

Minister's Statements and Speeches

THE APPROPRIATION (2023-2024) BILL

(NO. IX OF 2023)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

(13.06.2023)

Vote 4-1 Vice-Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology was called.

The Chairperson: We have 60 minutes in all for this Item and we are taking by Sub-Head. We start by Sub-Head 4-101: General as from page 143. Question? Hon. Uteem.

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Chairperson, Item 21110.005 –*Extra Assistance*, may we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister the name of the advisors and the salary package for them?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The name of the advisors –

- (i) Mrs Dookhee;
- (ii) Mr Dansighani;
- (iii) Mr Munbodh;
- (iv) Mr Adaken;
- (v) Mr Varma, and (vi) Mr Moonien.

And, I am going to table the list.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under Item 21110.011 – *Basic Salary*, can we have more details?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The basic salary refers to the compensation of employees and personal emoluments. Provision is made for payment for salaries and increments for 300 funded positions, *inter alia* administrative, technical, finance, human resource and general services cadres.

The Chairperson: Are you done hon. Vice-Prime Minister? Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: On page 143, there is an Item 21110.004 – *Allowances*, Rs6.2 m. May we have the details and a break down for this figure?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The allowances referred here are for the entertainment allowance, duty allowance, hospitality allowance, drivers allowance, car allowance in lieu of official car, internet allowance, duty remission car allowance, adhoc allowance, responsibility allowance for assuming high duties for the officers of the Ministry.

The Chairperson: We now move to page 144. Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 144, Item 22900.922 – *Conferences/Seminars/Workshops*. There is a drastic drop in the sum allocated as compared to the previous year. May we know why?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In the previous year, Mr Chairperson, we had the international conference of the IAdea and there are no other such conferences programmed for this year.

The Chairperson: Hon. Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Chairperson, under Item 22130 – *Studies and Surveys*, can we have further details pertaining to the surveys and studies we are referring to? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: These refer to the SAQMEC final study. The consultation, the pilot phase was carried out in February 2020 and we are right now preparing for the SAQMEC Final and it is carried out for some 4,000 pupils of Grade 6 in primary schools, spread for some 150 chosen schools both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Hon. Ms. J. Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger: Yes, thank you. Item 22120.008 – *Fees to Consultant (Transaction Advisor for PPP Projects)*, can we have more details about this project and can we know who the Consultant is, please?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Fees to Consultant is for the Transaction Advisor for PPP Projects. Provision is being made for consultancy fee of the –

- MIE Campus at Côte d'Or;
- UTM Campus at Côte d'Or;

- Education House at Côte d'Or;
- Construction of Technical Education Centre at Ebène, and the
- Construction of the PSEA Building at Beau Bassin. As far as the Consultant is concerned –
- For the University of Technology, advisory services have been awarded to Crisil Ltd from India.
- For the MIE, again, it is Crisil Risk and Infrastructure Ltd.
- As for the Education House, the recruitment has not been done yet.
- Construction of the Technical Education Centre at Ebène, approval of the Council is being sought for the award of the contract. It has not been done yet.
- For the PSEA, the Kukuza Project Development Company has been recruited as Transaction Advisor.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Time is over. We move to Sub-Head...

An hon. Member: No.

The Chairperson: What is wrong?

An hon. Member: I have a question.

The Chairperson: We are already over the time by one minute.

Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, before I started, I had informed the House that I have in front of me a piece of paper which says that the proposed time allocation has been agreed by the Chief Whip...

(Interruptions)

Let me finish hon. Ameer Meea. It has been agreed by the Chief Whip and the Opposition Whip. Now, either you trust me or you phone your Opposition Whip who has not been here since this morning, and you get the clarifications. I am just going by the rules.

Mr Ameer Meea: ... using less time. You can compensate. You said you will be flexible.

The Chairperson: Hold on, hold on! While we taking the Ministry of the Prime Minister, you must have noticed when I had time, I allowed it but now we are already at

the beginning. I won't get any time, as a buffer yet. Okay. Once I get the buffer time, I will give it to you. Okay, I am fair. I am not a goalkeeper!

So, Sub-Head 4-102: Pre-Primary Education. It starts from page 145 up to page 146. Hon. Dr. Boolell.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Sir. Under Capital Expenditure, Item 31112.002 – *Construction and Extension of Schools*, can the hon. Minister... **The Chairperson:** Excuse me, on which page are you?

Dr. Boolell: Page 145?

The Chairperson: Which item?

Dr. Boolell: 31112... **The**

Chairperson: That's over!

Dr. Boolell: Page 145 is over?

The Chairperson: We are on Sub-Head 4-102.

Dr. Boolell: Okay, it's alright.

The Chairperson: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 26313.071 – *Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (e) Project-Based Learning*, can we have some information with regard to this?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is to introduce Project-Based Learning which aims at enhancing the holistic development of young children and foster 21st century skills for 80 pre-primary schools on a pilot basis in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goal as per 2030 Agenda of UNESCO.

There is a consultancy fee of Rs200,000; video production of Rs50,000; production and printing of PBL Guideline, Rs250,000, and budget implementation of each of these PBL guidelines, Rs1,250,000. A total of Rs2 m.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 145, Item 26313.071 – *Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (f) Free Pre-Primary Education Scheme*, will the hon. Minister enlighten us how this sum of money would be spent?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Chairperson, we are still working on the grant-in-aid policy, the scheme. It is going to be spent in providing support for the payment of salaries of the teachers and all. We have here about Rs152 m. going to salaries of 360 teaching and 191 non-teaching staff. Around Rs3.6 m. for the contribution National Savings, and around Rs83 m. for other school operational costs comprising salary compensation, SICOM Pension, travelling, vacation leave, uniform allowance for attendants, retirement benefits, and so on and so forth.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: On the same Item 26313.071 – *Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (c) Private Pre-Primary Schools*, there is a reduction in the grant given to Private Pre-Primary Schools, from Rs95 m. last year to Rs40 m. May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, why the grant has been halved?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is mainly because we are changing the whole system. Initially, there was a per capita grant for some 18,000 students. Now with the new scheme, this will no longer be required.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under Item 26323.071 – *Early Childhood Care and Education Authority of which (a) One-Off Grant Private Pre-Primary Schools*, can we know the number of schools we are referring to, if ever the Minister has the details, please?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In fact, it was an amount of Rs100,000 which was given to hundred schools every budget year. I am given to understand that since we have come up with this policy, every year some hundred schools were provided with this sum, 125 schools. It was meant for pedagogical equipment, storybooks, tablets and toys.

The Chairperson: We now move to page 146. Hon. Dr. Boolell.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Sir. Item 22120.025 – *Fees to Oriental Language Teachers*, I see that there is an increase to Rs30 m. compared to Rs26 m. in the previous financial year, if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister can inform us...

The Chairperson: Just hold on, hon. Dr. Boolell. Which item you are talking about?

Dr. Boolell: Item 22120.

The Chairperson: This is under Sub-Head 4-103.

Dr. Boolell: You just said 146.

The Chairperson: Sub-Head 4-102. I said page 146.

Dr. Boolell: Yes page 146.

The Chairperson: The upper part; only the upper part.

Dr. Boolell: You are referring only to the upper part? Okay.

The Chairperson: Under Sub-Head 4-102, you got no question? Okay. Hon. Ameer Meea, I got three minutes this time, which I will give you later on. Okay. So, we move to Sub-Head 4-103: Primary Education. Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much. Item 22120.025 – *Fees to Oriental Language Teachers*, if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister can inform us as to the number of teachers who are teaching oriental languages and the oriental languages which are being taught in school? Thank you very much.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: 1,442 persons teaching oriental and ancestral languages.

The Chairperson: Hon. Ms J. Bérenger!

Ms J. Bérenger: Yes, thank you. Item 21110.005 – *Extra Assistance*, can we know to whom this extra assistance is paid to and what are their allocations?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Extra assistance is for the provision of supply teachers, primary supply teachers. Sorry, can you please tell me what is the number you have been requesting information about?

Ms J. Bérenger: Item 21110.005 – *Extra Assistance*.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Just give me one second. The extra assistance is meant for Program Manager Holistic Education as well as for Program Coordinators, Cluster Coordinators, Supply Teacher Primary, Supply Teacher for *Kreol Morisien*, Supply Teacher for General Purpose and Supply IT Support Officer.

The Chairperson: Hon. David!

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Chairperson! Item 22060 – *Maintenance*, I can see that there is a drastic drop in this maintenance budget from Rs41 m. to Rs11 m. as from this year. May I know the background?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The maintenance is being given to Mauri-Facilities and it is a centrally controlled project through the Ministry of Finance.

The Chairperson: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Chairperson! Item 22900.996 – *Natation Scolaire Programme*, may we have an idea of how many students will benefit of same?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: All students of Grade 4 in all our primary schools will be benefiting from this project, Mr Chairperson.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes, thank you. Item 22900.006 – *School Requisites*, we voted a sum of Rs48 m. last year and we are asked to vote a sum of Rs57 m. Can we have a breakdown of expenses under this item?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It's for the printing of primary textbooks, for the stationary items for holistic education programme, sport equipment and materials, medals, prizes and rewards.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 146, item 22090 – *Security*, there has been a massive increase from Rs78 m. to Rs100 m. Will the hon. Minister explain why this massive increase?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It's to provide day time and night security in primary schools and the four zonal directorates as per contract. The funds will be used for the provision of night security services in 216 Primary Schools and the increase in provision is because of the new bidding exercise which is being launched by the CPB.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under item 22030.001 – *Rental of Building*, can the hon. Minister shed some light upon the renting of which building we are referring to? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It's the provision made for the payment of rental building, parking slots facilities for even lines for network services; rental of building, provision is being made for the renting of office space for Zones 1, 3 and 4, including the store section, and accommodation for child needs volunteers along with payment for utilities and also for the rental of parking slots. The increase is due to the payment of additional parking slots.

The Chairperson: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Item 22030.007 – *Rental of Line for Network Services*, may I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister who is the Office Supplier and whether all Primary Schools have now been equipped with Wi-Fi facilities?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The payment is made to Mauritius Telecom and the rental of connectivity line is for the 255 Primary Schools in Mauritius and 17 Schools in Rodrigues.

The Chairperson: We now move to page 147 under the same Sub-Head Primary Education. Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you, very much. Item 28212.004 – *Primary School Supplementary Feeding Project*. A relative increase compared to the Estimates of the last financial year, if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister can apprise the House as to whom the project was entrusted and as to the number of needy students which take advantage of this feeding project?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Provision is being made for enhanced meals in 24 ZEP Schools and hot meals in 3 ZEP Schools and as for the list of caterers I will table it, Mr Chairperson.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under Capital Expenditure, item 31112.402 – *Upgrading of Schools*. Can the hon. Minister table the list maybe of schools being upgraded currently?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I will be tabling the list.

The Chairperson: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 31122.823 – *Acquisition of*

Equipment for Early Digital Learning Programme. May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether the contract has already been awarded and if so, to whom and when will be the delivery date?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The contract has been awarded to EDSIL through a G to G arrangement. We are receiving the tablets for Grade 5 and 6 this year.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 147, Acquisition of NonFinancial Assets, item 31112.002 – *Construction and Extension of Schools*. Will the hon. Minister at least table the list of schools concerned regarding construction or extension where this will be carried out?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: This will be done, Mr Chairperson!

The Chairperson: You will table?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I am tabling it!

The Chairperson: Okay thank you, we now move to Sub-Head 4-104: Secondary Education. Here also we got 10 minutes. We start from page 147.

Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Yes on page 147, Item 21110.005 – *Extra Assistance*, Rs98 m. is being budgeted this year. May I have the components of this figure?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The extra assistance once again, Mr Chairperson, refers to the payment of allowance for supply teachers recruited to serve the State Secondary Schools in all subject areas.

The Chairperson: Thank you! Any question on page 147 from anyone? Hon. Wochit!

Mr Wochit: Item 21110.002 – *Salary Compensation*, there has been a drastic increase in salary?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: This is due to the payment of compensation for Year 2023.

The Chairperson: We move to 148. Hon. Dr. Boolell.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Chairperson. In respect of Item 22090 – *Security*, compared to the last Financial Year, I see a substantial increase by Rs10 m. in relation to security, if the hon. Vice Prime Minister can apprise us as to whom the contract has been awarded and the reason as to why there is this substantial increase? Thank you very much.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Funds will be used for the provision of night security in 63 State Secondary Schools. Increase in provision is based on new estimates for contracts; bidding exercise is in progress at the level of the CPB.

The Chairperson: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 26313.034–*Mauritius Examinations Syndicate*, there is an increase of Rs30 m. for Year 2023-2024.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The operational examination related expenses of the MES are met from Government grant, income from fees in respect of examinations conducted by the MES on behalf of professional and other bodies and then funds for sponsorship of SC and HSC and GCE Exams. Most probably, this year, it is extra because of the fact that students of Grade 10 and Grade 11 both are sitting for the SC Exams.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Item 26313.132 –*PSEA – Management Grant to Private Secondary Schools*, there is an increase from Rs590 m. to Rs630 m. for this year, may I know have from the hon. Vice Prime Minister a breakdown of each college, how much is given for each college and what is the criteria for allocation of that grant? This is the management grant, not the student.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In fact, the grants are meant for rental for the use of premises and for the operational costs of each and every school. Now, the increase in the amount that has been mentioned here refers to the fact that the comprehensive grant formula is being worked again for the next phase of three years.

The Chairperson: Hon. David!

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 22030 – *Rent*, may I know the reason behind the increase from Rs1.9 m. to Rs5.2 m. as from this new financial year?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Here, the provisions are being made for the rental of podiums, sound systems in respect of functions in public Secondary Schools as well as provision

for internet services and rental for switches for all school net project at Rs86,000 per month and also the rental of business booth rental line or air box from Emtel for 63 State Secondary Schools.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

Mrs Mayotte: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 22120 – *Fees*, can the hon. Vice Prime Minister tell us more about the healthy and supportive school environment initiative whose provision has not changed for the next financial year? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Provision has been made for grant to school health clubs; 69 State Secondary Schools and 79 Private Secondary Schools and organisation of Youth Forum and Youth Assembly.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 148, Item 22900.807 – *Expenses icw Technology Education Stream*, a new stream is coming, will the hon. Vice Prime Minister tell us how many schools will be involved in the pilot project and whether it would be only State or Private Secondary Schools also?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: There are 10 schools involved; it will include both State and Private Secondary Schools. It will include academies as well as regional schools.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Item 28212.012 – *S.C and H.S.C Examination Fees*, there is no increase in the sum earmarked in spite of the fact that the Rupee has been devalued. Has there been any decrease in the number of students taking part in the examination?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Not at all, Mr Chairperson. In fact, the MES normally has a reserve and normally because of fluctuations in foreign exchange rates etc., so they normally do have the sum and part of it most probably remains from last year.

The Chairperson: Hon. Doolub!

Mr Doolub: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 22900.006 – *School Requisites*, I note an increase of at least Rs11 m., can the hon. Vice Prime Minister tell us the reasons thereof? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The provisions are for printing and publishing of textbooks for Grade 7, 8 and 9 and for the purchase of books for needy students, equipment and

materials and teaching aid materials. Increase in provision is due to the rise in the cost of printing and book materials.

The Chairperson: So we move to page 149. Hon. Ameer Meea!

Mr Ameer Meea: Page 149, Item 31112.402 – *Upgrading of Schools*, there is a budget of Rs68 m. May I have a list of schools which are being upgraded?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I will provide the list.

The Chairperson: Hon. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. I am referring to page 149, Item 31112.002 – *Construction and Extension of Schools*. There is a drastic drop for this financial year. Will the hon. Minister table at least the list of schools concerned with the construction and extension.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I am tabling the list.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Hon. David!

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 26323.123 – *Mahatma Gandhi Institute*. Je vois que chaque année, il y a un budget qui était prévu de R 10m. sauf sur cette nouvelle année financière avec une baisse à R 7 billion. Puis-je demander pourquoi cette baisse ponctuelle pour cette nouvelle année?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The Rs2.5 was provided for the acquisition of a new van, AC units and CCTV cameras. So, now that this has already been done, they do not require that much of funds.

The Chairperson: Thank you. We now move to Sub-Head 4-105: Technical Education. We have got 10 minutes and it starts from page 149. Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under Item 22120.008 – *Fees to Consultant - Roadmap for Technical and Technology Education*, can the hon. Minister provide details whether we have already embarked on with a consultant if ever to provide the name and details? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In fact, the fees are meant for a consultant coming from the University of Alberta in Canada. We have a provision of Rs5 m. for consultancy services to conduct a high level forum on technical and technology education and to devise a road map for technical and technology education for Mauritius. This will bring

together the triple helix of Government industry and technology operators to connect the skills gap of today and to the industry trends of tomorrow. So, it is, in fact, meant for the consultancy services to conduct this High-Level Forum on technical and technology education.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Chairperson. Under the Item 22900.991 – *Expenses icw Technical Education Centres*, can the Vice-Prime Minister can apprise us why there is this substantial increase compared to money earmarked in the last financial year?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The provision being made is to meet operational costs including salaries, allowance, maintenance of tools and equipment, as well as cleaning services for the 6 Technical Education Centres currently being administered by the MITD pending the taking over by ITET.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 26313.157 – *Institute of Technical Education and Technology (ITET)*. We voted a sum of Rs15 m. last year. Can we have a breakdown of expenses incurred last year?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: So the provision was made to meet the operational cost of ITET and the Human Resource cost, support of staff allowance, rental of office space, maintenance of building and also for the purchase and procurement of vehicles, IT equipment and furniture.

The Chairperson: Hon. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 149, same Item like hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie, Item 26313.157 – *Institute of Technical Education and Technology (ITET)*, Rs18 m. for this year. Will the hon. Minister tell us whether it is fully operational, number of students who are currently following courses and the staff, as well as the Board of the ITET?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: As I have just stated, Mr Chairperson, the 6 institutions are still being run under the MITD and the staff of the MITD is involved there.

I can also table the Board of the ITET.

The Chairperson: Thank you. Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Yes, Item 22900.991 – *Expenses icw Technical Education Centres*. There is an increase in the budgeted amount. Can we have a breakdown of the amount paid to each Technical Education Centre?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I don't have the information with me right now. I have it bulked, but we can provide it to you.

The Chairperson: We now move to page 150, the upper part only. Go on, hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 152, Item 28212.011 – *State of Mauritius/Additional Scholarships...*

The Chairperson: No! Which Item? Page 150. So there is no question. So we move to *Sub-Head 4-106: Special Education Needs*. We have got 5 minutes for that.

Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Chairperson. Item 26313.149 – *Special Education Needs (SEN) Authority*. There was no provision made last year and I see that there is provision of Rs169 m. So, if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister can apprise us as to how this money is being spent to cater for those who are in need of special education.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In fact, funds have been provided for the grant-in-aid and we are also providing hot meals to students in the SEN Schools. We are providing funds to the SEN Schools, the NGOs and the RCEA-SEN Schools. We are also providing hot meals in all these schools for all these children on a daily basis.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Yes, Item 26313.149 – *Special Education Needs (SEN) Authority (b) Grant-in-Aid for SEN Schools run by: (i) NGOs*. Could we have a list of the NGOs that will benefit from this budget, please?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: We have 47 NGOs and 8 RCEA Schools and a total of 2,505 students. We are going to table the list of NGOs.

The Chairperson: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: On this very same Item 26313.149 – *Special Education Needs (SEN) Authority (b) Grant-in-Aid for SEN Schools*. May we also have from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, the criteria for allocation of these grants to the various NGOs?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Chairperson, the Special Education Needs Authority has got norms and conditions and a list of criteria and all registered schools only do get these funds. I will obviously submit to the House, a list and criteria used by the SENA.

I would also like to add that the increase in funds is also on the account of the fact that the salaries of all the carers, teachers, drivers, handy workers have all been increased to meet the new requirements as per the budget.

The Chairperson: Hon. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 150, Item 22120 – *Fees*. For example, from Rs2.2 m, it comes to Rs1.2 m. this year and then again it drops for subsequent years. May we know why there is this drop, hon. Vice-Prime Minister?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The decrease is due to the fact that MIE has already conducted 50% of the work for the adaptation of textbooks.

The Chairperson: We move to page 151 under the same Sub-Head.

Dr. Gungapersad: Page 151 at the top. We find that transfers to non-profit institutions, Item 28211.067 – *RCEA for Special Education Needs (SEN) Schools*, for this year and subsequent years we do not have any budgetary provision while we had it last year.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I think that the funds have been transferred from one item to another. The amount has been transferred under the vote of Special Education Needs Authority.

The Chairperson: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Thank you. Under Item 26323.149 – *Special Education Needs (SEN) Authority of which (a) Upgrading of SEN Schools run by NGOs/RCEA*, may we have a list of the SEN schools that would be benefiting from this grant?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: If I'm not mistaken, all the SEN schools will be provided with this grant of about Rs100,000 for upgrading the infrastructure and around Rs50,000 for educational materials and equipment.

The Chairperson: Time is over! We move to Sub-Head 4-107: Scholarships and Capacity Building. We have got five minutes for this.

Mr Ameer Meea: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. On page 152, Item 28212.011 – *State of Mauritius/Additional Scholarship*, may I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister why the estimate for State and additional scholarship has decreased by Rs10 m. when we all know that tuition fees and living expenses around the world has been increasing and the more so, the living allowance for laureates has not been changed since 2017?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The funds are used for the payment of tuition fees, living allowance and air tickets for a total of 283 laureates and 13 beneficiaries of scholarships under the Rodrigues Scholarship Scheme. We have noted that some students have delayed their departure as well. Sometimes, those getting the scholarships decide to move at some other point in time, so, they ask for a delay. *Ils ont déjà commencé des cours* à Maurice and they decide to go after that. This is a policy decision.

The Chairperson: Hon. Ms Tour!

Ms Tour: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 28212.020 – *Student Scholarship Schemes for Vulnerable Households*. There is a decrease in provision for the year 20232024, may we know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister why this decrease in provision?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The decrease is due to a low number of applicants. For the vulnerable group, they apply for the scholarships and it all depends on whether or not, they come into the first 500 candidates according to the list from Cambridge.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Boolell!

Dr. Boolell: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 28212.010 – *Post-Graduate Scholarship Schemes*. I'm sure I will get the same reply from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister. In respect of budgetary provision earmarked compared to last year, there has been a substantial drop, be it for the State of Mauritius Post-Graduate Scheme or PostGraduate Scheme for Laureates. Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform us as to why there has been a drop in the budgetary provision? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Every year there are nine scholarships that are awarded to graduates willing to go for a Master's Degree. For studies abroad of one year's duration, the tuition fees, living allowance and air tickets at the beginning and end of the course are covered. For those who study locally, the scholarship covers tuition fee and living allowance for two years and their monthly allowance as well. So, most probably you have fewer students going for the two years and some going for one year only.

If they take the first degree in Mauritius, then, they can take two years for a postgraduate degree outside Mauritius. If they do not stay in Mauritius for their first degree and they go out, then they do not have to pay for the postgraduate allowance.

The Chairperson: Mr Uteem!

Mr Uteem: Under Item 28212.032 – *Scholarship Schemes to Student with Disabilities*, may I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister how many students benefited from that Scholarship and what is the amount paid to each student?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: In fact, we have five scholarships every year, normally five every year. And it all depends on which course they follow. Sometimes they go for polytechnics, for degrees – it all depends on which courses they are going for. So, the amount will vary.

The Chairperson: Hon. Mrs Luchmun Roy!

Mrs Luchmun Roy: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Under Item 28212.025 – *Financial Assistance Schemes to Students*, there is a considerable drop. Can the hon. VicePrime Minister provide information as to why there is such a drop in the figures and also the number of beneficiaries under this one? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is most probably due to the fact that we now have the Free Tertiary Education Scheme. 196 students had applied for the loan under the above scheme. We are talking here about a scheme that started in 2013 and the beneficiaries have all paid back their loans apart from one. That's why there is a decrease.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Again I am referring to page 152, Item 28212.038 – *Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme in Digital Technologies*. I would like to have details regarding how this Rs10 m. would be spent, number of

students concerned and where normally these students go to study - locally or abroad – to which universities?

The Scheme comprises two types of scholarships for those willing to go abroad and for those willing to do their post-graduation in Mauritius at the *Université des Mascareignes* and the funds were utilised for 22 new awards, two scholarships awarded for PHD courses, 15 scholarships to be awarded at Masters Level of one year duration if it is taken abroad and two years if it is taken in a local institution. Five scholarships awarded to PHD level for a duration of up to four years abroad or locally.

I do not have any more information here. 20 scholarships for AI and Block Chain technology are awarded at *Université des Mascareignes*. The number of beneficiaries is 12.

Mr Chairperson: Thank you, hon. Vice-Prime Minister. We will now move to the last sub-head which is Sub-Head 4-108: Tertiary Education. We have five minutes for this and it starts at page 152. Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Chairperson, Item 22130 - *Studies and Surveys – National Higher Education Strategy*. Can we have more details from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The *Studies and Surveys* refer to studies and preliminary project preparation for the National Higher Education Strategy and the funds of Rs5 m. are available. The Ministry is partnering with UNESCO, the World Bank and High Education Commission to obtain wide stakeholders' inputs on the topic. Preliminary pillars identified for the strategy are technology driven high education, agile regulatory framework and the quality assurance, pass ways and micro credentials as part of the higher education, the role of research and internationalisation and cross border higher education.

Mr Chairperson: Thank you. So, we move to page 153. Hon. David!

Mr David: Thank you, Mr Chairperson, Item 26313.150 – *Higher Education Commission*. May I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister to table the composition of the Board of the HEC?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Yes, it will be done.

The Chairperson: Hon. Uteem!

Mr Uteem: On the very same point, Item 26313.150 – *Higher Education Commission*, in addition to the composition of the Board, may I request the Vice-Prime Minister to also table the salary package of the Chairman and each member of that Board?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Yes, this will be done. The Chairperson has a package of Rs40,000 and members Rs2,500.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Boolell.

Dr. Boolell: Thank you very much, Mr Chairperson. On the same Item 26313.150 – *Higher Education Commission*, could the Vice-Prime Minister inform us as to the number of African students who have taken advantage of the scholarships awarded and secondly, the funding of research projects and if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister can table the projects that are being funded? Thank you.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: There are 153 African students who have benefitted from the scheme and 60 are still following courses in Mauritius. As far as the research fund is concerned, we have 103 projects that have been approved since the start of the scheme for a total project value of Rs156.2 m. As at date, HEC has a closing balance of Rs43.1 m. which will be used for disbursement in respect of ongoing projects in the year of 2023-2024. All new projects are funded on basis of the potential impact on the economy and society. Eight new projects have been approved for a total value of Rs7.5 m.

Funds amounting to Rs7.7 m. are committed for disbursement up to June 2023.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dhunoo!

Mr Dhunoo: Thank you, Mr Chairperson, under same Item 26313.150 – *Higher Education Commission*, ii. *Recruitment of foreign lecturers*, can the Vice-Prime Minister inform how many foreign lecturers have been recruited?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: The foreign lecturers are recruited on a temporary basis. They come for one or two modules and they go back but I will try to get the information and table it.

The Chairperson: Hon. Navarre-Marie!

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Item 28211.071 – *Higher Education Advisory Council*, may we know the composition of the Council?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It has not been constituted yet.

The Chairperson: Hon. Dr. Gungapersad!

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, Mr Chairperson. Page 153, Item 26313.150 - (d) *Université des Mascareignes of which Scholarship (Robotics and Artificial Intelligence)*, there has been a 100% increase in the budgetary provision. Will the hon. Minister inform the House how many students will benefit from the scholarship every year and for what level? Is it for diploma, graduate, post graduate levels?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: It is supposed to be for post-graduate. It is a Masters in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. It is serviced by consortium of universities and it is awarded jointly by UDM and *Université de Limoges*. There are 20 scholarships that have been awarded to students of self-finance. 15 students from batch 1 have already graduated.

The scholarship covers an amount of Rs250,000 per student as tuition fees and cost of overseas placement for up to three months during the last semester of the programme.

The Chairperson: Any question on page 154? No? Okay.

Vote 4-1 Vice-Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Rs 19,700,000,000) was, on question put, agreed to. (00.11 a.m.)