

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr Speaker: Hon. Members, I have to inform the House that the Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East, hon. Lauthan, has withdrawn his questions, namely PQ Nos. B/358 and B/418.

CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE – CASES REPORTED, PREVENTIVE MEASURES, ETC.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the outbreak of the chikungunya disease, he will state –

- (a) the number of reported and confirmed cases to date;
- (b) the curative and preventive measures taken to fight the disease;
- (c) the financial and other resources involved so far;
- (d) the additional measures to be taken in the future, indicating the financial resources earmarked in this connection, and
- (e) its social and socio-economic impact on the country.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, before replying to part (a) of the PNQ, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry has adopted a holistic approach to combat chikungunya, which emerged as an infection for the first time in April 2005. There were about 4,000 cases diagnosed between April to July 2005. The infection re-emerged in January 2006.

Government has shown its commitment right from the beginning, that is, from January 2006, when there was an indication of a rise in the trend of the disease. A multi-pronged approach has been adopted and all stakeholders involving other Ministries such as the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Agro Industry, the Ministry of Social Security, the Ministry of Women's Rights and the Police Department as well as the private sector have been taken on board.

The Prime Minister, himself, was very concerned about the situation. He chaired a meeting of the National Committee on chikungunya and he has

followed the situation closely all along. Furthermore, an inter-ministerial committee, under the chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping, comprising the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications, Minister of Environment & NDU, Minister of Public Utilities, Minister of Local Government and the Attorney-General, has been set up to ensure the co-ordination of activities and take appropriate policy decision.

We should be thankful to the President of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and the Government of the Republic of India, who have generously donated 79 tons of mosquito repellents at a total cost of around Rs12 m.

We are also thankful to the French Authorities which have responded spontaneously to our request for assistance.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed that 10,915 cases of chikungunya have been notified in Mauritius as from 23 December 2005 to 24 April 2006. Out of these, 8,669 cases have been confirmed. This figure includes data from the private sector.

With regard to Rodrigues, 562 cases have been reported and 373 cases confirmed.

With regard to part (b), concerning curative measures, I am advised that there is no specific treatment against chikungunya. Patients attending hospitals are prescribed analgesics and anti-inflammatory drugs to relieve the symptoms. These include, *inter alia*, paracetamol, diclofenac and brufen. In some cases of prolonged joint pains, steroids or chloroquine tablets for a short period may be prescribed under strict medical supervision.

Patients with high fever and severe joint pains are hospitalised. Those with less severe symptoms are treated as outpatients. Old patients seem to be more affected and are admitted because they may develop other complications.

Pregnant women with chikungunya are admitted for treatment in hospitals and are followed up until the delivery. Their babies too are screened for chikungunya.

The private practitioners have been requested to follow the same treatment protocol, which is being followed in the public sector, and have been advised not to over-prescribe steroids in the acute phase of the disease.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards precautionary measures taken to prevent the spread of the disease, my Ministry has adopted, again, a multi-pronged approach to deal with the situation. The measures taken include the following -

Surveillance

Surveillance has been reinforced at the port and airport for passengers coming from affected countries. Additional Health Inspectors have been posted at the airport, and logistic facilities have been made available to facilitate early follow-up of passengers put under surveillance.

Case Reporting

The Public Health (Infectious or Communicable Diseases) Amendment Regulations have been amended, so as to include chikungunya in the list of notifiable diseases. A press communiqué was issued to inform private practitioners that they should notify cases of chikungunya to the nearest health office. Furthermore, all private medical practitioners were informed by way of a circular letter to notify suspected cases to the nearest health office and new notification forms were sent to them in this respect.

Meetings have also been held with directors of private health institutions and the Association of Private Medical Practitioners to stress on the importance of notifying cases of the disease to the nearest health office.

Daily reports are submitted from each hospital and health centre to enable us to monitor the exact situation and take remedial action accordingly.

Vector Control

Larviciding activities islandwide to eliminate mosquito larvae have been reinforced. Fogging activities to eliminate adult mosquitoes are being carried out in areas where a cluster of cases have been reported and in all educational and health institutions. These activities are ongoing. The services of Roger Fayd'herbe & Co. Ltd were enlisted at the beginning of

the campaign for fogging activities in Mahebourg, Triolet, Grand Gaube, Post Lafayette and around the premises leading to Grand Bassin.

Infection Control

Infection control measures have been taken in hospital wards when cases have been reported. People treated as outpatients have been requested to take precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the disease.

Intersectoral co-operation

Regular meetings have been held with Ministries and Departments concerned as well as the private sector including the Joint Economic Council, AHRIM, Mauritius Sugar Producers Association, with a view to enlisting their support in the fight against chikungunya.

A national cleaning campaign in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and the NDU and the Ministry of Local Government, municipalities, district councils and village councils has been embarked upon to eliminate all potential mosquito breeding grounds in the country.

An Aggressive Media Based Sensitisation Programme is ongoing

The vector of chikungunya, i.e *Aedes albopictus* breeds in the immediate vicinity of habitations. It is of paramount importance to enlist the support and the participation of the community. Mr Speaker, Sir, in this respect an aggressive health education campaign is ongoing and the following are being carried out.

Communiqués giving information on chikungunya and preventive measures to be taken have been issued in the press. Special TV and radio programmes on chikungunya have been organised on MBC and other radio stations.

Furthermore, leaflets on chikungunya have been produced and have already been distributed throughout the island, including to the Ministry of Education & Human Resources. Moreover, posters on chikungunya are being distributed to schools, health institutions, women centres, community centres, youth centres, Citizens Advice Bureaus and NGOs.

Newspaper inserts on prevention against mosquito have been distributed throughout the island. Besides, information on chikungunya

is available on the website of my Ministry and on the Servihoo portal. A call free audiotex service has also been made operational.

Advertisements on the protection against mosquitoes have been displayed on buses as well as on electronic boards of municipalities. Preventive messages have been inserted in CEB and CWA bills.

Mr Speaker, Sir, only for the period 13 March to 20 April, 2006, 32,713 households were visited and health education dispensed.

Mosquito repellents obtained from the Government of India have been distributed to about 140,000 individuals islandwide in some 150 localities as part of the preventive campaign.

With regard to part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, a total amount of Rs42 m. has been earmarked to meet expenses for the control of chikungunya. This amount is being used *inter alia* for the purchase of -

- (a) 490 fogging machines at the cost of Rs14.3 m.
- (b) 542 spraying machines for the sum of Rs1.4 m.
- (c) 1170 kits of protective equipment at the cost of Rs2.7 m.
- (d) 38,400 litres of insecticides for larviciding and fogging purposes amounting to Rs14.2 m.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to draw the attention of the House that the initial stock of certain items like protective equipment, fogging machines, was nil. We have had to purchase all these equipment.

Further, the Media Based Sensitisation Programme which comprised, amongst others, special TV and radio programmes on chikungunya, TV and radio spots on mosquito control, production of 1,100,000 leaflets, 350,000 newspapers inserts is estimated to cost Rs7.1 m.

With regard to human resources, different grades of officers are involved in the campaign of chikungunya, namely Regional Public Health Superintendents, Officers of the Inspectorate Cadre, Health Information, Education and Communication officers, Community Health Care Officers, officers of the Health Surveillance cadre and insecticide sprayers and gangmen.

Further, the services of General workers from other Ministries and the DWC as well as 106 SMF and SSU Officers have been enlisted to assist the Ministry in the fogging and spraying activities.

Activities are coordinated at regional level by the Regional Public Health Superintendents.

145 Officers of the Health Inspectorate Cadre posted in the fifteen health offices scattered throughout the island to identify, eliminate breeding grounds of mosquitoes and supervise the fogging and the larviciding exercises.

The Health Promotion Coordinator and the Community Health Motivators also contribute to the awareness campaign against the disease.

The Community Health Care Officers are involved in the door-to-door preventive campaigns.

Officers of the Health Information Education and Communication cadre deliver talks to the public to sensitise them about chikungunya and precautions to be taken. To date, some 400 talks on chikungunya have been carried out throughout Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (d) of the question, to minimise the resurgence of chikungunya and outbreaks of other vector borne diseases, intensive islandwide vector control activities need to be carried out throughout the year as a preventive measure, irrespective of whether cases of vector borne diseases are reported or not. This will consist of a reorganisation of vector control activities at the level of the 13 health offices. For this purpose, catchment areas of these health offices will be divided into 10 sectors each. Each sector will be divided into blocks and each house in these blocks will be numbered. The sector will also be mapped. This will not only facilitate accurate location of clusters of cases, but will help target vector control operations. Larviciding activities will be carried out in these sectors at regular intervals.

To carry out vector control activities as proposed, a team of 200 Insecticide Sprayermen will be required.

Furthermore, there is need to increase the number of Health Surveillance Officers (HSO) to visit passengers already controlled at the airport and also to reinforce the team at the Vector Biology and Control Unit.

To be able to cope with transportation of the increased number of personnel, appropriate vehicles, to carry not only the personnel but ladders, insecticide, spraying apparatuses will be required. A total of 10 long wheel base lorries of 5 tons capacity will be required. It is to be noted that some health offices did not have any transport facilities before the present anti chikungunya campaign. Some had vehicles (vans, double cabs, buses) which are not appropriate. In this respect, the services of 10 drivers would also be required and recruitment would be made against existing vacancies.

The above measures proposed are complementary to other measures taken to control the spread of chikungunya and other vector borne diseases, namely health education, community mobilisation and media-based campaign.

The total cost of the proposed measures will amount to Rs22 m. which will include cost of equipment and manpower.

I wish to point out that following the outbreak in 2005, it is regretted that no follow up action was taken to prevent the resurgence of the infection in 2006.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (e) of the question, I must say that it is too early to have a full assessment of the social and socio-economic impact of chikungunya in Mauritius. However, the first indications reveal that there has been a fall in tourist arrivals.

No marked absenteeism has been officially reported. Normally during this period of the year, there are other viral infections such as Rota virus which cause gastro-enteritis and Respiratory Syncytial virus, Echo virus and Adeno virus causing fever, upper respiratory tract infections, and Herpes Simplex virus causing fever which affect the community and the workforce.

The Director-General of WHO showed no undue concern to the chikungunya disease which is affecting Mauritius. He called for the community to assume more responsibility to clean the environment. The WHO technical team reassured Government that the preventive measures taken are appropriate and would contain the outbreak. Besides, WHO did not feel it necessary to impose travel restrictions in Mauritius because of the disease.

Mr Speaker, Sir, let me seize this opportunity to place on record our deep appreciation to the overwhelming response that our awareness campaign has brought from the public at large. The regression of the disease is visible and tangible. There is no room for complacency. The campaign against chikungunya and other vector borne diseases will be permanent. I would like to make an appeal that we do not relent our efforts to keep the environment clean and control vectors on a permanent basis.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I see that the hon. Minister has recovered well from his illness of last week. He also recognised that we circumscribed the disease last year, in 2005. May I ask the hon. Minister whether the figure of 10,000 cases which has been presented to us includes all the cases that have been reported by the private doctors throughout the island?

Mr Faugoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have here the figures and they relate only to the hospitals. We have 400 private doctors in this country. The statistics were about a hundred days, from January to now. Does that mean that, in the whole of Mauritius, we have had only 100 cases every day over the last hundred days, to have just 10,000? May I ask the hon. Minister whether the figure really reflects what is happening in the country?

Mr Faugoo: The figures I have given include those which were reported by the private medical practitioners. There are around 1,200 cases that have been reported by private medical practitioners, which are included in the figure of 10,000. As I said, I have answered to few PQs. In fact, there is an influx of patients going to hospitals and health centres, but this is also due to other viruses, which are normal viruses that occur year in year out when there is a transition from summer to winter, Mr Speaker, Sir. This explains the influx of patients going to hospitals.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, if we have 400 private doctors in this country and the Minister says that the number of reported cases is 1,200, does that mean that, over the hundred days, each doctor has reported only three cases of chikungunya?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but I must intervene here. The hon. Leader of the Opposition must realise that he cannot repeat a question. The Minister has given a reply. He cannot go on repeating the same question.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is: if there are 400 private doctors and only 1,200 cases have been reported, does that mean the hon.

Minister has been able to monitor only three cases of chikungunya per doctor for the whole of the 100 days?

Mr Faugoo: I cannot answer for the doctors, Mr Speaker, Sir. What I can tell the House is the number of cases that were reported. In fact, one of the first actions that we took is to amend the law, making it mandatory for the private practitioners to report cases, which was not done last year. This is the first thing we did. We wrote to all the private clinics. We had meetings with the owners of the private clinics as well with the Private Medical Practitioners Association. They agreed, and we impressed upon them to report, because our policy is that whatever action we take at the level of Government will depend on the figures. I am giving the official figure to the House.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are three categories of patients: those who have gone to the hospitals, those who have gone to the private doctors, and those who have neither gone to the hospitals nor to the private doctors. The question is: How...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: How was the mandatory duty of the private doctors to report monitored by the Ministry?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, they are supposed to report. We don't have control upon them; we cannot have control upon them. They are professionals. We have served protocols, to which they have to abide. It is up to them to report.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reality is that, in the country, today, you have far more cases than those that have been reported by the Ministry. This is the reality; this is the truth. This is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have put a question as to whether the Minister agrees that there are far more cases than what he has said. Let him answer.

Mr Faugoo: I don't agree at all, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would like to say to the House that this is a most anti-patriotic gesture on the part of a Leader of the Opposition. This is the most damning statement one can make, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am talking of figures...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Order!

Mr Faugoo: I can ask the former Minister of Health, sitting on the other side of the House, whether there was a preparedness plan, a response plan, which was formulated to deal with any resurgence.

Mr Speaker: I will request the hon. Minister to reply to the question, please.

Mr Faugoo: I have already replied, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question that arises today is the capacity of the country to address an epidemic. We know that today the bird flu epidemic is one of the threats that we are facing. Already in February, Mr Pierre Formenti, from the WHO delegation that came to Mauritius, made the following statement - "*C'est déjà une épidémie à Maurice*".

I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether the situation has gone better since February up to now.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the basic of epidemiology. Any epidemic in a country goes up, does a peak, plateaus and then comes down. In February, it was the peak. We were recording 400 cases per day. Today, the figure speaks for itself. It is going down to about 50 to 60 cases a day, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reality is that the cases are far more. Can I ask the hon. Minister how many samples were tested every day since the beginning of the outbreak?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, out of the samples that were taken, which stands at 12,177, 7,895 were found positive. Around 10,000 were sent for screening, and 7, 895 were found to be positive.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister how many samples were discarded?

Mr Faugoo: It is the difference between the samples which were taken and those sent to the laboratory. It is only about 2,000 samples that were not sent.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister what was the capacity of the laboratory to do the sampling on a single day?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I must say that last year there were no tests carried out at all.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have two ways to carry out the test. One is the PCR, which has a capacity to test only five to six cases a day. The other one is culturing of blood, and the capacity of the laboratory is 300 to 400 tests a day.

Mr Bodha: Can I ask the hon. Minister how many samples were discarded every day?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Faugoo: I have already answered the question. I said that 2000 were not sent. If we divide it by the number of days, we'll get the figure per day.

Mr Bodha: Can I ask the hon. Minister how many samples were sent by the private doctors?

Mr Faugoo: Most of the samples from private doctors were sent to the lab, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the treatment. May I ask the hon. Minister when a protocol was designed for all the doctors in Mauritius?

(Interruptions)

Mr Faugoo: At the beginning of the outbreak of the disease, since January.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: When was the protocol designed?

Mr Faugoo: Since January, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has said since January.

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have the stereotyped manifestation of the disease and then we have the other manifestations of the disease and we know that there was no protocol which was designed at the beginning.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I'm sorry. Now, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is challenging the answer that has been given. If he wants to do that, he can do that another time, but for the time being, the supplementary questions should seek information and not give information or challenge an answer which has been given.

Mr Bodha: Who was the doctor who designed the protocol?

Mr Faugoo: All the doctors were sent protocols as from January, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: The truth, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that a protocol was designed only two weeks from now and the truth....

(Interruptions)

Mr Sinatambou: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir. Standing Order 22, paragraph 1 subclause (h).

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let me hear the point of order.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to Standing Order 22, a question shall not contain statement of facts unless they can be authenticated by the Member concerned. I would request the Leader of the Opposition if he cannot authenticate to stay put.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister that a protocol was designed only when certain doctors were giving treatments which had some damaging side effects like the use of cortisone? May I ask the Minister what did he do, in fact, to limit the side effects of treatment of steroids and cortisone?

Mr Faugoo: The hon. Leader of the Opposition is mistaken about a circular and a protocol, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Faugoo: Right from the beginning, we had given protocol on two aspects. First, on reporting and second on the treatment of the disease. That was done right from the beginning. Now, because we had information that some doctors were prescribing an excess of cortisone, we had to talk to the Private Medical Practitioners Association and then give them instructions. That's something different.

Mr Bodha: How did the hon Minister and the Ministry monitor that the protocol was implemented or not?

Mr Faugoo: Through the Medical Practitioners Association, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: In many cases, the protocol was not implemented, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Minister how many deaths there were inpatients who were being treated for chikungunya?

Mr Faugoo: There is no death recorded, Mr Speaker, Sir, of patients treated solely for chikungunya. As I have said...

(Interruptions)

Let me answer.

Mr Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer.

Mr Faugoo: As I have said in this House before, Mr Speaker, Sir, that chikungunya, may be a co-morbidity; it doesn't kill. We have only two cases reported, people who have died of some other reasons, they were chikungunya positive, but they didn't die of chikungunya.

Mr Bodha: Will the Minister agree, Mr Speaker, Sir, that chikungunya can make the patient more vulnerable to other infections and that this can be the cause of death.

(Interruptions)

... and that here have been cases of death related to chikungunya?

(Interruptions)

Mr Faugoo: I would have been surprised if it was otherwise, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is normal.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Dowarkasing: In fact, when the hon. Minister replied to a PQ on the 21 March this year, he quoted that there were around 4,148 cases. He also stated that everything is under control and the situation has been stabilised. So, how can he reconcile today, one month later, that the number of cases has doubled?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Faugoo: The figures are official ones, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the latest figure which I am giving to the House, the number of detected cases meaning confirmed cases, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Last question! Time is over, unless the Leader of the Opposition has a last question to round up the PNQ.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I raised this matter.

Mr Speaker: No, you cannot make a statement

Mr Bodha: Is the Minister, and through the Minister, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether we are setting up a national disaster campaign because ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Time is running out. Let us listen to the question and the answer.

(Interruptions)

Order! Order, please!

Mr Bodha: A national disaster campaign in relation to epidemics like chikungunya and bird-flu tomorrow.

(Interruptions)

Mr Faugoo: I would advise them to set up an Opposition disaster committee...

(Interruptions)

We have already set up a committee. On this side of the House, we are minded to work for the betterment of the people of this country and this is exactly what is being done, I can reassure the House.

Mr Speaker: Next item! Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister. I have to inform the House that PQ No. B/387 addressed to the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development will now be replied by Dr. the hon. Prime Minister. This Question will be answered after PQ No. B/359, time permitting.

PQ Nos. B/348 and B/349 addressed to the Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will now be replied by the hon. Minister of Arts and Culture, and the hon. Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment respectively. As the practice, these two questions will be answered after PQ No. B/419, time permitting. Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister now!

**FOREIGN NATIONALS - DRUG OFFENCES – NUMBER,
CONTACTS, ETC.**

(No. B/345) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to foreign nationals arrested in connection with drug related offences over the last five years, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police -
 - (i) the number thereof, nationality-wise, and
 - (ii) the number of cases in which their local contacts have been arrested, and
- (b) state if -
 - (i) deterrent measures were/are being adopted at ports of embarkation;
 - (ii) current measures at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport are adequate;
 - (iii) Mauritius is being used as a transit point for regional and international drug trafficking, and
 - (iv) the additional measures, if any, he proposes to take.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information relating to part (a)(i) of the question.

With regard to part (a)(ii), I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that there are 118 cases in which foreign nationals were arrested for drug offences, out of which 25 cases led to the arrest of 69 local contacts.

As regards part (b), I would like to inform the House that Mauritius is a member of Interpol and a party to several Conventions such as the United Nations Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, the SADC and African Union Protocol For Combating Illicit Drugs, and this enables regular interaction and exchange of information with other States whenever there are suspected drug-related cases.

Such interaction has enabled the implementation of stricter control measures at ports of embarkation as well as the identification and

dismantling of international drug networks. Mechanisms have also been put into place for arresting foreigners involved in drug transactions.

Regarding measures taken at the SSR International Airport, I am informed that at the level of the Police -

- (i) a team of ADSU is based on a 24-hour basis at the airport;
- (ii) an officer of ADSU with Police dogs has been posted at the Plaisance Airport Transport Service and Postal Service, and
- (iii) an 'intelligence cell' has been set up for the gathering and processing of information related to drug trafficking at the airport.

At the level of the Customs Department, measures taken are as follows -

- (i) Customs Officers have been trained on Drug detection, identification and profiling;
- (ii) a unit comprising of 4 Customs Officers and 4 sniffer dogs is based permanently at the airport;
- (iii) two X-ray scanners are operational for detection of concealed goods;
- (iv) radio communication devices have been procured for the Drugs Unit at the airport; and
- (v) camera surveillance equipment have been installed.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no sufficient evidence to substantiate that Mauritius is being used as a transit point for regional and international drug trafficking. According to the Police, most of the drug seized at the airport are primarily meant for local consumption.

In order to strengthen the present system to combat drug trafficking at the SSR International Airport, it has been decided to set up a collaborative mechanism involving all stakeholders such as the Police Department, the Customs Department and Airports of Mauritius Ltd. Additional measures are being taken such as -

- (i) the sealing of catering trolleys which have been identified as a possible means by which drugs can be carried from the aircraft inside the airport;
- (ii) additional CCTV cameras will be installed at strategic points;

- (iii) the reinforcement of perimeter patrol at the strategic points;
- (iv) the installation of additional X-ray equipment for passengers' luggage and for express couriers parcel, and
- (v) the acquisition of a software by the Passport and Immigration Office at the airport to enable gathering of passenger details prior to the arrival of the aircraft. This information will be used for passenger profiling.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to reiterate my Government's commitment to combating drug trafficking in the country, and all the necessary support is being given to organisations involved in the fight against this scourge.

Mr Varma: Can the Prime Minister inform the House of the total amount of drugs which has been seized in the 118 cases he just mentioned?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is in detail, one by one of the cases. In fact, since the question was about the foreign nationals, there are, as I said, 118 cases, but I can circulate the amount.

Mr Varma: Can the Prime Minister inform the House whether - with the amount of drugs which has been seized at the airport - the supply of drugs on the local market has decreased?

The Prime Minister: From what the Commissioner of Police tells me, most of the drugs that are found at the airport on passengers are for local consumption, that is, small amounts.

Mr Bérenger: I understand that the Prime Minister says that over the past five years, 118 persons have been arrested. Does the hon. Prime Minister have information as to how many are still in jail now?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question was about foreign nationals and I said that there are 118 cases in which foreign nationals were arrested for drug offences. Out of this, 25 cases led to the arrest of 69 local contacts. There is a long list, Mr Speaker, Sir, and some of them have been repatriated, that is, sent back to the countries of origin to be dealt with and sentenced there. In fact, this is the procedure and for some of them, the procedure is still going on for them to be repatriated.

Mr Bérenger: Sir, can I ask the Prime Minister whether there is any policy decision - since we are talking about foreign nationals who are in prison - to give priority of consideration for early trials in such cases involving foreign nationals?

The Prime Minister: I am presuming that there must be, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I can take this matter up.

Mr Dayal: Can the hon. Prime Minister say to the House whether training is dispensed to our Police officers to empower them with the skills of detecting suspects?

The Prime Minister: In fact, they are constantly being trained and more officers are being told how to tackle the problems of drugs, use of dogs and others.

Mr Varma: Sir, will the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether X-ray equipment are available now for the detection of drugs?

The Prime Minister: In my answer I said that the X-ray equipment are for the detection generally and X-ray scanners for the detection of concealed goods.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister did tell us earlier on that out of these 118 persons who had been arrested, some had been sentenced and he said some have been repatriated to serve their sentence in their country of origin. Can I ask the Prime Minister where matters stand as far as India is concerned? Because I understand that India is very keen to have its nationals serve their sentence fully in India and whether South Africa also is keen?

The Prime Minister: In the case if India, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not see that any has been kept here. In fact, that policy must be in line whereas in the case of South Africa, there are some cases where, in fact, penal servitude has been started here. As the hon. Member is saying as soon as it is practically possible, they will be sent back.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has one of the highest use of drug per head of population in Africa. I would like to ask the Prime Minister to send a strong message...

Mr Speaker: Put your question.

Dr. Husnoo: ... so that we have a zero tolerance for international drug traffickers here in Mauritius. Is Government going to introduce the death penalty for anybody found trafficking with more than 15 grams of hard drug?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that we are looking at all the laws and keep the options open.

Mr Bérenger: Sir, as a follow-up to my point concerning India and South Africa. In the case of India, it seems perfectly clear that the authorities are very keen to have their nationals serve fully their sentence in their country of origin, that is, India.

My question to the Prime Minister is: are we sure that this is the case for South Africa? Because I have a feeling that it is different, that the South African authorities are not that keen to have their nationals going back to serve their sentence in South Africa.

The Prime Minister: That's why I was distinguishing between India and South Africa. In the case of South African foreign nationals who have been arrested, I see that, in fact, most of them are actually doing their penal servitude here. Whether the South Africa Government wishes to have them sent to South Africa is not clear because they are serving their sentences here. It is the same for every case that I see.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the early 80s and 90s when most of the foreign nationals in possession of drugs were from India, a very strong and close collaboration was organised between Mauritius and India. ADSU people were sent even to India...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ganoo, ask your question, please.

Mr Ganoo: Can I ask the Prime Minister what type of collaboration has been set up between our country and countries from where these foreign nationals come, for example, from South Africa? Is there any type of this collaboration?

The Prime Minister: It depends also on the Convention that we have signed with different countries, Mr Speaker, Sir. As for India every effort is being made to send these foreign nationals to their country of origin.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know from the hon. Prime Minister how many arrests have been made at the airport and outside the airport recently?

The Prime Minister: That is a detailed question, but I can give the total number. Police tell me that they try to see if they can follow up the trail of the dealers. Sometimes they do not specifically arrest at the airport, but let it go so that they can follow the trail.

MBC – RECRUITMENT SINCE JULY 2005

(No. B/346) Mr S. Naidu (Third 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 & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House,

obtain from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, information as to, since July 2005 –

- (a) the number of new recruits, indicating –
 - (i) the capacity in which they have been employed and their remuneration;
 - (ii) their previous employment, and
- (b) the number of employees dismissed and the reasons for their dismissal.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, the information relating to Parts a (i) and (ii) of the question is being tabled.

As regards part (b), I am informed by the Director-General of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation that no employee has been dismissed. However, 15 employees on contract have resigned, the contract of three employees has not been renewed on expiry, and two freelancers have left without advance notice.

I am also informed that the Board of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation has already decided that a Human Resource Audit needs to be carried out with a view to assessing the manpower requirements of the organisation and streamlining its recruitment procedures.

Mr Naidu: Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister give the assurance to the House that the selection process has been done according to the requirements of the MBC Act?

The Prime Minister: It is for the MBC to follow.

SINGER J.B. – RESIDENCE – RAID BY POLICE

(No. B/347) 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 Commissioner of Police, information as to whether, on or about 14 April 2006, the Police carried out a raid at the residence of singer J.B. of Rivière du Poste and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2006, the Anti-Piracy Unit has been transferred under the aegis of the Anti Drug Smuggling Unit and has intensified its campaign against breaches of the

Copyright Act. So far, 36 cases which led to the seizure of about 200,000 exhibits comprising CDs and audios, have been established by the Unit.

It is in this context that on 14 April 2006 between 1715 hours and 1800 hours, upon reasonable grounds of suspicion of an alleged infringement of the Copyright Act, a team from ADSU searched the premises of singer, J.B. of Rivière du Poste, on the strength of a search warrant duly signed by a Magistrate of the Intermediate Court.

Following the search exercise, articles such as CDs, audio cassettes and jewel boxes and some documents were brought to the ADSU Headquarters for verification. The singer was also taken to the ADSU Headquarters at 1940 hours on the same day for inquiry. He was released on parole one hour later after checking all the matter.

However, I am further informed that after checking all the CDs, one by one to check whether there was any infringement of the Act, no offence has been disclosed in the above case which has now been classified.

Mr Guinness: Can the Prime Minister inform the House whether the Police broke a window pane to open the door?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I must tell the hon. Member that he, himself, has talked to me and he has said that there was a window pane that was broken, but the Police did not ring at the door. They put their hand through the broken window pane and opened the door.

Mr Guinness: Can the Prime Minister inform the House whether following an article in '*Le Militant*' in which the scripts of the singer were printed, that the raid was carried out?

The Prime Minister: I don't know whether the Police had actually read '*Le Militant*', Mr Speaker, Sir! I am told that it is concerning the copyright...

(PQ Nos. B/348 and B/349 – See after PQ. No. B/419)

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO – MAURITIUS SOVEREIGNTY

(No. B/350) Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) 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 issue of sovereignty of

Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago, he will state if the British Prime Minister Tony Blair has reverted back to him.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, I had a *tête à tête* with the British Prime Minister on the 26 November 2005 in Malta, during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Among others, I raised with Prime Minister Tony Blair, the issue of our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, as well as the proposed visit of Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago which the British Government had postponed on several occasions earlier.

Immediately after, at the request of the British Prime Minister, an *Aide-Mémoire* was sent to him on various subjects of vital importance to Mauritius, including the issue of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

In a letter which the British Prime Minister has addressed to me on the 04 January 2006, he has expressed his appreciation for the constructive spirit in which the issue of sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago has been approached by our two Governments. He was particularly struck by the statement I made in the National Assembly on the 09 December last, where I underlined the importance of the military base on Diego Garcia to maintain peace and combat international terrorism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, thanks to the initiative of this Government, the visit of the Chagossians to the Chagos Archipelago took place from 30 March to 10 April 2006. This visit was a joint initiative of the two Governments and all costs relating thereto have been shared equally.

Following this historical visit, our High Commissioner in London had a meeting with Lord Triesman, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 20 April. The latter stated that the UK Government was deeply appreciative of the way the visit to the Chagos Archipelago was organised. He requested our High Commissioner to convey to the Mauritian Government the personal appreciation of the Foreign Secretary, the Rt. hon. Jack Straw, who expressed his pleasure that the visit was handled with utmost care and skill and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned and he was looking forward to a closer cooperation and understanding on this matter.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, the visit to the Chagos Archipelago was a historic event and has served to create a climate of mutual trust which opens prospects for a meaningful resumption and pursuit of discussions between the two Governments on the sovereignty issue.

Mr Bérenger: It is five months ago that the hon. Prime Minister made a proposal to the UK Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, that, from what I understand, sovereignty should be returned to Mauritius and then a formal treaty entered into. Five months is five months! May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, in the *Aide-Mémoire* which he addressed to Prime Minister Tony Blair after his return, the issue of our sovereignty over the Chagos was tackled?

The Prime Minister: Yes, in fact, Mr Speaker, Sir. As I have said, I mentioned specifically the Chagos problem in my *Aide-Mémoire* to the Rt. hon. Tony Blair. When I sent the *Aide-Mémoire* this was specifically mentioned in it.

Mr Bérenger: In his *tête-à-tête* with hon. Tony Blair, Prime Minister of UK, did the Prime Minister try to find out what had happened? Because we know that, when I presented a new approach a few years back, the UK reaction was positive. Jack Straw said they would try and convince the Americans and then the Americans came back negatively and furthermore two Orders in Council were passed bringing us back completely to square one. Therefore, there was this zigzagging, Jack Straw approving then the Americans being negative and finally the Orders in Council being passed. Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he tried to find out what were the representations made by the Americans and why our British friends zigzagged?

The Prime Minister: Well, I don't know whether it is further to what was said, to what happened, I would rather not go into the details, but the British Government did indicate to me that the difficulty is that they have to talk to the Americans as well. As a first step this is what they said, they have to start building that relationship to come to an agreement at the end of the day. That is why I said I am not putting into question the military base at Diégo Garcia, but we need to have a formal treaty, the sovereignty returned to us and then we can do what we want. There is a long lease, if need be, for Diégo Garcia.

Mr Bérenger: It is only five months that the issue was raised with Prime Minister Tony Blair. Now it is expected that in the not too distant future, that there will have a change of Prime Minister in the UK.

Mr Speaker: This is a hypothetical question.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the Prime Minister whether he will agree with me that it would be in our interest, whilst respecting fully the protocol that exists, that we prepare the ground in regard to the next Prime Minister of the UK, of course, not in Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member said Mr Tony Blair is the actual Prime Minister, but I am in very good terms with Mr Gordon Brown.

Mr Bérenger: I did not mention anything like this.

The Prime Minister: That is what the hon. Member had in mind. I will certainly build on that relationship with him.

AFRICAN COURT OF JUSTICE & AFRICAN COURT ON HUMAN AND PEOPLE'S RIGHTS - LOCATION

(No. B/351) Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state if he has discussed the issue of the location of the headquarters of the African Court of Justice and of the African Court on Human and People's Rights with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation since 21 March last.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the reply is in the negative.

Mr Bérenger: Can I put a few supplementary questions? The Prime Minister says that he has not discussed the issue with the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs who replied to a parliamentary question. Can I ask him why? Because it is a very serious issue. We have lost that occasion - it seems so far - of hosting the African Union Headquarters for the African Court on Human and People's Rights. Why has the hon. Prime Minister not raised it with the Minister?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I don't know whether we have lost that initiative, it is still going on behind the scene, but not only behind the scene actually officially. What the hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs said on 21 of March is what is the situation although I must say the hon. Minister of

Foreign Affairs did mention it in Cabinet, but I don't want to give details of what happened in the Cabinet here.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister did say, whilst replying to this Parliamentary Question, that – ‘after we lost the vote - that should never have been taken, in fact - the hon. Prime Minister...

Mr Mohamed: On a point of order. Standing Order 22 (1) (b) prohibits the hon. Member to put any question that is referring to a previous answer to a supplementary question given on the 21 March, which he is doing.

Mr Speaker: No, I do not get your point. Could you please clarify?

Mr Mohamed: Standing Order 22(1)(b) which I shall read, Mr Speaker, Sir.

‘(1) Every question, including supplementary questions, shall conform to the following rules –

(b) a question shall not refer to any debate that has occurred or to any answer that has been given in the current session;’

And what the hon. Member is doing, he is referring to an answer which is given in the current session dated the 21 March. Therefore, it goes against the Standing Orders.

Mr Speaker: Let me hear the question again.

Mr Bérenger: My question is: the hon. Minister did say that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Public Infrastructure who headed the Mauritian delegation at Khartoum in January, that both had talked to the new Head of State in Tanzania. Is that the case?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. What has been answered, has been answered. The question today is whether the matter has been discussed by the Hon. Prime Minister with the hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs. The answer has been no. And then a further question has been put – the Hon. Prime Minister said discussions are going on and he is not, at this point in time, prepared to divulge to the House, I think.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know whether there have been any developments, any news concerning this very serious issue as far as the African Union is concerned.

The Prime Minister: Not as far as I know. But, as I said, this is the situation as at 31 March, Mr Speaker, Sir.

MAJOR CRIME INVESTIGATION TEAM (MCIT) - HIGH PROFILE CRIMINAL CASES

(No. B/352) Mr P. Bérenger (First Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will make a statement on the high profile criminal cases raised recently by the head of the MCIT in the public.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker Sir, the Major Crime Investigation Team which was set up in May 2000, is responsible to investigate into cases of serious crimes such as murder and manslaughter.

I have been made aware by the Commissioner of Police that recently the Head of the MCIT has made certain public statements to the effect that he would try to resolve some of the long outstanding serious criminal cases namely -

- (i) Conspiracy to commit a crime (Attempt upon the life of the Prime Minister) - (December 1995)
- (ii) Pomponette (April 2002)
- (iii) Bassin Blanc (November 2002)
- (iv) Ackmez Aumeer (January 2003)
- (v) Ismael Doba (January 2003)
- (vi) Indur case (February 2003)
- (vii) Ouma Ujoodha (May 2003)
- (viii) Dantier case (June 2003)
- (ix) MCB (February 2005)

Out of these nine cases, Mr Speaker, Sir, one has been successfully resolved, namely the Ujoodha case. The other remaining cases are still being investigated by the MCIT and the position in regard to each of these cases is as follows -

- (i) The case of conspiracy to commit a crime (attempt upon the life of the Prime Minister) was reported by way of inquiry on 15 January 2001 whilst recording the statement of a suspect involved in the case of "*Escadron de La Mort*".

Although, it appears that the questioning of the suspect was stopped – on exposure of this - the Police re-started investigating it, but on the evidence put forward, the Director of Public Prosecutions had advised a “*Nolle Prosequi*” in 2003. However, in March 2006, the case has been referred to the MCIT Team for inquiry as new evidence has cropped up. The investigation is ongoing.

- (ii) The Pomponette case (April 2002) concerns the missing of two persons. The MCIT has strong suspicion of foul play. So far, four persons have been interrogated.
- (iii) The Bassin Blanc case (November 2002) is at present subject to a judicial inquiry at the Savanne District Court. Furthermore, the MCIT is pursuing its inquiry into the case as new evidence has cropped up. One suspect has been arrested and released on bail.
- (iv) The Ackmez Aumeer case (January 2003) refers to a missing child. Five close relatives of the child have been interrogated.
- (v) The Ismael Doba case (January 2003) relates to a missing person. One suspect has been interrogated on 20 April 2006.
- (vi) The Indur case (February 2003) relates to a murder case. The State Law Office has referred the file on 06 April 2006 to the MCIT for further investigation. So far, two suspects have been interrogated.
- (vii) The Dantier case refers to a young lady who had been raped and murdered at Albion in June 2003. Two suspects have been arrested in March this year. DNA reports on the two suspects are awaited.
- (viii) The MCB case (February 2005) relates to a hold-up and the death of a person. So far, ten persons have been arrested and they have been released on bail. The inquiry is in progress to trace out the exhibits.

I am further informed by the Commissioner of Police that since September 2005, that is, as from the date the MCIT was reorganised and headed by a new Police officer, 45 cases have been entrusted to the MCIT

for investigation. So far, out of the 45 cases, the MCIT has been successful in resolving 23.

However, concerns have been raised in certain quarters in regard to the methods and tactics adopted by the MCIT during investigation. In this respect, I have impressed upon the Commissioner of Police to ensure that investigations are carried out in accordance with standards established by the International Human Rights Convention and also our own Human Rights Commission.

Moreover, in order to conduct investigation into serious criminal cases in a more transparent manner, video recording of interrogations have already been set up in Line Barracks and it is operational since 17 April 2006.

Furthermore, I wish to inform the House that we are shortly coming with a legislation for the setting up of an Independent Police Complaints Commission to look into complaints against Police Officers.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just want to make it clear. Concerning one of the cases which I heard the hon. Prime Minister mention, is it the case of Mare Longue where on 05 November 11 arrests were reported to have been made and weapons and 322 *plants de gandia* seized? Is that the case?

The Prime Minister: No, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am told that in the case of Mare Longue nothing substantial has so far come out. That is what I have been told. I remember having seen that document, but this is what I have been told. I will find it in a minute, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Those are statements by the gentleman concerned and then nothing crops up. I did not hear the hon. Prime Minister mention the case of the hold-up with loss of life at the Mauritius Commercial Bank where there were statements in that case challenging the figures of money lost and saying that foreign currency had been also stolen from the vault. Can I know why there is no mention to that case where public statements were made by the same gentleman?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I did mention the case, Mr Speaker, Sir. That was the eighth case where I said that so far 10 persons have been arrested in that case and they have been released on bail. The inquiry is still in progress to trace out the exhibits, I mean the money.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he can make reference to the statements again made by the same gentleman in December 2005, that he had uncovered a *réseau de pédophilie et de prostitution à grande échelle* in the north of the country? What has been the follow-up on that?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that an anonymous letter dated 15 April 2006 was received in the name of Mr Radhoa concerning sexual offences involving minors in the northern region. A fax was received on 17 April 2006 from a personal contact in France to the effect that there are offences of prostitution and paedophilia in the northern region where, according to the fax, foreign nationals and tourists are involved. A team has been set up to monitor the situation and surveillance activities are in progress, awaiting for the appropriate time, if need be, to intervene.

I should perhaps give the additional information which I have just found on the Mare Longue case. In fact, as I was saying, there is no case at Mare Longue. But while searching one suspect in the MCB case in November 2005, the MCIT has uprooted about 300 gandia plants and secured 4 rifles and 250 rounds.

Mr Bérenger: I'll ask the Prime Minister to revisit this Mare Longue Issue. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is aware. It was announced that 11 arrests had taken place, weapons seized, 322 *plants de gandia* seized. Now, we hear that all this has disappeared. We are very, very concerned, because my information is that there have been threats, interference etc. with the result that now the whole thing has evaporated, if I may use the expression.

The Prime Minister: I should have added, Mr Speaker, Sir, that 11 persons were arrested, but were then released on bail. In fact, I will follow up this matter with the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may be allowed a last supplementary question. In November that same gentleman argued, giving names and mentioning Vacoas that a *tueur à gage* was after him. Has this been taken seriously and what measures have been taken?

The Prime Minister: I have no information on this matter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Time is over. Questions addressed to hon. Ministers, please!

(PQ No. B/353 - No. B/359 - See 'Written Answers to Questions')

**SIC - CHAIRMAN - TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE &
BOARDS MEMBER**

(No. B/360) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Chairman of the State Investment Corporation, he will -

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom the terms and conditions of his service, and
- (b) give a list of all Boards where the Chairman is a member, indicating the emoluments and other benefits to which he is entitled.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am tabling the information requested.

**SIC - CHAIRMAN - MISSIONS OVERSEAS,
ALLOWANCES ETC.**

(No. B/361) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the Chairman of the State Investment Corporation, he will for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom a list of all overseas missions undertaken by him, indicating in each case the reasons thereof and the amount of allowances paid.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Chairman of the State Investment Corporation Ltd effected one overseas mission to South Africa from 15 March to 18 March 2006 in connection with prospective investment of the SIC in the gaming and entertainment sector. In that context, some professionals from the gaming sector were also interviewed.

Allowances paid to him amounted to Rs37,399.

STRAY DOGS – NUMBER, CONTROL ETC.

(No. B/362) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, in regard to stray dogs in the country, he will state –

- (a) their approximate number;
- (b) the health hazards they represent, and
- (c) the measures that have been or will be taken for their effective control.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, there has not been any survey carried out till date to determine the number of stray dogs. However it is estimated that there may be around 300,000 stray dogs in the country.

The most common health hazards are injury and infection to human beings and livestock through bites. Among the above conditions there are internal parasitism and rabies which, thank God, have not been diagnosed in Mauritius since 1896.

Government is conscious of the health and security risks caused by stray dogs and has taken the following measures -

- (a) Additional resources have been provided to the MSPCA which is responsible for dog catching activities. The number of vans has increased from 3 to 5 and additional staff has been recruited. As from December 2005, MSPCA has increased its dog catching activities by sending early morning teams from 5.00 a.m. and from 5.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. Consequently, the number of dogs caught has increased from an average of 800 monthly to about 1200 monthly. The number of dogs caught from January to March this year was 5,415 whereas over a period of 12 months last year it was 10,580.
- (b) 100 traps had been provided to the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, Ministry of Education & Human Resources, Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Beach Authority and hotels to enable these institutions to participate in the control of stray dogs.
- (c) The national sterilisation campaign has been intensified with free service offered in four regional veterinary centres, namely

at Abercrombie, Flacq, Rose Belle, Bambous and St Pierre. My Ministry has launched an intensive programme, in collaboration with MSPCA & PAWS (Protection of Animals Welfare Society) as from January this year on a regional basis. The campaign includes door to door canvassing for sterilisation and free transport to dog owners to encourage them to sterilise their dogs. This campaign has been carried out at Rose Belle, Saint Pierre, Grand Sable, Bambous, La Gaulette, Abercrombie and Flacq. Since January, 1,689 dogs have been spayed through this campaign in addition to 2,776 dogs spayed by PAWS. On the other hand PAWS whose activities were targeted at Mahebourg in the first instance, have moved to the Eastern Coast covering the villages of Trou D'eau Douce, Flacq, Roches Noires, Quatre Cocos Argy among others.

- (d) A national sensitisation campaign was launched in January, with distribution of posters throughout the country and broadcast of radio and T.V spots. Talks on humane education in schools, colleges, youth centres, community centres and social welfare centres by MSPCA are ongoing in order to sensitize the public on the need to register and sterilise their dogs and voiding the problem of stray dogs.
- (e) As a measure to facilitate and increase registration and sterilization of dogs, Government decided in December last that the registration fee of Rs150 be waived and the fee for retrieval of a pet caught by MSPCA should be reduced from Rs1,500 and Rs2,000 to Rs500 for all cases since January this year.
- (d) With a view to conducting the control of stray dogs more effectively, we intend to enlist the collaboration of private contractors. In fact, the Control of Stray Dogs (Amendment) Bill was introduced in 2003 by the previous Government, placing the responsibility for catching stray dogs under the control of the Ministry. This Act has not been proclaimed as private contractors have not been willing to undertake dog catching activities. Two tender exercises by the Central Tender Board inviting private organisations to carry out the catching of stray dogs have been without response.

The bid documents have been amended to attract response of private contractors and a fresh tender has been launched on 21 April and the closing date is 17 May.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister inform the House of the number of stray dogs which have been put down and those which have been reclaimed over the past year?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have the figures, but I can assure the hon. Member that the dogs are disposed of in a very humane manner. As to the number of owners who have claimed their dogs, I don't have the figure, but I will supply the hon. Member with the relevant figures.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House of the method which is used to destroy the unclaimed stray dogs?

Dr. Boolell: As I have stated, this is done in a very humane manner under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon.

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Minister state the number of dogs which are actually registered?

Dr. Boolell: I don't have the figure, but as I have stated, we have impressed upon the MSPCA to make it easy so that registration is within the reach and purview of almost one and all.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Minister inform the House ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, the question has been canvassed. The hon. Member should understand that supplementaries are meant to clarify the point. The point has been clarified. Next question, please!

TROIS BOUTIQUES – MAHEBOURG/ PLAINE MAGNIEN - VOLLEYBALL PITCH - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/363) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether there is any project for the construction of a

volleyball pitch at Trois Boutiques in the constituency of Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the project is included in the five-year plan of the NDU for 2005-2010 and will be implemented.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether he visited the proposed site for the volleyball pitch in Trois Boutiques?

Mr Bachoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the site is situated at the Trois Boutiques Housing Estate?

Mr Bachoo: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have already had a meeting with my officers and we have decided that we are going to implement it once funds are made available.

MARE TABAC – CREMATION GROUND

(No. B/364) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he is aware of the bad state of the cremation ground at Mare Tabac and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

The Minister of Information Technology & Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall reply to this question. Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Grand Port/Savanne District Council that the Mare Tabac cremation ground is not in a bad state. In fact, out of the three cremation pyres, one is currently under repair.

I am further informed that the cremation ground which is located in the cemetery compound is regularly maintained by the Council and a Burial Ground Attendant is posted on a permanent basis.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that the cremation ground in Mare Tabac is actually used as a dumping ground?

(Interruptions)

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I presume that this may well go beyond this Government's days, but I have no notice thereof and I will endeavour to find out.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is not aware of the situation. I will lay on the Table of the Assembly photos which show clearly that the cremation ground in Mare Tabac is being used as a dumping ground.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for his help and I will certainly endeavour to look into the matter.

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Soodhun!

COTE D'OR – SMALL PLANTERS - RELOCATION

(No. B/365) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether, following the decision to put up a Police compound in Vacoas on a plot of land commonly known as Defence land, he will state if the project for the relocation of small planters presently cultivating vegetables thereat and in the vicinity thereof to new plots in Cote d'Or has been implemented

Dr. Boolell: Following the transfer of a portion of land on which stood the Police Quarters to the Ministry of Education for the proposed construction of the Vacoas State Secondary School, a decision was taken by the then Government in April 2004, for an extent of approximately 6 *arpents* of land at Closel Vacoas to be released for the construction of the new Police Quarters.

The 6 *arpents* of land are occupied by 11 planters whom the then Government proposed to relocate on a total extent of 13 *arpents* at Côte d'Or. Irrigation facilities and land preparation works were also to be undertaken by Government prior to allocation of the lands to the planters.

My Ministry has now been informed by the Commissioner of Police that they are no longer proceeding with the construction of the Police Quarters. The issue of relocation of the planters concerned no longer arises.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister then confirm whether the land will be given back to the people using it prior to the decision of having the Police compound there?

Dr. Boolell: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(PQ No. B/366 - See after PQ No. B/419)

(PQ Nos. B/367 - B/369 - See 'Written Answers to Questions')

BASSIN, QUATRE BORNES – BINS DISTRIBUTION

(No. B/370) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the distribution of bins in the region of Bassin at Quatre Bornes, he will state –

- (a) if the project was funded by his Ministry and, if so, the expenditure involved, and
- (b) the criteria used for the allocation thereof.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the project was funded to the tune of Rs325,000 through the provision of bins for distribution.

Following long overdue requests by the inhabitants of the locality for an environment day and a clean-up campaign, the bins were handed over to the Municipality of Quatre Bornes for distribution.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister say how many bins have been distributed so far?

Mr Bachoo: Approximately 1,500 bins, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say whether it is envisaged to have a second distribution of bins in the locality?

Mr Bachoo: Not in the near future, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister enlighten us on which criteria the first distribution was done?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the *forces vives* of that region wrote to my Ministry as they were conducting a cleaning campaign throughout that

region. We received their request, and as we had enough bins available at the Ministry, we have provided them. That's all.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Minister confirm that there will be further distribution of bins? Because the inhabitants of Bassin have not received theirs and they are frustrated.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, this question has already been answered. The Minister said not in the near future.

HERMITAGE - BUS TERMINAL - CONSTRUCTION

(No. B/371) **Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the project for the construction of a bus terminal at Hermitage, he will state -

- (a) if there has been any delay in its implementation, and
- (b) when the terminal would become operational.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there has been a delay in the construction of the bus terminal at Hermitage due to additional works comprising the construction of toilet block, two kiosks and two stand regulator cabins, procedures for land acquisition and bad weather conditions.

The bus terminal is ready for operation and will be officially handed over to the Municipality of Vacoas-Phoenix on 08 May 2006 for operation and maintenance. However, I have been informed that the United Bus Service has started making use of the terminal since February 2006 for safety reasons and following representations from the public.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether care has been taken to ensure that all safety requirements have been met? Because there is a junction and a curve just beside it.

Mr Bachoo: There is a reason, which explains the delay in the opening of that stand.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The hon. Minister is stating that the bus terminal will be in operation as from 08 May. May we know whether all the necessary amenities will be there by the time it is operational?

Mr Bachoo: Most of the amenities will be available, Sir.

MORTALITY RATE - 2004/2005

(No. B/372) **Mrs L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will give the mortality rate on a monthly basis for the periods -

- (a) December 2004 to March 2005, and
- (b) December 2005 to March 2006.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to international classification mortality rate is calculated on a yearly basis. The indicator used for that purpose is crude death rate, which is defined as a number of deaths in a year for one thousand population.

I am informed that the mortality rates for the last five years are as follows -

- 2000 - 6.8%
- 2001 - 6.7%
- 2002 - 6.9%
- 2003 - 7%
- 2004 - 6.9%

The provisional figure of mortality rate for 2005 is 7% for one thousand population whereas the figure for 2006 will be available in early 2007, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Would the hon. Minister then confirm that we wouldn't be able to get the figures available for the month of January to April 2006?

Mr Faugoo: The figures will be compiled and laid on the Table of the Assembly, but I won't be able to give the percentage. As I said, which is given yearly.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I would impress on the Minister to do so please.

Mr Faugoo: I will do so, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister state the main causes of death in the country?

Mr Faugoo: The main reasons are in fact related to diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

VIRAL EPIDEMIC - NEW

(No. B/373) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if there is an outbreak of a new viral epidemic and, if so, will he give the number of people affected therefrom.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there is no outbreak of a new viral disease. During the past weeks, there has been an influx of patients with fever attending the Accident Emergency Departments of the regional hospitals and health centres.

My Ministry has investigated into the cause of this fever. The virology laboratory has not identified any new virus. This has been confirmed by preliminary results obtained from blood specimens sent to Réunion Island for analysis. The fever is mainly due to upper respiratory tract infections, conjunctivitis, diarrhoea and vomiting which are quite common during the transitional period between summer and winter.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Will the hon. Minister confirm whether a major number of the cases that have been reported to the hospitals were not mainly because of the chikungunya virus?

Mr Faugoo: I have given the answer in the PNQ of this morning.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Jugnauth: If the Minister is saying that there is no new virus, he will have to be careful in sending doctors on the television ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Put your question, please.

(Interruptions)

Mr Jugnauth: This is what he should do...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let me listen to the question, please.

Mr Jugnauth: He has to take care not to send doctors on television to talk about new virus.

Mr Speaker: Why he is sending doctors, then?

Mr Jugnauth: Yes, sending doctors on the television saying that there is a new virus.

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

AAPRAVASI GHAT TRUST FUND - COMPUTERS - LOSS OF SOFTWARE

(No. B/374) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Arts and Culture whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund, information as to whether -

- (a) any case has recently been reported to the Police in regard to the loss of software, indicating if two computers are presently in Police custody, and
- (b) any allegations of hacking have been reported.

Mr Gowressoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been informed by the Aapravasi Ghat Trust Fund that on 28 December 2005 two cases were reported to the Police with regard to -

- (i) missing of a software 'Autocad', and
- (ii) hacking of documents

I have also been informed that, in this context, two computers of the Trust Fund have been taken by the Police and are still in Police custody.

Mr Dookun-Luchoomun: May I know the outcome of the inquiry, Sir?

Mr Gowressoo: The Police inquiry is still under way, Sir.

ROSE BELLE SUGAR ESTATE - HERBICIDES - TENDER

(No. B/375) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Rose Belle Sugar Estate, information as to whether a new supplier has been awarded a tender for the supply of herbicides and, if so, the name of the supplier.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the management of Rose Belle Sugar Estate that tenders for the supply of herbicides for the year 2006 were invited on 29 October 2005 and seven tenders were received at the closing date, that is, on 09 November. The Board approved that the tender be allocated to four suppliers, namely Chemical House, Roger Fayd'herbe, Kirsh Co. Ltd and IBL Agro Chemical Ltd.

On 13 March, some problems were noticed in the fields with regard to the composition of one product, Diuron. The Board requested that an analysis be carried out by the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute, which reported that the product did not satisfy specifications.

On 17 April 2006, at the request of the Board, the management of Rose Belle SE, has -

- (i) cancelled the tender allocated to the company and reported the matter to the Ministry of Health and the Police;
- (ii) requested MSIRI to analyse all the other herbicides provided by the supplier as well as those that are in stock at Rose Belle S.E;
- (iii) suspended all payment to the supplier and will claim refund of amount already paid (Rs114,000) and damages for loss incurred by the sugar estate.

The Board has also decided that all new tenders will have to be compulsorily accompanied by a certificate of analysis and the certificate of origin, and to establish proper and clear procedures for the receipt, analysis and control of herbicides. I have been informed that in the previous years,

there had been no practice of carrying out analysis of herbicides supplied and procedures had never been clearly defined.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Since the tender for the best tenderer has been cancelled for the supply of diuron, can I ask the Minister whether the Board at its meeting which was held, as he just said, on 13 April, has decided that the second best tenderer be awarded the tender?

Dr. Boolell: I do not have the information, but from the information that is relayed to me, although it is not spelt out, it may be so.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the Minister confirm whether it was the Board's decision that had been conveyed to the Ministry? Because I have information to the effect that the General Manager has asked that the second best tenderer be discarded and that the tender be awarded to the third best tenderer.

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Lady is fully aware that the Board can make or cancel. So, it is up to the Board if the decision has been taken by the Board, the decision will be implemented.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: That is specifically what I asked, whether the hon. Minister can confirm that the Board's decision will be implemented?

Dr. Boolell: Can I impress upon the hon. Lady that the Board's decision will prevail?

At 1.00 p.m the sitting was suspended.

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

SOCIÉTÉ DES PROFESSIONNELS EN PSYCHOLOGIE - LETTER TO MINISTER OF EDUCATION

(No. B/376) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if he has taken cognizance of a letter addressed to him during the third week of March 2006 by the *Société des professionnels en psychologie* and, if so, will he indicate what action has been taken thereon.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken cognizance of an open letter from one Mrs Gianella Cathan, on behalf of the *Société des professionnels en psychologie*, which was published in the press towards the

end of March and which related to the new mode of admission to Form I. However, no official copy of the letter was sent to me or to my office.

As regards the contents of the letter, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the PNQ at our sitting of 21 March 2006 and to clear the misunderstandings which emerge from the letter as follows –

- (i) firstly, the new mode of admission to Form I is not a stand alone or isolated measure, but forms part of a series of initiatives in favour of education reforms which my Ministry is pursuing. This is the position I have stated and will continue to state in contrast to the view of the Opposition, which persists in making a selective reading of our reforms. It has, therefore, to be seen in the global context of further democratisation of education through the reinstatement of Forms I to VI colleges as set out in the Government Programme 2005-2010;
- (ii) secondly, by providing for admission on both regional and national basis to State colleges, through the new mode of access thereto, my Ministry never meant to identify an elite and at no point in time have I said so;
- (iii) thirdly and more importantly, the selection process had never been abolished between 2001 and 2005 and access to seats in Form I to the then Forms I to V secondary schools for period 2002 and 2005 was done through selection because in many cases, particularly in high demand schools as well as in confessional colleges, the demand almost always exceeded the number of seats available. MES had to choose the best deserving candidates for admission through a selection process, and
- (iv) fourthly, the introduction of the refined grading system for access on a national basis to the nine State colleges, as from January 2007, forms an integral part of our strategy of bringing overall improvement in the quality of education. It is based on merit, that is, performance.

Finally, I wish to say that in the elaboration of the new policy for access to Form I on a regional and national basis to State colleges, all views and opinions have been duly considered.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister talked about the view of the Opposition, but I was asking his reaction regarding the views of psychologists, professional people. May I ask the Minister whether he has responded to the wish of these professional people, because they proposed their help? Has the Minister responded to this wish of sharing opinions with these professionals?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, together with the opinions expressed, there have been many more opinions that have been expressed and all of them have been duly considered before the decision has been made.

Mrs Labelle: M. le président, en vue des points très importants concernant le développement de l'enfant, est-ce que le ministre est en présence d'une étude qui soutient le contraire de ce que ces professionnels ont avancé?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been replying to the question with regard to the letter to which reference has been made. There is no mention of any study and the results thereof.

Mrs Labelle: M. le président, ces professionnels ont fait part des conséquences d'une compétition sur le développement de l'enfant, les conséquences d'une dévalorisation de l'estime de soi. Ce sont les points avancés par les professionnels.

If the hon. Minister has taken cognizance of this letter, he should have noted these points. And, my question is: does the hon. Minister have a study, which can sustain the contrary of what has been stated? If he doesn't have, he just says so.

Mr Gokhool: I would request my hon. colleague to carefully read the letter, the content thereof. It is based on a hypothesis and the whole argumentation is developed on the basis of a hypothesis that this measure is going to promote elite. I have never said that. All that I have been saying is that students' performance will be recognised. That is what I have been saying. So, the letter is on the basis of an assumption that this measure is going to promote elite. The measure doesn't.

Mr Dayal: I should like to ask the hon. Minister whether the points raised in the letter relate to any scientific study that has been carried out and which has been referred to in that letter?

Mr Gokhool: I have read the letter carefully and the answer is 'no'.

Mrs Labelle: M. le président, lorsqu'on a parlé d'une évaluation - sur les compétences de l'enfant en se basant sur les performances scolaires - occulte et ignore tous les facteurs, autres qu'intellectuels, qui jouent un rôle prépondérant à cet âge?

We all know that there are many psychologists who have written a lot of literatures on these issues and I can go on, on these points.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I would allow a last question. Please!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, these are views of a group of psychologists. There are many other views of other psychologists and, the more so, this is not backed by any scientific evidence. That's why we have taken note and we have dealt with the matter.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, since we are dealing with the education of children, can the hon. Minister confirm whether he is prepared to meet professionals who have written a lot on that issue, and whether he is prepared to discuss with them and to see what comes out of the meeting?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me take the opportunity to say it once again. In implementing reforms, we are engaging dialogues and consultations, and the request being made is most welcome. If there is a request to meet them, I am going to meet them.

NURSING OFFICERS (MALE AND FEMALE) – EMPLOYED AS AT MARCH 2006

(No. B/377) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state the respective number of male and female nursing officers employed by the Ministry as at 31 March 2006.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that as at 31 March 2006, 737 substantive male nursing officers and 1129 female nursing officers were employed by the Ministry.

Mr Bérenger: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has the figure of how many new nursing officers we train every year and how many we lose to emigration?

Mr Faugoo: In fact, there are 501 nursing students who are actually following the course. As at present, there are 218 students who have already passed, but they are not on establishment yet.

As far as figures for those leaving the service, I can give for the three previous years. For 2003/2004, it was 107; for 2004/2005, it was 129; for 2005 to date, it is 68. Altogether, since 1999 to date, it is 664. These are for different reasons, not only because of emigration to other countries, but on ground of retirement, marriage ground which is quite consequential, that is, 165 out of the 664. There are those who have retired on other grounds and those who have passed away.

NURSING OFFICERS/CHARGE NURSES - PROMOTION

(No. B/378) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if any exercise has been effected from January to March 2006 for the promotion of nursing officers and charge nurses to the rank of charge nurses and ward managers respectively and, if so, will he give the number of female and male nursing officers and charge nurses thus promoted in each case.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the following promotion exercises have been carried out from January to 31 March 2006 in the grades of Charge Nurse (Male and Female) and Ward Manager (Male and Female) -

- (i) 27 male Nursing Officers were offered promotion as Charge Nurse (Male) on 27 March 2006 with retroactive effect as from the date of existing vacancies in that grade.
- (ii) 25 female Nursing Officers have been recommended on 30 November, 2005 to the Public Service Commission for promotion as Charge Nurse (Female). The matter is still under consideration by the PSC and they will be offered promotion with retroactive effect as from the date of existing vacancies in that grade.

- (iii) 12 Charge Nurses (Male) were offered promotion on 03 February 2006 as Ward Managers (Male) with retroactive effect as from the date of existing vacancies in that grade.
- (iv) 21 Charge Nurses (Female) were offered promotion on 09 March 2006 as Ward Manager (Female) with retroactive effect as from the date of existing vacancies in that grade.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the Minister whether the criteria for promotion are the same for male and female nursing officers?

Mr Faugoo: I guess it is the same, Mr Speaker, Sir.

STUDENTS - PREVOCATIONAL CLASSES (2003) AND NATIONAL TRADE CERTIFICATE FOUNDATION COURSE (2006)

(No. B/379) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the number of students who joined -

- (a) the prevocational classes in 2003, and
- (b) the National Trade Certificate Foundation Course in 2006.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in 2003, around 3,158 students were admitted in the prevocational classes in both State and private secondary schools out of which 1,847 joined the National Trade Certificate Foundation Course in January 2006.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the Minister what measures are being taken to encourage these pupils to continue their course? Because we find that there is a considerable amount of drop-outs.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the prevocational classes started in 2003 and they were to be for three years. There was no plan which was made for the fourth year. It was on when the programme was started. Then the previous Government realised what to do with these children who followed three years, then they brought in the fourth year, that is, the foundation course. So, in between many people left and that explains the low number.

With regard to what is being done, I would repeat what I have said. Prior to the introduction of compulsory education up to the age of 16 in December 2004, it is possible for students to drop out. As I have indicated before, we are in transition stage and there is need to completely revisit the whole prevocational education which, according to stakeholders, is not giving the required results. In this respect, in line with Government Programme 2005/2010 which provided for the revamping of polytechnic projects and the setting up of the *Institut pour la formation et l'éducation tertiaire*, my Ministry has set up an *ad hoc* committee with the following terms of reference -

- (i) to propose a curriculum that will ensure a harmonisation between prevocational and IVTB run foundation course curriculum, and
- (ii) to work out a phased approach for the development of prevocational curriculum resulting in the production and writing of the relevant materials.

In the light of the outcome of the work of the committee, my Ministry will examine the matter further for the elaboration of a new policy.

ENTERPRISE MAURITIUS LTD. - SMEs - ASSISTANCE

(No. B/380) 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 Enterprise Mauritius Ltd., information as to the number of Small and Medium Enterprises which have benefited from its services since July 2005.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, as per its mandate, Enterprise Mauritius does not offer its services according to size of enterprises. It provides assistance to companies by category of services in the industrial and services sectors, excluding financial and tourism sectors.

I am further informed that since July 2005, Enterprise Mauritius has provided a total of 798 different types of assistance to 250 enterprises, among others, in the following areas -

- (a) Market Development Services

- (b) Training in merchandising, industrial pattern making, fashion design and garment CAD for textile and clothing companies
- (c) Market intelligence and market leads
- (d) Support to product development and quality improvement
- (e) Plant intervention in textile and clothing companies especially SMEs to address specific problems

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am laying in the Library of the National Assembly information on the different types of services provided by Enterprise Mauritius to the 250 enterprises since July 2005.

FIRE VICTIMS - STATE LAND - APPLICATIONS

(No. B/381) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether in regard to the victims of fire and natural disasters, he will state the number, region-wise, who have applied to the Ministry for a plot of land.

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly as soon as the exercise is completed.

Sir, I would also like to point out that in many cases, applications for State land do not carry information as regards whether the applicant is a fire victim or a victim of natural disasters. However, as indicated in my reply to PQ B/188 and in line with this Government policy of putting people first, my Ministry has not limited its assistance to families of fire victims only.

In this respect, plots of State land at Cité La Cure and Morcellement Raffray Le Hochet, Terre Rouge, were granted to families of fire victims and landslide problem.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dulull: My Ministry is also opening up alternative housing opportunities to families in distress.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister mentioned areas where land has already been granted to victims. Will the same consideration be extended to other families facing the same problem?

Mr Dulull: Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned in my reply to a PQ that it will be decided on a case to case basis.

NHDC LTD. - HOUSING UNITS - APPLICATION, DELIVERY, ETC.

(No. B/382) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the NHDC Ltd., information as to -

- (a) the number of housing units since July 2005
 - (i) completed, and
 - (ii) delivered, and
- (b) the number of applications for a housing unit pending as at to date.

Mr Dulull: Sir, with your permission, I will reply to PQ No. B/382 and PQ No. B/413 together as they are both related.

I am advised that since July 2005, 381 housing units have been completed and 176 units have been delivered. The total number of applications registered at the NHDC is at to date 23,409, of which 18,454 relate to low cost housing units.

In regard to the measures being taken by my Ministry to address the issue, tenders for the construction of 533 low cost housing units spread over 6 sites - Chebel, Bambous, Henrietta, Rivière des Anguilles, Ville Noire and Rose Belle (Balisson)...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dulull: ...including infrastructures works have been advertised on 18 April 2006 by the NHDC and the closing date is 01 June 2006.

Preliminary steps have been initiated for the construction of some 325 units at Calebasses, Glen Park, La Tour Koenig and Petite Rivière.

In order to make land more accessible to the low income earners, my Ministry is envisaging a large scale site and services project on a plot of 48A at La Cure (a high demand area). The project will be carried out in two phases spread over two consecutive financial years starting from July 2006.

Whilst realising that Government alone will not be able to meet the high demand for a housing unit, my Ministry has had consultations with the private sector on how best the latter can contribute towards the social housing programme. Already some 14 promoters have submitted proposals which are currently being examined in consultation with other Ministries/Departments concerned.

I wish to point out that over and above the aforesaid measures, there are other schemes like Government grant for casting of roof slab, Government grant for purchase of material and Government sponsored loans plus gratuity that are all tailored for the low-income earners in the quest of a housing unit. Moreover, the MHC has revised its interest rate from 10.75% to 9.75% for housing loans up to Rs300,000.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister where are the 163 units delivered situated?

Mr Dulull: The houses ready for delivery are found at Notre Dame and Cottage.

Mr Lesjongard: Can the hon. Minister inform the House when the housing units at Cité la Cure will be completed and delivered?

Mr Dulull: They are in the process of completion and will be delivered in due course.

CEB – FAULTS – NUMBER SINCE JULY 2005

(No. B/383) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the CEB the number of faults –

- (a) recorded area-wise since July 2005 on the high and low tension networks respectively, and
- (b) attended during normal working hours and after working hours on the low tension network.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am laying in the Library of the National Assembly a copy of a document giving out the relevant information.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether clearing of faults on low voltage network is done live?

Dr. Kasenally: It is pretty dangerous, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I need notice of that question.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether the CEB is having recourse to a call centre to register complaints?

Dr. Kasenally: Although it does not fall within the purview of this question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll give the information. There is a call centre; the number is 130, and it is highly effective.

Mr Dowarkasing: Since the Minister is stating that it is highly effective, can I know what is the cost the CEB is paying per call registered at this particular call centre?

Dr. Kasenally: If the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I'll give the information.

CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE – FOGGING OPERATIONS – COMPLAINTS BY OFFICERS

(No. B/384) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether he will

state if he has received any health complaints from officers carrying out the fogging exercise to combat the chikungunya disease and, if so, will he state what remedial measures have been taken.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that verbal complaints have been received from some officers involved in fogging operations to combat chikungunya.

Subsequently, Occupational Health Physicians of my Ministry have been carrying out medical examinations of all officers involved in fogging operations.

During medical examinations, affected officers complained of mild irritation of skin, nose and throat and burning of eyes. Appropriate treatment and advice were given.

I am advised that this may occur if personal protective equipment is not used during fogging operations. In this context, I wish to point out that appropriate personal protective equipment, as mentioned in my reply to PQ B/322, have been provided to all those involved in fogging operations including Health Inspectors.

Furthermore, a circular has been issued to all Principal Health Inspectors in charge of the respective Health Offices, requesting them *inter alia* to ensure that all their staff do wear suitable personal protective equipment provided to them.

Fresh instructions have been given to all Principal Health Inspectors to ensure that staff involved in vector control operations wear the personal protective equipment provided to them. They have also been requested to monitor the situation closely.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether SMF officers are also provided with these equipment?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, all those involved in larviciding and fogging activities have been provided with these equipment.

Mr Lesjongard: Since we have been fogging the whole island for the past two months, has a study been carried out to assess the environmental impact of fogging on our fauna and flora?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but this does not arise from the original question.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that a Senior Health Inspector – a senior officer of his Ministry – has been admitted to hospital and is still suffering from health problems resulting from fogging exercise?

Mr Faugoo: I am not aware. I will request the hon. Member to pass on the information to me.

PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTS – PRICE REVIEW

(No. B/385) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether, in regard to Government's proposal to review the price of pharmaceutical products, he will state where matters stand.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, the process of consultation with importers of pharmaceutical products and retail pharmacists is still in progress. I wish also to inform the House that, following a number of meetings held at my Ministry, all stakeholders are agreeable to the principle that pharmaceutical products cannot be sold at unaffordable prices. Till now, they have shown much interest to adhere to this principle. I would seize this opportunity to thank all the stakeholders for their positive attitude, and more so, the collaboration they extended in the fight against chikungunya.

At present, my Ministry is considering to include the bonus quantity allocated to importers by suppliers in the pricing formula. This measure hopefully would bring down the prices. Presently, the maximum mark-up on pharmaceutical products is 35%, plus a special allowance of 2% is given.

I wish to add that the STC is presently exploring possibilities of importing high demand pharmaceutical products with respect to common diseases in Mauritius. this would enlarge competition and thus contribute towards price reduction. The recent initiative of STC to import and to put on sale citronella and neem oil has proved to be successful.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister how is this mark-up of 35% shared between the retail and wholesale pharmacies?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't have the exact information for the moment, but I will provide it to the hon. Member.

Mr Dowarkasing: Can I know from the hon. Minister why is it that there has been so much delay in reviewing the price of pharmaceutical products, whereas he reacted very promptly with respect to milk?

Dr. Jeetah: I do not wish to comment on what the hon. Member said. I think he is wrong. As I said, we are in the process of consultation. I think the hon. Member will understand that nobody would want to put people's lives in danger. So, we are doing whatever needs to be done.

MILK (IMPORTED) – QUALITY

(No. B/386) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Co-operatives whether he is aware of a recent case of low quality milk imported in bulk and packed under a higher quality brand and, if so, will he state the steps that have been or will be taken to prevent such practices.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that this case is still under investigation. As such, it would not be proper for me, at this stage, to make any comment thereon. But, regarding the specific point raised by the hon. Member, the House may wish to note that a committee of officials of my Ministry is being set up to look into ways and means to strengthen the present legal framework and control mechanism to discourage improper practices. I am prepared to take on board any suggestion to be made by the hon. Member.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister who is carrying out an inquiry in this matter?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that an investigation has been carried out by ICAC.

(PQ No. B/387 – See ‘Written Answers to Questions’)

FOREST SIDE SSS – STUDENT – TRANSFER TO SODNAC SSS

(No. B/388) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources

whether he is aware if any Form III student of the Forest Side State Secondary School has been recently transferred to the Sodnac State Secondary School and, if so, will he state the circumstances which led to the transfer.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to information available at my Ministry, 11 candidates applied for transfer to Sodnac SSS. Only two candidates have the highest aggregate - 25, 5 A. The demand for transfer for the two candidates who fulfil the criteria (i) highest aggregate, (ii) proximity, was acceded to as vacancies existed.

I wish to inform the House that independently of the general transfer exercise, my Ministry also receives *ad hoc* requests for transfer all throughout the year and such applications are examined and generally speaking, if the requests are received in the first half of the school year and vacancies exist, they are favourably entertained. If vacancies do not exist or if the *ad hoc* applications are made in the later half of the year, the applicants are advised to reapply next year.

As regards the specific point raised in the question of the hon. Member, I am informed that an *ad hoc* request was received from a student of Form III from Forest Side SSS for transfer to Sodnac SSS, and as a vacancy was available at Sodnac SSS, at the material time, after the general transfer exercise, the request was approved.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the Minister whether the 11 applications were received from zone three itself?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the application mentioned a change of address and my Ministry has verified; and there was a change of address to the zone to which the admission was sought.

Mr Gunness: Is the Minister prepared to table a copy of the change of address?

Mr Gokhool: To satisfy the curiosity of the hon. Member, I will do so.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the Minister whether, from the proof which is being laid on the Table, be it CEB bill or water bill, the name of the responsible party is on that particular bill?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is, there is evidence which has been provided that there has been a change of address;

this has been deemed to be *bona fide* by the Ministry, and the most important thing is that this candidate has the highest aggregate and the other candidates on the waiting list do not have that aggregate. So, nobody is being penalised.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: There is absolutely nothing personal meant in that case. But, my question to the Minister before I come back on this question of change of address: is the Minister prepared to confirm that all procedures were followed - there are detailed procedures to be followed - in that case?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have to clearly understand that there is a general transfer exercise. Once the exercise is over, *ad hoc* cases are also considered if a vacancy exists. There was a list of candidates who had applied, but there was no vacancy at that material point in time. When the exercise was over, a vacancy arose and, well before that point in time, the application was received and it was considered on the basis that that candidate had the highest aggregate and the other candidates had lower aggregates.

Mr Bérenger: Is the hon. Minister therefore confirming that once the vacancy had occurred that the candidate, the families and so on, followed all the required procedures?

Mr Gokhool: This is what I am telling the House, that we have looked at the case and the parents made a representation on the basis of change of address. There is a letter to that effect; the evidence is being tabled as well as the aggregate of the candidate.

Mr Bérenger: There is no quarrel there at all. My question is: since allegations have been made - apart from CWA, CEB bills - we know the problems that have arisen in the past - has any form of inquiry been carried out to ascertain whether there has indeed been a change of address or whether a pretext is being used?

(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: I think that we have to deal with this matter very carefully because it has to do with students and education.

(Interruptions)

We have the evidence of the change of address in the rent book. So, this is there and it confirms the change of address. Together with the change of address we also look at the other criteria. Change of address by itself will not allow students to get access, the other criteria is the aggregate and this student has the highest aggregate.

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon. Guinness.

Mr Guinness: This is a case of unfair advantage...

Mr Speaker: I'm sorry. The hon. Member cannot comment on the answer which has been given at question time. If the hon. Member wants to come back through another means, he can do so.

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the mother of that child is not the Deputy Rector of SSS Sodnac and by that way she got the information that there is a seat available? So, how will other students ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Guinness: How will other students know that a vacancy exists at SSS Sodnac?

(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: I take strong exception to the fact that the hon. Member is referring to the mother of a student. Any citizen, whether mother or Rector, if the procedures have been followed, he is entitled to get a seat.

(Interruptions)

I don't think I can discriminate on the basis of the fact that the child's mother is a Deputy Rector. I can't discriminate on that basis.

Mr Speaker: Order! Next question!

Mr Bérenger: If you would allow me one question. This is going to be with us for a long time. The point is: how do parents come to know that there are vacancies so that every child is given the fair chance?

Mr Gokhool: This is a fair question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to clarify this. At the beginning of the year, the exercise is undertaken and it is published in the press. Those who want a transfer can apply; this is the general transfer exercise.

(Interruptions)

Ad hoc transfers also take place throughout the year, depending upon the criteria. If the candidate satisfies the criteria and the vacancies are there, this can be done.

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – LOWER VI - VACANCIES

(No. B/389) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if all the vacancies in Lower VI in the State Secondary Schools have already been filled and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that 434 vacancies in available subject combinations were reported in the State schools for students coming from private secondary schools. 419 applications were received, out of which 314 have been favourably entertained.

I am also informed that around 120 vacancies have remained unfilled for the following reasons –

- (i) there was no demand for some vacancies in respect to specific subject combinations. In other words, the applicants did not match the vacancies in the subject combinations available or some schools like Marcel Cabon SSS or Sebastopol SSS did not attract candidates;
- (ii) some applicants did not satisfy the set criteria for promotion to Lower VI, and
- (iii) some candidates may not have accepted an allocated seat in a State school for geographical reasons and have preferred to remain in the private schools to which they were initially admitted.

The set objective of my Ministry is to broaden access to higher secondary education while, at the same time allowing the private secondary schools to remain a privileged partner in the provision of secondary education. Accordingly, all students of private secondary schools who could not proceed to Lower VI either because their respective schools did not run HSC classes or because the subject combination of their choice was not available thereat, were offered seats in State schools where vacancies existed and subject to their satisfying the criteria for admission to Lower VI.

In line with our policy of democratising access, my Ministry will look into the possibility of re-visiting the existing policy together with all consequential implications in order to ensure that in future vacancies are filled in an optimal manner.

Mr Speaker: Can I draw the attention of Ministers that when answering questions - although I don't have control on answers - the answers must be pertinent to the questions which have been put, and if the answers are long, they should be circulated.

Mr Guinness: It seems that a few vacancies still exist and I know students who are willing to get those seats. Is the hon. Minister prepared to advertise again for those seats?

Mr Gokhool: There are conditions which are laid down, they must qualify first. Secondly, they must also satisfy the subject combination.

(Interruptions)

Yes, but if they don't satisfy the subject combination, they will not be admitted. At this time of the year, I cannot say whether this can be entertained.

Mr Speaker: A last question!

Mr Guinness: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether this was not the practice in the past? There was a first advertisement after the result, then if seats are available a second advertisement is made. Was it not the practice in the past?

Mr Gokhool: It was exactly the same procedure. There was a first advertisement. We have gone through the second advertisement as well and, in fact, there was a third one, to give a third chance to those who were not able to get a seat. So, we went through all the procedures; and now we are

in the month of April and I don't think, at this point in time, it would be proper to conduct another exercise.

FINANCIAL SERVICES SECTOR – INSTITUTE – SETTING UP

(No. B/390) Mr D. Boodhoo (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if he intends to advise the Financial Services Promotion Authority to set up an Academy to provide continued specialised training in the global business sector to keep pace with rapid development and stiff competition in that sector.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the need to set up an institute to provide continued specialised training in the financial services sector to keep pace with competition is being examined at the level of the Financial Services Commission, the Bank of Mauritius and the Financial Services Promotion Authority (FSPA). It is envisaged that the institute will not only provide training in the global business sector, but also in all financial services.

The FSPA has initiated contact with two American Universities for possible participation in setting up of the institute. It may also be noted that initiatives are being taken by private institutions to provide training in that sector.

Mr Boodhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister when would that take place? When will the institution be set up?

Mr Sithanen: It is difficult for me to say specifically what would be the date. The discussions are ongoing between the FSPA and these two American Universities, but let me draw the attention of the House that besides the FSPA and the FSC, there are also some private initiatives being taken with a view to providing training in that specific sector.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES DIVISION - REFORMS

(No. B/391) Mr D. Boodhoo (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment whether he will state if he intends to bring reforms in the Employment Services Division of his Ministry with a view to providing better assistance to the unemployed.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am replying to both this question B/391 and B/349 addressed earlier to the hon. Prime Minister together.

I would like to inform the House that a number of reform initiatives are in the process of being implemented at my Ministry with a view to providing better assistance to the unemployed.

In view of the length of the reply, I prefer to table it and would like to take this opportunity to welcome suggestions from Members of both sides of the House after having gone through the reply on additional measures which they believe could be considered for implementation to further improve assistance being provided to the unemployed.

PORT LOUIS – TRAFFIC CONGESTION

(No. B/392) Mr D. Boodhoo (Second Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will state the progress achieved so far in relation to projects that will be implemented to reduce traffic congestion in Port Louis.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is taking a number of measures to reduce traffic congestion and to improve the traffic flow in and around Port Louis. With the assistance of the World Bank, a long-term prioritised investment programme covering all modes of transport based on a realistic appraisal of available financial resources and human and institutional capacity has been worked out under the Urban Transport Programme. This integrated 12-year transport programme has been derived to a large extent from the Integrated National Transport Strategy by Halcrow Fox Consultants, initiated as from 1999, and which has been updated to cover the period 2006 to 2018. The main components of this strategy are known and are as follows –

- (i) Provision of a Mass Transit System;
- (ii) Construction of a Port Louis by-pass of which three options have been identified, namely the Ring Road Project, the Harbour Bridge Project and the Elevated Highway Project.

The Road Development Authority has enlisted the services of a Consultant for a study of the new road from Terre Rouge to Verdun. This new road will provide a by-pass for the north/south traffic.

In view of the major investments required for the mass transit and the Port Louis by-pass projects and taking into consideration the current financial constraints, Government, in consultation with the World Bank, decided in March 2006, to opt for short-term and low-cost measures to address a problem. A team of World Bank staff is submitting a report by the end of June 2006.

Pending that report, my Ministry has already implemented a series of short-term measures as from July 2005 –

- (i) a bus stand at Coromandel to stem the flow of buses with limited passengers from entering Port Louis and causing unnecessary congestion in the City Centre;
- (ii) the use of the auto-pont on a Motorway at Pailles for cars in the third lane and priority to buses from the Motorway into the Eincar/Bell Village junction, and
- (iii) eliminating all parking slots along John Kennedy Avenue in Port Louis to allow the free flow of traffic.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to mention that similar short-term and low-cost traffic management measures at the northern entrance of Port Louis are being considered.

Government has also approached the French Government for the financing of a study for the –

- (i) provision of an additional lane to be used by buses from Trianon to Port Louis along motorway M1;
- (ii) conversion of Caudan Roundabout into a signalised junction, and
- (iii) coordination of traffic lights from Caudan junction to Immigration Square.

Mr Boodhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask a supplementary question to the Deputy Prime Minister. Along the highway *vis a vis* the Central Post Office we have a taxi stand which is just on the lay-by of the highway and every morning this causes traffic jam. Will the hon. Deputy Prime Minister consider finding an alternative place for this taxi stand?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I am grateful to the hon. Member for asking this question. Yes, we are trying to address the whole problem of entrance into Port Louis from the north and this is part of the solution we are looking at.

Mr Varma: Sir, can the hon. Deputy Prime Minister tell us what is the number of studies which has been carried out on reducing the traffic congestion in Port Louis?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I am prepared to lay them in the Library. Many of them are already in the Library. I'll lay any more that comes.

TOURISM INDUSTRY – CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROGRAMMES

(No. B/393) Miss K.R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications whether, in regard to the tourism industry, he will state –

- (a) the prevalence of corporate social responsibility programmes in the industry, and
- (b) the total amount of funds invested by the industry in significant empowerment and development programmes.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X.L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for the question which is very topical and pertinent. It provides my Ministry with an opportunity to carry out a survey in the tourist sector in order to assess the exact prevalence of corporate social responsibility programmes in the industry.

We believe that for the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry, it is essential that there is complete integration of the population with the tourists visiting our country. To facilitate this integration, the population should feel that it is benefiting fully from the fruits of tourism development, especially as the nation contributes to the prosperity of the tourism industry, for instance, for the grant of prime State lands and numerous tax concessions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, corporate social responsibility programmes of the private sector will undoubtedly have essential roles to play in this equation. I am pleased to say that there are some encouraging signs on the part of some of our partners in the industry who have realised the importance of embarking on social responsibility programmes for the benefit of the local communities in particular and for the society at large.

I am informed that several hotels voluntarily contribute to finance various welfare and social development projects. The various projects financed comprise –

- (a) participation in the fight against chikungunya, by carrying out cleaning, larviciding and fogging activities;
- (b) development of environment and infrastructure in the region where their hotel establishments are located;
- (c) setting up of the *Fondation Espoir Développement* for the betterment of livelihood of the local community;
- (d) sponsorship schemes for best students living in the localities found in the neighbourhood of the hotels;
- (e) preservation and maintenance of national heritage sites;
- (f) various other schemes such as housing loan scheme, medical scheme, study assistance, etc.
- (g) payment of contribution of Rs25 m by a promoter who acquires State land for a new hotel project to the Tourism Fund.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, without pre-empting the results of the survey, I do believe that the industry should be encouraged to provide more opportunities to our citizens not only to participate in, but also to advance to the highest echelons of the industry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, regarding part (b) of the question, my Ministry will include this item in our survey to cover the last two financial years.

The information will be laid in the Library of the Assembly in due course.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for his very informative answer. As he said the long-term sustainability of the industry and of these stakeholders are at stake. May I request the hon. Minister that, as a matter of policy, we may encourage them not only to have *ad hoc* and token measures for corporate social responsibility and empowerment programmes, but a certain percentage of the profits that these stakeholders make?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is very important that, for the tourism industry to prosper, employees and the public at large – we have seen the problem of *chikungunya* – must participate completely in the development of the sector. Therefore, any suggestions that my colleague or any other hon. Member would make in fostering this better *entente* in the tourism industry is welcome.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, to increase the social responsiveness of the tourism industry, can the Minister ask for a contribution of one dollar per day per tourist?

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think this issue should be raised with my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION –BIDS – PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANTS

(No. B/394) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will consider the advisability of seeking the help and advice of professional consultants for the preparation of bids to be submitted to the European Commission in the context of funds available under the Energy Facility.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Sir, Government will consider the advisability of seeking the help and advice of professional consultants to prepare proposals to be financed under the Energy Facility once guidelines for the call for proposals have been finalised by the European Union.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance whether he will look into the look and feel of how the proposals are prepared and whether they are slick? Because there are 30 m euros available under the Energy Facility and my information is that, in previous years, our presentation of proposals was completely unattractive and they did not even look at it.

Mr Sitanen: There are different facilities, Mr Speaker, Sir, one of them is the energy facility, there is also the infrastructure fund and the water facility. I am sure my hon. colleague is referring to submissions that were made by the previous Government in respect of the water facility and true it is that it was not well presented and it was rejected by the EU.

ST JEAN ROAD/SURATH AVENUE, QUATRE BORNES – GAS SHED

(No. B/395) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Local Government whether in regard to the building the ‘Gateway’ situated at the corner of St Jean Road and Surath Avenue, Quatre Bornes, he will state where matters stand.

The Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question. Sir, I would like to refer the hon. Member to replies made by the substantive Minister of Local Government to PQ No. IB/186 dated 30 August 2005 and PQ No. IB/462 dated 08 November 2005 on this issue. I am further informed by the Municipality of Quatre Bornes that, following a site visit effected on 22 December 2005, it was noted that the promoter had started an extension at ground floor along Surath Avenue to house a gas shed. On the same date the Municipality of Quatre Bornes served a notice upon the promoter instructing him to stop that construction as it was not according to approved plans. The notice has been complied with.

I also wish to inform the House that the Police and the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC) have already initiated their inquiries in the matter.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I appreciate the answer. I know that the substantive Minister is not here, but inhabitants of the region have said that the construction is continuing despite the injunction. So, I’ll request the hon. Minister to look into the question.

Mr Sinatambou: I shall indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

DISTRICT COUNCILS - PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

(No. B/396) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state if the Town and Country Planning Board has published guidelines on permissible development in each of the zones specified in the Outline Scheme approved for the local authorities and, if so, will he table a copy thereof.

Mr Dulull: Sir, Planning Policy Guidance has been published by my Ministry following the revocation of the Rural Outline Schemes by the Town and Country Planning Board and the deposit, for public inspection, of the new draft Rural Outline Schemes.

The Planning Policy Guidance for the District Council areas is available on the website of the Ministry, at the various District Councils and at the Town and Country Planning Board.

I have also made arrangements for a copy of the Planning Policy Guidance to be tabled.

In regard to urban local authorities, the planning guidelines are contained in the policy statements of the outline schemes currently in force in respect of the respective Municipal Council Areas. The relevant Government Notices are as follows –

Quatre Bornes	GN 1009 of 1984
Beau Bassin/Rose Hill	GN 796 of 1985
Curepipe	GN 216 of 1995
Vacoas/Phoenix	GN 126 of 1996

BOARD OF INVESTMENT – REPRESENTATION IN LONDON

(No. B/397) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board of Investment, information as to whether it proposes to open an office in London and, if so, when, indicating whether procedures have been initiated for the recruitment of staff.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, the Board of Investment (BOI) which has offices in Paris and Mumbai is presently examining the possibility of expanding its network in selected countries which represent potential for attracting investment. The United Kingdom is one of the selected target destinations.

I am informed that BOI is finalising the *modus operandi* for having representation in London. After that it will be in a position to determine its staff requirement and decide on recruitment.

CEB – RETIRED OFFICERS – PENSION ALLOWANCES - INCREASE

(No. B/398) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Central Electricity Board, information as to whether retired officers of the Board have received any increase in their pension allowances following the recent salary increase and, if so, the quantum thereof and, if not, the reasons therefor.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the CEB that it has been the practice at the CEB for the pension of retired employees to be adjusted following a salary review.

A salary increase has been granted recently. The CEB, at its meeting on 29 March 2006, discussed the issue of revision of pensions to retired employees in the wake of that salary increase. I am informed that the matter is still under consideration.

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CASINOS OF MAURITIUS LTD – GENERAL MANAGER

(No. B/399) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Casinos of Mauritius Ltd, information as to whether an expatriate has been recruited as its General Manager since 12 April 2006 and, if so -

- (a) whether the post was advertised;
- (b) his academic qualifications, and
- (c) the terms and conditions of his employment.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Management Company of the Casinos of Mauritius that no expatriate has been recruited as its General Manager as of to date. However, the possibility of recruiting an expatriate as General Manager is being considered.

MUNICIPAL & DISTRICT COUNCILS – SCAVENGERS – PROTECTIVE GEARS

(No. B/400) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will give the reasons why scavengers working in the various Municipal Councils and District Councils are not provided with protective gears such as boots, gloves and raincoats, particularly at a time when they are directly exposed to diseases such as the chikungunya.

The Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications (Mr E. Sinatambou): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question. I am informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, by the Local Authorities that all refuse collectors are provided with protective equipment such as boots, gloves and raincoats as prescribed.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, it was a complaint made by the workers of the Municipal Council of Port Louis, who came to see me. They said that gloves, boots and raincoats have not been provided for the last seven months.

They are working without these protective gears. I would ask the Minister to go and look into this because I would not have come with a question if I did not get any complaint from those people.

Mr Sinatambou: I thank the hon. Member for that and I shall look into the matter indeed.

CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE – NO. OF DECEASED PEOPLE

(No. B/401) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will give the number of people who have died during the last six months whilst being treated for the chikungunya disease.

(withdrawn)

PEDAGOGICAL INSPECTION – REORGANISATION

(No. B/402) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will give the number of inspectors within the National Inspectorate Division of his Ministry, indicating if this number is sufficient to carry out inspections in both private and secondary schools.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, contrary to what has been stated by the hon. Member, the National Inspectorate does not exist. At present, there is within my Ministry, a primary inspectorate looking at both pedagogical and management issues in respect of primary sector and only six pedagogical inspectors, coming from the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA), who are undertaking periodical and *ad hoc* inspection in some private secondary schools.

It appears that the attempt of my predecessor to set up a National Inspectorate was not a consensual one and it was fraught with a series of complications which made that, finally, it did not take off.

I am certainly not satisfied with the present state of affairs and I intend to embark on a complete review of the whole question of pedagogical inspection. Consultations have started with stakeholders and the work

towards the reorganisation of pedagogical inspection is progressing smoothly.

TEACHERS – TRAINING AND PROFESSIONALISM

(No. B/403) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the policy of his Ministry in respect of the continuous training of teachers.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the policy of my Ministry is to ensure quality education through quality teaching. Thus, my Ministry is focused on ensuring the professionalisation of the teaching staff through a number of ways, including through a process of continuous training. In fact, teacher training and continuous professional development of teachers is a priority of my Ministry.

The answer is very long, so if Mr Speaker does not mind, it can be circulated. There are many details. **(Appendix I)**

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

CEB – LOSS OF EARNINGS

(No. B/404) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether, in regard to the loss of earnings recently uncovered at the Central Electricity Board, he will state the amount involved, indicating –

- (a) what action has been initiated to recover that amount, and
- (b) the preventive measures taken to avoid recurrence of same.

Dr. Kasenally: Mr Speaker, Sir, I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the case where an industrial customer has been under-invoiced since the year 2000 due to an error - deliberate or otherwise

- in the programming of his electronic meter. The loss of earnings amounts to Rs41,224,549 over a period of 5 years. The under-invoicing was detected by the responsible officer of the CEB Meter Laboratory, which has been revamped incidentally.

The customer has been requested to make good the amount involved. The customer's response is awaited.

The CEB has taken the following preventive measures to avoid any recurrence –

- (a) an audit of all such meters is being carried out - in fact it was through this ongoing audit that this fraud was detected;
- (b) the calibration of meters is being counter-checked, thus mitigating, if not eliminating, risk of errors – wilful or otherwise.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT - MEMBERS - VISIT

(No. B/405) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry & Fisheries whether, in regard to the recent visit of the members of the European Parliament, he will state -

- (a) the issues which have been raised and discussed;
- (b) whether the proportionality of allocating funds under the accompanying measures among the ACP Sugar Protocol countries has been discussed, and
- (c) whether criteria have been proposed by the European Union for the allocation of funds and, if so, will he give details thereof.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, a joint ACP/EU Parliamentary Assembly delegation led by Mrs Glenys Kinnock and Mr Roy Chulumanda on behalf of the European Parliament and the ACP Parliamentary Assembly accordingly, visited Mauritius from 12 to 14 April 2006 to assess the impact

of the reform of the EU sugar regime on Mauritius and to submit a report thereof to the Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament.

The delegation had the opportunity to meet representatives of Government, the corporate sector, the small planters and trade unions. They also visited the *Belle Vue Centrale Thermique* and were briefed on the ongoing research at the MSIRI. Most importantly, they visited and interacted with workers in the sugar cane fields and also listened to the worries of representatives of small planters.

They had discussions with the Prime Minister, the hon. Mr Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development, the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as the Leader of the Opposition and hon. Jayen Cuttaree during a luncheon session.

The specific replies to the specific items are rather lengthy. I might as well circulate the information. **(Appendix II)**

Mr Dayal: Will the hon. Minister confirm that it is during her recent visit in Mauritius that Mrs Kinnock was first acquainted about the multifunctional aspect of the industry?

Dr. Boolell: No, this is an issue which has been canvassed and highlighted. In fact, with her thorough experience and being from a country where agriculture has its importance - and she had travelled throughout all the ACP countries - she understands the very essence and multifunctionality of the industry.

SUGAR INDUSTRY REFORM - ETAT MAJOR - VRS

(No. B/406) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Agro-Industry & Fisheries whether in the context of the Sugar Industry Reform, he will state -

- (a) if any study has been carried out to determine the cost of the salaries and other fringe benefits of the *Etat Major* of the industry as a percentage in the cost of the production of one ton of sugar, and

- (b) whether the Voluntary Retirement Scheme also includes the members of the *Etat Major* and, if so, the number who have opted for the scheme since its inception.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that the hon. Member is referring to non-agricultural staff members at middle and senior management levels.

In the context of the EU reform of the sugar regime and the preparation of an Action Plan for 2006-2015, a study was undertaken by a foreign consultancy firm, Landell Mills Consultants International on the overall situation of the sugar industry, including the financial aspects and reduction of overhead costs.

The consultants recommended among others the consolidation of estate management units which would lead to reduction of management costs. They pointed out that some estates have merged their management units and others are planning to do so.

In the light of the study, the road map for the sugar cane industry and the Multi Annual adaptation strategy have proposed the centralisation of the milling operations which would reduce the number of factories from 11 to 4. The centralisation process and the setting up of clusters would lead to a significant reduction of overhead costs.

As regards part (b) of the question, the VRS I which is being implemented since 2001 also includes members of the *Etat Major*. 29 sugar estates are implementing the scheme and the total number of employees who have retired through the VRS at the senior and middle management level is 135 up to now. With the centralisation of milling operations, it is expected that there would be further reduction of operational and fixed overhead costs.

COTE D'OR - GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - SMEs

(No. B/407) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in view of the shortage of sites in the region of Côte d'Or, he will consider the advisability of placing the site of the Government School thereat, and which is no longer in use, at the

disposal of persons working in the field of mechanic, panel beating, woodcraft and other similar jobs and, if not, why not.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources that though the Government School at Côte d'Or is not presently in use, it may be required to conduct National Trade Certificate Foundation Courses as from next year.

As stated in the Government Programme 2005-2010, the policy of my Ministry is to establish specialised zones for the benefit of SMEs with the appropriate support in each district. To this end, a committee comprising, *inter alia*, representatives from my Ministry, the Ministry of Housing and Lands, Development Bank of Mauritius Limited and Business Parks of Mauritius Limited has been set up to make an audit of existing available space and to conduct a matching exercise in terms of demand for and supply of industrial space.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the Minister consider the possibility of setting up same at Ecroignard where there are existing old schools ...

Mr Speaker: This is specific to one particular place. The hon. Member may come with a substantive question. Next question, please!

HIV/AIDS POSITIVE - BASIC INVALIDITY PENSION

(No. B/408) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions whether she will consider the advisability of introducing a basic invalidity pension for people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question of introducing a basic invalidity pension for people suffering from HIV/AIDS simply does not arise as such a provision already exists under section 8 of the National Pensions Act of 1976 as far back as 1994.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the question raised is of national concern, with your permission, I would like to make an overview of the situation prevailing today.

Today there are 737 persons who are HIV/AIDS+ve receiving BIP at the rate of Rs2,025 per month.

The beneficiary is also entitled to a child allowance of Rs655 (child below 10 years) or Rs705 (child above 10 years) in respect of every dependent child up to a maximum of three. A bedridden HIV/AIDS patient also receives a carer's allowance amounting to Rs1,225 per month.

In 1994, at a time when free medical treatment was not available to HIV/AIDS patients Government decided to award BIP to HIV/AIDS+ve persons.

In recent years there has been a steady increase in the number of HIV/AIDS infected persons.

Government has been providing free anti-retroviral drugs to people living with HIV/AIDS since April 2002 amounting to Rs1,500 - Rs2,000 per person per month and the cost to Government has kept rising. I am informed by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life that from Rs121,077 in 1999/2000 the figure reached Rs3,769,343 in 2003/2004 and Rs2,443,073 in 2004/2005. On the other hand, as at date with 737 HIV/AIDS+ve persons who are beneficiaries of BIP among whom 8 are getting carer's allowance my Ministry is spending about Rs19.5 m. annually on this item and the figure is expected to rise dramatically in the short and medium term with the detection of new cases and new applications for BIP by HIV/AIDS+ve persons.

In this context, my Ministry is having working sessions with the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development on the whole policy of giving assistance through (1) BIP and (2) providing free anti-retroviral drugs to HIV/AIDS+ve persons.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the last part of the reply means that there is a possibility of putting into question the making available to all those who need anti-retroviral treatment. I hope not.

Mrs Bappoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have not arrived to this conclusion. But it is the policy that we are reviewing. Of course, we need to give whatever assistance which is to be given as far as the treatment and the financial assistance are concerned to these people.

Mr Bérenger: Is the hon. Minister aware that Mauritius became the second African country to provide free anti-retroviral drugs in 2002 and it is a basic human rights situation?

Mrs Bappoo: We are well aware of it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

AVIAN FLU – PANDEMIC FLU / HIV/AIDS - MEDICINES

(No. B/409) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Co-operation whether he will state if there is any agreement within the framework of the World Trade Organisation or with other related international bodies for access to essential medicines for major health disasters like the Avian Flu, Pandemic Flu and HIV/AIDS.

The Minister of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions (Mrs S. Bappoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question. Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, provisions are being made within the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as follows –

First, at the Doha WTO Ministerial Conference in 2001, WTO Members agreed on a declaration on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and public health with a view to addressing access for developing countries to essential drugs at affordable prices for national health emergencies.

Second, WTO Members had agreed on a temporary waiver in a WTO General Council Decision on 30 August 2003 to allow generic drugs to be manufactured under compulsory licences for exportation to countries which lack production capacity provided certain conditions and procedures were followed.

Third, on 06 December 2005, after protracted negotiations, the WTO General Council agreed to approve changes to the TRIPS agreement that would directly transform the 30 August 2003 waiver into a permanent amendment to the TRIPS Agreement with a view to arriving at a permanent solution for developing countries to obtain cheaper generic version of patented medicines. A protocol amending the TRIP Agreement was adopted in the same decision. The protocol is open for acceptance by WTO members until December 2007. The General Council Decision was also reaffirmed in paragraph 40 of the 18 December 2005 WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration.

The 06 December 2005 WTO General Council Decision thus provides the legal framework of the WTO for access to essential medicines for major health disasters including Avian Flu, Pandemic Flu and HIV/AIDS.

However, until the amendment of 06 December 2005 comes into force, the waiver obtained in August 2003 remains in existence. Under this waiver, all WTO countries are eligible to import medicines except for 33 developed countries (including Australia, the European Union countries and the United States).

As regards Avian Flu, the World Health Organisation has engaged in negotiations with the original manufacturer of Tamiflu and Roche, the Swiss Pharmaceutical, Company has donated 5.125 courses of Tamiflu treatment to the WHO for rapid international response and regional response to a pandemic influenza strain. In the context of the visit of His Excellency, Dr. Lee Jong Wook, the Director General of the World Health Organisation to Mauritius from 06 to 07 March 2006, a request for financial assistance was made to the Director General by the Mauritian authorities for the purchase of Tamiflu.

For HIV/AIDS, the AIDS Medicine Diagnostic Services (AMDS) within the WHO is a network that is supporting increased access to good quality and effective treatment for HIV/AIDS by improving the supply of anti-retroviral medicines and diagnostics in developing countries. In partnership with a number of organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, the AIDS Medicines Diagnostic Services offers low-cost procurement solutions to ARV drugs and other HIV commodities to Government and non-profit organisations.

Therefore, the WHO has a qualification scheme for ARV producers to ensure that drugs produced are of good quality. Mauritius avails itself of this facility and buys its ARVs from WHO approved sources.

COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION PROGRAMME

(No. B/410) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Public Utilities whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to whether there exists a community water fluoridation programme for the promotion of oral health and, if so, will he give details thereof and, if not, will he state the policy that will be adopted in future.

The Minister of Health and Quality of Life (Mr S. Faugoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there is no community water fluoridation programme in Mauritius. However, to prevent dental caries and in the absence of fluoridated drinking water, fluoride supplements in the form of tablets are being distributed since 1981, free of charge to infants and children up to five years old.

Presently, the distribution exercise is being carried out in only 13 Area Health Centres covering about 35,000 children. Arrangements are being made to extend the programme to all the 26 Area Health Centres throughout Mauritius as from July 2006. It is expected that some 75,000 children will benefit from the programme.

Besides other fluorides, for example, tooth paste and fluoridated mouth rinses are easily available over the counter. Professionally applied fluoride garnishes are also used by the dentists to combat dental caries.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the implementation of any systemic fluoride therapy, such as water fluoridation requires stringent conditions of technical, monetary and logistics. The risks of fluorosis are also very high. As such, at this stage, it is not envisaged to implement such a programme.

Dr. Mungur: It has been noted that in certain areas 75,000 children are being given fluoride tablets. Can we know what are the selection criteria to give these children fluoride tablets?

Mr Faugoo: There is no special criteria, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is given to all the children below the age of 5.

CONSTITUENCY NO. 13 – SUGAR ESTATE WORKERS – VRS

(No. B/411) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries whether he will state if all the workers of the Sugar Estates found in Constituency No. 13 (Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) who applied for retirement under the VRS have been allocated a plot of land as provided for in the scheme and, if not, why not.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker Sir, there are five Sugar Estates which have offered the VRS in Constituency No.13. They are -

- (i) Bel Air Sugar Estate;
- (ii) Savannah Sugar Estate;
- (iii) Britannia Sugar Estate;
- (iv) Cascade Ltd, and
- (v) Union Sugar Estate.

Beneficiaries of three of the Sugar Estates have already been allocated a lot number for their plot of land through the drawing of lots exercise and they are -

- (i) Bel Air Sugar Estate;
- (ii) Savannah Sugar Estate, and
- (iii) Britannia Sugar Estate.

Infrastructure works on the sites of four of the Sugar Estates have already been completed, they are -

- (i) Bel Air Sugar Estate;
- (ii) Savannah Sugar Estate;
- (iii) Britannia Sugar Estate, and
- (iv) Union Sugar Estate.

At Bel Air Sugar Estate which has one site of an extent of 8.46 *arpents* to be allocated to 90 beneficiaries. The drawing of lots exercise was carried out on 17.11.04.

All infrastructure works have been completed and clearance certificates have been obtained from the relevant authorities. The company is awaiting the *Morcellement* Permit which is expected in one week's time, for the preparation of the titles deeds for handing over.

Savannah Sugar Estate which has 6 sites of a total extent of 37.27 *arpents* for 377 beneficiaries. The drawing of lots exercise was carried out on 11.10.04. Infrastructure works have been completed on all sites.

CWA will issue clearance certificate for Plein Bois and Rivière du Poste by next week. As for the sites of Camp Diable, L'Escalier, Mare Tabac and New Grove, a meeting has been scheduled on the 24th of this month between CWA and the company, following which clearance certificates will be issued.

Britannia Sugar Estate has 4 sites of a total extent of 43.51 *arpents* for 412 beneficiaries. Drawing of lots exercise was carried out on 06.02.05. Infrastructure works have been completed on all sites.

For 3 of the sites namely, Nouvelle France, Britannia and Batimarais, minor repairs and additional works have been requested and completed following a site visit by Road Development Authority and District Council on 28.02.06 and 07.03.06 respectively. The company is awaiting clearance certificate from Road Development Authority and District Council.

For the Grand Bois site, CWA has submitted a claim to Britannia Sugar Estate. The SIT as a partner of Britannia Sugar Estate in the VRS project, is objecting to the quantum of the claim and has requested for additional details. Britannia Sugar Estate has written to the CWA on 01.03.06 and a reminder sent on 11.04.06. Britannia Sugar Estate is still awaiting a reply from CWA.

I am liaising with my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, to expedite matters.

In respect of Cascade Ltd, we have a problem, Cascade Ltd has one site of an extent of 16.47 *arpents* for a total of 165 beneficiaries.

With regard to the site of Cascade Ltd, infrastructure works on the site have not yet started. The main reason is that the RDA had recommended that a roundabout be constructed at St Aubin for servicing the existing village, the new VRS *morcellement* and the St Aubin State Secondary School. Matters relating to the funding of the roundabout are being finalised.

Union Sugar Estate has one site of an extent of 25.38 *arpents* for a total of 265 beneficiaries.

While infrastructure works on the site have already been completed, the drawing of lots exercise has not been effected because of concern raised by the beneficiaries of Union Sugar Estate. The beneficiaries argue that some parts of the site on account of their slope are not suitable for residential purposes.

In some parts of the site, Union Sugar Estate had carried soil compaction to overcome slopiness. This compaction exercise was carried out following a study made by Professor Chan Chim Yuk of the University of Mauritius. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure consequently submitted their views on the compaction exercise stating that construction is possible.

However, the compacted parts imply additional cost for construction. The beneficiaries have expressed their concern on the issue of soil compaction and are still not agreeable to the site.

Accordingly, a site visit has been fixed for the 28 April 2006 with all the beneficiaries and other stakeholders to finalise matters.

SSR INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - FREIGHT FORWARDING OPERATOR

(No. B/412) Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state what steps have been taken in order to allow access to more than one Freight Forwarding Operator at the SSR International Airport since the beginning of 2006.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

I am informed that the Customs Department has not received any new application to operate as Freight Forwarding Operator at the SSR International Airport since the beginning of 2006. Should such an application be made, the Customs Department will consider same accordingly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in my reply to PQ No. B/625 on the same subject, I informed the House of the position regarding the operations of Freight Forwarding Agents at the airport. I wish to add that Airports of Mauritius Ltd. is pursuing its project for the development of the Freight Logistic Centre in line with its vision to transform the airport into an integrated logistic hub in the Indian Ocean. In this context, it has already launched a notice for Expression of Interest for the development of the cargo zone inviting companies interested in the setting up of facilities related to cargo activities such as warehouses, courier centres, refrigerated facilities and office blocks. It has also embarked on discussions with the Mauritius Sugar Authority to secure land to accommodate the facility. A tender exercise will be launched upon completion of these procedures.

NHDC - LOW COST HOUSING UNITS

(No. B/413) **Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac)** asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether he will state if any survey has been carried since July 2005 in order to assess the number the number of people in need of low cost housing units and who have applied for same at the NHDC Ltd, indicating the measures being taken by his Ministry to address this issue.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. B/382)

SOUTH AFRICA - WORLD CUP

(No. B/414) **Mr S. Mohamed (Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac)** asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether he will state the measures, if any, that are beign taken by his Ministry to benefit from the organisation of the World Cup in South Africa in the year 2010 and, if not, why not.

Mr Tang Wah Hing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Third Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac for his question which goes along the current thinking of my Ministry, with regard to taking maximum advantage of the holding of the Football World Cup in South Africa in the year 2010.

In this context, I would like to apprise the House that my Ministry has already started preliminary discussions with stakeholders to explore the possible avenues concerning benefits to be derived from this major international event in our region.

The relevant strategies will be worked out in due course by involving all the stakeholders concerned.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister consider the possibility of having foreign national teams qualified for the final in South Africa World Cup come to use Mauritius as a training ground before proceeding on to South Africa?

Mr Tang Wah Hing: I am looking into the matter, Sir.

FOND DU SAC GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - YARD TARRING

(No. B/415) **Mr R.N. Guttee (Third Member for Grand'Baie and Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware of the bad state of the yard of the Fond du Sac Government School and, if so, will he state the measures that will be taken as a matter of priority to have the yard tarred.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am aware of the state of the yard of the Fond du Sac Government School. The technicians of my Ministry have visited the school and have submitted a report on the school yard. According to that report, around 40% of the school yard is tarred, the remainder being covered with soil and small pebbles. Moreover, on the tarred part, there are some mild depressions and cracks caused by the roots of big trees in the yard.

The technicians of my Ministry have also advised me that mere re-tarring of the schoolyard will not resolve the issue since a drainage system will also have to be put up within the yard. This will have to be connected appropriately with the drainage system on the road outside the school premises.

Owing to this, my Ministry has made a request to the National Development Unit, which is presently carrying out works along the road leading to the school and to also consider carrying out the tarring and drainage works inside the school premises. I have just consulted my colleague and he is agreeable to

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, please.

PLANTERS (SMALL) - DEROCKING SCHEME

(No. B/416) **Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Minister of Agro-Industry and Fisheries whether he will state the number of small planters who have taken advantage of the Rs500m voted in the last budget for the Derocking Scheme, indicating the quantum disbursed to each of them.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, the amount of Rs500m for free derocking is not meant to be disbursed to planters individually, but to meet the cost of derocking, land preparation, cane setts and first planting.

I would like to point out that this amount was announced in the last budget, but no provisions were made for the amount and there was no detailed plan or project for the implementation of the decision. Following consultations with the small planters and the technicians, the project is expected to start in July 2006 after the cane harvest.

In the meantime, the following steps have been taken –

- (i) the Mauritius Sugar Authority has raised the amount of Rs 500m through a loan;
- (ii) the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool Corporation (SPMPC) has already placed orders following a tender exercise through the Central Tender Board (CTB) for the purchase of tractors, excavators and equipment for a total amount of Rs158m. and is awaiting clearance from CTB for the purchase of wheel tractors for a total value of Rs32m. The equipment is expected to be delivered in July 2006;
- (iii) several meetings have been held with the small planters to canvass them to regroup and to find the right mechanisms for regrouping. The process of dialogue is ongoing;
- (iv) Government has approved a set of incentives for the small planters who would participate in regrouped units, namely free derocking and land preparation for planters with land up to 10 ha, first plantation free of charge, compensation in case of loss of one crop and installation of irrigation network and equipment where needed, and
- (v) the sites, which were initially identified for the pilot phase of the project, are now being reviewed with the collaboration of the MSIRI so as to obtain quick results and use the pilot sites as a showcase.

A Task Force comprising the Mauritius Sugar Authority, the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute, the Sugar Planters Mechanical Pool Corporation, the Farmers Service Corporation, the Irrigation Authority

and representative of the Ministry of Agro-Industry, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development is monitoring the implementation of the project.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister how are the incentives to the small planters being funded?

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have highlighted that the Sugar Authority has raised an amount of Rs500m through a loan and, of course, as and when we are going to have accompanying measures, this is going to be funded. We have made it very clear that we need to give special and differential treatment to the planters because of the organic link with the milling companies.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister how is the loan going to be reimbursed?

Dr. Boolell: I have answered the question and I do not know what to do more to please the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Bérenger: This is a very serious question. The loan has been raised with what institution?

Dr. Boolell: Tender was called for and the banks submitted the quotation as a result of which the Sugar Authority following the exercise has raised the loan from the bank.

(Interruptions)

If my memory serves me right, I think it is Barclays.

CITE LA CHAUX, MAHEBOURG - NDU PROJECTS

(No. B/417) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the NDU projects at Cité La Chaux Mahebourg, including the uplifting of the football ground, the upgrading of the community centre and other environmental projects, he will state if he has received representations from the *forces vives* of the locality to the effect that the implementation of the projects is slow and, if so, will he give, in each case -

- (a) the date on which the contracts were awarded, indicating to whom, and
- (b) the expected date of completion of the works.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, representations have been verbally made by the inhabitants of Cité La Chaux to officials of the NDU regarding the delay in the handing over of the football ground and the community centre.

With regard to the football ground, a contract for the fencing thereof was awarded to DWC on 30 March 2005. This project has been completed on 31 October 2005. There is, however, a need for the levelling and turfing of the football ground. This matter is being attended to by hon. Richard Duval, Parliamentary Private Secretary, in collaboration with 'Association Jeunesse du Sud'. The work is expected to be completed by end of May 2006.

Regarding the upgrading of the community centre, a contract was awarded to DWC on 04 February 2005. While the work was in progress, it was noted that the building was not structurally sound and had to be pulled down and constructed anew. New tender documents have been prepared accordingly. It is proposed to award the contract to the DWC.

With regard to the embellishment works, the contract was awarded to General Construction, the Roadwork Contractor for that zone, on 14 January 2005 for Phase 1 and 12 May 2005 for phase 11. These projects have already been completed in July and August 2005 respectively.

Mr Bhagwan: We just heard what the hon. Minister has said, but I have been there, unlike him. Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a reply which the Minister gave on the 18th of October and it is shameful...

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, the hon. Member cannot....

(Interruptions)

I would ask the hon. Member at this late hour to refrain from using any pejorative expression.

Mr Bhagwan: I am speaking in general. Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister gave an answer on 18th of October to the effect that as far as the proposed ground was concerned, works were expected to be completed by

December. This is not so, because it is now, at the eve of the 1st May that topsoil has been laid there.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister confirm when topsoil was laid down on the football ground?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, all of us know that when we give works to the DWC, they have got a problem of finance...

(Interruptions)

It is known to one and all. Not only that, Mr Speaker, Sir, ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: I am not like the previous Member, who has been over and super generous with the taxpayers' money; and I know what I am saying!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister knows only No. 9!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Bhagwan! Put your question then!

Mr Bhagwan: As far as the community centre is concerned, Sir, there again the building has been demolished. There is nothing there

(Interruptions)

Can the Minister give an undertaking to the House when the building will be completed?

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that when the contract was awarded to DWC on 04 February 2005, it was felt that the building was not structurally sound and the building had to be pulled down.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Bhagwan, please! You have put a question, you wait for the answer!

Mr Bachoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to make it clear that we had a problem of funds and, unfortunately, the previous Minister had committed expenditure to the tune of Rs575 m., above the approved budget.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question! Hon. Ganoo!

(Interruptions)

Order!

CONVICTED PERSONS (MINOR OFFENCES) - NUMBER

(No. B/418) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether he will state the number of persons convicted of minor offences who have benefited from the community service order to date.

(Withdrawn)

CIVIL DEBTS – NON-PAYMENT – LAW REVIEW

(No. B/419) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Attorney-General, Minister of Justice & Human Rights whether it is proposed to amend the law so that defendants who fail to pay their civil debts after judgment has been obtained against them do not have to serve any term of imprisonment.

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am grateful to the hon. Member for having asked this question. In fact, I have already raised the matter with the Parliamentary Counsel and given instructions to review the law in respect of a non-payment of civil debts or Summons After Unsatisfied Judgement, SAUJ, as it is more commonly referred to, the more so, since the relevant provisions of the law date as far back as the last century.

Mr Ganoo: I am very happy that the Minister has answered in this direction, Sir, especially in view of the fact that we know that most of these victims are consumers who buy hire-purchase goods. When we are talking of human rights, I am sure this is an urgency. Can the hon. Minister tell us when will this new legislation be brought before the Assembly?

Mr Valayden: Very soon.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Minister knows that last time when this issue was raised it was because one poor chap, who was in prison, committed suicide there. Therefore, this is a very urgent issue. It is a simple issue; it is not a complicated matter. Can we appeal to the Minister that this amendment be brought before the House urgently?

Mr Valayden: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take notice of the suggestion of the former Leader of Opposition. But I must add that nothing has been done for the last ten years under that topic and now that we are doing it, we have to tread cautiously. Because we all know that even during the last conference, there were two conflicting opinions, that is, the opinion of the Senior Puisne Judge and the former Chief Justice Lallah.

We have the judgment in the case of Kamla Toolsee v/s The District Magistrate of Pamplémousses (2002), M.R. at page 29. Therefore, we have to tread cautiously. But, of course, we will come forward because this is a Government that 'Put Poor People First'.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Attorney-General aware of the comments made by the Learned Judge in the case of Clelie v/s Sawan in 1998, about imprisonment in cases of non-payment of debt in civil cases?

Mr Valayden: We are aware and this is why I am informing the House that we have to tread cautiously and we will bring forward the necessary amendments.

Mr Ganoo: This is a very complex issue, but isn't it another matter which can be referred also to the Law Reform Commission?

Mr Valayden: We already have the National Human Rights Commission as proposed in its suggestions at page 28 – a series of things that have to be done. Therefore, there is no need to send it to the Law Reform Commission.

PROF. BASDEO BISSOONDOYAL – BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

(No. B/348) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether Government proposes to hold celebrations to mark the one hundred's birth anniversary of Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal and, if not, why not.

(Withdrawn)

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES DIVISION – REFORMS

(No. B/349) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will consider the advisability of setting up a hardship committee to look into the means of providing employment to the head of a household which has no revenue whatsoever and, if so, whether Government will create a fund to finance the project.

(Vide reply to PQ. No. B/391)

CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE – TOURIST ARRIVAL – IMPACT

(No. B/366) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will state if the outbreak of the chikungunya disease has impacted on the number of tourist arrivals in the country and, if so, what measures have been taken so far.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, last month, we recorded for the first time since July 2005, a negative growth rate of 14.4 % in tourist arrivals.

The outbreak of chikungunya explains most of this, mainly because of its impact on the French market. However, part of the fall in March is also attributed to the fact that Easter holidays fell in April this year, as opposed to March last year.

The impact on our main market, France, has been considerable. A drop of 37.1% has been recorded in tourist arrivals from that market as compared to the corresponding period last year.

The French media has given extensive coverage to the outbreak of chikungunya in Reunion and in other neighbouring islands. Furthermore, it has been shown that some 30% of French tourists first travel to Reunion Island before coming to Mauritius; this factor has intensified the impact of the crisis.

A third element has been the fact that chikungunya crisis has deeply affected the population and economy of Reunion Island itself, our second most important market, and this has obviously led to a fall in travel out of Reunion. Tourist arrivals from Reunion Island thus dropped by 30.6%, as a result of the disease.

With a view to redressing this setback, the MTPA has taken a series of measures with a view to reassuring French travellers that the situation has returned back to normal. These measures aim at promoting Mauritius vigorously as a safe and as a “business as usual” destination within the tourism and travel industry and the market at large.

This campaign will be carried out with the collaboration of Air Mauritius and Air France, *l’AHRIM*, the hotel industry in general and AIOM, and consist of three components -

- (a) firstly, an “*Axe Professionnel*”, which targets the professionals of the travel and tourism industry. This consists of an intensive campaign in May and June, aimed at bringing some 1,000 professionals of the travel trade to visit Mauritius, and

(b)secondly, an “*Operation Grand Public*”, aimed at the public at large.

The proposed activities include -

- dressing up of one underground train of the Paris Underground with striking images of Mauritius for two weeks in May;
 - 670 spots of 30 seconds each on Voyage and National Geographic Channels, as well as programmes on France 2 and documentaries on RFO;
 - 118 spots on Europe 1 Radio;
 - sponsoring of TV programmes on TF1 and M6;
 - 1700 buses in Paris carrying a poster of Mauritius;
 - familiarisation trips for members of the press in general, and
 - presence of Mauritius in glamour magazines.
- (c) Thirdly, organisation of events; it is proposed to organise a series of events at both the local and international levels to increasing destination visibility, such as sponsoring of a day at the famous Longchamp racecourse.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the outbreak of chikungunya has, in fact, shown to what extent tourism is a fragile sector which depends for its prosperity on everyone’s co-operation. It is for this very reason that the theme chosen for the first *assizes du tourisme* was “*Le tourisme, l’affaire de tous*”, which was in fact organised before the chikungunya crisis. This has helped to sensitize everyone, including town and village councillors and the population at large, on the important role they can play to ensure the sustainability of our tourism industry.

The chikungunya crisis has also confirmed Government in its determination to diversify our markets. The House will note that the crisis could have been much deeper, had we not registered important increases in tourist numbers, particularly from Italy (87% growth), India (54.8% growth), CIS (59.5% growth), and Australia (33.7% growth). The campaign to further diversify our markets will continue in countries such as Russia, South Africa and Sweden.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will note that under the previous regime, and without any domestic crisis of the like of chikungunya, tourist arrivals fell on 15 occasions during the period January 2001 to June 2005. It even fell by as much as 12.1% in April 2002 as compared to the corresponding previous period. This shows clearly that the tourism industry would have been affected far more without this Government's vigorous efforts to re-dynamise the tourism sector.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether he has received representations from hotel groups after the negative coverage by TF1?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Member for that. In fact, there has been a lot of negative coverage on TF1 and we must all be responsible. In fact, this is why we must not be antipatriotic as well. I heard the Leader of the MSM on French and Reunion TV saying that the figures

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am talking about TF1.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, mention is being made of a person who is not in the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: No, this is not a point of order.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just making an appeal here. Let's not take it in a nasty way! I heard him say clearly that he disputed the official figures of the Mauritian Government some two months back. So, these are things that we must be careful. All right, we can say TF1, etc., but we must put our own house in order and not be antipatriotic in what we are saying.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Dowarkasing: One more question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Minister state whether he has carried out a study to measure the economic impact of chikungunya on our tourism industry?

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I look after tourism, I can tell you about tourism. In fact, we have not been lucky. We have avoided, at least, the worst. As you know, in Reunion Island, the impact is terrible in the tourism industry. Many hotels are closed. We have avoided that. Many people have been laid off. This is not the situation here. Let's touch wood! This is why I am asking the co-operation of everybody, genuinely that we get over these things and we protect our tourism industry.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, we acknowledge that lots of efforts are being done, but the problem, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that Reunion Island is considered as a destination not to visit. How is the Deputy Prime Minister going to go beyond this hurdle because the whole of the Indian Ocean...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Bodha:is considered now not to be visited.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did not hear the last part of the question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! A question has been put. Because of the noise in the House, the Minister has not heard the last part of the question.

Mr Bodha: The question is that on the web site of Reunion Island, it is considered as a destination not to be visited today and a hundred thousand people do the combination Reunion/Mauritius. How is the Minister going to go beyond this hurdle? Because the whole Indian Ocean region is considered as a region not to be visited now.

Mr X. L. Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, as you will note, the whole policy of the MTPA is now to project Mauritius as a no-problem destination, a destination which, in fact, we can visit quite safely. This is why, Mr Speaker, Sir, in May and June of this year, we are organising, at very reduced rates, for one thousand people working in travel agents to visit Mauritius. This is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir, that when they come to Mauritius, they see that things, in fact, are normal and this is my appeal also to everybody.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister says that the target is to present Mauritius as a no chikungunya problem area. Can I ask him whether his Ministry or Government has looked into one issue? According to my information, as the law stands in France especially - maybe elsewhere as well, but I am talking specifically of France - when tourists go to travel agents, the law, as it stands, seems to compel the travel agents to give a warning to the would-be tourists. Have we looked into that? Of course, we can't dictate to the French Authorities. But have we looked into that and is there anything that we can do to improve things?

Mr X. L. Duval: In fact, this is the problem not only with France, but with most of our main markets where the Government feels obliged to offer this information to tourists on the web site. Even the British Mission here has the information on its web site on the issue. This is the problem that we have; we can't fight against that, unfortunately; we talked to them and they said they have to provide some information. They can't do otherwise according to their legal obligations. This is, in fact, why, Mr Speaker, Sir, the idea of actually bringing people to Mauritius seems to be the best idea, in fact, nothing better as you have seen for yourself. If we have about a thousand people working there, they can actually go back and influence a lot more people.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware whether the private sector has appointed a firm of consultants from Singapore to work on a preventive plan?

Mr X. L. Duval: This question is better addressed to the Ministry of Health. But this is the case.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!