

SECONDARY

PRIVATE COLLEGES

17.10.00 (1)

RODRIGUES - GRANDE MONTAGNE COLLEGE

(No. B/43) Mr J. Léopold (Fourth Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will :

- (a) state if it is proposed to run Grande Montagne College separately from Le Chou College and, if so, will he say when and, if not, why not; and
- (a) state if on 28 and 29 September last, students and teachers attending Grande Montagne College refused to attend classes and, if so, will he give the reasons thereof and the remedial measures taken thereafter.

Mr Obegadoo: Mr Speaker, I am advised that with regard to part (a), the Rodrigues Educational Development Company Ltd. - REDCO manages two colleges in Rodrigues namely Le Chou and Maréchal colleges. The situation is such that Le Chou and Maréchal colleges are registered with the PSSA as full-fledged colleges and operate as such.

Le Chou college is made up of two departments, one at Le Chou and another at Grande Montagne. However, with the increasing number of students at Le Chou college, presently 856 and 848 at Grande Montagne, that is, a total of 1,704, it is becoming more and more difficult for the school management to monitor both departments.

The REDCO Board, therefore, decided, at its last meeting, in July this year that Grande Montagne will be, as from January 2001, registered with the PSSA as a full-fledged college.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that on 28 and 29 September last, teachers and students of Grande Montagne college refused to attend classes, protesting against the fact that during the preceding nights, intruders had penetrated the school premises and had committed several acts of vandalism in classrooms. In order to remedy the situation, the school management decided to have recourse to the services of a watchman as from 29 September. The situation is now back to normal.

14.11.00 (2)
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PRIVATE COLLEGES - PHASING OUT

(No. B/242) **Mr R. Daureawoo (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE)** asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, in regard to the agreement reached between the UPSEE (Union of Private Secondary Education Employees) and his Ministry on 31 May last, he will make a statement in respect of the acquired rights, benefits and privileges of all redundant officers resulting from the phasing out of private colleges and indicate if travel grants and overtime payment are being effected regularly by the PSSA to those officers eligible for same.

Mr Obegadoo: Sir, I assume that the term "redundant officers" in the question put by the hon. gentleman refers to secondary education personnel made redundant before September 2000 inasmuch as there have been no redundancies in that sector since the new Government assumed office nor are any redundancies anticipated for the end of this year or next year.

As the hon. gentleman may recall, after several months of wrangling between the Ministry of Education and the trade union, in May 2000 an agreement was reached whereby the relevant personnel made redundant since December 1982 and subsequently re-deployed were guaranteed a number of benefits both financial and non financial.

I am informed by the PSSA that all re-deployed redundant staff are currently being paid their salary, refund of travelling by bus, yearly increments and bonus. Certain other allowances/benefits in connection with past service (like passage benefits and refund of sick leave) made payable under the terms of the agreement of May 2000 are being computed and the PSSA will effect payment in due course. My attention has been drawn to the fact that one person has not been paid travel grant and I am informed that the PSSA is working out the formalities for the payment of the said travel grants to that person. With regard to unpaid overtime, I am advised that there is only one outstanding case which the PSSA has been requested to attend to urgently.

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PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - MAB REPORT

(No. B/130) **Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will state if the MAB has submitted its report on private secondary schools and, if so, whether the recommendations contained have been implemented and, if not, when does he propose to implement them.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, my Ministry has indeed received the MAB report concerning the New Comprehensive Grants Formula for private secondary schools in February this year. As the report entails substantial financial implications, clearance from the Ministry of Finance has been sought. Once financial clearance is obtained, a decision will be taken at Government level and implementation, as appropriate, effected.

The hon. Member might be interested to learn that my Ministry is working in close collaboration with the Federation of Managers of Private Secondary Schools and the Managers are accordingly being kept aware of all developments.

YEAR

2001

GRAND' BAIE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL & NORTHERN COLLEGE - LACK OF DISCIPLINE (10/04/01)

(No. B/164) **Mr A. K. Gungah** (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he has been made aware of certain problems arising out of lack of discipline at the Grand' Baie Government School and at the Northern College and, if so, will he state what measures he has taken or proposes to take to remedy the situation.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am informed that there is no reported problem of lack of discipline at Grand' Baie Government School save for the case of two teachers with frequent late arrivals and that is being dealt with.

With regard to Northern College, a Fact Finding Committee has been initiated and is to submit its report within three weeks of the date it was set up. I am nonetheless closely monitoring the situation at the college.

17/04/01 (55)

NORTHERN COLLEGE – TEMPORARY CLOSURE

(No. B/235) Dr. S. Chady (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the temporary closure of Northern College, he will state -

- (a) reasons thereof; and
- (b) why there was a major deployment of the Police for that closure.

Reply: As the House is already aware, following students' unrest at Northern College which occurred around 15 March, a Fact Finding Committee was appointed on 30 March. Since then, the PSSA has been closely monitoring the situation at the school.

Instead of improving, the situation has worsened and damage has been caused to school property. This tendency if left unchecked, would have led to a very chaotic situation, putting the safety of the students at risk. On 9 April, the situation has deteriorated to such an extent that one member of the staff was injured. The PSSA accordingly instructed the college to cease running classes, as a precautionary measure, for the four remaining days of the first term i.e. 10, 11, 12 and 13 April. The PSSA has further advised the School Manager to ensure that the days lost be replaced subsequently.

Given the risk potential of the chaotic situation at the school, the PSSA had sought the assistance of the Police in order to maintain discipline on 10 when the school was released. I am given to understand that the Police of Plaine des Papayes, in turn, sought assistance from the Police Station of Piton and this explains the greater number of policemen deployed on that date at the school.



Debate No. 31 of 27/11/2001

EDUCATION OFFICERS – TRANSFER TO MEDCO

(No. B/846) Dr. N. Issimdar (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles & Souillac) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will ascertain the reasons why the Education Officers who were transferred to MEDCO St. Aubin following the closing down of Nightingale College, Surinam, have not been posted to State secondary schools nearer to their respective places of residence instead of being transferred again to MEDCO Vacoas and to MEDCO Cassis.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, following the taking over of Nightingale College by MEDCO in January 1994, the teachers became employees of MEDCO and were posted to MEDCO St. Aubin until its phasing out in March 2000, when these teachers were redeployed in other MEDCO schools, namely MEDCO Clairfonds and MEDCO Cassis.

By an agreement signed between Government and the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE) in 1983 and re-affirmed in May 2000, Government undertook to safeguard the employment of excess or redundant staff of private secondary schools and to redeploy them to other institutions in the educational sector. However, prior to September 2001, such cases had not been properly addressed, to the extent that the redeployed teachers were being paid an allowance in lieu of salary and were not covered by any pension plan in the absence of a formal employer. Accordingly, the present Government agreed in July 2001 that all remaining redundant staff, that is, those coming from the 1983 batch, and those coming from the two schools which closed down in January 2000 would be absorbed into MEDCO.

It is to be noted that when teachers of new secondary schools and Macmillan College were redeployed in January 2000, no policy decision had been taken regarding employment by MEDCO, hence there could be no merger of these teachers with MEDCO employees.

With the new decision to make of all the redundant teachers MEDCO employees and to redeploy them wherever necessary within the public sector in education, posting closer to residence becomes envisageable within limits dictated by administrative convenience.

It has come to my notice that some MEDCO staff residing in the south have understandably expressed their wish to be posted to schools nearer to their place of residence. Such requests are presently being considered in the context of the normal annual transfer exercise. The hon. Member is most welcome to bring to my attention any specific case entailing personal hardship.

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**BYRON COLLEGE, CENTRAL FLACQ – INDUSTRIAL
DISPUTES & TREASURER'S REPORT**

(No. B/296) Mr A.K. Gungah (Second Member for Grand'Bale & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, in view of the fact that the situation at Byron College, Central Flacq, is explosive, he will use his good offices with the PSSA with a view to instituting a fact-find committee to examine –

- (a) the serious nature of the industrial disputes prevailing thereat and;
- (b) the reasons for the non-approval of the treasurer's report by the PTA Annual General Assembly on 2 occasions this year.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, my Ministry had, as far back as December 2001, requested the PSSA to investigate certain alleged malpractices at Byron College. The Authority has undertaken two panel visits on 14 March and 08 April of this year, and has had several working sessions with the management of Byron College, particularly about the poor state of industrial relations there. As a result of this exercise, a list of unresolved issues was established, and guidelines were issued to the Manager for the timely implementation of the required measures, to tackle these issues. Unfortunately, the Manager did not respond positively, and the unhealthy situation persisted. The PSSA was then requested to arrange a roundtable discussion, involving the management of Byron College, the Federation of Managers and UPSEE which, in fact, took place on 09 May. In the light of the discussions, the Manager of Byron College has agreed to review his stand and to reconsider the grievances of the staff in accordance with the guidelines issued by the PSSA. The latter is monitoring the situation closely.

As regards the Treasurer's Report for 2001, I am informed that it was not approved at the last Annual General Assembly on account of some questions which could not be answered. However, this is a purely procedural matter, internal to the PTA, and any alleged malpractices must now be referred to the Registrar of Associations.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say that a fact-finding committee is not set up as a matter of course, but constitutes a measure of last resort after it has been established that all avenues for redress have been exhausted. I repeat, we are closely monitoring the situation at Byron College.

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(No. B/296) (contd)

Mr Gungah: A meeting was scheduled yesterday between UPSEE, the Ministry of Labour and the management. Did it take place?

Mr Obeegadoo: I am afraid, if that concerns the Ministry of Labour, I would not be aware.

Mr Gungah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I had the opportunity to meet almost ten to twelve teachers of that institution, and I have, with me, a list of all the problems they are facing, copy of which I have given to the Minister. In view of all these problems, I find that a fact-finding committee is very urgent.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, education is a very sensitive area, where appointing fact-finding committees each time there is a dispute, a degradation of industrial relations, would not help students, would not help the country. Therefore, when there are alleged malpractices, when there is a problem in a particular institution, the PSSA, as regulator, is there to inquire and try to help resolve these issues. I have recently met with the federation of managers of private secondary schools and I have requested them – and they have agreed – to come in and assist where there are such problems. I have also appealed to UPSEE, which represents employees of the private secondary sector, to be proactive and help resolve disputes. As I said, a fact-finding committee is only a measure of last resort, when there is no longer any prospect of amicably settling a problem. I don't think that, in the case of Byron College, we have reached that stage, and we shall endeavour, by any means possible, to settle whatever problems remain to be settled.

Mr Gungah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the meantime, there is a high degree of frustration among the teachers, and students are suffering. What does the Minister propose to do, to find a solution rapidly?

Mr Obeegadoo: We are closely monitoring the situation. I have instructed the PSSA to find a solution to prevailing problems, as a matter of urgency. If the situation is not resolved within a matter of weeks, let us say by the end of the second term, then, certainly, we shall have to reconsider our approach so far.

Mr Chumroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister in presence of any application for a takeover of the school by MEDCO?

Mr Obeegadoo: I am not aware of any such application, Sir.

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(No. B/296) (contd)

Mr Chumroo: I am given to understand that the Manager is ready to make an offer for a takeover by MEDCO to the Ministry. Is it one possibility that can be envisaged?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Government has no agenda to nationalise education. We are committed to a full, rich, beneficial partnership with the private sector in education. At this stage, there has been no question of MEDCO taking over Byron College brought to my attention. If there is, we shall consider it at the appropriate time.

SCHOOLS (PRIVATE SECONDARY) - MAB SURVEY - FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (15/05/02)

(No. B/305) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state the findings and recommendations of the survey on private secondary schools by the MAB in September 2001 and indicate what action he proposes to take as a result thereof.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I wish to point out at the very outset that there was, of course, no sinister motive behind the decision to request the Management Audit Bureau (MAB) to carry out a survey to identify schools which do not meet the minimum standards as laid down in the Education Act.

In line with the educational reform plan which advocates parity of esteem, my Ministry is committed to enhancing schools efficiency and improving the quality of education generally. It was with that mindset and with the full agreement of the Federation of Managers of Private Secondary Schools that the survey by the MAB was commissioned. The report of the MAB has only just been submitted to me and I wish to state clearly that it is not an end in itself, but rather a tool to enable us to achieve the desired target of public parity of esteem through the upgrading of the school infrastructure and environment. Obviously, the report refers both to substandard schools having room for manoeuvre and those with inherent limitations in terms of upgrading prospects.

A Committee under the chairmanship of the Director of Education (secondary sector) of my Ministry and involving the Federation of Managers of Private Secondary

Schools has been set up to look into the question of parity of esteem and an eventual package of incentives to be granted to private secondary schools for upgrading in the context of reforms. The MAB Report constitutes a valuable working document for that Committee which is expected to complete its assignment before the end of the year.

Mr Chumroo: Sir, will it be correct to say that in the recommendations some schools have been found not to be of a certain level and, therefore, they should close down because they have no scope for any kind of improvement? In those cases, what does the Minister propose?

Mr Obeegadoo: It would be premature to answer the question. As I stated earlier, the report has only just been submitted to us. The objective of that study was to define a minimal level of standards, to consider schools which were below that level to identify which of them had the means to upgrade, thereby allowing us to tailor a package which would allow for upgrading and also to identify schools which, by virtue, for instance, of being housed in rented premises, have no real prospect of upliftment. We would then be discussing with the Managers how over time a solution could be found to such a problem.

Mr Chumroo: Being given that some of the schools will definitely not be able to improve, is there any kind of proposal that can be made in way of compensation so that they voluntarily close down without any hassle?

Mr Obeegadoo: That will certainly have to be looked into, Sir. We shall welcome suggestions from the Federation of Managers of which the hon. gentleman is a member.

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SHRI KRISHNA ASHRAM - STATE LAND LEASE

(No. B/551) **Dr. B. Hookoom** (Second Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Housing and Lands whether, in regard to the Shri Krishna Ashram, he will state when and to whom the State land on which stands the Ashram was leased by his Ministry and indicate whether any request for its extension was applied for and, if so, whether it was acceded to and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Choonee: Sir, the land was leased to the Bible Society of Mauritius on 08 May 1992.

There was no request for extension.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS - INCREMENTS

(No. B/552) **Mr D. Hurnam** (Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to -

- (a) the number of private secondary school teachers who have so far benefited from three increments upon improvement of qualifications pursuant to the Chessworth Report and the PRB Report of 1987 and 1998, indicating if the payment of increments has been discontinued and, if so, the reason therefor;
- (b) the number of teachers whose claims for the payment of such increments are presently pending at the PSSA, and
- (c) whether such payments will be reactivated.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, to place this issue of improvement of qualifications in proper context it is essential to understand that it may arise in the following situations -

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PQ No B/552(contd)

- (i) Grade II Teachers holding less than HSC together with a teacher's certificate obtaining a teacher's diploma to become Grade I;
- (ii) Grade II Teachers holding the HSC obtaining a teacher's diploma to become Education Officer; and
- (iii) Grade I Teachers i.e. not holding the HSC but with SC + diploma obtaining a degree to become Education Officer.

Diploma holders obtaining a degree were not and are not eligible for increments. Degree holders obtaining a PGCE or any other post graduate qualifications do obtain increments, but were not covered by the "three increments" scheme.

In 1989 the Chesworth report, commissioned to look into the anomalies of 1987 PRB Report, recommended the grant of three increments in the case of teachers improving their qualifications and moving from one grade to another grade. It is important to note that, at the time, improvement of qualifications did not lead to grade to grade promotion unless there existed a relevant vacancy according to the entitlement formula laid down by the PSSA. Just to point out the fact that last year in 2001 the Ministry of Education has taken the initiative to change that. Henceforth, any improvement of qualifications may lead to grade to grade promotion irrespective of this issue of entitlement formula. So, as a result of the 1989 Chesworth report, the PSSA started paying teachers three increments on improvement of qualifications.

However, in 1993, the PRB Report recommended the stoppage of payment of three incremental credits for grade to grade promotion in general and the PSSA acted accordingly.

Later the 1998 PRB Report was taken to have reintroduced the payment of three increments for grade to grade promotion in general, teachers who then became eligible, that is, who obtained their further qualifications after the publication of the PRB Report in August 1998 were thus granted the three increments.

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PQ No B/552(contd)

This created an anomalous situation whereas those qualified between 1994 and 1998, were not paid the three increments and this situation was remedied by the Heeralall Report of 2000 which recommended the adjustment of salary for any upgrading which took place between 1994 and 1998 by way of granting so-called "hypothetical" increments.

However, around August/September last year, the internal auditor of the PSSA expressed doubts on the grant of the three increments being paid on upgrading of qualifications and was of the view that PRB Report was being wrongly interpreted. The matter was referred to the Ministry for Civil Service Affairs which advised in February 2002, that the upgrading of teachers could not be considered as a grade to grade promotion justifying the payment of three increments as no offer of appointment was made to them when their salaries were adjusted. This was further confirmed by the State Law Office. The PSSA thus as from March 2002 stopped considering applications for the grant of three increments for upgrading of qualifications.

With regard to part (a) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the PSSA that the exact number cannot be ascertained without going through the individual files of all teachers, but the PSSA has confirmed that the necessary adjustments have been made in all cases up to and including the latest cohort of teachers who upgraded their qualifications in December 2001, except for 63 cases.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed by the PSSA that the number of claims which have not so far been entertained is 63.

Having regard to part (c) of the question, I wish to distinguish between two situations -

Firstly, it would appear that stoppage of payments by the PSSA in March 2002 meant that of the same cohort of teachers having obtained the teacher's diploma in December 2001, some whose claims had already been processed, obtained the payment whereas others did not. At my request, the PSSA sought legal advice on this issue, but has been advised that it would not be legally in order for such payments to be extended to all concerned.

D29P12CO4
PQ No B/552(contd)

Secondly, as regards the fundamental problem relating to interpretation of the 1998 PRB Report, it is proposed to hold a meeting as between the relevant advisers of the PSSA and the unions concerned so as to reach a consensus, failing which, any aggrieved party has been invited to seek legal redress.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS (SUBSTANDARD) –
OPERATION IN 2003

5 Nov. 02

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(No. B/646) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will submit a list of substandard private secondary schools which will operate in 2003.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, there exists no list of substandard schools as such. In 1989, Government commissioned the Management Audit Bureau (MAB) to carry out a survey with a view to, *inter-alia*, formulating a package of incentives for managers, and recommending measures for the gradual elimination of disparities between State and private schools. The MAB categorised the private secondary schools, in its Report, in three main groups as follows -

- (i) uneconomical schools, with a school population of less than 350;
- (ii) school with a population of between 350 and 1400 students; and
- (iii) oversized schools, having a student population of above 1400.

The MAB study revealed that the operating costs of schools, with student population of below 350, were exceedingly high and concluded that additional investment in the upgrading of their facilities will not be cost-effective. It also recommended that sub-economical schools, that is, with a student population of below 350 students, be required to submit detailed plans of their re-organisation into viable units.

It was on that basis that Government introduced the concessionary DBM loans for upgrading of private secondary schools.

D32/IF/P05/1

No. B/646 (contd.)

The 1989 report revealed that the following schools had less than 350 students -

St Bartholomew's College
Bradley College
Byron College
College des Villes Soeurs
Grand Bois College
Macmillan College Mahebourg
Mayflower Brisée Verdière
Newton College RDA
Pamplemouses High School
Port Louis High School
Presidency College (RDA)
Progressive College
Quartier Militaire College
Thanacody College
Unity College
Victoria College
Willoughby College (B)
Willoughby College Girls
Windsor College (Boys)
Windsor College (Girls)
Macmillan College, Rivière des Anguilles
New Secondary School, Montagne Blanche

I would like to draw the attention of the House that two schools (namely Macmillan, Rivière des Anguilles and New Secondary School, Montagne Blanche) from the 1989 list were closed down in January 2000 due to the fact that their school population had dropped below 150. In fact, in 1999, my predecessor had evolved a policy for stoppage of grants in case the student population of grant aided Private Secondary Schools went below 150.

Incidentally, two more schools, namely Stratford and Northern Colleges, although not initially in the list of less than 350 students of the MAB have had to close down since September 2000 due to strained industrial relations and students unrest.

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In 2001, my Ministry commissioned the MAB to carry out a survey of private secondary schools with a view to working out a policy for their upgrading to achieve parity of esteem. The report was received earlier this year, but was found to be incomplete and the MAB has been requested to supplement its report.

Following the closing down of Macmillan College of Rivière des Anguilles and New Secondary School of Montagne Blanche in January 2000, there has been a pressing demand both from the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE) and the Federation of Managers for the gradual closing down of substandard schools. My Ministry is being very careful in the implementation of such closing down because of the need to strike a balance between demand for and supply of Form I seats region-wise. This delicate balance has now become even more sensitive as we are now moving towards compulsory secondary education up to the age of sixteen (16). For instance, in 2001 some 2000 prevocational students joined Form I and next year we are expecting the figure to be around 3000 and this is, of course, over and above the normal mainstream intake. We are, with the collaboration of UPSEE and the Federation of Managers, proceeding on the basis of planned phasing out of schools which have a population of less than 150 students, taking into consideration factors like possibility of redeployment and sustainability of demand of seats region-wise .

Based on the above principles, my Ministry has carefully studied the cases of three (3) schools namely Macmillan College, Willoughby College (Boys), and Willoughby (Girls) having a school population of less than 150 each. Being satisfied that there do exist redeployment possibilities and that the demand of seats for Form I can be catered for by existing schools in the region, Government has taken the decision to stop payment of grants in favour of the three (3) schools I have just mentioned as from January 2003.

Dr. Boolell: Will the Minister inform the House whether those schools which cannot be run in a cost-effective manner will be compulsorily acquired?

Mr Obeegadoo: No, Sir. The issue of compulsory acquisition does not arise, has never arisen since 1989.

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Dr. Boolell: Can he then inform the House as to what happened in the case of Stratford College?

Mr Obeegadoo: In the case of Stratford College, Mr Speaker, Sir, as everybody knows there was a sale by levy initiated by teachers who had been dismissed some 20 years ago and that had nothing to do with the stoppage of grants to the school. In the process, Government thought it fit to put in a bid for the acquisition of building which is strategically located in the centre of Quatre Bornes and the outcome is well known to us all.

Mr Dulloo: I have two questions, Sir. When the issue was raised now and again, the hon. Minister has said that in case there would be closing down, modalities are being spelt out for any eventual closure. He has mentioned a few colleges that have closed down already. May I ask him, in the case of those colleges, what modalities have been worked out and how these are being implemented, I mean the closing down of Macmillan and other colleges he has mentioned?

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, modalities would simply mean the stoppage of grants by the PSSA.

Mr Dulloo: But what about the colleges which have invested and have been servicing Mauritius in the field of education for so many years? Because in his report, the Minister said it is evident that some 40 colleges will have to be phased out with compensation for losses on a case to case basis. May I ask him whether the question of compensation has been considered for those colleges that have closed down, as well spelt out in black and white in his report?

Mr Obeegadoo: I do not know which report is being referred to. The reverse side seems to show the "Action Plan" which is not mine! Anyway, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Federation of Managers has indeed put in a request for compensation to be payable to Managers should closures result from implementation of the reforms in education, which request is presently under study by Government.

D32/IF/P05/4

Mr Dulloo: May I ask him, therefore, in the case of those colleges that have closed down already, whether the question of compensation is being considered? Because those managers have been left out of work all of a sudden.

Mr Obegadoo: The four schools which have closed down have done so not as a result of reforms in education. As the Leader of the Opposition who was then Prime Minister will recall, when the New Secondary School of Montagne Blanche and Macmillan College of Rivière des Anguilles were closed down, there was no compensation paid out. In the case of the two colleges which have closed down since September 2000, that is, Northern College and Stratford College, the closures did not result from reforms in education, but from bad management, from industrial relations problems, from students' unrest which had nothing to do with the reforms.

Dr. Boolell: Except for Macmillan and Byron colleges, can we take it for granted that there will be no closure of substandard schools?

Mr Obegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no decision concerning Byron College at the present time. The hon. gentleman, maybe, is anticipating on events. I am indeed very concerned about the state of industrial relations at Byron College, but there has been no decision as yet to stop payment of grants to Byron College. The three schools which will not be operating in January 2003 are Macmillan College, Willoughby College (Boys) and Willoughby College (Girls). According to the criteria set down by my predecessor, then Minister Chedumbarum Pillay, schools falling below the 150 student mark should not be allowed to function and I would agree with him. This is why we are going along those lines. As regards the future there is, on the one hand, pressing requests from the Federation of Managers who say: close down substandard schools and it would be better for the reputation of private secondary schools and it will facilitate the attainment of parity of esteem. There is similar pressure from UPSEE, the Union of Teachers which says that the State has a duty to upgrade the quality of education being offered to students and those schools that do not have the ability to upgrade should close down. Government, as I said, has to strike a balance. The Managers and the Union have a point.

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(No B/646 Cont'd)
(Mr Obeegadoo)

On the other hand, we are moving very fast to ensure education for all up to age 16 and we desperately need places in schools. That is why Government has embarked on a very ambitious programme of infrastructural development. So, we are trying to strike the right balance. We will be envisaging, from year to year with the agreement of the Federation of Managers and the teachers and all key stakeholders, a phased, orderly and properly managed closure of schools which do not have the ability to upgrade.

Mr Dulloo: The Minister has made a comment just now. He has referred to the minimum requirement of 150 pupils as laid down by his predecessor, that is, the previous Government. May I ask him whether he is aware that this criteria was contained in a whole package which also includes the question of compensation? And this is why in his own report he said that a committee will be set up to monitor its implementation and spell out the modalities of any eventual closure; and the Managers were given to understand that these modalities would include compensation as laid down by the previous Government.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me repeat, two schools closed down before September 2000, Macmillan College and the New Secondary School of Montagne Blanche. As far as I am aware, rightly or wrongly, no compensation was granted to the managers. There is now a request from the managers for compensation which are to come in the future and which result from the reforms. That request is under study.

MACMILLAN AND WILLOUGHBY COLLEGES - GRANTS - STOPPAGE



(No. B/732) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information from the PSSA as to whether any decision has been taken regarding the discontinuation of allocating grants to Willoughby College, Mahebourg and, if so, will he make a statement thereon.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I wish to refer the hon. gentleman to the answer I gave to his Parliamentary Question B/646 on 05 November 2002. In that answer, I did confirm that, on the basis of a policy established in 1999 for stoppage of

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unrevised

(P.Q. No. B/732 ctd.....)

grants to schools with a school population of below 150, Government had decided to cease payment of grants to Macmillan College, Willoughby College (Boys) and Willoughby College (Girls).

I am informed by the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) that these colleges have 63, 92 and 133 students respectively. Accordingly, the PSSA will only effect payment for the period ending 31 December 2002.

My Ministry and the PSSA are finalising plans for the redeployment of students in other secondary schools of the region and the absorption of the redundant staff by MEDCO.

Dr. Boolell: Can I then ask the Minister why is it that there is an element of bias in the case of MEDCO Clairfonds and Port Louis? The two colleges were allowed to merge. Why is it that, in the case of Willoughby College, even though there has been an appeal from the private colleges managers appealing to the Minister, yet the Minister has remained indifferent to this appeal?

Mr Obegadoo: It is for the simple reason, Mr Speaker, that MEDCO is a company owned by the State.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the Minister why is it that, in the presence of our good friend, hon. Guimbeau, the PPS of Curepipe, he met the Manager of Willoughby College and accordingly agreed that he would give due consideration to the request?

Mr Obegadoo: Mr Speaker, it would appear that the owners of Willoughby College have been lobbying and contacting MPs to obtain the continued payment of grants to their schools. Now, the decision of Government has been taken on the basis of a clear policy established back in 1999 and Government is going to stick to its decision.

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(P.Q. No. B/732 ctd....)

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the decision of 1999 was not coupled with a payment of compensation? He has mentioned Willoughby and Macmillan Colleges. When this decision was taken to phase out those colleges registering less than 150 pupils, was it also decided that a compensation would be paid to those colleges, especially to management depending on that income for their livelihood? In the case of Macmillan and Willoughby colleges that he is mentioning, is the question of compensation being considered?

Mr Obeegadoo: My good friend was not in Government in 2000, nor was I. Now, the policy was established in 1999. In January 2000, two schools were closed down under the previous Government, namely Macmillan Rivière des Anguilles and New Secondary School, Montagne Blanche. In neither case was compensation paid to them.

Mr Dulloo: The decision was taken and Government said that the question of compensation was being examined. The document that I referred to on the last occasion clearly spelt out that, in such cases, compensation would have to be paid.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, when I became Minister of Education, I did not come across any file which indicated that the issue of compensation was under consideration. However, as I said on 05 November last, a few months ago, the federation of managers of private secondary schools has put in a request for compensation for any future closure of schools; and that request is under consideration right now by Government.

Dr. Boolell: Can the hon. Minister lay copy of that request made by the federation of managers of private secondary schools to the PSSA in respect of requests to encourage the merging of the two colleges of Willoughby.

Mr Obeegadoo: I do not have copy of such a correspondence at hand and I cannot confirm off hand whether there is a correspondence from the Federation of Managers to PSSA to that effect. That might be the case, but I cannot confirm right now.

YEAR

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**MINISTER OF EDUCATION & SCIENTIFIC
RESEARCH/FEDERATION OF MANAGERS OF PSS -
AGREEMENT**

(No. B/378) **Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether an agreement has been entered into on 20 June 2000 between the Minister of Education and Scientific Research and the Federation of Managers of Private Secondary Schools and, if so, will he state the contents thereof.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, indeed on 20 June 2000 an agreement was signed by the then Minister of Education and Scientific Research and the Secretary of the Federation of Unions of Managers of Private Secondary Schools, further to which the Federation called off a threatened lock-out.

A copy of the document incorporating the contents of the agreement is being tabled.

Mr Chumroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, being given that the agreement was signed between the previous Ministry of Education, does it still stand good?

Mr Obeegadoo: Yes and no in the sense that the agreement refers specifically to proposals which were incorporated in what was called the Action Plan of the then Minister Pillay, which, of course, no longer founds the policy of my Ministry or Government. However, a number of points in that agreement, which are of a general nature, have already been implemented or are being implemented.

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**MINISTER OF EDUCATION/FEDERATION OF UNIONS OF
MANAGERS OF PSS- MEETING**

(No. B/385) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he has had a recent meeting with the association of Managers of private secondary schools and, if so, will he make a statement thereon.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I have had a meeting with the Federation of Unions of Managers of Private Secondary Schools yesterday afternoon. This closely follows one which I had with them two weeks back, on 12 May last.

The House will recall that, as far back as May 2001, when I presented the educational reform proposals, my Ministry embarked on a comprehensive exercise of information, consultation and negotiation with all stakeholders in the field of education. In the process, I managed to put in place a mechanism for dialogue, to reinforce the public/private partnership.

The main apprehension of the private sector has been closure of their schools, as a result of the construction programme of new State secondary schools. Hence, several meetings have been held with the Managers to analyse the implications of the construction programme in terms of demand and supply of seats, as well as various issues pertaining to the operation of the private sector in secondary education.

As regards the meeting held on 12 May last, it was convened at my own initiative, to clear any misunderstandings and to reassure the Managers' Federation of my Ministry's firm commitment to work in close collaboration with the private sector.

I met the Federation of Managers for a second time yesterday afternoon. In general, the meeting was meant to pursue the dialogue begun earlier between Government and the private sector. More particularly, discussions centered around issues of admission and construction of schools for 2004, as well as the issue of the grants to private secondary schools, all in the wider context of parity of esteem, which remains our common objectives. We have decided to meet anew on Thursday 12 June.

24
3 June 2003

GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOL - MONTHLY COST PER STUDENT FOR YEARS 2000-2002

(No. B/408) Mr X. L. Duval (Fourth Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will table a list of the monthly cost per student attending each Government secondary school for each of the financial years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the information requested is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the information is not available? As a matter of course at the Ministry, it has to be compiled.

Mr Obeegadoo: Yes, Sir. Because the question relates to each Government secondary school, including presumably both recurrent and capital expenditure, therefore this is a constantly evolving picture and the information is being compiled and will be made available.

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✓ **PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS/CONFESSIONAL SCHOOLS - SUBSIDY PER STUDENT**

(No. B/409) Mr X. L. Duval (Fourth Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will table a list of the monthly subsidy per student met from public funds for each private secondary school including confessional schools for each of the financial years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the information requested for is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly.

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't want to be rude to the hon. Minister, but this information has already been submitted and is a subject matter of the last Report of the PAC. Therefore, I find it very hard for the Minister to say that it is being compiled. I was as polite as I could, but it was not apparently helpful. This is why I am saying I find it very hard to believe that this information is not available as it is already the subject of Section V of the last PAC Report.

Mr Obeegadoo: Let me try and make it easier for the hon. Member to comprehend. The hon. Member is perfectly right. This issue was raised at the level of the Public Accounts Committee in respect of one of the fiscal years mentioned in the question. Even for that year, Members of the Public Accounts Committee made some quite pertinent remarks as to the method of calculating those figures. We are so attentive to those remarks that we are looking again at the computation of those figures and for the other year, of course, we have to compute anew.

✓ 14

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – FORMS I & VI INTAKE - 2002/03
(03/06/03)

(No. A/25) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will, for each of the years 2002-2003, table the intake in Form I and in Lower VI for each private secondary school.

Reply: I am hereby tabling the intake in Form I and in Lower VI for each private secondary school for each of the year 2002-2003.

MEDCO/PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – TEACHER-PUPIL RATIO
(03/06/03)

(No. A/27) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state the teacher-pupil ratio in the MEDCO schools and other private secondary schools and say if it is Government policy to continue to operate the MEDCO schools or whether Government is contemplating to allocate funds to existing cost effective private secondary schools in order to improve their facilities and to offer a voluntary retirement scheme to teachers in excess of requirements.

Reply: The teacher-pupil ratio in MEDCO schools is 1:15 on the average, while in other private secondary schools it is 1:19 on average.

As the House is aware, following agreements signed with the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE) in 1985 and 2000, Government has a duty to safeguard the employment of excess or redundant staff of private secondary schools. This exercise is being carried out through the Government owned company MEDCO. Thus MEDCO is not only operating secondary schools, but is also acting as a body which absorbs all excess and redundant staff of private secondary schools. These staff are then redeployed in State secondary schools, MEDCO schools and other departments of the education sector where required.

Any excess human resources for whom no suitable redeployment is found is posted in the MEDCO schools until definite needs for staff arise at particular places. This explains why the teacher to pupil ratio in MEDCO schools is higher compared to that of other private secondary schools.

For the time being, the MEDCO schools will stay. In future, Government will decide as to whether an alternative route may be taken.

Sir, Government is committed to the principle of parity of esteem and that's why my Ministry has been contemplating ways and means for the private sector to be able to upgrade their institutions. Following discussions between the Federation of Unions of Managers of Private Secondary Schools, the PSSA and my Ministry a scheme is being worked out to enable private secondary schools to contract loans from the Development Bank of Mauritius at a concessionary rate of interest.

As regards the Voluntary Retirement Scheme to teachers in excess of requirements, my Ministry is presently working on the issue. Any proposal from the hon. Member will be most welcomed.

24 July, 2003

(17)

**SCHOOLS (PUBLIC & PRIVATE) - STUDENTS -
COMPARATIVE COST PER ANNUM**

(No. B/542) Mr X. Duval (Fourth Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will say if the figures concerning the average cost per annum to the public purse of a student attending private and public secondary schools in Mauritius are now available and, if so, will he make a statement thereon.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I wish to thank the hon. gentleman for his sustained interest in the question of the comparative cost per capita of students in public and private secondary schools to the State. I understand that the matter has received quite some attention at the level of the Public Accounts Committee which the hon. Member chairs and it has also been the subject of several Parliamentary Questions from the same hon. Member in June, this year.

The question has always been a controversial one ever since secondary education was made non fee paying in 1977 inasmuch as the State was perceived as spending more on a small minority of students in public schools and less on the majority found in private secondary schools, while disclaiming all responsibility for most of the so called *recalés du CPE* who were left to themselves.

D29P08CO8

PQ No. B/542 (contd)

At the heart of the Reform programme in education ushered in by the present Government, is the belief that all children should have equal educational opportunities whatever their place of residence or educational institutions attended. Accordingly, the concept of public "parity of esteem" for all secondary schools is being strongly promoted by my Ministry. Obstacles to such "parity of esteem" concern staffing, infrastructural facilities and most importantly financial resources. Hence, the renewed interest in the question of objectively determining the comparative level of public expenditure on students in State and private schools at both primary and secondary levels.

To put an end to what has become a never ending and damaging controversy, we believe that a shared understanding should be evolved with the relevant stakeholders as to the appropriate method of calculating and computing the said costs.

As regards secondary schooling, in line with the Budget Speech's commitment to promote a strong partnership with the private sector in education, a new round of talks began in June with the Federation of Unions of Managers of private secondary schools. The issue of computational methodology in respect of per capita spending is being addressed and once an agreement is found in that respect, the figures will be computed so as to be understood and accepted by all parties. Should the said figures reveal a significant disparity, the issue will be addressed in partnership with the managers and operators as part of the global reform programme.

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P.Q. No. B/542 (cont'd)

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, Sir, two months ago, I asked the hon. Minister if we could have the figures. He stated that the figures existed, but he was going to see how they could be adjusted in one way or another. Two months have gone by and now we hear that the figures cannot be given because the Government needs to agree with some external people, third parties, as to what is the cost to the Government of public and private education. Is this serious? The Government does not know and has to concert with other people as to what is the cost of private and public schools!

Mr Obeegadoo: Those are the people who are our partners. They are the private sector in education and they have been performing a public duty inasmuch as they have been providing education to students both at primary and secondary levels who would, otherwise, be deprived of schooling. We are committed to a strong and fruitful partnership with the private sector in education. That is, indeed, a historical legacy which we intend to preserve and promote.

Let me make it very clear. The Ministry of Education did have its figures. Those were submitted, for instance, to the Public Accounts Committee and Members of the Public Accounts Committee were right, their points were well taken, concerning the manner of computing these figures. These figures were also contested by the various stakeholders in education, the managers of private secondary schools, different educational authorities. So, we decided to take a fresh look and we thought if everybody agrees as to the method of computing these costs we can put an end to such a controversy. We have started, again, after the Budget, discussing with the managers of private secondary schools as to how these figures would be computed and we have got our technical cadre, qualified accountants at my Ministry, the experts of the federation of managers, to sit down together and there are still some disagreements as to the way of calculating the costs. Existing figures are available and the hon. Member has seen them. These figures can be communicated any time.

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P.Q. No. B/542 (cont'd)

Mr Duval: On a point of order, Sir, the hon. Minister is quoting what is supposedly happening at the Public Accounts Committee but which has not been reported officially in the report of the Public Accounts Committee. I think he should be careful not to have a debate here as to what has been or has not been happening at the Public Accounts Committee, what has been said or has not.

Mr Speaker: Is the Minister referring to what is found in a report or is he making comments on what is going on in the Public Accounts Committee? There is a great distinction. Unless and until the report has been made public, the hon. Minister has no right to comment on what is going on in the Public Accounts Committee.

(Interruptions)

Mr Obeegadoo: The report has been made public in December of last year and I am referring to what is now public knowledge.

I will not be much longer. All I am saying is that, instead of keeping on arguing about figures, we are trying to agree on the methodology. If the hon. Member has any suggestion, then, once again, we will quite happy to consider. As soon as the figures are obtained, they will be communicated to the House.

Mr Duval: Sir, on a point of order, I just wish to draw your attention that the PAC Report makes no mention of any recalculation of the costs per student. It makes no mention of that. I think it would be wrong to presume here in Parliament what has happened in the Committee. I have a copy of the PAC Report and I wish to table it. I did not want to get into this debate, but I think there should be some restraint from the Minister of Education.

Mr Speaker: It amounts making an unfair comment of what is contained in the report.

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P.Q. No. B/542 (cont'd)

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will refer the hon. Member to paragraph 5 of the third report of the PAC which was made public in December 2002 and which refers to, precisely, the very same issue.

Mr Duval: On a point of order, Sir. Can I table a copy of the PAC Report?

Mr Speaker: Can the hon. Member take his seat, please? We are not going to have a debate on the report of the Public Accounts Committee right now.

Mr Duval: On a point of order, Sir. May I table a copy for your ruling in the future? There is no mention of the need to recalculate any figures of the costs. Perhaps you can come later with a ruling on this point. Otherwise this debate can go on for ever.

Mr Obeegadoo: I do want to argue on this point. Let us forget about the PAC Report. The figures are being computed anew on the basis of agreed methodology and they will be communicated to the House as soon as possible.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has said that they have not computed the figures, they have not made the assessment in monetary terms. Can I ask him whether he is ensuring that, at least, between public and private schools, the type and standard of education are similar? Is there an assessment ongoing on this aspect of education?

Mr Obgeegadoo: I have already answered, Sir.

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

SSS - MEDCO TEACHERS

(No. B/73) **Dr. R. Beebeejaun (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific research whether he will state if teachers from MEDCO are working in State Secondary Schools and, if so -

- (a) the number;
- (b) in what capacity and if involved in teaching, their teaching load, and
- (c) whether the prior approval of the PSC has been obtained.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am informed that on 20 February 1983, the then Government reached an agreement with the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE) and the Mauritius Association of Students whereby Government "undertook to do everything within its authority, prerogative and jurisdiction to redeploy any employee who may become redundant as a result of the closing down of private secondary schools in the future." A commitment was reiterated in another agreement between UPSEE and Government, signed in May 2000.

In pursuance of the 1983 Agreement, private secondary school teachers, made redundant since, have been redeployed to the Mauritius Educational Development Company Limited (MEDCO), and to State or other private secondary schools and such teachers continued to be paid by the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA).

In line with the May 2000 Agreement, MEDCO has been designated, since the late 1990s, as the organisation re-employing redundant teachers and arranging for their redeployment in schools other than MEDCO schools as and when appropriate. The Articles of Association of MEDCO have accordingly been amended. I am informed that the question of prior approval of the Public Service Commission does not arise, to the extent that such teachers are not State employees.

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D02P10cl/2

P.Q. No. B/73 (cont'd)

I am advised that, as at present, some 130 teachers of MEDCO are working in State Secondary Schools, of which 128 carry out teaching duties and the other 2 perform duties of Usher. I am further advised that teachers in State Secondary Schools are normally required to teach for a minimum number of 28 periods per week. State Secondary School Rectors are called upon to ensure that optimal use is made of MEDCO staff posted to their schools, in line with time-table requirements.

Dr. Boolell: I would like to ask the Minister whether he has received complaints from Education Officers appointed by the Public Service Commission, that they are unduly penalised, because they are transferred to make room for the MEDCO teachers.

Mr Obeegadoo: If I have at all, Sir, it would have escaped my notice. I am not, at this point in time, aware of any such representations.

Dr. Beebeejaun: If the Minister was made aware would he condone such measure?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, let me try and explain the situation clearly.

(Interruptions)

If the hon. gentleman would care to hear the answer.

Over the last 20 years, private secondary schools have closed down from time to time. According to the 1983 agreement, all the employees of such schools are automatically kept in employment and paid by the PSSA. More often than not, they are sent to MEDCO. It is logical that, instead of having persons at MEDCO earning a salary from public funds and doing nothing, they be redeployed. When they are redeployed, it is up to the Head of the institution to make the best possible use of them without, of course, having two teachers conducting one class. If there are specific cases of abuse, that can be reported to me. It is inevitable that, in some schools, redeployed staff would be working less than 28 periods a week. That is still better than having them at MEDCO doing nothing and earning money.

Dr. Beebeejaun: I thank the Minister for the last part of the answer. It has been fully replied.

**PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS -
GRANTS & ALLOWANCES**

19/30/3/04

(No. B/131) **Dr S. Maudarbocus (Third Member for Port Louis south and Port Louis Central)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will say what measures are in place to ensure that the grants and allowances paid to private secondary schools are used for their legitimate purposes.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, grants are paid to private secondary schools by the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) as provided under Section 4(e) of the PSSA Act which reads -

"The Authority shall be responsible for the payment of grants properly accruing to secondary or pre-vocational schools."

Furthermore, Section 15(i)(a) of the Act, provides that the amount of grant to be paid to a secondary school or pre-vocational school shall be determined in accordance with such criteria as the Authority may determine.

In 1989, the Management Audit Bureau introduced a comprehensive grant formula, which is reviewed every three years. The grant formula consists of -

- (i) the Operations Grant, and
 - (ii) the Management Grant.
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D04P14CO6
PQ No. B/131 (contd)

Grants are payable in accordance with assessment exercises carried out annually by the PSSA. The quantum payable is determined after an assessment as per set criteria, which is normally worked out in collaboration with Managers. The assessment exercise is itself a control mechanism for the effective use of grants paid. Any change in facilities offered is taken into account when the assessment exercise is carried out and payment of grant is revised accordingly.

Besides the periodic inspections and assessments carried out by the inspectorate of the PSSA, the private secondary schools are required under Regulation 4 of the PSSA Regulations, to submit an estimate of income and expenditure and under Regulation 5 to submit audited final accounts to the PSSA annually.

Dr. Maudarbocus: Can the hon. Minister say if the inspectors who visit the schools try to find out if there are fictitious employees?

Mr Obeegadoo: I presume that is indeed the case, that is, when PSSA inspectors do visit the schools they pay attention to everything that is relevant to their duties.

Dr. Maudarbocus: Are employees of the secondary schools are made to work as cook, servant, driver and in the commercial enterprise of the manager of the school?

Mr Obeegadoo: I am not aware of such facts. Of course if they were true that would totally be unacceptable and I would invite the hon. gentleman to communicate to me any information that he may have in that regard.

Dr. Maudarbocus: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will be ready to communicate these information to the Minister, but unfortunately the Minister is going to give these information to that inspector and the same inspector will inform him.

The Prime Minister: Give it to me.

D04P14CO7
PQ No. B/131 (contd)

Dr. Maudabocus: I am going to do so.

Do the inspectors make surprise visits or uninformed surprise visits or the visits are known before?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, I cannot reply in detail for each and every inspector, for each and every school. But I presume that generally visits are pre-arranged, but at times surprise checks may be called for.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has been made aware that any such complaints have been received, that is, complaints to the effect that such grants are not being used for their legitimate purposes?

Mr Obeegadoo: If this was so I would have taken appropriate action immediately.

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D04/P19/mt/1

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SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR - LOAN FACILITIES

(No. B/147) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in the wake of educational reforms, he will -

- (a) consider the advisability of providing a level playing field in the secondary education sector and, if so, will he set up an independent regulatory body, and
- (b) state if private secondary schools are given loan facilities to improve their standards.

Mr Obeegadoo: Yes, Sir, in line with the educational reform plan of my Ministry, which advocates parity of esteem, my Ministry is committed to

- (i) the provision of equal educational opportunities to all children whatever their place of residence or educational institution attended;
- (ii) enhancing schools efficiency, and
- (iii) improving the quality of education generally.

Accordingly, the concept of "parity of esteem" for all secondary schools is being strongly promoted by my Ministry to provide a level playing field within the secondary education sector. Obstacles to such parity of esteem concern staffing, infrastructural facilities and financial resources.

With a view to evolving a shared understanding of the reforms process and to clarifying the participation of the private sector in the shaping of the future of secondary education, a mechanism for dialogue with the Federation of Union of Managers has been set up since 2001. Regular meetings have been held with the federation to address both operational issues and to look into the question of parity of esteem.

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D04/P19/mt/2

UNREVISED**(No. B/147) contd.**

Operational issues discussed and finalised with the Federation include the upgrading of teachers, admissions to Form I and Lower VI exercises pre-vocational project.

As regards staffing the conditions of service of teachers of private secondary schools have been aligned with those of State secondary schools. Moreover, steps are being taken so that private secondary schools are staffed with qualified teachers, that is, graduates, as is the case in the public sector. New recruits will in future be only graduates, and those teachers of private secondary schools, who are of grades lower than graduates will be replaced by fully qualified education officers when they retire.

Within the ongoing re-examination of the structure and operation of the PSSA, the Federation of Managers has submitted suggestions for an independent regulatory body. These suggestions are being thoroughly studied by my Ministry.

Discussions with the federation have led to the conclusion that parity of esteem cannot be established unless private secondary schools are financially assisted, and there is a broadly comparative level of public expenditure on students in State and private secondary schools. A package of incentives for the upgrading of private secondary schools has been discussed. However, the federation has expressed the wish that Government guarantees the continued existence of private secondary schools, which they propose to be formalised in terms of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Work on the said MoU is ongoing.

A Development Bank of Mauritius Loan Scheme already exists which can be availed of for projects, such as upgrading of toilets. However, in the context of the MoU, we are also discussing with the Federation of Managers, which other infrastructural projects would entitle private secondary schools to benefit from the loan scheme in the global context of redefining norms and standards for secondary schools.

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(No. B/147) contd.

Mr Chumroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Mauritius Telecom, the Independent Broadcasting Corporation or the Bank of Mauritius have all become regulators and, therefore, are not participants in the activities. But here, the Ministry of Education is an operator and with the private parties they have formed a federation to look at things and as such they are providers and, at the same time, regulators. Does the hon. Minister not think it proper that a regulatory body be set up, which will be independent from the providers of this service?

Mr Obegadoo: The suggestion had been made and is being studied.

Mr Chumroo: With regard to the second part of the answer, I would like to know whether any school so far has been allocated with such loan for the improvement of their infrastructure?

Mr Obegadoo: I would not be in a position to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if the hon. gentleman puts a substantive question, I will certainly answer.

Mr Chumroo: I would like to know whether any loan has been sanctioned so far, because from what I gathered, Government is investing a lot and private schools also would like to be in line, but this type of loan is not being provided to private schools for improvement.

Mr Obegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. gentleman seems to be very well informed of education in the private sector. Right now, there is a loan scheme that exists at the Development Bank of Mauritius. It has existed for many years. Last year, Government improved upon that scheme to make it even more attractive, whereas in the past, for instance, under the former Government, the scheme did exist, but managers did not avail themselves of the loan, because they found the conditions not to be attractive.

Sir, the loan is in existence and for certain projects, such as the upgrading of toilets, the loan can be subscribed. However, norms and standards in the private secondary sector in Mauritius, date back to the 1950s.

D04/P19/mt/4

UNREVISED**(No. B/147) contd.**

With the reform process in education, we are negotiating a new Memorandum of Standing with the managers, whereby in line with the economic and social development of the country, norms and standards in all secondary schools, be they private or State, are defined anew.

The loan scheme of the DBM will be so tailored that the infrastructural projects that it will finance are strictly in line with the redefined norms and standards. I think that such an approach is in the best interest of the children of this country, Sir.

UNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS - INTOXICATION

(21) 3/4/04

(No. B/206) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether he will state if the cause of intoxication of the Unity College students has been established.

Reply: I am informed that on 29 March 2004, 36 children from Unity College attended the Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital complaining of burning sensation in the nostril and eyes, headache, nausea and some with giddiness and abdominal pain.

Three of them were admitted for observation and their conditions were found to be satisfactory. The following morning, they were all examined by a paediatrician and were discharged.

Results of specimens submitted for toxicological analysis were negative. In view of the fact that very transient manifestations of symptoms and all pathological investigations did not reveal any incriminatory substance, no specific cause could be attributed from a purely medical point of view.

However, I would like to add that surveys carried out both by the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life and my Ministry have confirmed that there is a persisting mild and occasionally more pronounced odour of vinasse and alcohol in the vicinity of Alcodis Ltd. Such odours, under specific conditions such as poor ventilation and crowded areas may cause symptoms similar to those reported on 29 March.

D05/IF/W02/3

I further wish to inform the hon. Member that, amongst other measures, Alcodis Ltd. has been requested -

- (i) to undertake a complete audit by a qualified professional to identify possible leakages and to submit a certified report;
- (ii) to increase the carting away capacity of vinasses in a sound environmental manner; and
- (iii) the vinasse treatment plant to be made fully operational.

My Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, Ministry of Agriculture & Natural Resources, the MSIRI and the University of Mauritius is closely monitoring the situation. A follow-up meeting is scheduled with Alcodis Ltd. tomorrow to review progress.

D07W03CO1

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS - MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

(No. B/302) Mr J. C. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, having regard to the educational reforms he will state if his Ministry has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with various private educational authorities and, if so, will he -

- (a) table copy of each of such memoranda, and
- (b) state the financial implications, including loans from the DBM, in each case.

Reply: Yes, indeed, in the context of the educational reforms Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) were signed in June 2002 between any Ministry and the following colleges -

- (i) Aleemiah College;
- (ii) Catholic (Confessional) Colleges;
- (iii) DAV College;
- (iv) Hindu Girls' College, and
- (v) Islamic College

With regard to (a) the hon. Member may refer to Private Notice Question of 30 July 2002 when copy of the MOUs were tabled. Nevertheless, I am hereby tabling a copy of each of the memoranda for the benefit of the hon. Member.

D07W03CO2
PQ No. B/302

As regards (b) given that the above-named colleges had agreed to convert their existing college into forms I - V secondary school and to construct/set up each a new Sixth Form college, loans are being made available to them for these projects, at a concessionary rate of interest to be determined by the Development Bank of Mauritius (DBM). The financial implication would therefore be a function of the amount of loan eventually taken and the interest differential between the concessionary rate and what the DBM normally grants to private secondary schools, which presently is 6%.

Up to now, only Aleemiah College has contracted a loan of Rs3m at the concessionary rate of interest, as provided for under the MOU signed in June 2002.

MACMILLAN COLLEGE, RIVIERE DES ANGUILLES -
COMPENSATION

1/6/04
(23)

(No. B/510) **Mr M. Dulloo (Third Member for Grand'Baie and Poudre d'Or)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state why compensation has not yet been paid to Macmillan College of Rivière des Anguilles following the closing down of the said college.

Mr Obegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, payment of grants to Macmillan College of Rivière des Anguilles was stopped with effect from January 2000 on the basis of a policy established by the then Government in 1999 for stoppage of grants to schools with a school population below 150. In 1999, the college, in fact, had a student population of 113. However, no scheme was established by the then Government for the payment of compensation to managers upon closure of their colleges. Thus, the managers of the two private secondary schools which closed down in January 2000 namely Macmillan College of Rivière des Anguilles and New Secondary School of Montagne Blanche did not receive any compensation.

Such a situation stands in stark contrast to the measures ushered in by the present Government whereby closure of low populated private secondary schools, pursuant to educational reforms under way, are invariably accompanied by the orderly redeployment of students and staff alike and payment of a fair compensation, as determined by a formula established by the Management Audit Bureau to Managers of the relevant secondary schools.

D12P13CO6
PQ No. B/510 (contd)

Mr Dulloo: It is most unfair. When the Government takes ...

(Interruptions)

I am very sorry, when Government takes a decision, so all those who have been affected along the line there is continuity of Government in Mauritius. Can I ask the Minister whether compensation has not been paid to the Macmillan College of Mahebourg which was closed down in the same circumstances for the same reason? Why Macmillan College of Rivière des Anguilles which was closed down for the same reason was not paid compensation? That does not make any difference whether it happened before September 2000.

Mr Obeegadoo: The gentleman seems to have a very odd conception of continuity. Of course, a Government can be deemed to be bound by previous decisions. In this case, the previous decision of the former Government was not to pay compensation. And when we brought in educational reforms, the principle was established that to the extent that closure results from the educational reforms, then payment is due. Accordingly, the MAB has worked on a formula, which is now in application.

Mr Dulloo: Private Secondary Schools along with the approval of the Ministry of Education issued a circular - Circular 38 dated 26 September 2003 - and according to the criteria for compensation as laid down. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he should not look at it again and whether the college in question, about which I have asked a question, should not qualify for compensation?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, the hon. gentleman can seek the advice of his present colleagues in Opposition. Two schools were closed in January 2000. The then Government had ample opportunity to reflect upon the advisability of payment of compensation and to put up a scheme for compensation to be paid. Many schools have closed down with no compensation paid. I gave two examples. Now, any school, which closes down as a result - I stress as a result of educational reforms is entitled to payment of compensation. For instance, in this present fiscal year, Macmillan College of Mahebourg and Progressive College have closed down and the Managers have received compensation.

YEAR

2005

**RODRIGUES - REDCO LTD. COLLEGES -
STUDENTS - PROTEST (08/02/05)**

(No. B/38) Mr J. Von-Mally (Third Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state if students of the REDCO Ltd. colleges in Rodrigues refused to attend classes on Monday 31 January 2005 and Wednesday 02 February 2005, and, if so, will he give the reason/s thereof.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by REDCO Ltd that on Monday 31 January 2005, a group of pupils of Le Chou College and on Wednesday 02 February 2005, a larger group, this time, from Le Chou, Grande Montagne and Maréchal Colleges refused to attend classes and publicly demonstrated, in front of the Commission for Education in Malabar, against the transfer of teachers and non-teaching staff within REDCO schools.

Transfer of teachers and non-teaching staff is a yearly recurrent feature in the education sector as a whole and REDCO is no exception to the rule. Such transfers are effected either because of requests emanating from the teachers themselves or for reasons of administrative convenience. For example, when new teachers are appointed, there is need to ensure that there is a proper mix of experienced and new teachers in each school.

In the past, the transfer of REDCO teachers used to be effected on an *ad-hoc* basis, but it has, this year, assumed another dimension, because the number of REDCO schools has increased since 2000 from 3 to 5.

Accordingly, REDCO management, with the collaboration of the rectors/principals of the REDCO schools and of the national inspectorate, attempted to effect a general transfer exercise as it is done in mainland Mauritius which is just and fair so as to ensure –

- (i) optimal utilisation of resources to dispense quality education in Rodrigues, and
- (ii) also a fair distribution of degree holders and diploma holders in secondary schools.

The transfer exercise was approved on Friday 28 January 2005 by the REDCO Board on which sit two representatives of the Commission for Education of Rodrigues and it was meant to become effective on Wednesday 02 February.

However, in the light of the public demonstrations, apparently not so much against the fact of the transfer but the timing of the transfer exercise, REDCO Management had discussions with the federation of PTAs of

schools and the Commission for Education in Rodrigues and consensus was reached to limit the transfer exercise to about ten teachers who had themselves expressly requested their transfer. I am informed that the situation is back to normal now.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is obvious that the protest could have been avoided if there had been better communication between REDCO and the PTAs of schools; and I have impressed on REDCO the need to improve communications in general in the education sector.

Mr Von-Mally: Being given that the Commissioner for Education said that he was not aware of the transfer, can we say that there has been a lack of co-ordination between the Commissioner of Education and the Ministry of Education?

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am not aware of any such declaration, but as I have just stated, there is need to improve communication. Indeed, there is always need to improve communication, Sir.

**PUBLIC/PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - COST &
DISPARITY (01/03/05)**

(No. B/176) Dr. R. Jeetah (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the cost *per capita* of students in the public and private secondary schools to the State, he will state -
(a) the actual cost, and
(b) if there is any disparity and, if so, the reasons thereof.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said in reply to PQ No B/542 at our sitting on 29 July 2003, it is the belief of this Government that all children should be entitled to equal educational opportunities irrespective of their places of residence or educational institution attended, and my Ministry is committed to the promotion of 'parity of esteem' for all publicly funded secondary schools, whether State or private.

In this respect, my Ministry has had long and protracted discussions with the Federation of Union of Managers of private secondary schools on the issue, but it has not been possible to reach a consensus as to the method of calculating the *per capita* expenditure.

In the light thereof, it was unanimously agreed that the issue of *per*

capita cost be referred to the Management Audit Bureau for consideration.

The latter has accordingly been requested to -
(i) determine the appropriate method of computation of the total and *per capita* public expenditure on students in State and Grant Aided Private Secondary Schools respectively; and
(ii) to determine, in the light of the recommended method of computation, the actual total and *per capita* expenditure by the State in respect of students of State and Grand Aided Private Secondary Schools respectively.

The report of the MAB is still awaited.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, in June 2003, a question was asked by hon. Duval and the Minister's reply was: "The information is being compiled." Is it not taking a bit too long?

Mr Obeegadoo: As I stated in my answer, it was not in June, but in 29 July 2003 that hon. Duval did raise the question. After the question was raised here, we pursued discussion with the federations of managers. Unfortunately, we could not reach agreement. But we agree to refer the matter to the MAB. I do not have the exact date when that was done. It could be at the end of 2003 or at the beginning of 2004. We have not had any response from the MAB as yet. My Ministry has issued reminders and I do hope that very soon we will have the results of the inquiry.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think it is quite worrying that last week we heard the number of schools that was built by this Government, which is a good thing. But on what basis do they do all this? How can they work without the proper figures?

Mr Obeegadoo: Construction of schools has nothing whatsoever to do with this issue of computing for purposes of comparison per capita expenditure in the public and private secondary schools.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - STUDENTS'
ATTENDANCE

15/3/05
20

(No. B/205) Dr. R. Jeetah (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will state the total number of students in attendance both in private secondary schools and public schools in 2004 and their respective associated costs.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, again, I shall reply, since the Acting Minister is ill.

I am informed that in 2004 there was a total of 114,476 students enrolled in secondary schools with 37,268 students in the State Secondary Schools and 77,208 students in the private secondary schools, inclusive of 4,200 students in the fee-paying secondary schools.

As regards the associated costs, I wish to point out that the hon. Member is asking for same in respect of calendar year 2004 when, in fact, public sector expenditure follows the financial year pattern, as we know it.

Be that as it may, the costs associated with the attendance of students in publicly-funded secondary schools for Financial Year 2003/2004 is as follows -

- (i) Rs640,547,000 for State schools, and
- (ii) Rs1,578,362,662 for private schools

that is, a total of Rs2,218,909,662.

22/3/05

22.03.05

43

(27)

D07/IF/P08/2

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, actually this underpass is a hazard for pedestrians, especially for women. It goes directly into the bush alongside the river and there is no security there. Will the Minister consider the possibility of constructing a proper and secure underpass so that pedestrians may use it.

Mr Guinness: Sir, what I can propose to my hon. friend is that probably we can organise a site visit together with the MPs of the constituency. We can go and have a fresh look at the underpass.

IMPERIAL COLLEGE, FOREST SIDE - STUDENTS - SUSPENSION

(No. B/241) **Mr G. Paya** (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to whether it has carried out an inquiry in regard to the suspension, at the beginning of March 2005, of six students of Form IV by the management of the Imperial College at Forest Side, Curepipe and, if so, what has been the outcome.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Private Secondary Schools Authority that on 02 March 2005, the Manager of Imperial College sought the approval of the Authority for the expulsion of four students of Form IV and one of Lower VI of his college for alleged gross misconduct. In fact, they were caught smoking in classrooms during recess. The students have been rusticated by the school administration pending a decision of the PSSA.

The PSSA has, I am advised, inquired into the matter and has communicated its advice to the management of Imperial College. A decision by the school is expected by the end of this month.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – ADVERSE CLIMATIC
CONDITIONS – ATTENDANCE OF STAFF

19/4/05
28

(No. B/284) **Mr J.C. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the PSSA, information as to whether members of the teaching staff of private secondary schools have to attend duty on days when the schools are closed because of adverse climatic conditions and, if so, the duties assigned to them on the aforesaid days.

Mr Obegadoo: Sir, on days when schools are closed for reasons of adverse climatic conditions, members of the teaching staff of schools, whether primary or secondary and whether State or private employees, may or may not be called upon to attend duty.

...

CA/D15/P07/4
(No. B/284) (Contd)

For instance, on 21 March last, schools remained closed upon the advice of the Meteorological Services. However, all staff members, whether teaching or non-teaching, were called upon to report to their place of work to give assistance to their respective Heads, in ensuring that the school was ready for resumption the next day. It stands to reason that, in such circumstances, duties assigned to members of the teaching staff are at the discretion of the hierarchical head and/or employer, subject to established schemes of service and/or schedule of duties.

Mr Armance: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the communiqué is very often ambiguous, and what he proposes to do on the next occasion?

Mr Obeegadoo: I am not aware of any such ambiguity, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Armance: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister say whether any instruction was given to the Heads of departments or managers on what to do on such days?

Mr Obeegadoo: I don't believe any such instructions are warranted, Sir. Any Head of an educational institutional institution should know, when his school is closed to students because of adverse climatic conditions, what needs to be done in terms of availing himself of the resources of his staff, to get the school ready for resumption the next day.

Mr Michel: I noted that, prior to that question, teachers were asked to be present on the day the school is closed. After that question, that policy has changed. This is why we are putting the question. I don't think that it is out of thin air that we put that question. It is because there is a change. My question is: How is it that, prior to that question, the recommendation from the Ministry was for all staff, teaching also, to report to work? Is it true or not?

Mr Obeegadoo: With all due respect to the hon. gentleman, I can assure him that the question put has not led to any change in policy. In fact, as I explained in my answer, Mr Speaker, Sir, depending upon what the Ministry of Education and what the employer of the relevant staff thinks is or is not required, staff of schools, whether teaching or non-teaching, may be called upon to attend work when the school is closed for students.

**ADOLPHE DE PLEVITZ S.S.S - C.H. MR – HANDYMAN -
EMPLOYMENT (06/09/05)**

(No. I B/205) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state the reasons for the termination of the contract of Mr C. H., a handyman on full time employment at the Adolphe de Plevitz State Secondary School.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the employee concerned is a part-time redundant handyman of ex-New Secondary School, now redeployed at the Mauritius Educational

Development Company Ltd (MEDCO) and posted to Adolph de Plevitz State Secondary School. This posting is on the basis of an arrangement, which exists between my Ministry and MEDCO, for the gainful employment of redundant employees of ex-private secondary schools on similar terms and conditions.

The hon. Member may wish to note that the policy of the Ministry regarding redundant employees of private secondary schools is premised on an agreement dated May 2000 between Government and trade unions. This agreement safeguards the employment of redundant employees of ex-private secondary schools and allow for them to be absorbed in MEDCO on 'no less favourable terms' and to be redeployed in other institutions in the education sector.

I am informed that, on 17 June 2005, following a request from the zone Director of Education Zone 1, the management of MEDCO, after consultation with the then Chairman, decided, without the approval of the Board of Directors of the company, to offer employment as full time handyman to the employee concerned with effect from 21 June 2005, before the general elections.

It was not in order for the management of MEDCO to convert the part-time employment of the employee concerned into a full-time one, the more so as MEDCO is already overstaffed and is not authorised to employ additional persons without the approval of my Ministry. Further, the decision would have been unfair to the other part-time employees of MEDCO who would have asked that the same treatment be extended to them.

In the circumstance, there was no alternative, but to terminate the

illegal full-time employment of the employee concerned and to revert him to his part-time employment. An enquiry has been initiated to situate responsibilities in the matter.

RODRIGUES - REDCO ADMINISTRATION - TAKING OVER BY GOVERNMENT (18/10/05)

(No. I B/348) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if Government has decided to take back the control over the administration of the REDCO which was entrusted to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and, if so, the reasons thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it should be known that REDCO was, prior to the decision of the previous Government to transfer it to Rodrigues Regional Assembly (RRA), a Government-owned private company responsible for the delivery of secondary education in Rodrigues.

Rodrigues still has a dearth of qualified teachers. Many Mauritian teachers have been employed, on a contract basis, and have been providing their services over many years to the education sector in Rodrigues. In spite of very strong representations from a majority of the Mauritian teachers serving in Rodrigues, the previous Government had hastily and unilaterally decided to transfer the Government shares of REDCO to the RRA so that the latter became the majority shareholder of the Company. All the implications had not been carefully thought through and Rodrigues, although having its specifications, cannot stay behind educational reforms in the mainland. This decision took place just before last general election.

The present Government, in line with the new mandate for change and its clear vision for a world-class quality education for the whole of the Republic of Mauritius, has decided to resume control over REDCO mainly for the following reasons –

- (i) to ensure that Rodrigues does not stay behind and partakes in the global quest for world-class quality education, through proper planning for a smooth transition;
- (ii) to safeguard the interests of the Mauritian teachers serving in Rodrigues and who have, over the years, significantly contributed to the development of education in Rodrigues and who have expressed genuine fear that their employment may be terminated abruptly, at any time, and

(iii) to upgrade the quality of education in Rodrigues.

The RRA and its Commission for Education and Training have only been set up in 2002 and at this stage, there is a lack of experience and expertise in Rodrigues for the handling of secondary education.

To note, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that the totality of the funds of REDCO emanates from the State via the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA).

The empowerment of Rodrigues in the management thereof can only be considered in a phased manner with due regard to training and capacity building.

Procedures have already started for the taking over and I personally met the Chief Commissioner, Rodrigues to explain to him the situation. I am, however, informed that the representative of the RRA has, so far, refused to sign the "share transfer form". Arrangements have been made by my Ministry to request the Attorney General's Office to look into the legal means of implementing the decision of Government to take back control over REDCO.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Minister saying that if these schools were left under the control of the RRA they would have been left backward with the reforms, with the famous world-class education. May we know how this would have been so?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I explained that we are going to implement the reforms and we are now in a transition phase. So, we need to be careful when we are implementing these changes. I have already explained the reasons why Government decided to take back the control.

Mr Guinness: One of the reasons that the Minister stated is that if the schools would have been left with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly they would not have followed the trend of the reforms. Can I know why it would have been so?

Mr Gokhool: For the successful implementation of the reforms we need to have the necessary conditions. Right now, there is a dearth of qualified teachers.

Mr Spéville: The Minister just said that there is a lack of manpower for gearing the secondary schools in Rodrigues. Can I ask the Minister

whether the object is to give the Rodriguans the possibility to take control of education and all that come with under the autonomy? Is it not a setting back in taking that decision which was at the time putting the Rodriguans in front of their responsibilities?

Mr Gokhool: This is the idea and we don't disagree with it, but I think what I have explained is that the educational interests of Rodrigues should take priority over any other consideration. This is the concern why we have resumed control at this point in time.

Mr Spéville: Is the Minister aware that one of the major problems regarding the students this year and which very much upset them is the issue of transferring their teachers, a decision taken by REDCO - which at that time was managed by a Board in Mauritius? This decision led the previous Government to sit with the RRA to find out solutions and one solution was to get the RRA to really take part in the decisions of REDCO.

Mr Gokhool: I don't disagree with that, but what I am saying is that the conditions are not presently available for the change to be made. That's why we are ensuring that the proper conditions are there and then we can contemplate the change.

Mr Spéville: Is the Minister in presence of representations from all the PTAs in Rodrigues further to the decision of Government to take back control over the administration of the REDCO over the last week? Meetings are going on with PTAs, students, parents, teachers, everybody. There is no politics in there. It is a real concern for education in Rodrigues. Is the Minister aware that meetings are taking place in Rodrigues concerning the decision of Government to take control over REDCO, decision which is really affecting students there?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we are monitoring the situation and an officer from the Ministry is travelling to Rodrigues to ensure that everything is done properly so that the resumption of studies in January takes place without problems.

The Deputy Speaker: A last question!

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister saying that the RRA does not have the capacity to manage the schools and is it not a step backward in the philosophy of the autonomy of Rodrigues?

Mr Gokhool: All I am saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that

education is a priority and we want to proceed in a gradual manner in bringing about the change. So, we have to have the conditions, which will allow the change to take place.

The Deputy Speaker: Next Question, hon. Dowarkasing!

YEAR 2006

RODRIGUES - REDCO & STATE LANDS (25/04/06)

(No. B/353) 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 state if matters pertaining to the Redco and State lands which were entrusted to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly are now being handled by the central Government and, if so, will he give the reasons for the review of this policy.

Reply: The answer is no, there has been no change in policy. Matters pertaining to REDCO and State Lands, which were entrusted to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, are still being handled by the latter.

REDCO - BOARD - COMPOSITION, MEETINGS, ETC. (16/05/06)

(No. B/490) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to the REDCO, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom, information as to –

- (a) when the Board was constituted;
- (b) the composition of the Board;
- (c) the number of Board Meetings held to date, and
- (d) if a manager has been appointed thereat.

The Minister of Education and Human Resources (Mr D. Gokhool): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your kind permission, I shall reply to this question. I am informed the following –

As regards part (a) of the question, the REDCO Board was last constituted in January 2002.

With regard to part (b) of the question, in terms of the articles of the company, the Board comprises a Chairman, two representatives each from my Ministry and the Commission for Education, Rodrigues and one representative each from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Ministry of Rodrigues, the State Investment Corporation Ltd and the PSSA. I am tabling the detailed composition of the Board as at now.

As regards part (c) of the question, the Board has met on twenty-six occasions from January 2002 to date.

As regards part (d) of the question, the post of Manager is vacant since April 2002, but the then Chairman was acting as Manager until his resignation in July 2005. Since then, one of the representatives of my Ministry on the Board is acting as Manager and is handling the administrative issues of the company.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister who is actually the Chairman of the Board?

Mr Gokhool: We don't have a substantive Chairman because the Chairman resigned in July 2005.

Mr Guinness: If I understand well the Minister, the Board was constituted in 2002. The Chairman has resigned and one year has lapsed and no Chairman has been appointed up to now for the REDCO Board. Does it seem normal for a Board to function without a Chairman?

Mr Gokhool: Let me correct the hon. Member. What I said is the Chairman resigned in July 2005.

(Interruptions)

But then, Government came with a decision to change the status of REDCO and, thereafter, there were representations from the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and these discussions have been going on and we have not yet reached a final decision.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister how many times the Board met since July up to now?

Mr Gokhool: The Board met on 26 occasions from January 2002 to date.

Mr Guinness: Can we know whether the Board has ratified the appointment of the acting Manager?

Mr Gokhool: The post of the Manager is still vacant. It is the Permanent Assistant Secretary of the Ministry who stands in as Manager for the time being. Once the Board is properly constituted, the post will be filled.

Mr Guinness: I don't know who is the person who is acting as Manager. It seems that the Board has not ratified the appointment of that person as Manager. Is it legally in order?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, in the previous situation, the Chairman was Chairman and Manager as well. The PAS of my Ministry sits on the Board of REDCO and, therefore, the Board nominates a Chairman if there is business to transact, and the Chairman acts also as the Manager. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. This is what has been going on in the past.

Mr Guinness: Since one year, no Manager has been appointed. I think it is time to appoint a Manager. Can we know when the post will be advertised?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, once the issue of ownership is finalised and the Board is properly constituted, the Manager will be appointed and this is going to happen very soon.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has replied that he does not have a timeframe.

Mr Gokhool: We don't have a timeframe.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the question of ownership does not arise, because in a Parliamentary Question put by hon. Bérenger, and for which, we got a written answer, it is said that everything is back as it was before the election, that is, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has got back the 51% shares. Everything is back as previously.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I said is that there was a decision of Government to take control of REDCO and then there were representations made by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. These discussions have been going on and a decision will be finalised very soon.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the House needs to be clarified on this issue. There was a first PQ which I, myself, asked the Minister. He said that the Government of Mauritius will take back the management of REDCO. Two weeks ago, hon. Bérenger asked the same question and we got a written answer where it is said that it has been back as it was before the election. The House has to know where matters stand. Either the Government of Mauritius has taken back REDCO or it is still with the Rodrigues Regional Assembly!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been discussions between Rodrigues Regional Assembly, my Ministry and the State Law Office. This decision has not been finalised yet. But, as I said, it will be done very shortly and I'll inform the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (1983) – REDUNDANT (30/05/06)

(No. B/683) Miss K.R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if Government proposes in the near future to engage discussions with the group of “Redundant Teachers of 1983” so that an acceptable agreement be reached.

Reply: I understand that the hon. Member is referring to the secondary school teachers who became redundant after the closure of several private secondary schools in 1983. This issue is a long standing one and discussions with UPSEE are ongoing.

In fact, following the abrupt and arbitrary closure of several private secondary schools in 1983, an agreement was signed between the Government and UPSEE whereby it was agreed to redeploy these teachers in pre-vocational schools after the MIE has given them the necessary training.

However, as a result of practical problems encountered by many redundant teachers like denial of yearly increment, the non refund of sick leave not taken and more importantly the refusal of private Managers to employ them, another agreement was signed in May 2000 between the Government and UPSEE to reaffirm the commitment of the Government to safeguard the employment of redundant staff from private secondary schools. Following this agreement, the Government redeploys the redundant staff in Government and parastatal bodies, including MEDCO, in suitable

posts and on no less favourable terms.

However, since 2004, UPSEE has been requesting that the redundant employees of 1983 be compensated for loss of increments and their salaries be adjusted with an award representing four increments. In view of the far reaching financial implications, the matter is still being discussed. If in the light of the discussions, it is felt that there is need for a new agreement, consideration will be given thereto.

**STATE/PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - STUDENTS -
LATE ARRIVALS (27/06/06)**

(No. B/853) Mrs Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if his Ministry has received complaints from the Rectors of State or Private Secondary Schools to the effect that there is an increase in the number of late arrivals of students due to transport problems and, if so, will he state the remedial measures, if any, that have been initiated.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, except for Zone 3, a few Rectors of some State Secondary Schools in the remaining three Zones, have indeed reported that there has been an increase in the number of students attending school late on account of transport problems.

In regard to the private secondary schools, according to Private Secondary Schools Authority, there has not been any such complaint, recently. Two isolated cases in respect of Keats College and Cosmopolitan College were reported on one private radio channel in February and April, respectively.

I am, however, informed that the question of students attending school late on account of transport problems is still isolated and cannot be generalised at this stage.

As regards remedial measures, the Rectors of the State schools and the Directors of Zones on the one hand and the PSSA on the other, have brought to the attention of the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the bus operators of the need to ensure that they provide an efficient and timely service. There is also a joint committee on free transport chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure, which is currently monitoring the free transport facility.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry has not received letters from Rectors informing the Ministry about this particular problem of late arrivals?

Mr Gokhool: This is the channel through which complaints are received either through Rectors or Directors. And when these complaints are received we channel them to the National Transport Authority for remedial action. The situation is being monitored closely.

Mrs Labelle: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that in one State School there are dozens of students who miss the first period regularly? The school has informed the Ministry of the situation.

Mr Gokhool: As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, there may be isolated cases where Rectors and the Zone Directors do take corrective measures. They inform the NTA and the situation is remedied. But, if there is a specific case, to which the hon. Member is referring, I will look into it and see to it that the situation is rectified.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, is the hon. Minister aware that this has become a regular feature now at SSS Bel Air and SSS Sebastopol because of transport problem. As the Minister knows, there is no regular transport in these regions and pupils miss the first period almost regularly in these two schools.

Mr Gokhool: As I just said, this may be the case, but these are isolated cases, but the mechanism exists where we can take remedial action. But if the situation persists, I will look into the matter and try to remedy the situation.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it seems that this situation is prevailing since the beginning of the year and we are now in June. Therefore, can I know from the Minister, what action has been taken since the beginning of the year?

Mr Gokhool: I think coming late to school may not be tied to the issue of transport only, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. But if the matter relates ..

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member has asked a question, let me give him the answer. If it relates

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let the Minister answer, please.

Mr Gokhool: If it relates to transport problem, I will look into it. The hon. Member is a teacher and he knows that there are many other factors that lead to delay in coming to schools.

The Deputy Speaker: So, the matter will be addressed by the hon. Minister.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am insisting, because I have experienced this problem with these pupils. I had the opportunity to bring pupils to schools, because they were waiting for buses for more than half an hour. These pupils are really facing a problem because of transport.

May I impress upon the hon. Minister to look into this matter?

Mr Gokhool: I think the case of Bel Air SSS has been mentioned. If the hon. Member will give me the information, I'll look into it.

Mr Bundhoo: Will the hon. Minister kindly conduct a survey at the Bel Air SSS, and also at Sebastopol SSS, just to find out the cause of lateness? Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I must say that we have already raised the matter with the Deputy Prime Minister and we even had a meeting with the inhabitants of Trou d'Eau Douce and GRSE. Maybe, the hon. Member could liaise with the hon. Minister and see to it that a survey be conducted to find out the real cause behind the transport problem, causing lateness.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can do that, but I have to inform the hon. Member that we do receive regular statistics now, because this situation is being monitored. If the hon. Member wants me to go into the causes, that is something we can look into.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - SCIENCE SUBJECTS (11/07/06)

(No. B/957) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the private secondary schools, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if the Authority ensures that facilities for the teaching of

science subjects are available in all cases, in accordance with the norms laid down, before proceeding with -

- (a) the registration of these schools, and
- (b) the approval for the teaching of these subjects.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in accordance with Section 9 of the Education Act, the PSSA undertakes each year, between July and October, the registration of all Private Secondary Schools which intend to operate in the following year. In their applications for registration of schools, which should be submitted by 31 July at latest, Managers of Private Secondary Schools have to indicate the purpose for which they are seeking registration and the facilities available in their respective schools.

Thereafter, the PSSA carries out its annual assessment exercise, which includes school inspection visits, and if the school satisfies the requirements of the PSSA, it is registered either as a Form I to V or a Form I to VI secondary school.

Independently of the question of registration of the school as a whole, the PSSA has a detailed set of norms and standards for all academic, laboratory and sports facilities. For the teaching of Science subjects, an application must satisfy the minimum norms and standards, which is generally 50% of the total requirements. In such cases, the school is paid only 50% of the grants to which it is entitled and if it upgrades the grants payable are correspondingly increased. A school, though registered, will not be authorised to teach Science subjects if it does not satisfy the minimum norms and standards regarding physical facilities, equipment, chemicals and teaching aids.

Even after registration and authorisation to teach Science subjects are granted, the PSSA continues to monitor the availability of facilities in schools through the regular school inspection visits effected by its supervisors. It is on the basis of the outcome of these inspection visits that grants to Managers are released on a monthly basis. If the school falls short of the minimum requirements, grants are withheld by the PSSA.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the promotion of the teaching of Science and technical subjects is a strategic component of the present reforms which aim at a World Class Quality Education and in the context of the new curriculum, a new orientation will be given to the teaching of these subjects.

I am conscious of the limitations and shortcomings of the present system of registration of schools and assessment of norms and standards by the PSSA

and I am proposing to request the Authority to revisit the whole issue taking into account best practices world-wide.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether he has received an email at the beginning of the year highlighting some lacunae in the whole procedure that is operating at the PSSA?

Mr Gokhool: I have already hinted at the possible shortcomings and attention of the PSSA has been drawn to it, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that despite recommendations made by inspectors from the PSSA highlighting certain shortcomings, grants have been given to schools?

Mr Gokhool: I think PSSA relies on the reports made by the supervisors and this is a matter which is dealt with by the PSSA. But if the hon. Member is mentioning certain shortcomings, I am taking note and I will see to it that remedial action is taken.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister confirm whether Le Mauricia Institute had received a grant in November, last year?

Mr Gokhool: I will have to check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, what I would like to inform the hon. Minister is that despite observations made by the Inspectors from the PSSA highlighting that the school there is not up to the required standard, Le Mauricia Institute has received the grant from the PSSA?

Mr Gokhool: I have to check the information to which the hon. Member is referring; and if this is true, remedial action will have to be taken.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – STUDENT POPULATION (11/07/06)

(No. B/973) Mr N. Guttee (Third Member for Grand'Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he is aware that the school population is low in certain private secondary schools and, if so, will he state Government policy in regard thereto.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the PSSA that in

1999, the Management Audit Bureau recommended that a private secondary school with less than 150 students is not considered to be economically viable nor pedagogically sound and in September 2003, the figure of 150 was revised to 175 to take into account one additional class of 25 prevocational students.

I am further informed that, at this stage, there is no private secondary school with a student population of less than 175. However, there are around eight private secondary schools which have generally experienced a gradual decrease in their student intake over the past years. On the basis of a trend analysis carried out by the PSSA, it would appear that there is a likelihood that, in the years to come, these schools may fall short of the threshold of 175 students.

So far, the policy in respect of schools with low student population has been to request the PSSA to stop the payment of grants to any school with a student population of less than 175. As a result of this, three schools in 2003 and one school in 2004 closed down.

My Ministry is aware that, in a near future, many private secondary schools are likely to face the threat of closing down because of low school population. This matter has been discussed with the UPSEE and not later than last week the matter was discussed between my Ministry and the Federation of Unions of private secondary schools. We agreed that the question of closing down of private secondary schools has to be considered in a global context and the matter will soon be referred to Government for policy guidance.

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – STUDENT POPULATION (25/07/06)

(No. B/1143) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the sub-standard colleges having a school population of less than 175 students, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the PSSA, information as to –

- (a) the names of the colleges falling in this category, and
- (b) if any scheme has been worked out in respect of these colleges.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to PQ B/973 at our sitting on 11 July 2006 and to confirm that, according to the PSSA, there is no private secondary school with a student population of less than 175. Consequently, the question of providing the

names of the private secondary schools with less than 175 students does not arise at this stage.

As regards part (b) of the question, I wish to reiterate what I said on 11 July, namely that Government will soon be invited to issue policy guidance in respect of the future of private secondary schools whose student population may fall short of 175 in the future.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the same answer, the hon. Minister said that he forecast that, according to the trend, there will be eight colleges with a student population of less than 175. Can the hon. Minister tell us what are these eight colleges?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are examining the situation, but the question relates to the present situation, to which I have given the answer.

When we come to the bridge, we will cross it.

Mr Speaker: Next Question, hon. Guinness!

Mr Guinness: The teachers are anxious since the Minister said that the trend is showing that eight colleges may fall short of 175 pupils. So, it would be just fair that the hon. Minister states the names of the colleges which fall...

Mr Speaker: Why is the hon. Member insisting? The hon. Minister has answered that he will cross the bridge when he will reach it. The hon. Member has to wait and put the questions then. Next Question, hon. Guinness!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – GRANTS (31/10/06)

(No. B/1256) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to the criteria laid down for the allocation of grants to private secondary schools.

(Vide Reply to PQ No. B/1234)

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – BLUEPRINT (31/10/06)

(No. B/1257) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if Government proposes to render public the Blueprint on the state of private secondary schools, and, if so, when and, if not, why not.

Reply: I wish to thank the hon. Member for providing me the opportunity to clear out a misunderstanding on this issue, as a result of reports carried by certain sections of the local media.

In fact, in March 2006, I requested the Director of PSSA to favour me with his personal views on the current situation in the private secondary school sector and to submit his recommendations on the way forward with a view to allowing my Ministry to reflect further on the development of that sector. The Director of PSSA has accordingly submitted a report to me which is being examined in the context of the ongoing educational reforms and in line with the new philosophy of Government.

The Report is therefore for internal use and will be an input to the proposals that will be formulated for the sector in due course after proper final consultations with all the stakeholders. At this stage, therefore, the question of releasing the report of the Director of the PSSA does not arise. In due course, I shall come up with policy proposals for an overhauling of the private secondary school sector generally. I thank the Hon. Member for her interest in the matter and I take this opportunity to invite her as well as any other member of the House to submit to me their views to that effect.

**PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS
– GRANTS ALLOCATION – CRITERIA (31/10/06)**

(No. B/1234) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne

Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to whether it is proposed to review the criteria laid down for the allocation of grants to private secondary schools.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to reply to PQs B/1234 and B/1256 at the same time as they both deal with the same issue.

The allocation of grants to private secondary schools is based on a formula recommended by the Management Audit Bureau (MAB) since 1989. The aim thereof is to facilitate the running and management of private secondary schools and at the same time to enhance the quality of education in these schools by providing them the required financial means.

All schools which meet the criteria of the PSSA for registration as a school accordingly obtain grants for their operation, management and maintenance. The information regarding the criteria for the allocation of grants to private secondary schools is being tabled.

The formula is revised every three years on the basis of cost increase, achievement, and new policy orientations. The last MAB Report on the review of the grant formula for period 01 July 2003 to 30 June 2006 was released in May 2004 and was implemented retrospectively from 01 July 2003. The exercise for the review of the formula for period 01 July 2006 to 30 June 2009 is presently being carried out by the MAB.

As regards the specific point as to whether it is proposed to review the criteria for allocation of grants, it is premature at this stage to reply in a definitive manner to the question as the MAB has not yet submitted its final report on the review of the Comprehensive Grant Formula. However, I understand that in the course of its current exercise, the MAB has made some proposals, which it is presently discussing with all stakeholders, including the Federation of Unions of Managers of Private Secondary Schools. It appears that the Managers have interpreted the preliminary proposals of the MAB as final ones. Unfortunately, the Managers walked out of the meeting without giving the MAB an opportunity to explain its proposals.

I wish to add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Federation of Unions of Managers has asked for an increase of 67% .

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to draw the attention of hon. Members that the exercise for the review of the Comprehensive Grant Formula is carried out independently by the MAB and that my Ministry has been apprised of the preliminary proposals made by the MAB only on 10 October.

I have requested the MAB to resume discussions with the Federation of Managers and to reach a consensus thereon. I plan to inform the Cabinet on the issue and I shall, in due course, meet the Managers to explain to them the favoured option. In this respect, Government will examine the request of the Managers in the context of the ongoing educational reforms but also taking into account the present economic context as well as the fact that the present formula dates back to 1989, some 17 years back.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that preliminary proposals were submitted to his Ministry on 10 October. Can we know from the preliminary proposals whether the incentive grants, which were given to Managers of schools for infrastructure, will be abolished? Can the Minister confirm whether this is true?

Mr Gokhool: I can't go into the details at this stage because I have requested the MAB to go for further discussions. So, it won't be appropriate at this time to go into the details.

Mr Guinness: The Minister must be aware that the main contention of the Managers, who are, in fact, threatening for a lockout in January, is that the revised grant formula, that is, the proposal which has been submitted to his Ministry takes into account, the student population and the performance of the students only. These are the only criteria. Is it true?

Mr Gokhool: I think I replied that the whole exercise is taking into consideration the views expressed by the Managers as well as those of all the stakeholders. Besides, I also mentioned that the proposal of the Managers is for an increase of 67%. So, in the light of all this information, the discussions are going on and I think it is premature at this stage to go into the details of what formula is being proposed, but I will certainly inform the House at the right time when the formula is agreed upon.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has mentioned that he asked the MAB to reconvene meetings with the federation of Managers to resume discussions. Does he have any specific dates onto which this meeting is scheduled?

Mr Gokhool: I have already asked the MAB a week ago, but the

Managers - as the colleague of the hon. Member mentioned - said that they will go for a lockout. There is some communication to be done before they come to the negotiating table and this is being done. My information is that they have not yet come back to the negotiating table yet.

Mr Guinness: Can we know from the Minister whether he himself convened the union of Managers for any meeting to sort out matters?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I informed, this particular exercise is specific to MAB, otherwise I have been meeting the union of Managers very regularly and I strongly believe that we should maintain the partnership between the private secondary schools and the Government schools.

Mr Guinness: The Minister keeps on hammering that the Managers are requesting a 67% increase. Can the Minister tell the House whether he has the detailed proposal that the Managers have submitted to the MAB?

Mr Gokhool: I do not have the detailed proposal, but I have a picture of what they are looking for. As I said, we have to look into it in terms of new policy orientations, the economic situation and, at the end of the day, I think we should see – and my hon. colleague will agree with me – the educational interests of the students. That should be the bottom line. Other things can be discussed and agreed upon.

Mr Guinness: Can the Minister tell the House if the MAB comes, in fact, with the abolishing of the incentive grant formula...

Mr Speaker: This is a hypothetical question.

Mr Guinness: Let me rephrase my question, Mr Speaker, Sir. The Managers have said that the incentive grant formula is a must for them because this brings improvement. Therefore, what will be the position of the Minister...

Mr Speaker: That is also a hypothetical question.
The Table has been advised that PQ B/1262 has been withdrawn.
Next question hon. Guinness!

MAB - STATE AND PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – STUDY (07/11/06)

(No. B/1307) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in

regard to the study carried out by the Management Audit Bureau regarding the per capita expenditure in private and public secondary schools, he will state if its report has been submitted and, if so –

- (a) what are the main findings, and
- (b) will he consider the advisability of laying a copy thereof on the Table of the National Assembly.

Reply: The Management Audit Bureau (MAB) has, in September 2006, submitted a draft report on the “Computation of per capita expenditure in State and private secondary schools” to my Ministry for comments and views.

I wish to point out that although the request to MAB was made as far back as August 2003, it was only in January 2006 that I personally intervened to request the MAB to urgently start the exercise.

I also wish to say that this computation exercise is a very complex one as it involves two sectors, namely the State school sector and the private secondary school sector which have the same mandate and objectives but have different work practices and operate within different structures. For example, while in the State sector, only graduates are employed as Education Officer, in the private sector, there may be Teachers who are only SC holders.

Consequently, the MAB has established different modes of computing the per capita expenditure, each having its own assumptions and parameters.

A Technical Committee comprising Senior Officials of my Ministry and the Director of the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) has been set up to examine the draft report and to submit its views/recommendations on the way ahead in order to harmonize both sectors and reduce disparities, if any.

The Technical Committee is presently in the process of finalising its views/recommendations for eventual submission to the MAB. Given the fact that report is still in its draft form, it is considered premature at this stage to comment on the findings thereof, nor is it appropriate to lift figures out of context and make sweeping generalisations.

As soon as the MAB completes the exercise and submits its final report, I shall consider the advisability of laying a copy thereof on the Table of the National Assembly.

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ALEEMIAH COLLEGE – UNREST - MEDIATOR - REPORT

(No. B/1587) **Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the mediator who was nominated to address the numerous problems at the Aleemiah College, he will inform the House whether a report has been submitted by the mediator and, if so, what are the recommendations of the report and what will be the outcome.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, following the unrest at Aleemiah College in August 2006, my Ministry, with the approval of Government, appointed a mediator to look into the circumstances which led to a deterioration of the relations between Management and the staff and to establish the causes of such a state of affairs, including any possible shortcomings in the present system. The mediator was also expected to make recommendations for a sustainable partnership between Management and the staff through sound employer-employee relation and for settlement of complaints, grievances and disputes in a spirit of harmonious industrial relation.

The report was required to allow my Ministry to take stock of the situation at Aleemiah College and to decide on the way forward. The Mediator did submit his report on 05 October 2006.

The recommendations contained therein have already been communicated to the main stakeholders and I am tabling a copy of these.

Further, an Implementation Committee has been set up to ensure that the recommendations contained in the report are implemented. This Committee which is chaired by a senior official of my Ministry comprises, *inter alia*, the following stakeholders –

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PQ No. B/1587 (contd)

- (i) Director PSSA;
- (ii) the Manager of Aleemiah College;
- (iii) the PSSA Supervisors of the Aleemiah College;
- (iv) one Representative from the Secondary and Preparatory School Teachers and other Staff Union;
- (v) one Representative from the Parents Teachers Association of Aleemiah College, and
- (vi) one staff representative from Aleemiah College.

The other members are mostly senior officials of my Ministry.

A first meeting of the Committee was held on 22 November 2006, and I am informed that an implementation plan has already been worked out at this stage for the execution of the recommendations and the PSSA has been directed to monitor same to ensure smooth resumption of studies in 2007. The Committee will also closely follow the situation.

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**ALEEMIAH COLLEGE, PHOENIX – MEDIATOR -
APPOINTMENT (27/03/07)**

(No. B/61) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Aleemiah College, Phoenix, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if a mediator was appointed to look into the problems prevailing thereat and, if so –

- (a) the date he was appointed, and
- (b) if he has submitted his report and, if so, will he consider the advisability of tabling a copy thereof, indicating which of the recommendations have been implemented so far.

Reply: As regards part (a) of the question, in my reply to PQ B/1587 of 05 December last, I informed the House that a mediator was appointed on 04 September 2006 to look into the circumstances which led to a deterioration of the relation between Management and the staff, and to establish the causes of such state of affairs, and to make appropriate recommendations.

As regards part (b) of the question, I also informed the House that the mediator submitted his report on 05 October 2006. However, given the situation at Aleemiah College was coming back to normal gradually, it was considered not appropriate to publish the report in full in order to avoid an unnecessary debate on the subject. It is, therefore, the policy of Government not to release the mediator's report. However, I wish to point out here again that the 22 major recommendations contained in the mediator's report were released to all stakeholders. A copy thereof was also tabled in the National Assembly on 05 December 2006.

The House is already aware that an Implementation Committee was subsequently set up by my Ministry to ensure the implementation by the PSSA of the recommendations contained in the mediator's report. Up to now, most of the recommendations have either been implemented already or are nearly reaching completion. These include the appointment of a new Manager, the fencing off of the boundaries between the two schools, corrective measures taken by Management to overcome problems pertaining to staff functioning as per their scheme of duties, and staff embarking on courses offered by tertiary institutions for enhancement of their qualifications. In addition, there is presently no interference of the President of Halkae Quadria Ishaat-I-Islam or any Board member in the day-to-day running of the schools. Furthermore, the Implementation Committee is continuing its work and will ensure that the remaining recommendations are implemented within the shortest delay. I am tabling a copy of a status report from the PSSA on the 22 major recommendations contained in the mediator's report.

I wish to add that my Ministry, in liaison with the PSSA, is closely monitoring the situation at the school and, from our point of view, the situation has considerably improved. Further, I personally met the President of the Halkae Quadria Ishaat-I-Islam on 14 March 2007 to review with him the situation at Aleemiah College and to ensure that all problems affecting the school are resolved within the set structures. I also propose to have a meeting with the Implementation Committee shortly and to effect a visit to Aleemiah College for a *de visu* assessment of the situation.

ALEEMIAH COLLEGE – INCIDENTS (17/04/07)

(No. B/175) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the situation prevailing at the Aleemiah College, Phoenix, he will state where matters stand, indicating the measures that will be taken by his Ministry to redress the situation.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the continued unrest at Aleemiah College (Girls) was the result of two incidents, namely the circulation of a letter by a teacher, which students of Forms I to III were forced to sign, under threat, to the effect that they had not participated in the protest of 16 March 2007 and the fact that some students were insulted by two teachers.

The PSSA and the Implementation Committee are currently working on the recommendations contained in the mediator's report and I am personally following up the matter. In the meantime, some other problems have, unfortunately, cropped up: for instance the letter which the students of Forms I to III were forced to sign or/and the alleged disparaging remarks by a lady teacher towards some students.

In order to create the required conditions for a normal resumption of studies at the beginning of the second term on 23 April 2007, I have taken the following steps -

- (i) I personally met the President of the Halkae Quadria Ishaat-IIslam, on 14 March 2007, to review with him the situation at Aleemiah College and to ensure that all problems affecting the school are resolved within the set structures. The President of the Halkae Quadria Ishaat-I-Islam has agreed to collaborate and has also given the assurance that he does not propose to close the school;
- (ii) I have also been in contact with the Student Council, the PTA and the teachers' representatives;
- (iii) I have requested the PSSA to have a team of supervisors to regularly visit the school, interact with the students, teachers and parents in order to forestall any problem;
- (iv) I convened a meeting on 05 April 2007 with the representatives of teachers, PTA and the Student Council, to hear the grievances of these three parties and to decide on the way forward on how to stabilize the situation in the present conditions. I have stressed upon all these parties on the need that appropriate procedures be followed to bring a comprehensive solution to the above-mentioned problems so as not to aggravate the situation;
- (v) as a result of that meeting, I have set up a Fact Finding Committee under the chair of my Permanent Secretary. This Committee has been mandated, to hear the different parties involved in the above incidents especially the two incriminated teachers and the manager of the school. The students will also be allowed to depone before this Committee. This Committee will also be required to come up with recommendations on the

way forward, and

(vi) I shall have a working session with the Implementation Committee whereby I will make an audit of the recommendations that have so far been implemented and take stock of what remains to be done on 19 April 2007. The other recommendations of the mediator's report will also be taken on board by this Implementation Committee. All the proposals made by the different stakeholders, namely the representatives of teachers, Parents Teachers Association and the Student Council, at my meeting with them on 05 April 2007, will be taken up at the level of the Implementation Committee on 19 April 2007.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is unfortunate that instead of assisting and finding a comprehensive solution or helping to assist in the implementation of the solution to contain the unrest, some quarters are creating more unrest by erroneously amplifying the situation to further their own personal agenda.

Having said this, I wish to reassure the House that my Ministry, in liaison with the PSSA, is closely monitoring the situation at the school. I also propose to effect a visit to Aleemiah College at the beginning of the second term.

Dr. Husnoo: There have had different committees that have been set up to try to solve the problems that have been going for the last six months.

We have committees from the Ministry of Education, from Halkae Quadria Ishaat-I-Islam and two *ad hoc* committees. There is one manager there and one post of manager is being advertised as well. All these committees, all these managers are being appointed, may I ask the hon. Minister who is in charge of that college and who is the manager in charge of that college?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a manager of the college. He is a Rector who looks after the administration of the college. But as I have indicated, the college is owned by a religious body; this is the set up in which the college operates.

Dr. Husnoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform us whether there had been a decrease in the intake of the students in Form I and Lower VI this year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the intake this year, there has been a slight decrease, but as the hon. Member will note, admission to

colleges is by parental choice. This is the situation not only in Aleemiah College, but there are other colleges which are facing this decline in student population.

Mr Soodun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he is aware that Dr. Subraty has been designated as mediator and can the hon. Minister confirm to the House if the report of Dr. Subraty is being implemented?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the case, because initially Government decided that a set of priority recommendations be implemented, then there were representations made that the other recommendations should also be taken on board. This is the case and the Implementation Committee has taken all the recommendations on board. There are, I think, about 52 and it will take some time to ensure the implementation of all these recommendations.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister inform the House how many items are being taken into consideration out of the 52 recommendations made by Dr. Soobratty.

Mr Gokhool: I don't have the exact figure, but I can check from the report that I have here. From the last report that I have got, there are 15 of them which have been looked into and action has been taken. The committee continues to meet to look at the other recommendations.

Mr Lauthan: M. le président, l'honorable ministre a parlé au début de sa réponse de « *continued unrest* ». Ne pense-t-il pas que le ministère et la PSSA auraient dû jouer leur rôle de régulateur d'autorité ? Suite à une question de mon collègue la dernière fois, au lieu de publier les 52 recommandations, on avait choisi de publier 22 seulement en escamotant les 30 autres recommandations, parmi 19 touchaient des manquements au niveau de l'administration et 4 soulignaient des manquements au niveau de la PSSA. C'est ce qui a amplifié la colère et la frustration parmi eux.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I differ from the opinion of the hon. Member because the idea is to bring back the situation to normal. That is why Government decided, in its own deliberate judgment, to look at those recommendations which are priority, and Government has not left out the other recommendations. These are being looked at.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I, by way of information, inform the House that there is a Union which is deliberately trying to stir up the students and the chairperson of the Parent Teacher Association has made a public statement that that Union should stay away from the problem which is at Aleemiah College.

Mrs Perrier: M. le président, est-ce le ministre peut s'assurer que derrière ce dégraissage d'élèves, il n'y a pas l'intention déguisée de fermer le collège pour le convertir en un collège technique ou payant?

Mr Gokhool: I have given my answer. The organisation has told me that they don't intend to close the school.

UPSSE – PRESIDENT – TRANSFER (08/05/07)

(No. B/296) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the president of the Union of Private Secondary School Employees, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if the latter has been transferred from the MEDCO Trinity to the Sir Abdool Razack Mohamed State Secondary School as from 23 April 2007 and, if so, the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to say, at the very outset, that, in the context of the overall policy of my Ministry for a World Class Quality Education, the optimum utilization of resources is a *sine qua non* condition.

The president of the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE), a teacher at MEDCO Trinity, forms part of a group of 22 Education Officers and 12 non-teaching staff, having been redeployed from MEDCO schools to State secondary schools in the context of a global exercise which aimed at rationalising and optimising the use of resources in both State and MEDCO Secondary schools, particularly in the present tight economic and strict budgetary constraints.

In fact, a survey has revealed that manpower resources were largely underutilised in the MEDCO schools to such an extent that many teachers were operating with a reduced time-table and that, in certain cases, teachers have had less than 10 periods per week, that is, slightly more than one days' work per week or only two periods per day. There were also cases where

teachers did not have any timetable at all. On the other hand, my Ministry was facing a serious lack of teachers in certain areas and had to have recourse to Supply Teachers who may not always have the full set of qualifications and the required teaching experience.

My Ministry could not allow such a situation to continue, particularly in view of the provisions of the PRB Report to the effect that an Education Officer should put in, at least, 28 periods of 40 minutes per week.

It is also to be noted that MEDCO was specifically created for the purpose of taking over and operating private secondary schools having closed down and for allowing the absorption of redundant teachers, employees of private secondary schools for redeployment anywhere in the education sector where their services may be required.

The redeployment of the 22 teachers and 12 non-teaching staff concerned from MEDCO schools to State Secondary Schools has, therefore, to be seen within its proper context which is one of rationalisation and optimisation of resources. Consequently, any motive that is imputed to this redeployment like victimisation or punitive transfer, is not correct and is totally unjustified. Similarly, it is not also proper to single out the president of UPSEE and present his case out of context as a different one from that of his remaining 21 colleagues. It is important for me to point out that we look at the human resources globally, that is, the teachers and the non-teaching staff. The fact that one teacher happens to be a trade unionist or a president of a trade union is only incidental. There are several trade unions and trade union leaders in the education sector who are allowed to criticise me or my Ministry, however their criticisms may be unjustified and it is not fair and proper on the part of that particular trade union leader to describe himself as a victim without qualifying or substantiating such an allegation.

Finally, I wish to inform the hon. Member that, following the redeployment of the president of UPSEE to Sir Abdool Razack Mohammed SSS, he has made representations to the effect that although he is registered by PSSA to teach in Lower and Upper Six, he has not been doing so for a long time and he has accordingly requested to be posted to another State Secondary School, namely Port Louis (North) SSS. His request has been acceded to. I also understand that the president of UPSEE has filed a case against MEDCO with the Labour Office and that the matter is following its course.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether it finds it normal that a president of a union of private secondary school be posted in a

State school?

Mr Gokhool: This is the normal practice. Ever since MEDCO was created, as I have said, they have to be redeployed in any State Secondary School, be it MEDCO or the Government schools. This has been the ongoing practice

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not following the president's involvement in the mass demonstration and lately in the demonstration for Allemeeah College when he asked his resignation that such transfer was made?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am the Minister of Education and Human Resources. I am concerned with the work of the teachers in the schools. Whatever Mr Paraouty or anybody does outside, that is not the concern of the Ministry.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister, where matters stand because the gentleman met the manager of the MEDCO and negotiation is on for him to get back to MEDCO,?

Mr Gokhool: All I know is that Mr Paraouty has been posted to Port Louis North SSS

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister how is it that the presidents of other unions in the State schools work less periods so that they can use their time off for union purposes and in this case, the gentleman is doing twenty-four to twenty-eight periods?

Mr Gokhool: If the president or the official of a union requests for time off, this is being taken care of.

MEDCO CLAIRFONDS – INCIDENT (08/05/07)

(No. B/326) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if there was any incident recently at the MEDCO Clairfonds and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor.

(Withdrawn)

MEDCO COLLEGES – BOARD MEMBERS (15/05/07)

(No. B/397) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the MEDCO colleges, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain therefrom information as to –

- (a) the composition of its Board, and
- (b) a list of its Managers

Reply: I wish to inform the House that MEDCO is a private company and the affairs of the company are regulated by its Board. I am tabling information requested as per parts (a) and (b) of the question.

RODRIGUES – MAURITIAN TEACHERS - THEFTS

22/05/07
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(No. B/424) Mr J. C. Barbier (Third Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether in regard to cases of thefts reported by Mauritian teachers living in Rodrigues at La Ferme, Capri, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the remedial actions taken, if any, and
- (c) if inquiries have been carried thereinto and the outcome thereof

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that two (2) cases of theft have been reported to the Police by Mauritian teachers living at La Ferme, Capri in Rodrigues since 2000 to date.

With regard to part (b) of the question, I am informed that with a view to preventing the occurrences of this nature, the Police has taken the following measures in Rodrigues -

- (i) Regular foot and mobile Police patrol is being maintained round the clock by the local Police, Rodrigues CID and a special patrol team covers La Ferme, Capri, where Mauritian teachers are presently residing;
- (ii) Stop and search of suspicious vehicles and persons; and
- (iii) Sensitisation campaign by Police in the context of the ongoing Police and Public Partnership Policing project.

As for part (c) of the question, I am informed that both cases are being investigated by Rodrigues CID.

PROFESSOR BASDEO BISSOONDOYAL COLLEGE – ALLEGED CASES OF MISMANAGEMENT ETC. (19/06/07)

(No. B/648) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if the Authority has received complaints from teachers of the Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College in relation to cases of mismanagement and harassment of teachers and, if so, the actions, if any, that have been or will be taken.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that there are two complaints in relation to alleged cases of mismanagement and harassment against teachers at the Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College that have

been brought to the attention of the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA), namely –

- (i) the case of Mr. V.K Bachoo, and
- (ii) an alleged case of mismanagement reported by an anonymous group of 21 teachers of both the Boys' and Girls' Departments of the said school.

In the first case, on Friday 01 June 2007, the PSSA received a letter of complaint from Mr V.K Bachoo, Physical Education Teacher at Prof B. Bissoondoyal College (Boys), to the effect that a sum of Rs1,033.20 had been deducted from his salary for his having been absent from duty on Wednesday 14 February 2007 and Thursday 15 February 2007 on the occasion of Maha Shivaratree festival.

From records obtained from Prof B. Bissoondoyal College (Boys), out of 10 applications for leave on 14 February 2007, only one, namely, that of

Mr Bachoo was not approved and out of 30 applications for leave on 15 February 2007, only three, including that of Mr Bachoo, were not approved. A panel of officers visited the school on Tuesday 05 June 2007 and the matter was discussed in the presence of the Manager and Mr V.K Bachoo. The Manager's version was that he had received numerous requests for leave for those two days in connection with the Maha Shivaratree festival and the exigencies of the service were such that he could not entertain all the requests for leave. Thus he gave instructions to the PSSA for the salary of

Mr Bachoo who absented himself without authorisation for the two days, to be deducted.

The PSSA accordingly deducted the two days' salary from the teacher's pay. However, in light of the representations of Mr Bachoo, the PSSA is further investigating the matter.

As regards the second case, on 11 June 2007, the PSSA received a letter from an anonymous group of 21 teachers of both Boys' and Girls' Departments of the college where mention is made of "some irregularities and mismanagement at the colleges." There were alleged cases of excessive workload, injustice, harassment, and some irregularities concerning Parent-Teachers Association."

I must point out that anonymous complaints are not considered as a rule although from time to time these are exceptionally examined depending on the nature and scale of the complaints. In that particular case, a first

analysis of the individual time-tables of teachers, the workload of nonteaching staff and return of absences show that PSSA's norms and standards are being respected by the colleges. However, an in-depth inquiry is being carried out by the PSSA.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the case of Mr Bachoo, can I know whether it is the practice and does the Minister find it normal that a teacher who has written against a Manager be called before the same Manager to depone against him?

Mr Gokhool: Sir, according to Mr Bachoo, it was a case of underpayment. So, the facts have to be established and the best way to do it is to listen to Mr Bachoo and the Manager. The PSSA will then judge on the basis of whatever is being said in the course of the meeting.

Mr Guinness: Could it not have been done separately, that is, meeting and questioning the teacher and the Manager separately?

Mr Gokhool: The outcome would have been the same, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister aware that following the meeting, Mr Bachoo had verbal dismissal?

Mr Gokhool: I cannot pronounce on that. I have to check with the PSSA.

Mr Guinness: Let me come to the question of mismanagement. Has the PSSA informed the Minister that, in some cases, attendants who are employed at the college, work for themselves in their own bookshop in the school yard. Is he aware of that?

Mr Gokhool: I think there was an anonymous letter where many points were raised and I said that the PSSA has been carrying out an inquiry which is still ongoing.

Mr Guinness: Is the Minister aware that some attendants and caretakers who are paid by the PSSA do work at the Manager's guesthouse and work as maids in his house and some are even working at the University. Is he aware of that?

Mr Gokhool: These are allegations and they have to be looked into. I cannot pronounce on the basis of allegations.

Mr Gunness: Is the Minister aware that one attendant was carrying computers and sewing machines from Flacq to Réduit and it happened that one sewing machine fell down from the van and was broken. He is now asked to reimburse Rs50,000. Is he aware of that?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I'll certainly pass on this information to the PSSA.

Mr Gunness: Is the Minister prepared to set up a fact-finding committee on that institution to look into the case of mismanagement? This is known...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gunness: For example, there is a head of department who is related to the Manager and who works the whole day in the supermarket. It is known in Flacq, but he is paid from public funds.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I shall pass on the information of the hon. Member to the PSSA to look into and carry a proper inquiry.
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YEAR 2008

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – CLOSURE (25/03/08)

(No. B/49) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the closure of Private Secondary Schools in 2007 and 2008, he will state –

- (a) the number thereof,
- (b) the policy of his Ministry regarding the closure of schools and the redeployment of students and staff, and
- (c) the measures taken to redeploy -
 - (i) the students,
 - (ii) the teaching staff, and
 - (iii) the non-teaching staff

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will reply to PQ B/49 and PQ B/50 which relate to the same subject matter at the same time.

(a) one private secondary school closed down in 2007 and three others in 2008;

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(b) the policy of my Ministry is that private secondary schools are liable to close down where either there are strained industrial relations or where the schools fail to satisfy the requirements of the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) in terms of pedagogical norms and standards, structural soundness of their infrastructure and minimum school population which stand at 150 for mainstream and 25 for the rest.

Whenever a school closes down, the priority of my Ministry is to ensure the redeployment of the students to allow them to continue and complete their secondary schooling in another educational institution where vacancies exist and as near as possible to their places of residence.

As regards the staff, an agreement was signed in 1983 whereby Government agreed that –

“it will take all appropriate measures for the protection of employment of the employees concerned” and to “do everything within its authority, prerogative and jurisdiction to redeploy any employee who may become redundant”.

Another agreement was signed in May 2000 essentially to reaffirm the 1983 agreement.

Until 2007, it was possible to ensure the redeployment of the redundant employees either in the MEDCO schools or in the State Secondary Schools where there were shortages in view of the fact that the education sector was expanding. However, as from 2007, the situation has stabilized and the State Secondary Schools, inclusive of the MEDCO schools, have now their full complement of staff. Further, the four MEDCO schools are already overstaffed. Consequently, Government agreed to a three-pronged approach whereby –

(i) all redundant employees who are aged 50 and above retire in accordance with the provision of the Private

Secondary Schools Staff Pension Scheme;

(ii) all redundant employees who are below 50 but above 35 with at least 10 years of service be redeployed in MEDCO provided they are either fully qualified to teach in a State Secondary School (i.e. possessing a post HSC degree) or are qualified at least at diploma level in scarcity areas (e.g. Design and Technology, Home Economics etc), and

(iii) all other redundant employees including those with less than 10 years service be granted a refund of contribution under the Pension Act and be asked to look for employment (either in the education sector or another sector) on their own with the possibility for them to access the empowerment programme for retraining/reskilling.

(c) Notwithstanding the three-pronged approach, my Ministry was in presence of representations from different quarters and with a view to avoiding hardship to the redundant employees, my Ministry has made a special effort and it has been possible to redeploy the near totality of them. In 2007, 15 redundant employees were redeployed comprising eight teachers and seven non-teaching staff and in 2008, 94 employees were redeployed comprising 66 teachers and 28 non-teaching staff.

(d) Out of the 66 teachers, 26 who are fully qualified and are within the age bracket of 35 to 50 years have been redeployed as Education Officer whereas the remaining 40 have been redeployed as Administrative Support staff in the State Secondary Schools against existing vacancies but without loss of salary and other benefits. As and when opportunities will arise in the teaching sector in future, they will be transferred to teaching positions.

As regards the students, 38 students from Pamplemousses High School in 2007 and 303 students from Rose Belle High School, Presidency College Rivière des Anguilles and Newton College Rivière des Anguilles have been redeployed and offered a seat in another State or grant-aided private secondary school.

However, from the recent batch, there are around 40 students who have moved to another school of their choice whereas some 10 students are still not satisfied with the school to which they have been redeployed. These cases are being addressed on an *ad-hoc* basis.

My Ministry and the PSSA are following up the situation closely.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, since the time I submitted this Parliamentary Question, lots of progress and positive developments have taken place and I thank the hon. Minister for that. But, I have two small requests. One, there are about 17 qualified, full-fledged teachers with BA degrees and professional courses in teaching like PGCE and some have Masters. They have been offered jobs as Usher or Clerical. I would request the hon. Minister if they could be redeployed in their substantive posts because this creates frustration.

Secondly, I have just learned that there are four vacancies and three new recruits. I would request the hon. Minister to see to it if they could be taken on board.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have indicated, we have redeployed teachers where teaching positions are available and the others in administrative support positions. Whenever vacancies arise, we will accommodate these teachers.

Mr Guinness: May I know from the Minister - he said the near totality has been redeployed - how many are left to be redeployed?

Mr Gokhool: Six.

Mr Guinness: The Minister said that there was the agreement in 1983 and this agreement was reaffirmed in year 2000. The Minister should know that the agreement for the trade unions is *sacré*. Therefore, the Minister must go in line with the agreement which has been signed between the union and the Ministry of Education. Previous Ministers have all followed

Mr Speaker: This is a statement. What is the question of the hon. Member?

Mr Guinness: My question is: previous Ministers of Education have abided by this agreement. Why is it that the present Minister is not abiding by this agreement?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a PQ No. B/63 concerning the issue and, if you allow me, this will answer the question of the hon. Member.

Mr Speaker: When we reach the question, the hon. Minister will answer.

Mr Gokhool: If you will allow me to answer the question.

Mr Speaker: We will wait, then the hon. Member can put supplementary questions.

Mr Mohamed: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that the conditions with regard to salaries are the same. But would all the conditions of service be the same, such as prospects of promotion, the type of job that is being done? If that is not the case, what would he do in order to see to it that all conditions of service eventually are, at least, brought to be in line with what they were used to?

Mr Gokhool: I have taken note and I'll see that these are taken care of.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I heard the hon. Minister rightly, he said at the start of his answer that schools are liable to close down where there are strained industrial relations. Can he explain what he means by that?

Mr Gokhool: It is one of the reasons. There are various conditions which can lead to the closure of schools, one of which is persistent strained industrial relations. If there are strikes going on in a school, we have to take into account the interest of the child. For me, the interest of the child is first, I have to ensure that this is being taken care of. If the conditions do not prevail for education to be provided, I think the PSSA will be well advised to close the school.

Mr Rucktooa: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the closure of private secondary schools, the redeployment of students, staff, honestly and sincerely, is the hon. Minister looking - in the future ultimately most or all the private secondary schools are going to be closed - into the measures to be taken? Because it is a slow death of all private secondary schools as from today.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, secondary school is a partnership between Government and the private sector; it will remain a partnership although the partnership will be modified. I do not subscribe to the hypothesis of the hon. Member that all private secondary schools will close down.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Minister refer to the terms and conditions of service. It seems that the Minister is not sure whether they are going to enjoy the same terms and conditions. May I remind the Minister that according to the agreement which has been signed, they have to received the present salary, enjoy the end-of-year bonus, yearly increment, wage compensation, refund of bus traveling, travel grant, refund of sick leave, passage benefit, loan, etc. Therefore, the question must not even arise in the head of the Minister to change this.

Mr Gokhool: The issue was in terms of promotional prospects, but in terms of salary and other fringe benefits these are provided.

Mr Cuttaree: I come back again to the answer which the hon. Minister gave regarding industrial relations. Mr Speaker, Sir, in an enterprise there are two parties, and if one party feels that his rights are being trampled upon, it is his right to go and fight with any legal means that is at his disposal. How can the hon. Minister say to the House that, for example, where there are strikes - it is a legal right for workers to strike – his interest is the children, therefore, he will allow the school to close?

Mr Gokhool: What I said in my answer – if the hon. Member has listened is where the strained industrial relations have become perennial.

This is what I said.

Mr Cuttaree: There must be a reason. The way the Minister puts it is that, if teachers' rights are being trampled upon by the management and if they have to fight for their rights, then he is threatening them by saying that he is going to close the school.

Mr Gokhool: We'll observe the law when we'll have to take the decision.

Mr Guinness: I think the Minister himself is pushing the UPSEE towards a general strike in April and he will know what teachers mean.

Mr Gokhool: UPSEE is free to go on strike any time.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – CLOSURE (25/03/08)

(No. B/50) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the recent closure of three private secondary schools in the South, he will state if the teaching and non-teaching staff have now been redeployed.

(Vide reply to PQ. No. B/49)

**EDEN COLLEGE (BOYS), QUATRE BORNES – TEACHERS – LIBRARY
ACCESS (01/04/08)**

(No. B/121) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche & GRSE) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the teachers working at the Eden College (Boys) Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary School Authority, information as to if a written authorisation from the administration is required for them to have access to the school library and, if so, if this is normal practice.

(Withdrawn)

EDEN COLLEGE (BOYS), QUATRE BORNES – SCHOOL LIBRARY (08/04/08)

(No. B/206) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the teachers working at the Eden College (Boys), Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary School Authority, information as to if a written authorisation from the administration is required for them to have access to the school library and, if so, if this is normal practice.

(Withdrawn)

UPSEE/GOVERNMENT – AGREEMENTS (15/04/08)

(No. B/239) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the agreements signed between Government and the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees in 1983, he will state if his Ministry has decided to override same.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of misunderstandings about the agreements that exist between the Government and the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE). I welcome the opportunity of this question to enlighten the House and the public at large about the essence of these agreements because in fact, there are two: one signed in February 1983 and the other, in May 2000, and the position of my Ministry on same.

First of all, these agreements have to be placed in context. With regard to the first one signed in February 1983, it has to be borne in mind that at that time, a large number of private secondary schools had closed down and were in the process of being closed down. The country was going through a difficult economic situation and unemployment was high. Job opportunities were limited. Around 200 employees were facing the threat of being laid off as a result of the closing down of the schools and because of the social dimension of the problem in the then socio-economic context, Government decided to take *“all appropriate measures for the protection of employment of employees concerned and to do everything within its authority, prerogative and jurisdiction to redeploy any employee who may become redundant”*. That agreement was meant to address the situation of employees concerned at that time as well as that of those who could have become redundant immediately after because it was then foreseen that the colleges would be closing down one after the other. Therefore, the Agreement of 1983 was never meant to be of an open ended nature to be applicable to all future cases irrespective of when or how they might occur. Nowhere is it stated that the agreement would apply *ad infinitum*.

It is precisely because the 1983 agreement was not meant to apply *ad*

infinitum that the need was felt in May 2000 to sign another agreement to address possible cases of redundancy that could have arisen at that time. Again the Agreement of 2000 was not meant to be of an open ended nature. That agreement was meant to address the situation of employees concerned at that time as well as that of those who could have become redundant immediately after.

Admittedly, on account of the fact that the education sector was expanding and more particularly as from 2002 when many secondary schools were constructed, it was still possible to ensure the redeployment of employees of private secondary schools.

However, now that the situation has stabilised and that the possibility of automatic absorption are few and far apart, and also there are now attractive alternative employment opportunities in various sectors of our economy with possibility of earning higher income, the practice of redeployment *in toto*, as it existed in the past, is no longer viable and sustainable.

Furthermore, it is also the Ministry's view that in a spirit of equity to recruit qualified job seekers in the labour market, automatic redeployment may be fraught with serious legal implications with respect to equal opportunities considerations. As regards the question of as to whether my Ministry has overridden the agreements, it does not arise. In fact, my Ministry is still upholding the spirit of these agreements and as indicated in reply to PQs B/49 and B/50 at our sitting of 25 March 2008, on account of existing vacancies in non-teaching positions, my Ministry has managed to redeploy all the redundant employees *albeit* not in the same position but without loss of salary and other related benefits notwithstanding the rather awkward situation whereby salary and other benefits are not commensurate with work performed.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must say that I am rather confused by the hon. Minister's answer. When he says that he has not overridden this agreement, does he mean that it still stands good?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have explained the situation as it was in 1983 and 2000. It has now evolved. All I am saying is that the spirit of the agreement is being maintained and that we cannot predict, with precision, what is going to happen in future. Therefore, I cannot give a blanket guarantee that redeployment will take place *in toto*.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just mentioned that he believes that this agreement was no longer sustainable, and now, he is saying that he still abides by the spirit of the agreement. Therefore, I take it that the agreement is still applicable and sustainable because as he has just mentioned, he had managed to redeploy all the teachers in spite of the fact that he kept mentioning that he is not going to keep this agreement.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have explained that the economic situation and the situation in the education sector are evolving and I have put the two agreements in their particular context. As I said, I cannot, at this stage, give a blanket guarantee that redeployment will take place as it has been the case in the past, but the spirit of the agreement is maintained, that is, to ensure that where schools are closed down, people will find alternative employment. And this is where the Ministry, as I said in my previous PQs, will help these people to find alternative employment.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, therefore, will the Ministry not take the responsibility of finding alternative employment for the teachers?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am very clear. The Ministry will assist, and, as I said in my previous PQs, we have the reskilling programme and other possibilities exist. The other thing, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the education sector is very dynamic. It would be a paradox that we would try to maintain security of employment, a job for a life time in a sector which is supposed to be engaged in lifelong learning and employability. I think this should be a paradox.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like the hon. Minister to be clearer. Either we maintain the agreement or we do not!

Can I know from the hon. Minister whether it is being maintained?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have given the answer and the hon. Member is free to make her own interpretation of my answer.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I then ask the hon. Minister what will happen to teachers who are in employment in schools which have not closed down yet and which ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: This question is hypothetical.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: I am going to rephrase it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

May I ask the hon. Minister whether, when schools become overstaffed and teachers are declared redundant, the Ministry then considers redeploying these redundant teachers in spite of the fact that the school is still operating?

Mr Gokhool: This is a hypothetical situation, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to mention to the hon. Lady that problems like these are, normally, in the first instance, dealt with by the PSSA whose Chairman is Mr Naga and whose Director is Mr Luchoomun. All I am trying to say is that whenever there are problems, they are first dealt with by the PSSA and thereafter they are referred to the Ministry according to law.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am asking the hon. Minister a simple question on the policy. Will he mention whether he is going to consider teachers in schools who have not closed down yet to be redundant when the schools become overstaffed?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: This question is hypothetical. The hon. Member ought to ask the hon. Minister what he is going to do actually with regards to schools where teachers are redundant. But he cannot foresee which schools are going to close down and how many teachers are going to be redundant. Can the hon. Member rephrase her question again?

(Interruptions)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am addressing the question, through you, to the hon. Minister of Education and I am expecting an answer from the hon. Minister of Education and not from the hon. Minister of Finance! To start with, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - my question is simple - there are teachers presently working in schools which have not closed down and who are being declared redundant.

Can I know from the hon. Minister what will be the policy of the Ministry in such cases?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have already answered to this question because, apart from the three colleges which have closed down, there are other colleges that closed down. And this has been dealt with in the arrangements which have been made recently. This is a hypothetical situation. As I said ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I do believe that the hon. Member has asked a specific question about colleges that are still operational, but where teachers have been declared to be redundant. That is the point that the hon. Member has made. Is it the case?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware of cases, unless the hon. Lady is better informed than the Minister!

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, the Minister has, a number of times, in this very Assembly, mentioned that I, being a teacher, should know certain things and I would like to state ..

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Both the Minister and the hon. Member should not make things too personal. Because this is something which has to do with education. The issue is simply about education; it has nothing to do either with the Minister or with the hon. Member. That is my ruling.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, being a member of the Union, I have information that there are cases of teachers who are becoming redundant due to overstaffing. May I ask the Minister what his Ministry's policy is in such cases?

Mr Gokhool: I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that I do not have the information which the hon. lady has. How can I answer on the basis of something which I am not aware of?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Last question!

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on both occasions in this context, the hon. Minister mentioned the difficult economic situation of our time to explain the compassionate attitude of the Government. Does he not think that today the situation is still more difficult and there is more need than ever to be compassionate towards these teachers?

Mr Gokhool: I will answer the hon. Member by just repeating what I said. The economic situation is evolving. There are better opportunities in many sectors and, in particular, in the education sector where we are promoting lifelong learning and employability. We will help these people to go and find other jobs.

Mr Jhugroo: M le président, le ministre peut-il confirmer si les *managers* des écoles privées veulent sa démission ?

Mr Gokhool : It's just becoming a joke! Either the hon. Member is a joker!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Next question!

GOVERNMENT/UPSEE – AGREEMENTS (15/04/08)

(No. B/153) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the agreements signed between Government and the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees in 1983, he will state if his Ministry has decided to override same.

(Withdrawn)

EDEN COLLEGE – SCHOOL LIBRARY – ACCESS (29/04/08)

(No. B/323) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the teachers working at the Eden College (Boys) Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary School Authority, information as to if a written authorization from the administration is required for them to have access to the school library and, if so, if this is normal practice.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the answer is in the negative. This is not a normal practice.

I am informed that the management has informed the PSSA that teachers will continue to enjoy unrestricted access to the school library when they have free periods, but they should inform the school administration accordingly.

Mr Gunness: The hon. Minister is saying that this is not normal practice. How is it that during free periods the teacher must still inform - this is the main question – the administration for access in the library?

Mr Gokhool: I think the question was whether there has to be a written authorization. The answer is no. But if the teacher goes to the library and, in case the teacher is required, the management should know where he or she is. He or she has just to inform the management and that is a normal practice, but not the written authorisation.

Mr Guinness: I am sure the Minister must be aware that the PSSA in a letter dated 11 March to the management of Eden College stated that they have to refrain from such practice. Is the Minister aware that on 17 March the management wrote another letter to the teachers insisting that this practice, that is, a written authorisation, will continue?

Mr Gokhool: I am giving the answer that I have as at now, that there is no practice of written authorisation. That is the answer.

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the Minister whether he can, at least, ask the inspectors of the PSSA to meet the teachers separately so that they know the real story?

Mr Gokhool: That has been done, because the supervisors went to the school. I have to inform the House that they did notice certain abuses and the abuse is that some teachers leave the school premises during school hours without informing. I am not generalising, but there have been such cases and the attention of the management has been drawn to look into the matter whereby the management introduced this issue of written authorisation, but this is not in order. The attention of the college has been drawn by the PSSA and this is the situation now.

Mr Guinness: We know that when supervisors visit the school, they meet the management only. Is the Minister prepared to ask the inspectors to meet, at least, the teachers separately?

Mr Gokhool: Supervisors visit schools regularly. But if the hon. Member insists I will ask the PSSA to do the needful.

Mr Speaker: Or else the teachers can meet the inspectors!

(Interruptions)

**PROFESSOR BASDEO BISSOONDOYAL COLLEGE -
ALLEGED MISMANAGEMENT (17/06/08)**

(No. B/720) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College, Central Flacq, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Private Secondary Schools Authority, information as to if a fact finding committee will be set up to look into the allegation of acts of mismanagement levelled against the management thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, my Ministry receives from time to time, representations by way of anonymous letters from staff members of Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College to the effect that they are victimized by the Manager of the school.

The representations relate generally to non-approval of sick leave and casual leave, drastic cuts in salaries, refusal of release to follow MIE courses and compelling of staff to do private work for the Manager.

As the PSSA is the Authority responsible to regulate the private secondary schools sector, the complaints are invariably referred to the Authority for investigation and report.

I am informed by the PSSA that it could not conclusively deal with any of these representations because –

- (i) when PSSA Supervisors visit the school, the Manager invariably denies the allegations and is reluctant to cooperate and allow them access to the information required, and
- (ii) most of the whistleblowers or complainants prefer to remain under anonymous cover and therefore the allegations cannot be cross-checked and verified, particularly, in the absence of evidence to the effect.

However, as a measure of precaution the PSSA always reminds and cautions the Manager of the school of the need to remain consistent with the Education Act, the PSSA Act and the School Regulations.

It is felt that the Industrial Relations Act makes ample provision for sound industrial relations between employee and employer and for conflict resolution. It is, therefore, imperative for employees who feel aggrieved by the decisions and actions of their employer to take advantage of the existing mechanism under Industrial Relations Act. At this stage, the question of setting up a Fact Finding Committee does not arise.

Mr Guinness: I heard the Minister himself saying that employees don't want to go ahead, they don't want to talk. That is why I feel there is urgent need. There is allegation that Mr N.S – I am not going to mention any name – who is employed as caretaker at the school is working a whole day at Poste Lafayette in the bungalow of the Manager. Is the hon. Minister aware of that particular case?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must inform House what the hon. Member has mentioned and the information I have given is only one side of the story, because the supervisors make regular visits and they have other information. With regard to the point being raised, it is part of the allegation. That's why I say that if people have certain grievances and complaints, they must reveal themselves and the PSSA can take appropriate action or if they have an industrial relations problem, they can refer the matter to the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, once an employee in that institution comes forward to denounce what is going on, I am sure the hon. Minister is not aware of the harassment there, if I take the case of Mr V.K.B. and Mr G.R.

Mr Gokhool: Can I take a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? I have just mentioned – I have a copy of the allegations - that these are anonymous. I don't know whether it is allowed for the hon. Member to use the anonymous allegations to put questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a personal explanation! Does the hon. Minister mean to say that he is aware of what the hon. Member has just been stating right now?

Mr Gokhool: Yes, Sir.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is not only allegation in that. The last time the hon. Minister answered...

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister says that he is aware of that.

(Interruptions)

This is what I meant, the hon. Minister is only aware.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the case where there is victimization, for example, in the case of Mr B., in June 2007, the hon. Minister answered that the PSSA accordingly deducted two days' salary from the teacher's pay and in the light of the representation of Mr B., the PSSA is further investigating the matter. Can I know where this matter stands after one year?

Mr Gokhool: I cannot give the answer as to where matters stand with regard to this specific Mr B. Mr B. identified himself. That's why the PSSA was able to conduct the enquiry and take remedial action. This is the best way to proceed. I do think the hon. Member has some qualms about victimization. If we know the case, we are going to take action; just like in the case of Mr B., action has been taken.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I am sad to say that these people are still being victimized, the increment has not been paid to them in January of this year, because they have come forward. At least, these two gentlemen have got the courage to come forward and no increment is being paid to them.

Mr Gokhool: Precisely, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this will be an industrial relations matter which can be referred to the Industrial Relations Office of the Ministry of Labour and action will be taken at that end.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the Minister whether he is aware that even the Union UPSEE has requested for a full-fledged Fact Finding Committee so that, at least, the employees can come forward and depone and say what they have to say in the mismanagement and *in camera*, if possible.

Mr Gokhool: I have received the representation from the Union, but the problem is that it is of an anonymous nature. If we have any person, any organisation identifying and making representation on the basis of facts, that will help certainly.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I put the question whether UPSEE has insisted on a Fact Finding Committee, the Minister said that he is aware, he received representations from the UPSEE and now he is saying that these are anonymous. I insist that it is urgent and imperative - in fact, I am sure hon. Bachoo and hon. Peetumber are also aware of it, knows a bit; but as an ex-trade unionist, I am asking to the Minister - that a Fact Finding Committee be set up and we will get all the truth out of it.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the conditions do not exist for me, to consider, at this stage, a Fact-Finding Committee.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister earlier mentioned that there were visits done by supervisors of the PSSA. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether these visits were scheduled ones or surprised ones?

Mr Gokhool: There are both normal and surprised visits which are carried out.

MEDCO COLLEGES – SC & HSC – PASS RATES (29/07/08)

(No. B/999) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the MEDCO colleges, he will state the number thereof, which are presently operating in the island indicating the percentage pass rates for the Cambridge School Certificate examinations and the Cambridge Higher School certificate in respect of each of the Medco Colleges for each of the past five years?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are at present four MEDCO schools operating in the island of Mauritius, namely, MEDCO Alex Bhujoharry Secondary School, MEDCO Cassis Secondary School, MEDCO Trinity Secondary School and MEDCO Clairfonds Secondary School.

MEDCO Alex Bhujoharry Secondary School is the only one to run HSC classes, the others being Forms I – V schools. As regards the percentage passes at School Certificate level for each of the schools over the past five years, I am tabling the information. However, I wish to inform the House that there has been a steady increase in the performance of the students from 50% to 96% at MEDCO Alex Bhujoharry Secondary School from 2003 to 2007 whereas for the others, the percentages have varied from 20% to 54%.

The HSC results of MEDCO Alex Bhujoharry are as follows -

Year 2003 -	64%
Year 2004 -	55%
Year 2005 -	40%
Year 2006 -	61%
Year 2007 -	89%

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he could inform the House on the activities being carried out with regard to the celebration of the 15th anniversary of MEDCO colleges?

The Deputy Speaker: This has nothing to do with the question. The Table has been advised that PQS Nos. B/1016, B/1017 and B/1018 have been withdrawn.

PROFESSOR BASDEO BISSOONDOYAL COLLEGE – COMPLAINTS (05/08/08)

(No. B/1076) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College, Flacq, he will state if he has received letters dated 10 and 24 July 2008, respectively, from the students and the attendants thereof, complaining of the recurrence of mismanagement thereat and, if so, if he proposes to set up a fact finding committee to look into the whole matter?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I received copies of the two letters dated 10 July 2008 and 24 July 2008 emanating from a group of students and attendants of Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College respectively.

The first letter of 10 July 2008 is, in fact, an anonymous one emanating from a group of students.

Although the allegations were anonymous, the Private Secondary Schools Authority (PSSA) has looked into the matter and I am informed that-

- (i) the school has undertaken an overall cleaning of the premises and the broken window panes are being replaced. The school management has been requested to complete all outstanding minor repairs before the resumption of studies on 11 August 2008;
- (ii) the management of the school has denied having taken any contribution from students for organising the function on music day and internal examinations. It has not been possible for the PSSA to collect evidence that there has been any forced contribution, and
- (iii) with regard to the misuse of the PTA funds, the PSSA has not been able to establish facts. However, the Registrar of Association is being requested to look into the matter.

I wish to remind the House that, as indicated in my reply to PQ No. B/720 on 17 June 2008, so long as the complainants prefer to remain under anonymous cover, the allegations cannot be crosschecked and verified.

The second letter of 24 July 2008 emanated from attendants of the school who alleged to modification of their hours of work without their consent and imposition to work on Saturdays up to 17.00 hours. The PSSA has informed that the school management of Professor Basdeo Bissoondoyal College has been instructed to strictly comply with the official working hours provided by PRB Report 2008.

The two complaints are of an administrative nature, relate to different issues and are being addressed by the PSSA as appropriate. Consequently, as indicated at our sitting of 17 June 2008, the need for a fact-finding committee does not arise.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I take the first letter of the 10 July from the students. The Minister said that, in the case of music day, inquiries have been carried out and that there has been no contribution. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the PSSA inquired as to whether students were asked to pay Rs40 for the internal examination fees? Is it normal practice for schools to ask students to pay for internal examination fees?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, the matter has been looked into and, as I indicated, the PSSA was not able to find evidence to the point being raised by the hon. Member.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the hon. Minister whether the PSSA enquired from any student and, if yes, can he give the names of the students to whom questions were asked?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware of the nature of the enquiry that was carried out. The enquiry was carried out by the officers of the PSSA at the level of the school.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think, at this stage, be it an anonymous letter, since students have made complaints that they are paying, at least, the supervisors or the inspectors should have called certain students to verify whether this is the case.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has said that he does not have the details on how the enquiry was carried out, but an enquiry was carried out and the result is that there has been no evidence.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree, but you would imagine that my question goes in line with that letter and the Minister would have presumed that I will ask these supplementary questions.

Mr Gokhool: I know, but, as I have said, this was an anonymous allegation. In spite of the fact that it was anonymous, the PSSA was requested to find out what was exactly the situation.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister said that...

Mr Speaker: We are turning round and round. We are taking a lot of time of the House. If the hon. Minister does not have the details as to whether it was an enquiry carried out student by student, he should say that he does not have the information.

Mr Gokhool: I said that I don't have all the details of the enquiry.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member can come with a substantive question.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll come to the letter from the attendants. Is it normal that a school modifies the timetable and the attendants are asked to work from 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, this is contrary to PRB recommendations and the school has been given strict instructions to comply with the provisions of the PRB Report 2008. I can add, as I said last time, if the employees are still not satisfied, they can refer the matter to the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations because their contract is being infringed by the school.

Mr Guinness: There is a number of cases like that where the college does not adhere to existing rules. This is why several times I have asked the Minister whether he is ready to set up a fact-finding committee to let people come and talk. Why is the Ministry refusing the setting up of a fact-finding committee?

Mr Gokhool: I have already given my answer, but I can assure the hon. Member that my Ministry is monitoring the situation at the school and PSSA has been given strict instructions not to condone any malpractice. This is the guarantee I can give to the House.

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has looked into the case where four attendants had registered in the attendance book that they were at their site of work supposedly at Flacq at 7.51 a.m., 7.49 a.m., 7.38 a.m. and 7.58 a.m. respectively, but these same four attendants were obliged to go to work at Ebene, that is, the Eastern University. Has the hon. Minister looked into that matter?

Mr Gokhool: That matter was raised in PQ No. B/720.

(Interruptions)

If it is being raised again, I'll look into the matter because this is a new information that is being given to me.

Mr Guinness: I cannot understand. There have been articles in two different newspapers with pictures.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. The hon. Member can put questions, but he cannot expect the hon. Minister to read all the press.

Mr Guinness: It seems that the hon. Minister is not aware, even though he went to the college for only five minutes. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the supervisors have met the four attendants and asked them to state that they had taken a vacation leave on that day when they were seen on the site of work?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I may look into it. What I can say to the hon. Member is that we have a union of employees registered and recognised. The employees know their rights. I think they will help the Ministry if they can report the matter in an official manner and then we can look into it and open an inquiry. But anonymous allegations make it difficult.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the Minister refer to the union of employees, but it is the same union of employees who has asked the Minister several times to set up a fact-finding committee, and the Minister is saying that he is going to collaborate! The hon. Minister should set up the fact-finding committee and we will see.

Mr Gokhool: But the hon. Member has to advise the union to come with evidence or with facts which will be the basis of the fact-finding committee and not mere allegations. We cannot act on mere allegations.

Mr Speaker: I think we have had enough debate on this question.

Next question!