

**INDIAN RESORT HOTEL, POINTE SUD-OUEST, LE MORNE –
TAXI-DRIVERS (07/07/09)**

Mr A. Ganoo (First Member of Savanne & Black River): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I address my intervention to the attention of the hon. Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources, because this is a matter which concerns Culture.

I am the mouthpiece of 26 taxi drivers who are operating in front of the Indian Resort Hotel, at Pointe Sud-Ouest, Le Morne. These 26 drivers are regrouped in the Indian Resort Taxi Drivers' Association. They have set up a kiosk where they can shelter themselves when they are waiting for clients to come during their spare time. This kiosk has been set up on a plot of land opposite the entrance of the hotel and, at one time, the Beach Authority has requested these taxi drivers to move away so as to dismantle this kiosk. These taxi drivers have apprised the Beach Authority of the situation and they have appealed to the Beach Authority to understand their situation, that they have constructed this kiosk as a shelter when the weather is not so good and it rains. As I said, this kiosk was being utilised by them just to protect themselves from bad weather. This is the situation for these 26 drivers. In fact, this kiosk is opposite the taxi-stand at Le Morne Pointe Sud-Ouest public beach.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must confess the Beach Authority has been very understanding. I have a letter with me dated 16 June 2009, where the Beach Authority says, I quote –

“In view of the above, the Authority does not raise any objection for the erection of this kiosk since it is not causing any inconvenience to the beach users. However, you are hereby informed to approach Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund for appropriate clearance and approval as the structure is found in a buffer zone.

Your attention is also drawn that the kiosk should be purely on a temporary basis and in case the Authority is envisaging to implement any project or development on this beach, you will be requested to shift to an alternate place.”

So, the Beach Authority has understood the plight of these 26 taxi drivers, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir and has been very kind and sympathetic to the request of these 26 taxi drivers who are earning their living honestly. It is only because of the weather that they have to shelter themselves under this kiosk which they have built with the help of the hotel. Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have also written to Miss Stephanie Anquetil, the Chairperson of Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund. They have brought this situation to her attention, that this kiosk is being used for the purpose of sheltering themselves from strong the sun and rain and also for the purpose of having their lunch.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will be grateful, if permission could be granted to use the

same kiosk for the time being till any other projects be set up at the existing site by competent bodies. A letter to that effect has been addressed to the Chairperson of Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund on 28 January 2009. I am urging the hon. Minister responsible for Culture to see to it if he could intervene and accede to the request of these taxi drivers, who, as we all know are already facing other problems these days and this ban on them will worsen their difficulties and will cause undue stress to them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am appealing to the hon. Minister if he can prevail over the Chairperson of the Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund to allow these 26 taxi drivers who are operating in front of the Indian Resort Taxi Drivers' Association to allow them to leave this kiosk as it is, so that they can use it, as I said earlier on, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to shelter themselves more particularly in case of bad weather . I make an appeal, therefore, to the hon. Minister to be sympathetic to the request of these 26 taxi drivers who are operating, as I said, in front of the Indian Resort Hotel.

Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(8.07 p.m.)

Minister of Education, Culture & Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have listened with much attention to what has been said by the hon. Member of the Opposition, hon. A. Ganoo. In fact, being sympathetic is, of course, one good thing, but we have also to be alert to the conditions which are set by UNESCO because, as we know, this land is very special. In fact, we had the opportunity this morning of talking about the buffer zone in Port Louis. There also there is a buffer zone. This matter, in fact, has been brought to my attention a few months ago. This construction has been there since the month of January this year. The matter has been raised. In fact, it has been brought to my knowledge by hon. Dr. Babajee in the first instance, I must say, where he was also asking me to be sympathetic. Then, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee came to me for the same problem. In fact, she also asked me to be sympathetic and now, hon. A. Ganoo is asking me to be sympathetic. I must say Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we have to look at the facts and then we have to take a decision which would be in the best interest of one and all.

I must inform the House that Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund Act 2004 provides for the Trust Fund to manage, regulate and administer all developments, works and activities within the Le Morne Cultural Landscape which is now a World Heritage Site as we all know, and we are proud of it. Specific regulations have been promulgated in September 2007 under the Planning and Development Act for the control of development within the landscape, but we call the Planning Policy Guidance to Le Morne Cultural Landscape.

This document provides specific guidelines that ensure the protection of the landscapes integrity and authenticity.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Indian Resort Taxi Drivers Association has erected a wooden kiosk with corrugated iron roof and with concrete platform at Le Morne Pointe Sud- Ouest public beach without any consultation and prior approval from Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund and the National Heritage Fund. This structure falls within the buffer zone of the landscape. I am informed by Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund that they have not received any request from the Indian Resort Taxi Drivers Association operating at the Indian Resort hotel for that kiosk which is on a public beach. In fact, there is a letter which the hon. Member has mentioned from the Beach Authority. It says that, *à priori*, there is no objection, but as the hon. Member mentioned it himself, it is stated in the letter that clearances have to be obtained from Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund for the approval of any structure which is found on the buffer zone.

But that Trust Fund has not given any clearance or approval. This is where matters stand. I must say that, given that Le Morne Heritage Trust Fund has the obligation to manage the Le Morne cultural landscape, the Indian Resort Taxi Drivers Association was requested by the Beach Authority, therefore, to approach the Le Morne Trust Fund and ask for appropriate clearances which, as I have said, have not been obtained. A request has been made to the Ministry of Local Government by the Beach Authority. After looking into the matter, it has asked for the structure to be removed on the beach as it will hinder the development of the buffer zone. They respect structures that have to be respected on that zone. Every year we have to reply to UNESCO.

They look at what is happening. I must say that in certain countries, structures - for example, a bridge in Germany - have had to be dismantled. This is the situation. I would wish to be sympathetic, but how are we going to reply to UNESCO? What explanation will we give?

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is where I will ask the three hon. Members to work at least once together and try to convince that hotel. It is the duty of the hotel to find a shelter for the taxis which are supposed to be attached to it. The hon. Member certainly knows that the hotel is being difficult and, in fact, this is what had caused the problem. The request has been made and action has also been initiated for the hotel to provide shelters for the taxi drivers. We are trying to make the hotel understands and if we find a solution, we will be able to settle the whole problem to the satisfaction of one and all. The hotel will have to agree. In my constituency, there are hotels and taxis attached to them. They have shelters for their taxi stand. We have to work in that direction. The matter is not closed, that shelter will have to be removed, unfortunately. I am sorry for that but, at the same time, we will try to find another solution for these taxis drivers.

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

At 8.14 p.m., the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 14 July 2009 at 11.30 a.m.