member about questions being changed, I must inform the House that we are

encountering a lot of problems to read the handwriting of hon. Members when they draft the questions. According to the Standing Orders...

(Interruptions)

I am not blaming the lady. But, I am just saying that, according to the Standing Orders, it must be “legible writing.” I have asked the Whips of both sides of the House to meet me during the day, so that I can show them the handwriting of some hon. Members of the House and what problems the Clerk and his staff are having.

(Interruptions)

I am making a point. I am not blaming the hon. lady.

(Interruptions)

I have asked the hon. whips to come and see me. I must say that the Clerk and Deputy Clerk have come to see me yesterday. They are having a lot of problems. They have to phone and find out what is written on the paper.

MBC – COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER - POST

(No. B/1490) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to whether a post of Communication Manager was recently created thereat and, if so –

- (a) the name and qualifications of the person who was recruited, and
- (b) the salary and benefits attached to the post.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that, on 09 February 2006, the Board approved a recommendation of the Management to recruit a Communications Manager.

Conscious of the fact that there was an urgent need to improve the communications system of the Corporation, the Board decided to recruit someone who had a good experience in journalism and who would be able to deal with people at all levels, especially as the Corporation interacts very often with prominent figures in all spheres of the society.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information requested by the hon. Member.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister say whether there was any advertisement, internally or externally, for that particular post?

The Prime Minister: As I said, the MBC considered it urgent that they get somebody. In view of specificity and in areas of scarcity, it has been the common practice to hire the services of employees of the right calibre. That is what they call 'headhunting' at the MBC. The same practice has been applied for the recruitment of the Communications Manager as it has been for others.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Prime Minister state how urgent it was? Because there was a PRO at the MBC. Therefore, why this post could not have been advertised, since there was already a PRO?

The Prime Minister: There were lots of criticisms from different quarters of the MBC with regard to their image and so on. They want to improve their image and make sure that they communicate properly.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Prime Minister say who is incumbent of that post?

The Prime Minister: It is Mrs Chettiar Bullywon.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, le Premier ministre peut-il nous confirmer si cette dame a bénéficié d'une bourse destinée à un journaliste?

The Prime Minister: I understand she has been nominated to follow a training course on radio and television broadcasting in China in October.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know whether this scholarship was meant for a journalist and not for a Communications Manager?

The Prime Minister: But, she is a journalist as well as a Communication Manager.

MBC – *HUM TUM* PROGRAMME – COST

(No. B/ 1491) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) 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 Hum Tum programme, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to whether the Board has now been made aware of the total cost therefore and, if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that the account of the *Hum Tum* programme is under preparation.

I have instructed the Corporation to have the exercise completed as soon as possible and to have the accounts properly audited.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister answered a question on this issue nearly four months ago. Can we imagine that the accounts have not been prepared as at now? Therefore, how can he reconcile the fact that the Board, which is supposed to vote a budget first of all and then go on with the programme, has not been handed over the cost up to now?

The Prime Minister: The *Hum Tum* programme took place in August. When the hon. Member asked me the question, it had just finished. From what I understand, the final programme has been reedited into ten programmes of approximately 52 minutes, and is being broadcast every Sunday. Besides, an agreement with Mauritius Telecom is being proposed to broadcast the programme on video on demand, which will, therefore, continue to generate income. My understanding is that the programme has already generated a surplus as at 20 November. So, it is continuing, and that is why they need some time to finish it.

Mr Guinness: The hon. Prime Minister is saying that the programme will be generating a surplus. I am sure that he must know by now how much has been spent on foreign artists and on lighting and decors for that programme.

The Prime Minister: As I said, all the details will be given, but I didn't say it will be generating a surplus. I said it has generated a surplus up to now.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the attention of the Prime Minister been drawn to the fact that no less than the Chairperson of the MBC/TV showed a total disagreement in the forecast of budget and the expenditure to be incurred in the preparation of such a programme?

Mr Speaker: It is a fact.

Mr Bhagwan: I am just asking.

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that he has.

Mr Speaker: Let us give a chance to hon. Jhugroo.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le Premier ministre peut nous informer pendant combien d'heures a duré le programme *Hum Tum*?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member should come with a substantive question.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Prime Minister state whether he is aware that the budget allocated for this programme has created a lot of frustrations among other producers at the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of that, maybe the hon. Member could give some details.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Guinness!

Mr Gunness: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm or state whether the MBC will spend for the two other programmes *Batté Séga* and *Kaatrinilé*, a tamil programme, the same budget or roughly the same budget will be earmarked?

The Prime Minister: I thought the complaint was that they are over spending. Now, the hon. Member wants them to spend the same amount on both of them. What does the hon. Member want?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, I said!

MBC – STAFF – TRANSPORT

(No. B/1492) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the hon. Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the transport of the staff of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to whether there is/are any agreement(s) with any person(s) or company(ies) and , if so –

- (a) the names of the person(s) or company(ies) who is/are party thereto, and
- (b) table a copy of the contract(s).

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that in January 2006, a tender exercise was conducted for the night transport service of staff.

The technical and financial bids were submitted in separate envelopes and a Tender Committee evaluated the offers against a set of pre-defined criteria and submitted its recommendations to the Board.

I am informed that at its meeting held on 31 August 2006, the Board of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation approved that the services of two companies, namely Gitanjali Co. Ltd. and Mungroo & Sons Ltd, be retained for night transportation of staff.

I am also informed that letters of award for the contracts have been issued to the successful bidders on 08 September 2006.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Prime Minister tell us who was awarded the contract?

The Prime Minister: Sir, the contracts were obtained by Gitanjali Co. Ltd and Mungroo & Sons Ltd.

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Prime Minister tell us how is it that the MBC has a contractor for providing transport? From my information, the camera which has been lost is from a private van registration number 80154 which is not a duly contract car of the MBC.

The Prime Minister: I will have to inquire into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING AUTHORITY BOARD – CHAIRPERSON, MEETINGS, ETC

(No. B/1493) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Board of Independent Broadcasting Authority, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) the name of its Chairperson;
- (b) the number of meetings held since the appointment of the Chairperson
- (c) the total fees paid to the Chairperson as at todate and
- (d) the number of recommendations it has received from the Complaints Committee and which have been acted upon.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, pursuant to section 6(a) of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 2000, Mr Harris Dut Balgobin was appointed as Chairperson of the Authority by the President of the Republic after consultation with the Prime Minister and the then Leader of the Opposition. The Board was duly constituted in June 2006.

I am informed that one Board meeting and two Staff Committee meetings have been held since the appointment of the Chairperson.

The Chairperson of the IBA is drawing fees at the same rate as those paid to former Chairpersons of the Authority.

I am further informed that two cases from the Complaints Committee are awaiting consideration by the Board of the IBA.

MAURITIAN NATIONALS - RÉUNION ISLAND - VISA

(No. B/1494) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) 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 entry requirements for Mauritian nationals into Réunion Island, he will state if discussions are ongoing with the French authorities and, if so, where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, since 12 May 1987, a visa is being granted on arrival to those Mauritians visiting Reunion Island for tourism or family visits only. Those proceeding on business have to apply for visa beforehand.

With a view to reinforcing the trade and economic links between the two islands, during my official visit to France in March 2006, I raised with President Chirac, the issue of the possibility of enlarging the visa regime to include business visits and a decrease in the gaps between each stay. I must say that President Chirac agreed to Mauritians travelling to Reunion Island for a period of less than 15 days being exempted to the requirement of having to apply for a visa.

Consequently, in August 2006, the French authorities forwarded two draft agreements entitled -

- (i) *“Accord entre le gouvernement de la République Française et le gouvernement de la République de Maurice visant à faciliter la circulation des ressortissants mauriciens à la Réunion”, and*
- (ii) *“Accord entre le gouvernement de la République Française et le gouvernement de la République de Maurice relative à la réadmission et au transit des personnes en situation irrégulière”.*

The State Law Office has been consulted and has submitted its views. These are being examined by a committee of officials including Prime Minister’s Office and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Corporation. As soon as this exercise is over, arrangements will be made for the signing of the two agreements and I believe that they are just about to be finalising.

CAUDAN CASINO – INCIDENT – 09.11.2006

(No. B/1495) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware of an incident which recently occurred at the Caudan Casino, involving one Mr. S. C and, if so, will he, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether an inquiry has been carried out thereinto.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that on 09 November 2006, at around 0040 hours an incident occurred at Caudan Casino involving one Mr S. C. and the Manager of that Casino.

The Police carried out a preliminary inquiry and on 15 November 2006, Mr S. C. along with two other people were arrested by the Police. On the same day, they appeared before the District Court of Port Louis and each

of them has been provisionally charged of “rogue and vagabond”. They were subsequently released on bail and the Police enquiry is still continuing.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, is it true that the reason given for the assault is that he has been provoked by the Director of the casino?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware about the reason that has been given, but the Police must have found enough ground to arrest the person concerned.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether Mr S.C. is the same gentleman who was arrested for the illegal importation of Subutex and, at that period of time, he was already on bail for this question of Subutex?

The Prime Minister: This is correct, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there is any follow-up by the Police concerning the public behaviour of this gentleman, which is causing a lot of disruption in other public areas by using the name of Ministers? Unfortunately, I have to say it again. Has this been brought to the attention of the Prime Minister and will the Prime Minister make an inquiry and take appropriate action?

The Prime Minister: As I was saying last time, Mr Speaker, Sir, a lot of people, when they have any kind of problem, they just use the names of Ministers. I am sure it happened when you were in Government as well, but the Police have assured me that none of this happened and, in fact, I get a chance and opportunity to say last time in reply to a question as to why he was allowed bail. In fact, he was detained for a whole week before he was given bail.

PMO – CONTRACT EMPLOYMENT

(No. B/1496) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third 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 Prime Minister’s Office,

he will give a list of the persons employed under contract thereat, indicating, in each case, whether it is on a part time or a full time basis.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling a statement giving the information required by the hon. Member.

Mr Barbier: Can the hon. Prime Minister give us the number on part-time and full-time basis?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member has asked for persons employed on contract, indicating in each case whether it is on part-time or full-time basis. That is why we will give him the list.

Mrs Perrier: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether Mr Joypaul is recruited as adviser to the Prime Minister's Office?

The Prime Minister: He has been very active in foreign affairs. As you know, he has been an adviser on foreign affairs. Like every other Prime Ministers had advisers on foreign affairs, he was an adviser with me during my first mandate and he is an adviser now.

Mrs Perrier: Can we know if Mr Joypaul is provided with official security guard at his residence?

The Prime Minister: It depends whenever there is a need, whether there is a threat and all this. I will not certainly go into security matters, but whoever needs security get it, but nobody gets full-time security, if that is what the hon. Member wants to know.

SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS - APPOINTMENT

(No. B/1497) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, he will state if he has been appointed by the Public Service Commission according to established procedures.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply is in the affirmative. The Secretary for Foreign Affairs has been appointed by the Public Service Commission in terms of Section 89 (4) of the Constitution.

MBC TEAMS – PRIME MINISTER’S OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/1498) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation teams which accompanied the Prime Minister during his overseas missions since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, for each mission, information as to –

- (a) the composition thereof, and
- (b) the total costs incurred by the MBC.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling the information asked for by the hon. Member.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Prime Minister inform the House who selects the staff of the MBC and what criteria are being used to choose the persons who will accompany him? Because repeatedly the same people are being chosen.

The Prime Minister: First of all, let me inform the hon. Member that the staff is not chosen by the PMO, but by the MBC; and secondly, from what I notice, it is not the same people who are chosen every time. So far, there are at least about eight or nine persons.

Mr Speaker: I will have to inform the House that PQ Nos. B/1503, B/1504, B/1513, B/1514, B/1516, B/1517, B/1518 and B/1543 have been withdrawn.

COAL TRANSPORTATION - PORT LOUIS HARBOUR- UNION ST AUBIN

(No. B/1499) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of

Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping whether, in regard to trucks using public roads for the transport of coal from the Port Louis harbour to the coal-powered energy producing plants in the south, he will state the number thereof.

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

I am informed that four trucks of 30 tonnes capacity each are presently transporting coal from the Port Louis Harbour to the Centrale Thermique du Sud, Union St Aubin on a daily basis, with an average of 18 trips daily.

As per Road Traffic regulations, the movement of such vehicles like other heavy vehicles is prohibited between 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. towards Port Louis.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his answer. I understand that these 18 trips are for 400,000 tons of coal that are imported a year and this is going to go up. May I ask the hon. Minister whether Government intends to conduct a study for this very questionable decision of putting coal-fired power plant? And coal by the way, as “The Economist” points out, is the dirtiest of all fossil fuels, and this plant was put there by these highly environment conscious people.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put her question, please.

Miss Deerpalsing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether Government intends to conduct a study to quantify the cost that this represents today and the expected future cost as well regarding congestion and pollution to the country?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I can answer one part of that question. We have to study the impact of such heavy vehicles on our roads and, if need be, we can compel those companies to contribute to the road fund. That concerns the Ministry of Land Transport which I am representing.

BANK OF MAURITIUS/FIRMS – LOAN SCHEME

(No. B/1500) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Bank of Mauritius, information as to whether it has a scheme to give loans to private sector firms or group of firms and, if so, whether any such loan was granted during the period 2001 to June 2005, indicating the details thereof.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Bank of Mauritius has no scheme to lend directly to private sector firms or groups of firms. It is, however, empowered under the Bank of Mauritius Act 1966, subsequently replaced in 2004, to grant advances to authorised banks and other credit institutions on such terms and conditions and against such security as determined by the Board of the Bank of Mauritius.

I am informed by the Bank of Mauritius that during the period January 2001 to June 2005, the Bank has advanced two special lines of credit to banks for onlending to the EPZ sector and the sugar industry in support of its restructuring plan.

With a view to strengthening the manufacturing base and enabling EPZ companies to modernize their equipment, a special line of credit for an amount of Rs500 m, subsequently increased to Rs800 m was made available to banks for on lending to the EPZ sector. Some Rs357.5 m was disbursed by the Bank of Mauritius to commercial banks and the amount outstanding from commercial banks as at to date stands at Rs9.1 m. The rate charged to the banks was 5 percentage points below the prevailing Lombard rate of on lending at 2.5 percentage points below the Lombard rate with repayment period of seven years inclusive of a moratorium of two years.

For the sugar sector, a special line of credit of Rs2.45 billion was made available to support the restructuring of the sugar industry in the context of the Sugar Sector Strategic Plan 2001-2005. An amount of Rs2,092,6 m has been disbursed by the Bank of Mauritius to commercial banks from January 2001 to date and of which Rs1532.7 m is outstanding from the commercial banks. The loans are repayable over a period of ten

years inclusive of a waiver of three years. The rate of interest on loans disbursed up to December 2004, was at 5.5 percent to commercial banks for on lending at a rate not exceeding 7.5 per cent. In respect of loans disbursed after December 2004, the rate of interest to banks was 4.5 per cent for on lending at 6.5 per cent.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bank of Mauritius has also provided a special line of credit to the Development Bank of Mauritius for it to participate in the National Equity Fund. An amount of Rs122.5 m has been disbursed which is repayable over a period of ten years inclusive of a moratorium of three years. The interest rate is 5 percentage point below the prevailing Lombard rate.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister to confirm whether, yes or no, this constitutes the use of public money to generously subsidise the corporate sector?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Bank of Mauritius is empowered under the Bank of Mauritius Act in some specific cases where national interest is at stake to provide such loans which are then onlent to these sectors. I have mentioned these three specific cases, one is the sugar sector, the second one is the EPZ and the third one is national equity.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether anywhere in the world there is any self-respecting regulator which offers this kind of practice and whether this exists in countries like Singapore that we want to emulate or countries in our league like Botswana or Estonia? Is this acceptable and common practice anywhere in the world for a public regulator to offer loans to the private sector?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, it does exist in some countries and it is basically included in the Bank of Mauritius Act.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister in his answer said that the rate of interest with respect to the sugar sector was some five percentage points below. Being given that at the time that this was given in 2001, the gap was about 3% to 4% which was concessionary, today the rate of lending has gone significantly up, may I ask the hon. Minister whether Government intends to raise the interest rate because now this is a dead give

away not a concession any more. Will the Minister make sure that this rate goes up so that the public gets a fair return on its money?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a decision which rests with the Bank of Mauritius.

PLANTERS (SMALL) – MOLASSES – PRICE

(No. B/1501) Miss K. . Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the molasses content in the sugar cane of the small planters, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Sugar Syndicate, information as to the price being currently paid to them for each ton thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes for this very relevant and pertinent question which relates to one of the products that in the coming years would add a lot of value to the sugar cane industry.

Sections 31 to 33 of the Cane Millers and Arbitration Control Board Act provide the manner in which the value of the molasses shall be determined by the Control Board. The existing contract between the miller and the planter makes provision for the planter to opt to receive his molasses in cash or kind prior to the crop year concerned. In practice, all planters generally opt for cash.

I am further informed that Mauritius Molasses Co. Ltd and Alcohol and Molasses Co. Ltd are responsible for sale of molasses.

I am also informed that the Directors of the Mauritius Molasses Co. Ltd. regard the Molasses Trading Ltd. and Tate and Lyle Pic, incorporated in the United Kingdom, as the direct holding company and the ultimate holding company respectively.

The Mauritius Molasses Co. Ltd. has informed that the final price per tonne of molasses paid to small planters for the crop 2005 was Rs1,563.31. For crop 2006, the planters have already received two advances, Rs250 per tonne on 25 September 2006 and Rs200 per tonne on 26 October 2006. The final price for the current crop is estimated to be Rs1,500 per tonne.

Currently price determination of molasses is made on the premise that molasses is a by-product of sugar. In our Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy-Action Plan 2006-2015, the objective is to sub-cluster into four production units so as to optimise value-added and to mitigate the effects of the 36% cut in the price of sugar.

We will thus have to review the legal provisions relating to income to planters to ensure that they receive fair value from all the revenue streams of sugar cane cultivation that will flow out of the modernization of the sugar industry and the sugar cane sub-clusters. This will include revenue from sale of ethanol and other alco-chemicals, as they become commercially exploitable, in addition to the revenues from sugar, electricity and molasses.

The 36% price cut and gradual liberalisation of trade have given rise to a new situation in a new landscape.

I have accordingly decided, under the powers vested in the Minister under section 22 of the Cane Planters and Millers Arbitration Control Board Act to direct the Board -

- (a) to look into all aspects of marketing of molasses,
- (b) advise whether the present marketing arrangements are such that they ensure that the best prices that can be obtained are actually obtained, and
- (c) to advise on any options that would yield higher prices.

Miss Deerpalsing: I thank the hon. Minister for his answer, but being given that the price of molasses has gone up significantly, fourfold, since 2000 to now and that the planters have not received any benefit on that and the end buyer is buying at the increased price, which means that the same rent seekers are hoarding rents in-between, may I ask the hon. Minister whether when he has given these instructions for the planters to get their fair share, he will ask the committee to compensate the small planters on a retro-active basis, because, as I said, the price of molasses has gone up fourfold from 2000 to now?

Dr. Boolell: Let me impress upon my good hon. friend that we are going to reconcile the interests of all parties concerned. The interests of no partners are going to be set aside. Let me also impress upon her that the

price obtained for molasses depend very much on the evolution of world market prices and, as far as I have been told, the exercise is conducted in all transparency, but that remains to be seen. I can give the hon. Member the firm guarantee that the committee will address all these issues because our objective is to mitigate the loss of 36%, try to narrow it so that there is fair and equitable distribution in respect of revenue streams that should go to all parties concerned.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry does have the evolution of prices from 2000 to date?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that the Control Board is monitoring the situation and has all the facts. If the hon. lady is keen, I can certainly see to it that all the facts are relayed to her.

ROSE BELLE SUGAR ESTATE - CLOSURE

(No. B/1502) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to the closure of the Rose Belle Sugar Estate, he will state –

- (a) the factories to which the sugar cane of Rose Belle were re-directed, and
- (b) whether, any amount of money was to be paid as milling rights to the Rose Belle Sugar Estate, as provided for by the Sugar Efficiency Act, indicating the amount thereof.

Dr. Boolell: With your permission, Sir, I am tabling this reply.

MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS - REGISTRATION

(No. B/1503) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floréal) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether in regard to the applications for registration as medical practitioners received from persons who have studied medicine in Ukraine, he will state if his Ministry has been apprised of the standard of studies undergone and if so, the course of action, if any that his Ministry is contemplating.

(Withdrawn)

NPCC – COMPUTER PROFICIENCY PROGRAMMES

(No. B/1504) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Productivity and Competitive Council, information as to whether the computer proficiency programmes are still on-going and if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

LAW PRACTITIONERS ACT – AMENDMENT

(No. B/1505) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights whether, in regard to the Law Practitioners Act, he will state when Government proposes to bring amendment thereto in order to provide for the possibility to set up law corporations, in line with the last Budget Speech.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that I have recently, pursuant to section 6 of the Law Reform Commission Act 2005, requested the newly-constituted Law Reform Commission, chaired by Mr Guy Ollivry QC, to examine and review the Law Practitioners Act with a view to making recommendations on amendments to be brought thereto, in order to provide for the setting up of law corporations, as envisaged in the last Budget Speech. I have asked the Commission to endeavour to make its report within twelve weeks.

SMES – LOW-COST INDUSTRIAL ESTATES

(No. B/1506) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance

and Economic Development whether, in regard to the setting up of low cost industrial estates to house small and medium enterprises, he will state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, as already announced in the Budget Speech 2006/2007 nine low-cost industrial estates will be created to cater for the small and medium enterprises. In this context, BPML is converting its six industrial estates namely at Pamplémousses, Beau Vallon, Tyack, Bambous, L'Escalier and Forest Side into low-cost industrial estates for small and medium enterprises. In total some 247,000 sq ft of industrial space has been made available. An information campaign has been launched by BPML in collaboration with SEHDA to allocate the space. As at todate 45,930 sq ft has already been allocated to 13 SMEs and another 11,000 sq ft will be allocated to 4 SMEs shortly. The remaining space is still available for potential applicants.

On its part, DBM has already initiated action for the construction of three new estates each with 20 units at Terre Rouge, La Tour Koenig and Highlands. Following a public tendering exercise process, contract for consultancy services has already been allocated. Drawing specifications and tender documents are under preparation prior to calling of public tenders from building and civil engineering contractors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, depending on demand and experience with these 9 estates, we will create other such industrial estates and have requested the Ministry of Housing and Lands to begin identifying potential sites.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if he can enlighten me as to whether there is any industrial estate identified in the east coast of the island?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, from a quick scan and with my knowledge of geography, it would appear no, because I see Pamplémousses, Beau Vallon, Tyack, Bambous, L'Escalier, Forest Side. To be fair to BPML, I must say that these are existing spaces that have been converted and the three from DBM are at Terre Rouge, La Tour Koenig and Highlands. As I concluded, Mr Speaker, Sir, depending on demand, we will construct additional sites, but there is a lot of space available in the six estates that I have mentioned that are managed by BPML.

Mr Bundhoo: May I ask the hon. Minister if he can impress upon his colleague, the Minister of Housing and Lands if his Ministry can identify land to look into the possibility of setting up an industrial estate in the region of Bel Air so as to serve this part of the island?

Mr Sithanen: I will look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the applications to obtain land facilities have been done through the SEHDA, the Ministry of Lands and Housing or both?

Mr Sithanen: I don't know. I would have thought either BPML or SEHDA, but I need notice of this question.

**MAURITIUS REVENUE AUTHORITY
– REVENUE COLLECTED – FINANCIAL YEAR 2005-2006**

(No. B/1507) 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 financial year 2005-2006, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, information as to the amount of money collected in terms of revenue from –

- (a) customs duty;
- (b) excise duty;
- (c) income tax, and
- (d) corporate tax.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall answer to parliamentary questions nos B/1507 and B/1508 together.

In 2005-2006, provisional figures from the Accountant General indicate that total revenue collected amounted to Rs35.4 billion. This included Rs3 billion from customs duty, Rs6.6 billion from excise duty, Rs2.8 billion from personal income tax and Rs4.7 billion from corporate tax. It makes a total of Rs17.1 billion for the four taxes.

For the financial year 2006-2007, out of a total projected tax revenue of Rs38.6 billion, forty-six percent is estimated to be accounted for by customs duty Rs2.2 billion, excise duty Rs7.9 billion, personal income tax Rs2.5 billion and corporate income tax Rs5.3 billion which together account for Rs17.9 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is clear that the cost of abolition of all these four taxes would be staggering, raising the budget deficit from Rs8.6 billion to Rs26.4 billion, that is, from 4% to 12.4% of GDP. If we were to give up all the proposed tax handles, the only tax instrument remaining that could compensate for such a shortfall is the VAT. To compensate for this massive loss of revenue, it would require increasing the existing VAT rate more than twofold to 33 percent. This would, indeed, be unsustainable and unbearable especially to consumers. It would also brand Mauritius as an unfriendly place for foreign investment while also discouraging domestic investment.

What the country can afford and Government intends to abolish is the customs duty. Our policy intention is to transform Mauritius into a duty-free island, as has been stated in the 2006 Budget Speech and we are indeed already fully engaged in its implementation. We have brought down the top rate from 65% to 30% and consolidated the number of non-zero tariff bands from 7 to 3. In view of the revenue implications and because we are implementing at the same time income tax reform, the customs tariff reform is being phased over 3 years.

Mr Speaker, Sir, abolition of income taxes, as has been proposed by some, would lead to a direct revenue shortfall of Rs8 billion, that would double the level of budget deficit to around 8%. The proposal has not been accompanied by any concrete suggestion of how this shortfall could be compensated, except for the vague statement that it would lead to higher level of economic activity that would be translated into higher revenues to Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the reality would be that whatever the level of increased activity induced, a zero rate of tax would lead to zero revenue. Since no revenue at all would be forthcoming under customs duty and income taxes and given the magnitude of the adjustment required in order to keep the budget deficit and public debt to sustainable levels, any Government would have no other alternative on the revenue front than to

increase consumption taxes - as it has happened in the past, Mr Speaker, Sir - such as the VAT and excise taxes, or introduce new taxes or both.

Yet another possibility open to Government to make up for the Rs8 billion annual shortfall in its revenue from income tax is to make an equivalent cut in its expenditure, for example by stopping the Rs7.5 billion annual investment on infrastructure and other capital projects or by laying off huge number of Government employees or by reducing significantly expenditure on education, health or other social services. These would have a dramatic impact on the welfare of the poor and the vulnerable.

Moreover, the income tax, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the only tax that can make everyone pay his fair share of taxes. Mr Speaker, Sir, there are no valid arguments that could justify why the wealthiest Mauritians and companies which make huge profits should not be called upon to shoulder their contribution to the nation. The proper policy is the one adopted with the last Budget: reduce the income tax burden on the middle class including exempting the lower middle class and focus on strong enforcement based on a simple income tax regime at a low rate of 15%

Mr Speaker, Sir, the proposal to abolish income tax is not only completely unrealistic but utterly irresponsible. In contrast, this Government's plan of reducing the personal income tax rate and the corporate income tax rate to 15 percent by 01 July 2009 would ensure fairness while ensuring that we are internationally competitive on the tax front whilst safeguarding revenue and our ability to finance critical social programmes and the welfare state.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance whether he can state to the House what is the share from each rupee of tax collected which goes towards the payment of public debt to the tune of Rs117 billion and what was such share for the financial year 1999/2000?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said during the debate on the Budget that 30% of all revenue collected is earmarked for debt servicing, that is, the repayment of the principal and the interest payment. And this percentage has increased over the five year period 2000 to 2005.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister explain to the House how he will get more revenue when the tax rate is brought down to zero?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must confess that this is a mystery to me. I can understand what is called tax buoyancy. When you bring down tax, let's say from 50% to 15%, the tax revenue can increase. I think in the literature this is called the laffer curve. But if it is brought down to zero – I am not a great mathematician, Mr Speaker, Sir – but, obviously, if zero is applied on any base, the resulting revenue would be zero, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he considers it fair for companies which make high profits to pay no tax?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a very serious topic. In the Budget of 2004/2005 presented by the then Minister of Finance – I don't know which paragraph – he said we need to have more progressivity in Income Tax. In that particular year, Mr Speaker, Sir – and it is good that I remind this to my friends on the other side – the then Minister of Finance, in fact, increased the burden of both corporate tax and personal tax. The personal tax, at the margin, went up to 30% and the corporate tax went up because there was an alternative minimum tax that was imposed. All of a sudden, by some magic incantation, the very people that increased both corporate tax and income tax have become supporter of zero tax, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, from what I understand, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development just explained that the corporate tax and income tax were increased, and simultaneously, the VAT was increase by 50%. May I know from the Deputy Prime Minister, if we were to abolish income tax and corporate tax and in view of the massive *manque à gagner*, how many points would we have to increase in the VAT in order to compensate the *manque à gagner*?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, let us be very fair to the nation. There have been instances in the past where, not only corporate tax and personal tax have increased, but VAT has also increased by 50%. As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am a very simple economist, I don't know about voodoo economics. But, Mr Speaker, Sir

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order, please!

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there will be a massive shortfall of revenue and there are only two ways of compensating this. The first one is to increase existing taxes and the second one is to have a massive reduction in expenditure. Mr Speaker, Sir, let me tell my friend that I am willing to have a debate on TV with anybody on this issue, even tonight.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! I said last question!

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House what is the alternative minimum tax and whether this is the corporate tax, and can he give a clear answer without ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sithanen: I was trying to make a simple point, Mr Speaker, Sir. When our friends were in Government, not only did they raise corporate tax and personal income tax, but also the VAT by 50%. Now, all of a sudden they say that they are going to abolish income tax.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

CUSTOMS & EXCISE DUTIES, INCOME TAX, CORPORATE TAX – GOVT. POLICY

(No. B/1508) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether he will state if Government proposes to abolish customs duty, excise duty, income tax and corporate tax and if so, how it is proposed to compensate the shortfall in Government revenue.

(vide reply to PQ No. B/1507)

AIRPORT/SEAPORT – PHARMACIST

(No. B/1509) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of posting a pharmacist on a permanent basis at the airport and at the seaport as a means to control the movement of drugs in and out of Mauritius with a view to combating drug trafficking.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with the existing regulations and administrative measures in force, both the import and the export of drugs (medicine used for human) are adequately controlled in Mauritius.

The measures for importation include the following –

- (i) all imports must be covered by an import authorisation from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce;
- (ii) imports of specific drugs such as dangerous drugs, antibiotics, vaccines, hormones, blood products and other biologicals need specific import permits delivered by the Ministry of Health;
- (iii) prior to importation of any drug, it is examined and approved by the Pharmacy Board;
- (iv) all invoices in respect of pharmaceutical products are cleared by the Registrar of the Pharmacy Board before the Customs Department may authorise the release of the drugs;

- (v) the sources of supply of imported drugs are known and approved by the Pharmacy Board.
- (vi) the importers, as is the case for exporters, are licensed wholesale pharmacies;
- (vii) the drugs are sold in Mauritius in licensed pharmacies so that control is easier, and
- (viii) consignments of drugs can be inspected at any time by pharmacy inspectors.

As regards exportation of drugs, it is very limited. In fact, only one local manufacturing company of pharmaceutical products is licensed to export drugs. The details of its exports are submitted to the Pharmacy Department of my Ministry for approval prior to any export.

In addition, a few wholesale pharmacies export drugs to Seychelles and Comoros Island under the strict control of my Ministry and the Customs Department.

Accordingly, Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is effecting adequate control on the movement of drugs in and out of Mauritius and is, therefore, not proposing to post a pharmacist on a permanent basis either at the airport or at the seaport.

As far as illicit drugs are concerned, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the mandate of the Customs and Police Departments and the expert for such activity will be more a forensic one rather than a regular pharmacist.

QUALITY CONTROL LABORATORY – SETTING UP

(No. B/1510) Dr. A Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of setting up a

Quality Control Laboratory for the testing of the generic drugs imported from the different laboratories and from different countries.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, most drugs imported in Mauritius are either branded products from the innovator companies or branded generics. I am informed that very few drugs are marketed under their International Non-Proprietary (generic) names. Drug testing should, therefore, not be limited to only generics.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is proposing to implement a Quality Assurance Programme in phases.

In this respect, a first phase concerning the testing of the drugs used locally in a WHO Certified Quality Control Laboratory is already being implemented. In fact, currently, drugs sampled from Government Stores and from the private market are being sent to a WHO Certified Laboratory in South Africa for analysis.

The second phase consists of the setting up of a Quality Control Laboratory in Mauritius itself. In this connection, Government has already approved for the existing facilities available at the health laboratory of the Government Analyst Department of my Ministry at Réduit, to be upgraded. Arrangements are, accordingly, begin made for the available space at that laboratory to be converted into a Quality Control Laboratory.

Concurrently, my Ministry is also undertaking the following actions –

- (a) list of chemical reagents and reference samples required for the laboratory tests has been finalised.
- (b) Action for the procurement of these items will be initiated during this financial year;

Pending the full implementation of phase two of the project, my Ministry is initiating action to order a ready-to-use analysis kit, known as the GPHF Mini Lab for the testing of some drugs. The kit is utilized in many countries and its use is approved by the WHO.

The kit which has the advantage of being portable will allow for the testing of 40 substances, 35 of which are of direct relevance to our needs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for the long term, it is envisaged to have an independent quality control laboratory with an entirely new set of instruments. In this respect, my Ministry will have consultations with the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Mauritius and the Faculty of Pharmacy of the University of Montpellier.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended

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

STATE LANDS - JULY 2005/NOVEMBER 2006 – BENEFICIARIES

(No. B/1511) Dr. M. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to State lands leased, since August 2000 to July 2005 and since July 2005 to date, he will state the names of the beneficiaries, indicating in each case –

- (a) the extent thereof;
- (b) the projects earmarked;
- (c) if the promoters have started the project within the time frame, as stipulated in the agreements;

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the pieces of information requested for is being compiled. I am advised that this exercise is time-consuming. Once the exercise is completed, the information will be placed in the Library.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister inform the House whether land has been retrieved from Concasseur Sud at St. Félix and, if yes, the reason for it?

Mr Dulull: If that land was retrieved the information will be found in the list.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister inform the House whether any new promoter has been given land at on the site of Concasseur Sud and, if yes, to give the name of the promoter later on?

Mr Dulull: Information is being compiled and will be laid in the Library.

JEAN LEBRUN GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1512) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the new building at the Jean Lebrun Government School, he will state when will

–

- (a) the final architectural drawings be ready;
- (b) the tender be launched, and
- (c) the constructions work start.

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

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the tentative implementation programme for the first phase comprising the pre-primary unit and 8 classrooms is as follows –

- (i) Completion of working drawings (architectural and structural) and tender documents – End of February 2007
- (ii) Tender procedures and award – end of April 2007
- (iii) Construction to start by mid May 2007 and to be completed by mid November 2007

BEACH CHAIRS - RENT

(No. B/1513) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Beach Authority, information as to the conditions and the criteria laid down for the rental of beach chairs to tourists.

(Withdrawn)

MOTOR VEHICLES INSURANCE CLAIM TRIBUNAL – CASES – JULY 2005/NOVEMBER 2006

(No. B/1514) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice and Human Rights whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Motor Vehicles Insurance Claim Tribunal, information as to the number of cases –

- (a) referred thereto since July 2005 to date and,
- (b) for which ruling has already been given during the same period.

(Withdrawn)

CARGO HANDLING CORPORATION – BOARD MEMBERS – OVERSEAS MISSIONS

(No. B/1515) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Basin and Petite Rivière) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard to the overseas missions undertaken by members of the Board of the Cargo Handling Corporation since July 2005, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information, in each case, as to –

- (a) the composition of the delegations;
- (b) the amount of money spent thereon;
- (c) the countries visited;
- (d) the purposes of the missions, and
- (e) if he has received any complaint in relation thereto, and if so, the actions taken, if any.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External communications (Mr X. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, information required in respect of parts (a) to (d) of the question has been compiled by Cargo Handling Company Ltd, and with your permission, I am tabling a copy of the statement.

For the financial year 2005/2006, I wish to inform the House that although the budgeted provision was much higher, only an amount of Rs1.3 m. has been spent by the Cargo Handling Company Ltd on missions abroad. This is in sharp contrast with the situation that prevailed in previous years.

For example, during the financial year 2002/2003, the amount spent on mission overseas was Rs4.5 m; in financial year 2003/2004 it was Rs4 m. and in financial year 2004/2005 - the last year the hon. Member was in Government - it was Rs7.5 m., that is, more than five times that it was in the last financial year. These figures, Mr Speaker, Sir, represent respectively 0.6%, 0.5% and 0.9% of total cost compared to 0.1% for the financial year 2005/2006.

I am also tabling copies of the statements which, I am sure, will interest of hon. Member.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will note that for the financial year 2006/2007 an amount of Rs1.3 m. has been incurred up to now against an approved budget of Rs3 m.

With regard to part (e) of the question, I wish to inform the House that one Union representing some port and maritime employees has complained recently about the number and cost of missions undertaken by the Cargo Handling Corporation Ltd.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I met with the representatives of all the unions of the port employees on Monday 20 November when the question of overseas missions was again raised by that Union. I have reassured that union that in line with the declared policy of Government, expenses relating to overseas missions are kept within control and that the approved ceiling is not exceeded.

I have, furthermore, informed that union that the number and costs of missions have decreased considerably, compared to previous years, notwithstanding the fact that the rate of exchange has appreciated significantly and the costs of air tickets have gone up.

I should also like to take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, Sir, to state that transshipment traffic, which is vital for the long term viability of the port, had deteriorated significantly under the previous regime by more than 22% in financial year 2004-2005 and by a lesser amount of 7.5% for the year ending June 2006. Although a decrease has started slowing down, it was imperative for the ports authorities to reverse that declining trend by launching a number of aggressive campaigns vis-à-vis the major shipping lines. Likewise, it was necessary to invest in the procurement of additional

yard and container equipment in order to enhance productivity and overall port efficiency.

The House will note that both the Mauritius Ports Authority and the Cargo Handling Corporation have already committed an investment of Rs2.5 billion for the next two years, in order to upgrade the port infrastructure as well as for acquisition of yard and cargo handling equipment. All these investments are meant to promote Port Louis as a major logistic platform for transshipment business. This has inevitably necessitated travel abroad, particularly with regard to procurement of additional ship-to-shore cranes.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform the House that all these efforts, including the marketing campaigns undertaken recently, are now yielding positive results. Transshipment traffic has picked up since July 2006. For the period July to September 2006, transshipment rate has registered an increase of more than 17%. There is need to maintain this positive trend in the years to come through a consolidated aggressive marketing campaign.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all know the figures prior to 2005. The Deputy Prime Minister has used the term ‘control’ over the issue of travel. Is the hon. Minister aware that no less than a senior adviser of the Prime Minister publicly raised severe doubts concerning the last mission in Australia? Being given that no less than a senior adviser of the Prime Minister has made comments, can the Minister, at least, inform the House and the country whether he has taken cognizance and whether he has discussed the matter...

(Interruptions)

Let me finish! Does the hon. Minister have a problem? He can go and see Dr. Juhoor.

Mr Speaker: Address the Chair!

Mr Bhagwan: I am advising him to see Dr. Juhoor. Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: I don't take instructions from the hon. Member. Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House and the country the reason why Mr Gilbert Philippe, who is no less than the senior adviser of the Prime Minister, has queried the last mission of the Cargo Handling Corporation to Australia? This has been done publicly. I am asking the Minister, in Parliament, what his comments are.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Chief Whip, order! Do you have a question to put? If so, stand up and put the question. Do you understand? Otherwise, you keep quiet.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, my hon. friend may have some problems in hearing too.

Mr Bhagwan: No.

Mr X. L. Duval: I think he has, because I did not say 'few members', but 'representing some', meaning not all, which is different from a few members. As far as the situation between Mr Gilbert Philippe and the CHC is concerned, the missions, as normal, are approved by the Board, and this mission was supported by the Board. Mr Philippe has raised some queries in a letter that he sent, which found its way to the press I don't know how. As far as I am concerned, this is an internal matter between Mr Philippe and the Board of Directors.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, no less than a senior adviser of the Prime Minister has made harsh comments concerning the last mission to Australia. I think that, being the Minister responsible, he owes us, at least, in Parliament, some explanations on the queries raised by Mr Philippe.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not wish to comment on this issue in Parliament. However, I wish to inform the hon. Member that, as I mentioned, the costs have significantly dropped – more than five times less in terms of cost than the immediate previous year. Therefore, this is one point that is verifiable. The rest is a question of opinion. Whether you ought

to go to a particular trip or not is a question of opinion. Some people think it was a good idea; some may have different opinions. I will not here comment on peoples' opinion about these issues.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not people. It is the senior adviser of the Prime Minister. There have been comments from the union concerning one PAS – I will not mention the name – who has been so long on the Board and has travelled many times. This has been criticised by the union. We have read about it in the press. Can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister inform the House whether he has had the opportunity to look into the file, and inform us why only one civil servant has been enjoying all the travels over the years? I say over the years, because this was so even when we were in Government. If they want to put some order, at least, let us clarify what is happening.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am happy that the hon. Member has corrected himself. It has always been the situation that part of the missions is covered by representatives of employees, so that when they come back, they are able to explain to the employees what they have seen. The port is a vital sector and is undergoing vital change. It has also always been the practice that, on some missions, members of Government sector go in order to support the port authorities.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House how many times this gentleman has travelled during the past five years?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, luckily for the hon. Member, I am, in fact, providing the information for his Government as well as for our Government. So, he will be very happy to pick it up himself.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House what was the official date of invitation of the last mission to Australia? When were they supposed to reach Australia, when they left, and what was the...

(Interruptions)

Let me finish. I will have a few questions for the hon. Minister later on. He must wait for his turn.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan, address the Chair, please.

Mr Bhagwan: But, hon. Dr. Boolell is disturbing me.

Mr Speaker: Don't listen to him.

Mr Bhagwan: He keeps on harassing me.

Mr Speaker: You should take care of him outside the House.

Mr Bhagwan: Unfortunately, he is my good friend. Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister say how many days before the conference started did these gentlemen go to Australia? I think it is good to clarify these things. All this has been stated in the press. I think it is good that we have some answers in Parliament.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Member. I do not have a clue. But, if he puts a specific question about the number of days, I will be happy to look at it and provide him with the information. The only thing I have been told is that there were some travel difficulties to go there and come back.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether the same gentleman is also a PAS at the Ministry of Tourism?

Mr X. L. Duval: Who is the hon. Member talking about?

Mrs Perrier: The same gentleman we are talking about.

Mr X. L. Duval: Tell me who.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Appadoo.

Mr X. L. Duval: The hon. Member wants to know whether Mr Appadoo is a PAS both at the Ministry of External Communications and the Ministry of Tourism. Is that the hon. Member's question?

Mrs Perrier: Yes.

Mr X. L. Duval: He is only a PAS at the Ministry of External Communications.

SOS NETTOYAGE – WORKERS

(No. B/1516) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment whether he is aware that the SOS Nettoyage has laid off some of its workers, and, if so, will he –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –
 - (i) when they were laid off;
 - (ii) the reasons thereof, and
- (b) the measures his Ministry proposes to take, if any, for the redeployment of these workers.

(Withdrawn)

CITE LA CHAUX, MAHEBOURG - BARACHOIS

(No. B/1517) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Housing & Lands whether he is aware that the “*barachois*” found near Cité la Chaux in Mahebourg was closed down and if so, will he state –

- (a) the reasons thereof;
- (b) the date of the closure, and
- (c) whether Government will consider the re-opening thereof.

(Withdrawn)

ALBION RESEARCH CENTRE – PROJECTS

(No. B/1518) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the Albion Research Centre, he will state the research projects that the centre is proposing to carry out in the forthcoming months.

(Withdrawn)

BPML – LEGAL PERSON & CHAIRPERSON OF TENDER COMMITTEE

(No. B/1519) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd, information as to the names and date of appointment of –

- (a) its legal person, and
- (b) the Chairperson of its tender committee.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I reply to this question, I must say that I hope that the hon. First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière is not trying to play a dirty game because he already knows the answer to the question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. The Minister must withdraw the words ‘dirty game’. In this context, it is unparliamentary. Withdraw that!

Mr Sinatambou: It is hoped...

Mr Speaker: I have asked the hon. Minister to withdraw what he has said.

Mr Sinatambou: I withdraw, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is hoped that the objective is not to play politics with honest and respectable citizens of this country, among whom even a member of the Judiciary. BPML’s legal advisers from the State Law Office are above the gimmicks of cheap politics. The population will immediately realise that behind...

Mr Speaker: I said that answers to questions must be relevant. I am giving some latitude, but the Minister is taking too much latitude. I will ask him to restrict his answer to the question, and to answer the question.

/...

Mr Sinatambou: Yes, Sir.

In view of the damning findings of the Fact Findings Committee of BPML, it does appear that some would do everything to hide their misdeeds and failures which have driven BPML towards the edge of a cliff.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: It's a matter of opinion.

Mr Sinatambou: I am informed by BPML that so far the company has had two legal persons. Firstly, His Lordship, Mr Justice Bushan Domah from the time he was Parliamentary Counsel and secondly, the Solicitor General, Mr Dhiren Dabee. There is no record about the exact appointment date of his Lordship, Mr Justice Domah, but it would seem from documents that he was the legal adviser of the company as from December 2001. After his appointment as *Puisne* Judge, the Solicitor General, Mr Dabee, was appointed legal adviser as from 06 February 2003 and he is still the legal adviser of BPML.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as for part (b) of the question, I am informed that the Chairperson of the Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd. Tender Committee is Mr S. Soondron, the Project Manager of the company. He was appointed on 01 December 2005.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I know from the hon. Minister who was Chairman of the Tender Committee prior to 2005?

Mr Sinatambou: I am afraid the hon. Member will have to come with a substantive question. He asked me for the Tender Committee's Chairperson for now.

Mr Bhagwan: I asked prior to 2005.

Mr Speaker: The Chairperson of the Tender Committee.

Mr Bhagwan: Prior to 2005?

Mr Speaker: But the hon. Minister did not have the answer. The hon. Member will have to come with a substantive question.

**MACOSCLE - ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
CHAIRPERSON, ETC**

(No. B/1520) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the MACOSCLE, information as to –

- (a) the date the last annual general meeting was held, and
- (b) the names of its Chairperson and office bearers, indicating –
 - (i) the date of their assumption of office, and
 - (ii) their remuneration package.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that as at July 2005, there was an audit backlog extending between three and four years. 576 active cooperative societies had not submitted their accounts for audit purposes. As at today, and following measures initiated since July 2005, the House may wish to note that this backlog has now been cleared.

As regards part (a) of the question, I am informed that the Annual General Meeting of Mauritius Co-operative Savings and Credit League Ltd., that is, MACOSCLE, was held on 17 February 2002.

The following candidates were elected as office bearers on 09 June 2002 and they assumed duties on 19 June 2002. The office bearers are as follows –

- (1) Mrs Anthonee Jim David
- (2) Armoogum Nade
- (3) Bhujun Geerjanan
- (4) Dassagne Laval
- (5) Dorasami Bruno
- (6) Eustasie Benoît
- (7) Mariapa Gaëtan
- (8) Topize Antoine
- (9) Mrs Rayapen Lizy
- (10) Jhoree G.

The House may wish to note that the following three members have been replaced by co-option as follows -

- (1) Mr Jim David Anthonee was replaced by Mr B. H. Anthonee on 24 September 2003;
- (2) Mrs Lizy Rayapen was replaced by Mr P. Patou on 29 December 2003; and
- (3) Mr G. Bhunjun was replaced Mr J. F. Alexis on 25 May 2005.

At a committee meeting held on 19 June 2002 –

- (1) Mr B. Dorasami was elected Chairperson/President
- (2) Mr G. Mariapa was elected Treasurer
- (3) Mr B. Eustasie was elected Secretary.

The monthly remuneration package is as follows –

The Chairperson's allowance is Rs6,500, with a travelling grant of Rs2000.

The Secretary's allowance is Rs5,000, with a travelling allowance of Rs1,000.

The Treasurer gets an allowance Rs5,000 with an travelling allowance of Rs1000.

Board Director (Mr Armoogum) bears an allowance of Rs3,000 with a travelling of Rs600.

Vice Chairman (Mr L. Dassagne) bears an allowance of Rs600 with a travelling allowance of Rs100.

Board Directors are paid an attendance fee of Rs300 per sitting and a monthly travelling allowance of Rs100.

FISHERMEN – LAGOON FISHING VESSELS - LOANS

(No. B/1521) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and

Fisheries whether he will state the number of letters of intent issued by his Ministry to fishermen or associations of fishermen for the purchase of lagoon fishing vessels since July 2005 to date, indicating how many of them are operational.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the Development Bank of Mauritius that under its Semi-Industrial Fishing Loan Scheme, a loan ceiling of Rs3 m. is made available from the Development Bank of Mauritius to a group of fishermen organised in a company, cooperative society or association embarking in semi-industrial fishery (sword fish fishery or chilled fish fishery) for the purchase of fishing vessels of 10 - 18 metres in length, engine, safety and other equipment/accessories.

Letters of intent are issued by the Fisheries Division of my Ministry to prospective promoters, including groups of fishermen or associations of fishermen in respect of technically viable projects in the semi-industrial fishery, that is, the off-lagoon fishery.

In this context, for the period July 2005 to October 2006 the Ministry issued 13 letters of intent and a sum of Rs5,150,000 has been released by the Development Bank of Mauritius in favour of five groups of fishers, out of which four are operational. The remaining eight requests are still under consideration at the Development Bank of Mauritius.

CASTING OF ROOF SLAB SCHEME – GRANT

(No. B/1522) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the grant for the casting of slabs, he will state whether Government is proposing to increase the quantum thereof in view of the increase in the price of building materials, labour and transport.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Casting of Roof Slab Scheme has enabled a large number of families with modest means to construct their homes. Under this scheme, a grant amount of Rs55,000 is

provided to low income families building their own houses and in possession of a land parcel or a "*droit de surélévation*" to enable them to cast their roof slabs.

Since the start of the scheme in financial year 1997/98 to November 2006, 27,800 families in Mauritius and 1,324 families in Rodrigues have benefited from cash grant to cast their roof slabs. Total disbursements by Government have amounted to over Rs1 billion.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the economy recovers from the implementation of the reform programme, thereby generating fiscal space, we plan to review the criteria to increase the benefits provided

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I have from the Deputy Prime Minister a time-frame for the review because we have just had a recent increase in iron-bars?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has been a Member in Parliament for quite a time and he knows when such announcements are made.

Mr Ganoo: I see that the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has very intelligently not talked about the advisability of increasing the quantum, but he has talked about the criteria which is correct. The question that I want to ask is that perhaps the criteria of the wages should be looked into in view of inflation especially. The solution would be perhaps to raise the salary bar.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this will depend on fiscal space. Obviously, we will review both the criteria for eligibility and also the amount, but it will depend to a large extent on what fiscal space we have, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: May I ask the hon. Minister of Finance whether he is satisfied with the whole system of casting slabs right from the application up to the disbursement? It concerns public funds. Is it not time to have a fresh look at the system of processing the files?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are specific criteria that are laid down and procedures also to follow. If the hon. Member has some specific

cases where he thinks that there has been departure from the established criteria, he can give them to me, I will ask my officers to look into them.

Mr Bhagwan: I have been Minister responsible for NDU and the Citizens Advice Bureaux were involved in the processing of applications. I was not happy myself at times.

(Interruptions)

Yes, giving advice and processing of files! Can the Minister of Finance have a fresh look at the whole issue where the CAB is being involved and is the Minister satisfied the way these files are being treated at the level of the CAB?

Mr Sithanen: I am not ware, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the CAB processes these files. We all received our *mandants* - I am just referring to my own experience - and we all invariably refer them to the appropriate department.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister tell us how many files are pending at the level of his Ministry?

Mr Sithanen: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I will give him the answer.

BOIS MARCHAND – HOUSING ESTATES - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1523) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to whether the housing estates at Bois Marchand were built as per the plans and construction standards, and
- (b) whether it is the policy of his Ministry to develop such housing estates.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, in regard to part (a) of the question, I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the corrugated iron sheet

housing units put up at Bois Marchand by those families who were amongst the squatters of the NHDC housing units in July 2005 and were each allocated a building site lease at Bois Marchand. All of them have obtained assistance from the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups in terms of construction material up to the value of Rs40,000 each. I am further advised that the plans have been drawn by the Trust Fund and the materials provided comprise iron sheets and poles.

In regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry will continue to provide assistance to vulnerable groups in terms of provision of land for residential purpose. In line with my Ministry's objective to provide decent housing in a suitable living environment and within the expansion of economic opportunities, provision has been made for essentially on-going low-cost housing units implemented by the NHDC Ltd for the construction of Firinga and Exim type housing units.

Further, under the Empowerment Programme, provision has been made for social housing components whereby Government will acquire 2000 to 3000 *arpents* of land across the country near existing agglomerations to be sold to landless families with a monthly household income of Rs8500.

Mr Lesjongard: Will the hon. Minister inform the House whether the planning settings were carried out by his Ministry?

Mr Dulull: The construction was handled by the Trust Fund for Vulnerable Groups and the plan was made by them and approved by the local authorities.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not talking about the construction, but about the planning settings.

Mr Dulull: When we allocate land, it is surveyed and the Planning Division stepped in for the allocation. The construction is then handed by the Trust Fund for vulnerable groups. They provide the building materials and the plan.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Minister whether he considers this in order that constructions are carried out so close to a highway?

Mr Dulull: That is not new construction near the highway. There has been construction near the highway since long.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Minister whether he has visited the site there?

Mr Dulull: I do pass along the site quite often. It's along the highway and I have been there quite a few times.

Mr Lesjongard: Does he not consider it as an eyesore for an island where we are promoting the tourism industry?

Mr Dulull: I mentioned in an answer to a PQ last time that if the hon. Member who has been Minister of Housing and Lands considers it as an eyesore, it is the direct consequences of their mismanagement...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Barbier: May I ask the Minister whether he knows that these dwelling houses are being built without any provision for toilets. I was there on Sunday last and people were complaining about the problems that they have to face. Has the Minister been there to see the environmental damage in this region?

Mr Dulull: The hon. Member should know that when people undertake construction, they have to do it to fit their purpose, to construct toilets and whatever amenities they need.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister inform the House whether the Waste Water Management Authority has given clearances to the Ministry of Housing prior the construction of these houses?

Mr Dulull: I need notice to find out the relevant permit.

Mr Bhagwan: Will the Minister table the document next time?

Mr Speaker: The Minister just said that he needs notice of the question.

Mr Bhagwan: He can table the document.

(Interruptions)

One last question Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister inform the House whether his Ministry has received representations from the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, the Ministry of Tourism and the tourism sector concerning this particular project and whether he has liaised with the Ministry of Environment to see to it that this frontage on the motorway be upgraded?

Mr Dulull: A substantive question will be most welcomed.

MULTI-ANNUAL ADAPTATION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION

(No. B/1524) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries **whether, in** regard to the proposed implementation of the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy Action Plan, he will state –

- (a) the number of employees who will -
 - (i) lose their jobs following the clustering of the 11 sugar factories into four factories, and
 - (ii) be offered to retire under the Voluntary Retirement Scheme or Blue Print in the remaining four sub-clusters
- (b) the cost of the VRS or Blue Print. and
- (c) if Government is proposing to use the funds to be made available from the accompanying measures to finance the VRS or Blue Print

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy Action Plan provides for more attractive conditions under which voluntary retirement may be offered to achieve the objectives of modernising the sugar

cane industry. The overall objective is to ensure the commercial viability and sustainability of the sugar cane sector for it to continue fulfilling its multi-functional role in the Mauritian economy. The sugar industry is to be transformed to a sugar cane cluster, producing several types of sugar, energy from bagasse/coal, ethanol and also chemicals.

As regards part (a)(i) of the question, employees in the seven factories that will close as from 2006 will not lose their jobs following centralisation. They will be offered the choice between a compensation package on voluntary retirement, or continuation of their employment in accordance with the provisions of the Blue Print. Blue Print facilities are offered by factories upon closure when they centralise with other entities. Some 1,200 employees are expected to be concerned by the seven closures.

Regarding part (a)(ii), the Voluntary Retirement Scheme is available under the provisions at Section 23 of the SIE Act and may be offered by a planter, miller or service provider. It is voluntary. It is expected that some 6,000 persons would be willing to accept the VRS as part of the Adaptation Strategy.

The four sub clusters, that will remain after closure of seven factories, are still in formation and, at this point in time, there is no way of determining how many employees will be offered voluntary retirement. Millers would also be allowed to effect the choice of the employee to whom the offer of an early retirement scheme (ERS) would be made. However, the employee would have the right to accept or reject the ERS offer. Some 300 employees could be concerned.

The cost of such VRS for 6,000 persons is estimated at Rs3.6 billion and the cost of the Blue Print for 1,200 persons in the seven factories is estimated at Rs1.3 billion.

The re-engineering of the sugar industry will entail a significant social cost. The request for funding under accompanying measures includes a proposal to meet part of the VRS and Blue Print costs from the funds provided by the European Union (i.e. 75% of the total VRS costs and 70% of the total Blue Print costs).

Mr Guinness: I heard the Minister saying that there will be a new VRS. What will change from the present VRS to the new one?

Dr. Boolell: In respect of the age which has been moved for male individuals from 55 to 50 and for women from 50 to 45. Over and above that, there will be a re-skilling programme, accompanying measures right from the time of the incubation of a project till it comes to fruition. They will be entitled to a concessionary loan from the Empowerment programme, let alone the fact that once they are re-skilled and emerging sectors take off, they will be redeployed to the other emerging sectors. Besides, few of them will simply retire, others will move into existing sectors which are being consolidated and others will simply become owners of their private enterprises.

Mr Guinness: Therefore, can the hon. Minister confirm that nothing will change in terms of compensation and land will be given to those who benefit VRS?

Dr. Boolell: If the hon. Member refers to the Multi-Annual Adaptation Strategy, which is on the website, he will find that those who are below 45 are entitled to 1.5 per month/year of service, which is far better than it was to be. In fact, we are constantly improving on what it was. There is nothing wrong. We are building on existing incentives and it is to the upliftment of those people. We have to see to it that they are properly accompanied to ensure that they come back into the main economic stream.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR – FOREIGN WORKERS – PERMITS

(No. B/1525) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether, in regard to foreign workers who have been granted working permits in the construction sector, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the steps that are being taken to ensure that these workers be replaced by Mauritian workers.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I wish to state that this year, 1,442 work permits have been issued as at 31 October 2006 and to be able to understand my reply to part (b) of the question and have an idea on the trend, the House may wish to note that,

for the previous few years the number of work permits issued for the construction sector is as follows -

2003:	2,113
2004:	3,305
2005:	1,267
2006 to date:	1,442

En 2004, l'honorable membre était lui-même ministre, il a octroyé 3,305 permis et cette année, on a donné que 1,442. The figures speak for themselves, I believe. We see that we are acting more conscientiously.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a number of measures have been taken by my Ministry to ensure that as far as possible foreign workers are replaced by Mauritian workers wherever possible in all sectors of the economy, including the construction sector -

- (i) My Ministry does not authorise a company to recruit foreign workers unless that company shows proof of having advertised the posts in the local press and informs the Ministry of the outcome of the exercise.

A list of qualified jobseekers registered with the Employment Service of my Ministry is also referred to the employer for consideration and selection purposes.

A decision on the request for authorisation to recruit foreign labour is taken only after I am fully satisfied that the employer has made all efforts to recruit on the local labour market and has not been successful.

- (ii) Moreover, in some cases, work permits are granted with the condition that the employer should recruit and train a local counterpart to eventually replace the foreigner. Such condition is attached in cases where local workers do not have the required skills to perform the job. In such cases, the

counterpart should be recruited within a period of 3 months from the date the work permit is issued.

- (iii) The Employment Service carries out regular inspections and close monitoring to ensure that, where required, local counterparts are indeed recruited and are being trained by the expatriates concerned.
- (iv) As regards the construction sector in particular, in addition to the measures I have just mentioned, companies are allowed to recruit foreign workers only where skilled workers are required in large numbers for specific time-bound projects and where it has not been possible to recruit locally.

Furthermore, the foreign workers are required to leave the country on completion of the project. In such cases the question of replacement does not arise.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to be informed that, following the decision to close down the DWC, a special desk has been set up at the Employment Service of my Ministry as from this month, to assist the DWC contract workers to be redeployed in the private sector.

The list of the DWC workers is being sent to all construction companies which apply for foreign labour and also to those notifying vacancies to the Employment Information Centres. These companies are being requested to recruit from the DWC list first, before consideration be given for recruitment of foreign labour.

In order to ensure that companies do not employ foreign workers to the detriment of local workers, I personally chaired a meeting, at the beginning of this month, with employers in the construction and related sectors, to sensitise them on the need to give priority to the recruitment of local workers.

Mr Soodun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm that the issuing of work permit is according to the contract of work and not one, two or three years?

Dr. Bunwaree: The permit is issued for a period of time. In fact, I have given the figures, because I have been asked to give the number of permits granted. I have given the number of permits issued. The valid work

permit for this year is not 1,442; it is 1,887, because workers, who have been given a work permit in the past are still working and, at the end of their contract, they will go.

Mr Soodun: Can the hon. Minister confirm that the trade union has made a request to the hon. Minister to stop issuing work permit to foreign workers in the construction industries?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just said that when the hon. Member was Minister of Labour, he issued 3,305 work permits for one year. He ought to see that at that time. What I am saying is that we are doing the work conscientiously....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Soodun, do you think it is in order that when the hon. Minister is answering, you are interfering?

Mr Soodun: No.

Mr Speaker: It is not in order, thank you very much.

Dr. Bunwaree: He is not listening Mr Speaker, Sir! We are acting judiciously, but we have to agree that there are some cases. There are agreements between countries also. We have to take all this into consideration. I have given all the reasons and I don't think the population can blame us at all. In fact, the Opposition was not doing its job.

Mr Soodun: Can the hon. Minister inform the House to which company has the work permit been issued in the construction industry?

Dr. Bunwaree: The work permit is issued by the Ministry of Employment, not by the company.

Mr Soodun: For which company?

Mr Speaker: To which company has the work permit been issued?

Dr. Bunwaree: The companies are numerous, Mr Speaker, Sir. They would apply and either their application will be accepted or refused.

Mr Soodun: For the 3,305 work permits, may I know to which company was issued the work permit?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I said 3,305 workers; it was at the time the hon. Member was Minister of Labour. Now it is 1,440.

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

Mr Soodun: The hon. Minister has mentioned 3,305 workers. I would like to know to which company the permits have been issued?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are more than 40 companies. I can have the information tabled.

(Interruptions)

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said in his answer that companies have got to give proof that they have advertised in local newspapers. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether this provision applies for recruits at the management level as well.

Dr. Bunwaree: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know from the hon. Minister how many applications are pending? I am sure applications have been received, especially for IRS projects. Can we know the number of applications for different sites received and which are being processed?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll look into it, but then I can tell the hon. Member that at the end of the year, we all know that the construction business goes a bit down. Maybe by early next year, we will have the applications processed.

MANUFACTURING & AGRICULTURAL SECTORS - JOB LOSSES – JULY 2005-NOV 2006

(No. B/1526) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment whether, in regard to job losses in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, he will state the number thereof since July 2005 to date.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member is aware, only employers of the non-EPZ Sector employing 10 or more workers have an obligation, under Section 39 of the Labour Act, to notify me of their intention to reduce their labour force. Consequently information on job losses which have occurred in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors since July 2005 to date is not readily available at my Ministry.

The information asked for has therefore to be compiled and will be placed in the library of the National Assembly in due course.

Mr Soodhun: As regards Floreal Knitwear, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many workers have been laid off?

Dr. Bunwaree: I have given a press point, the hon. Member can listen to the news tonight.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to know from the Chair whether it is a proper answer.

Mr Speaker: It is clear that according to practice & procedure I cannot force the Minister to answer.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have talked to the population. I have given information concerning the laying-off of workers at Floreal Knitwear and I can assure the House ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Member challenging my ruling?

Mr Soodhun: I just want to clarify my point.

Mr Speaker: Do you have a point of clarification?

Mr Soodhun: Yes.

Mr Speaker: What is your point?

Mr Soodhun: I have asked the question in the House. I have not asked it outside the House. I want to have an answer from the hon. Minister.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, hon. Soodhun, you have been a Member of this House, if my memory serves me right, for the last twenty years. You must have read the Standing Orders and Erskine May. Let me tell you that I cannot compel a Minister to answer a question.

Mr Bodha: On a point of clarification, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask you whether it is proper, when a question is being asked in the House, for the Minister to say that he will give the answer in a press conference?

Mr Speaker: What can the Chair do? The Standing Orders are clear. I have no control on answers of Ministers.

(Interruptions)

I have said this is my ruling. If you want to challenge my ruling, you can come with a substantive motion.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have said that I have given the information to the population. If a proper question is put, I will give the answer. But I can assure the population and the hon. Members on the other side of the House that insofar as Floreal Knitwear is concerned, all - without exception – the people who have been laid off will be offered new jobs.

Mr Speaker: I think the Minister would have been wise to say it earlier instead of saying that he would give the answer outside the House.

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Ganoo: Since the Minister has answered a question on Floreal Knitwear, can he tell us whether he is aware that Floreal Knitwear has any plan to lay off furthermore part of its workforce?

Dr. Bunwaree: I have been informed that this is the end process of the whole restructuration which started years ago. This is the end of it. In the future, there is not going to be any laying-off at Floreal Knitwear.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just replied that all the workers at Floreal Knitwear who have been laid-off are going to be reinstated. May I know where are they going to be reinstated?

Dr. Bunwaree: I have said they will be offered alternative employment.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the Minister which type of employment is going to be offered.

Dr. Bunwaree: They will be offered the same type of employment which they were doing, but, on top of that, there will be training and, probably, opening up in the Anahita project in Bel-Air.

SEHDA – SMALL ENTREPRENEURS - REGISTRATION

(No. B/1527) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the SEHDA, information as to –

- (a) the number of persons registered thereat as small entrepreneurs;
- (b) the criteria laid down for registration, and
- (c) whether any mechanism exists to ensure that these persons initiate the business activities for which they have registered.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this PQ. The House would be glad to note that the different measures initiated since July 2005 have yielded very positive results in terms of SME and entrepreneurial development.

The decentralisation of the activities of the business counseling unit of SEHDA, the *Caravane de l'entreprenariat*, budgetary measures announced in June this year, the organisation and success of the SME fair in September and the promulgation of the Business Facilitation Act have helped to give a big boost to the SME sector.

As regards figures proper, I am informed as follows –

- (a) For period July 2005 to 31 October 2006, 3,104 enterprises have been registered with SEHDA. During the same period, the number of potential entrepreneurs who visited the desks of SEHDA stands at 13,738. I may add that the trend of potential entrepreneurs visiting SEHDA since June 2006 is on the increase and this confirms that Mauritians are very enthusiastic to set up their own enterprises in the SME sector.
- (b) The criteria used for registration are stipulated in the SEHDA Act 2005 and they are as follows –

As per the Act, the definition of “enterprise” includes every form of trade, commerce or manufacture, craftsmanship, calling, profession, vocation, occupation or support service.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed that a monitoring mechanism does exist whereby after registration, enterprises are contacted by SEHDA to oversee project implementation, provide relevant guidance and assistance in terms of further counseling, technical or marketing support. Out of 3,104 registered enterprises, 1,715 are already operational.

LAND INFORMATION SYSTEM – AUSTRALIAN CONSULTANT FIRM

(No. B/1528) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the establishment of the Land Information System, he will state if a decision has now been reached as to the hiring of the services of an Australian firm of consultants.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the decision to hire the services of the Department of Land Information of the State of Western Australia (DOLA International) to conduct a land scrutiny mission in Mauritius with a view to the establishment of a land Administration and Management System (LAMS) was taken as far back as 08 March 2005 by my predecessor, the former Minister of Housing & Lands. This decision itself followed a mission in Perth, Australia in December 2004 by a team of senior officers of

the Ministry of Housing & Lands. May I emphasize that the Land Information System (LIS) forms part of the Land Administration and Management System project.

DOLA conducted a two-week land scrutiny mission from 25 July to 12 August 2005 and its draft final report was submitted in September 2005. The final report, which took on board the views of stakeholders in Mauritius, was subsequently submitted in December 2005 and finally approved by Government in May 2006 after in-depth study of the recommendations made therein, and appropriate consultations thereon.

One of the main recommendations of the way forward is first and foremost a Programme Design Project (PDP). Following further study and consultations, Government has approved, in principle, that a team of six consultants from DOLA International comes over to Mauritius for a four week consultancy mission for the PDP, for which consultancy mission, an agreement, vetted by the State Law Office, would need to be signed.

The signature of the agreement is awaiting the identification of six national counterparts to the six Australian consultants, and a firming up of the road map for the implementation of the LAMS project, the next step being a Programme Implementation Project (PIP) following the Programme Design Project.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister what is the exact objective of this consultancy service?

Mr Dulull: The consultancy service is going to be for the Programme Design Project.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may we know what are the terms of reference for that particular project?

Mr Dulull: The terms of reference of this project include, *inter alia*, the design of the land administration and management for record keeping and to have an electronic online registration. The ownership of the whole land administration and registration will be for the Government.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Is the hon. Minister aware that such consultancy service was already hired to prepare the detail implementation

plan and a report has already been submitted in May 1998. 40% of the cartographic work has already been carried out in Mauritius as far back as in August 2004. My question to the Minister is: why is it then that the whole area of the island has not been covered yet, and why are we going again for consultancy when the work has already been done?

Mr Dulull: The hon. Member is right when she mentioned that it dates back to 1998. The Swedish survey made a report, which was to be implemented. Then the following Government decided to start a new consultancy with DOLA which has proved to be very costly. What we want now is to be more cost-efficient and go for a project design programme.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the Minister whether he is aware that the part that was left on that programme was to link the mapping to the deeds Registry of the Registrar General Department through a parcel identification number to be allocated to each parcel. May I know from the Minister why the parcel identification number has not been allocated and why is it that they are going again for a plan when the work has almost been completed?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid to say that the hon. Member is not well aware about the magnitude of the project.

(Interruptions)

There has been a survey of 27 sq km of the northern part of the island where we have captured the data - just capturing the data is not the programme. We have to have the software to record the data, to develop the system and it is an integrated system for online registration, for mapping of each plot and the parcel identification is just a key factor to record the data.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I hope that the Minister is aware that there was a pilot project and that the digital map of the pilot project has been completed and compiled in the Map-info software and that the textual information on the parcels has been compiled in Foxpro database. Can the Minister explain why the formal pin has not been allocated and why the whole of the island coverage has not been done?

(Interruptions)

Even if I read it, it's my own handwriting, my friend!

If the pilot project has been completed - that is why we carried out a pilot project - then why was it not implemented for the coverage of the whole island?

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Member address the Chair, please?

Mrs Dookun Luchoomun: Yes, Sir.

Mr Dulull: As I mentioned, we had a pilot project covering over 27 sq km in the north and that is not the end of the project. The whole project is an integrated project. We have to have the proper software to record all the data. The data is there with the cartographic section; the data is not lost, but we have to integrate them with the whole Land Administration Management System. It has to be integrated within the system.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the hon. Minister what was the point in going ahead with the pilot project?

Mr Dulull: The pilot project was to see the workability of the system itself and to find out what are the problems before going ahead.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether he has gone through the file and has seen how the Director of Audit's report has been very critical to the amount of money that has been spent on equipment that has not been used since 1998?

Mr Dulull: Before the Swedish Survey being conducted, we had the World Bank report in 1995. The Swedish Survey needed implementation, but, unfortunately, the previous Government did nothing, and that is why we had the wastage of equipment.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Is the Minister aware that the digital mapping is carried out by having aerial photos by the Cartographic Unit? If the project has worked for the pilot scheme, the same procedure would be applied for the island and, if this is the case, the consultancy work has already been done. Why go again for consultancy when the work has been done to almost 40% by August 2004?

Mr Dulull: I think the hon. Member is being confused with what we call digital mapping and Land Administration and Management System. Digital mapping is part of the Land Administration and Management System, but is not the Land Administration and Management System. We have online registration, we have to have the survey and it comprises a lot of processes. It is not only digital mapping.

NATIONAL AIR CARRIER – AIRWORTHINESS

(No. B/1529) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether, in regard the impending increase of the fleet of the national air carrier, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Civil Aviation Department, information as to whether the mechanism that is presently in place to ensure that all standards of airworthiness required by law are complied with and maintained.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and external communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that airworthiness inspection is part of the statutory obligation of the Department of Civil Aviation in compliance with the provisions of the relevant annexes to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, the Civil Aviation Act, the Civil Aviation Regulations, the Civil Airworthiness Requirements of Mauritius as well as the European Joint Airworthiness Requirements.

In the fulfillment of its obligation and as a contracting State of the ICAO, it is incumbent upon Mauritius to discharge duties pertaining to operations inspection, certification and continued airworthiness surveillance on all aircraft registered in Mauritius.

To assist him in the discharge of his responsibility, the Director of Civil Aviation has in place a dedicated flight safety section, which is staffed by one Divisional Head, one Airworthiness Inspector and other support staff. Given the unavailability of qualified professionals in the field locally, the department of Civil Aviation is continuously having recourse to the services of Bureau Veritas, an international organization involved, *inter alia*, in airworthiness surveillance of aircraft to conduct airworthiness inspections duties. A resident airworthiness surveyor from the latter company is at present based on a full time basis at the Department to assist the flight safety section.

As regards flight operations, the department of Civil Aviation has a standing arrangement with the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority for *ad hoc* inspection of flight services on Mauritian registered aircraft.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may also wish to know that my Ministry is in process of consolidating the Civil Aviation regulations so as to enhance the regulatory functions of the DCA.

Insofar as the forthcoming change in the fleet of Air Mauritius is concerned, due to the replacement of two B767 aircrafts by two Airbus 340, the House may rest assured that necessary steps have been taken by my Ministry in collaboration with DCA and ICAO to ensure compliance with standards of airworthiness stipulated in the relevant annexes to the Convention on International Civil Aviation.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Will the hon. Minister inform the House the number of aircraft in the Mauritian registry?

Mr Duval: I have information here. Air Mauritius has 40 aircrafts, Catovair has 6 and there are three operating offshore as well.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the Minister whether in this team taking care of airworthiness, there are any vacancies in that particular department?

Mr Duval: There is a large number of vacancies. The problem is, of course, the salary that is being offered does not induce people to come and join the DCA. We have to have recourse to outsourcing from foreign organizations.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether the Civil Aviation has a back-up plan if in case anything happens to the airstrip and, if so, what is the situation?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not think this arises from question.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the Minister whether it considers it proper to have a single Air Inspection Officer for the whole fleet of about 20 aircrafts?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, I think they are managing at the moment. There are various initiatives that are being taken. Firstly, the scheme of service is presently being reviewed and finalized. There is also a contract with CTB which is being vetted so that we can actually obtain more international experience.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can the hon. Minister inform the House of the number of overseas trip carried out by the Inspector for the year 2005-2006 for the purpose of airworthiness?

Mr Duval: I do not have this kind of information.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In view of the major safety implications involved, will the Minister agree to set up a whole team of professionals for the smooth and sound running of the section?

Mr Duval: This is what is being done. As I mentioned, we are looking at the scheme of service. There is the tender for the recruitment of overseas services, too. In her question, the hon. Member mentioned about Air Mauritius increasing its fleet, but, in fact, it is not the case. It is replacing two 767 by two A340 and the two 767 will be going away in February. It is only in November 2007 that a new aircraft is coming for Air Mauritius.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May we know whether there is a time-frame for this new sort of set-up that the hon. Minister wants to have for airworthiness section?

Mr Duval: Since it tends to take a long time, I do not have a time-frame, but I will certainly pass on the information that we should look at it quickly.

SCHOOL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

(No. B/1530) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne & Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the School Information Technology project, he will state, for the period July 2005 to June 2006 –

- (a) the amount of money spent thereon, and
- (b) if tenders were launched and, if so, the dates on which -
 - (i) they were launched and finalised, and
 - (ii) the contracts were awarded.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the hon. Member that the School Information Technology project, as originally conceived, comprised the following components –

- (i) conversion of existing classrooms into computer laboratories;
- (ii) recruitment of ICT teachers, and
- (iii) purchase of ICT equipment.

For the information of the House, when I took office, tenders for the setting up of 50 computer laboratories had already been floated, works had already started and total amount disbursed during the period July 2005 to June 2006 was Rs23,652,847.

However, in a spirit of equity, it was decided that, instead of equipping only 50 schools with computer laboratories as previously planned, the IT equipment would be distributed equally so that each school would get five PCs and one printer. This decision necessitated the provision of infrastructural facilities in all primary schools with the collaboration of the Energy Services Division of the Ministry of Public Utilities. Scope of works for the provision of ten power-points in each primary school was worked out and tenders floated and awards made. Total payment of Rs3,915,037 was made during the period July 2005 and June 2006 in respect of the works.

During the referred period, there were 223 ICT teachers. A total amount of Rs28,075,675.52 has been paid to them in terms of salaries, gratuity, annual leave and travelling.

Regarding the purchase of equipment, I am informed by the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunications that expenditure incurred during the period under reference was Rs33,482,672.18.

With regard part (b), parts (i) and (ii) of the question, tenders for the conversion of existing classrooms into computer laboratories were launched by the CTB in February and May 2005, and awards were made to the five different bidders in April and June 2005.

As far as electrical works are concerned, tenders were launched during period March-May 2006 and awards were made to the different bidders during period April-May 2006.

With regard to the purchase of the ICT equipment, tenders were launched by the CTB on 23 February 2006, and the bids were evaluated and finalised on 24 April 2006 by the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunications. The contracts were awarded to three different bidders on 05 and 19 May 2006.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister talked about IT equipment, and I presume that they are computers and printers.

May I know the number of computers and printers that have been purchased?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer the hon. Member to PQ B/1452, where I gave the information. But, for the benefit of the hon. Member, I will just give the figures. For 2006, there are 1,375 computers and 275 printers.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether it is in order to have tenders launched and finalised in such short time?

Mr Gokhool: I will not be able to answer this question. But if a question is asked about the duration, I will find out.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister the number of schools to which these equipment have been allotted and whether these schools were equipped with IT labs to receive these equipment?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, 50 labs were being constructed. Other schools didn't have labs and so we have made these facilities available to all schools. I have just mentioned the number of computers, that is, five computers and one printer per school at this stage. We are going to increase this.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether these schools which did not have the IT labs have been using these computers and printers meanwhile? Because they did not have IT labs.

Mr Gokhool: At this point in time, the facilities have been provided to all schools and they are using the computers and the printers.

ATHLETES - AWARD

(No. B/1531) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Youth & Sports whether he will state the criteria laid down for the nomination of the athlete of the month.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Sports Council (MSC), which operates under the aegis of my Ministry, runs two categories of monthly awards to reward athletes who achieve outstanding performance during a particular month. The first category pertains to athletes under 15 years of age, while the second category concerns those over 15 years of age.

Every month, all sports federations are invited by the MSC to submit their recommendation for the best athlete in each category of the award for their respective sport discipline.

A panel of jury of the MSC assesses the recommendations received from all sports federations with a view to selecting the winner for each category of the award. The panel of jury comprises four representatives of the MSC, one representative of the Ministry of Youth & Sports, one representative of the Mauritius National Olympic Committee and the press.

The assessment is carried out on the basis of the following criteria –

- (i) performance of the athlete in competitions at regional, national or international level;
- (ii) number of participating countries (for international competitions), and
- (iii) number of participants in these competitions.

The panel of jury then draws a shortlist of three to four athletes and finally decides on the winner of award for each category.

AMUL MILK POWDER – SALE TO HOSPITALS, PRISONS & AGRICULTURAL MARKETING BOARD

(No. B/1532) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to the AMUL milk powder, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the quantity thereof sold to the hospitals, the prisons and the Agricultural Marketing Board.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the State Trading Corporation that 13.2% of full cream milk powder imported were sold to hospitals, 5.2% to prisons and 0.30% to the Agricultural Marketing Board.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister gave us the figures in terms of percentage. I suppose he can give us the information in terms of quantity.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did mention in my previous reply that the total quantity imported was 155,947 kilogrammes. The hon. Member can make his own calculations.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister the dates on which the milk was sold to the hospitals, prisons and the Agricultural Marketing Board?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the exact dates. I need a substantive question, so as to be able to give these details.

Mr Guinness: Is the hon. Minister aware that only a few weeks before the expiry date of the milk, it was sold to the AMB and that the health officers have just seized all the milk?

Dr. Jeetah: If the hon. Member has such information, please forward it to my Ministry. I will certainly look into it, Mr Speaker, Sir. I did say that it is .30% of 155.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the same thing applies to the prisons. I know what I am talking about. Can the hon. Minister inquire whether prisoners, our friends...

(Interruptions)

They are human beings as well! I have no problem, Sir. They are human beings and are there for whatever reasons. But, many of them are our friends. Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether these people are being given expired AMUL milk to consume? Will he inquire and make a statement to the House?

/...

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, it would be most unfair to give expired milk to the hon. Member's friends, but the hon. Member can pass on this information to his friends that this milk is correctly being used on Air India and in Taj Hotel.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The hon. Minister is disturbing the hon. Lady from listening. Please keep quiet.

(Interruptions)

LA TOUR KOENIG – HOUSING UNITS – CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/1533) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the housing estate at La Tour Koenig, of which 198 units have been completed, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the National Housing Development Company Ltd., information as to when the decision for its construction was taken.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am grateful and thankful to the hon. Member for asking this question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! What is so exciting in that?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Dulull: Sir, I am advised that the housing project consisting of 198 housing units at La Tour Koenig, the construction of which was completed and handed over to the beneficiaries a few days back, forms part

of a global housing project comprising of some 1500 units the inception of which dates back to 1997 thanks to the vision of Dr. the hon. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, the then and present Prime Minister.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the hon. Minister answer!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

Mr Dulull: This housing project/programme for the construction of 1500 housing units, meant for low income group, was to be implemented in different localities. Subsequently, the sites were identified and leased to the NHDC Ltd, including the one at La Tour Koenig, which was leased in 1998.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dulull: In parallel, negotiations and consultations were being carried out with the Exim Bank of China for financing the project. The award for consultancy services for the design and supervision of the project was made in 2000. Technically, construction works should have started within a short period of time.

However, it was only in February 2002 that the contract was awarded and it was only in November 2003 that constructions started, that is, three years later.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is yet again a telling example of how projects were being managed in the most ineffective and inefficient manner, to say the least, characterised by delays in implementation in a country which was boosted as the “*pays le mieux géré au monde*” by the previous régime.

LA TOUR KOENIG - INDUSTRIAL PARK - LEASE

(No. B/1534) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications whether, in regard to the industrial park at La Tour Koenig, he will state –

- (a) when was the decision for its creation taken, and
- (b) the name of the beneficiary of the first lease and the date on which it was granted.

The Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Cooperatives (Dr. R. Jeetah): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQ No. B/1534 addressed to the hon. Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I take it that while referring to the industrial park at La Tour Koenig, the hon. Member means DBM industrial park at La Tour Koenig.

I am informed that as regards part (a) of the question, the decision for the creation of a DBM Industrial Park at La Tour Koenig was taken by the DBM Board in consultation with the Ministry of Finance in October 1986

As regards part (b) of the question, the beneficiary of the first lease was the Development Works Corporation and the lease was granted on 01 July 1987.

BUSINESS PARKS OF MAURITIUS (LTD) – LEASES

(No. B/1535) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Business Parks of Mauritius (Ltd), information as to the number of leases, in respect of plots of land vested therein, which have been retrieved since July 2005 to date, indicating the total area involved.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Business Parks of Mauritius Limited that since July 2005 to date, two plots of land of a total area of 4.5 acres have been retrieved and that action is being initiated by the Business Parks of Mauritius Limited to recover nine plots of land, making up a total surface area of 14 acres, from lessees who have failed to comply with specific provisions of the lease agreement requiring them to start construction works within six months from the date of signature of the agreement.

Miss Deerpalsing: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether he has or intends to retrieve the land leased to Ebène hyper-market?

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question, because I heard the other day that no less than a former Prime Minister was challenging me to give the name of one of the *petit copains* who had benefited from the lavish largesses of the former Government in the BPML scandal. That's not my job but if a name was needed, the Ebène hyper-market should certainly be one. Indeed, consideration will have to be given regarding the retrieval of eight acres of land leased to Ebène hyper-market because it is absolutely revolting, Sir, that eight acres of land have been leased to the Ebène hyper-market without even the deflated one-off payment of Rs2.5 m. per acre.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: That is to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd. has unexplainably foregone the payment of a sizeable amount of Rs20 m. and possibly even without the Board approval. What is more, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that the lessee is benefiting from payment of a reduced yearly rental of Rs1.4 m. per year instead of Rs1.6 m. The one major fear is that it may be impossible to retrieve any of these lands because they made sure that such loopholes played only in favour of their *petits copains*.

Miss Deerpalsing: Can I know from the hon. Minister how much land has been leased and the total amount of one-off payments received so far?

Mr Sinatambou: I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that as at today, out of 105 acres, 82.89 acres have been leased to 36 beneficiaries. The total one-off payments received from the beneficiaries to date amounts to Rs168 m. whereas, astonishingly the costs for infrastructural works incurred by the Business Parks of Mauritius Ltd. amount to Rs336.4 m., in other words a loss of more than a 100%.

RÉDUIT TRIANGLE – NGO’S & CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS – PLOTS OF LAND

(No. B/1536) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the plots of land in the Réduit Triangle (ex-Illovo land), he will give a list of the Non-Governmental organisations and cultural organisations in whose name a plot of land was reserved as at July 2005.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, the pieces of information asked for, based on records available at my Ministry, is being placed in the Library.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister tell us which cultural organisations whose lands have been retrieved?

Mr Dulull: For cultural organisations, we have the Urdu Speaking Union, the Indo Mauritian Christian Association and the Tamil Cultural Centre.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister inform the House whether his Ministry has received representations from the Tamil Cultural Centre and the IMCA concerning the decisions of Government?

Mr Dulull: Sir, we have received representations from the cultural centres and we are giving them due consideration.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether Government will review its position and give back the land to the Tamil Cultural Centre and the IMCA, being given that this is a most unfair decision taken?

(Interruptions)

Mr Dulull: I said that the matter is still under consideration.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Minister give an undertaking to the House that there will be no discrimination whatsoever?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order, I said! Let the hon. Member put the question.

Mr Bhagwan: There is an uproar among the Tamil Cultural Centre's Members, the Indo Mauritian Catholic Association's Members as regards this decision of Government because much work has been done concerning the preparation of the plans, going for fund raising, and this decision is doing a lot of injustice to them.

Mr Dulull: We had representations, as I said, from the Urdu Speaking, Hindi Speaking Union and the Tamil Centre. It is still under consideration.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Est-ce que le ministre peut-il dire quelles sont les raisons qui ont été données à ces ONG et organisations culturelles pour justifier la décision du ministère de reprendre les terrains concernés?

Mr Dulull: We have not retrieved any land. There was a mere letter of reservation and I have mentioned in an answer that the cost of infrastructure in the Ebène Triangle is to the tune as per Mega Design Rs237 m. We have already allocated the land, the requests of the Cultural Centres are being considered and we are here to give satisfaction to each and every one. *Nous ne voulons pas que nos citoyens soient défavorisés.*

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether a proper lease agreement was signed between Government and each of these socio-cultural organisations?

Mr Dulull: As I said, concerning the cultural organisations, we had mere letters of reservation, not even letters of intent.

Mr Ganoo: Can the hon. Minister urgently look into the matter and come up with a decision to enable these cultural organisations to repossess their land so as to avoid any social disturbance in the country?

Mr Dulull: I mentioned that the land was at the stage of reservation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: One last question, Mr Speaker, Sir,

Mr Speaker: A last one and quickly please!

Mr Bhagwan: Will the Minister inform the House whether the decision for retrieving these lands was the Minister's decision or that of the Ministry of Housing or Government?

Mr Dulull: Sir, giving and retrieving land is a collective decision.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a statement the Minister made reference to the cost of infrastructure in the vicinity of the land that has been leased. Can the Minister give us an exact indication as to the cost of the infrastructure involved for the construction of the Maharashtra Bhawan?

Mr Dulull: I am not aware, Sir.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister made a statement regarding the cost of infrastructure and now he says that he is not aware!

Mr Dulull: The cost of infrastructure as per Mega Design in the Ebene Triangle was to the tune of Rs237 m.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Minister how was this supposed to be apportioned among the various lessees in that area?

Mr Dulull: When the previous Government pledged for reservation, they never had any basis of apportionment. Now, we are working on it and the matter is under consideration. We want to find a solution.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, est-il vrai de dire que les raisons avancées par le ministre concernant le *retrieval of land* est que le gouvernement avait des *prestigious projects on the site*? Est-ce que le ministre veut dire que les projets émanant des ONG et des organisations socio-culturelles ne sont pas *that prestigious*?

Mr Dulull: We have never mentioned prestigious projects, maybe it was said when the previous Government was in office. We are talking about viable economic projects.

WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY – TARIFF STUDY

(No. B/1537) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Wastewater Management Authority, information as to –

- (a) if there will be an increase in the rate of the waste water charges;
- (b) the number of households connected as at todate, and
- (c) whether the chargeable percentage of water used will be reviewed downwards.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, in reply to PQ No. B/115 on 04 April 2006, I informed the House that, at the request of donor agencies, a Consultant would be appointed to carry out an independent tariff study for the waste water sector. A Consultant has, in fact, been appointed and the study is ongoing. The final recommendations would be submitted for discussions in January 2007. At this point in time, it would be advisable to await the recommendations of the Consultant.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that the number of households connected as at June 2006 was 61,750.

As regards the chargeable percentage of water used, same will not be reviewed.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in a previous answer the hon. Minister said that the sector policy paper will have to be updated and approved, keeping in mind those who are economically vulnerable. Is that being done?

Dr. Kasenally: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister whether it exists a dispute between the Institute of Consumers Protection and the Wastewater Management Authority on the tariff fares and what has been the outcome so far?

Dr. Kasenally: We have no dispute whatsoever. I have met some people from the Institute of Consumer Protection; they have some reservations and it has been explained to them. Both the ICP and ACIM have expressed reservations about the tariff and they simply do not want to pay what has been decided by the Wastewater Management Authority. They want the tariff to be drastically reduced, but this is not possible. If we do so, there will be a collapse of the wastewater system in this country and we do not want that under these circumstances as there is so much to do as far as environmental protection is concerned.

Mr Dowarkasing: Sir, is the Minister aware that thousands of letters have been sent to consumers, threatening them of the possibility of disconnecting their water supply if they do not pay their wastewater charges?

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, the wastewater charges have to be paid, as I have said. In order that the system be sustainable, people will have to pay. Of course, while doing so, we take into consideration the affordability of the people at the lower rung of the ladder, but, as far as the the public utilities system is concerned, we cannot ask people not to pay wastewater charges, not to pay water charges and not to pay electricity. This is not feasibly...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Kasenally: Therefore this Government has to ensure the financial sustainability of all its utilities.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! I must inform the House that PQ Nos. B/1551 and B/1552 have been withdrawn.