

## SECONDARY

### REFORMS

PNQ

15/05/01  
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**The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam)** (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the proposed reform in education, he will –

- (a) state the reasons for the elimination of star schools in the public sector only and the consequential creation of super star colleges in the private sector;
- (b) spell out in detail the practical measures he will take to ensure that admissions by the new grading system will be done in a fair and transparent manner, and
- (c) state the measures he will take to ensure the continued existence of private secondary schools.

**Mr Obegadoo:** Mr Speaker Sir, as the House is aware the latest document on Reforms on Education refers to the vexed issue of C.P.E. ranking and democratisation of access to Secondary Education.

For recall, at present, each year some 28,000 children attempt the CPE Examination which is the most important examination of our educational system in as much as compulsory education ends at the CPE and no child can get admitted to the secondary without passing the CPE. Of the 28,000 candidates each year some 9,000 fail and repeat Std VI. Of the repeaters, half again fail and until this year were, in general, condemned to the wilderness with all the attendant dangers. And the other half does go on to the secondary but with minute chances of any significant academic achievement thereafter. From the 18,000 or so who pass, some 1,000 have to be selected for admission to the perceived star schools, hence the notorious ranking system. It is well known that the extreme and inhuman competition associated with ranking imposes tremendous stress upon children, parents and teachers alike. CPE ranking is anti-pedagogical in that it vitiates the role of the school by making of ranking students its paramount objective. CPE ranking is unjust in that it is based on subject assessment of 1 hour 45 mins to determine once and for all the intellectual worth of a child and his mastery of a programme taught over six years.

Ranking, Mr Speaker, Sir, is an essential support of the star schools system and it is as precise as it is harsh and arbitrary. Precise in that it ranks students by the one decimal point and arbitrary in that it purports to establish an intellectual hierarchy as between students having already attained with a grade A the desirable learning competencies as defined by experts.

It is therefore obvious that ranking has to go. The point is to understand the connection between star schools and ranking. Without star

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schools, there is no need for ranking which is nothing but an instrument of selection. Likewise without ranking, there can be no star schools as we know that whatever residual selection persists on the basis of grading will guarantee the entry of students with a wider range of abilities in anyone school.

The objective of Government is therefore to do away with existing perceived star schools and to gradually make of all our secondary schools star schools in the sense of being centres of excellence.

Accordingly, 11 perceived State star schools will be transformed into Form VI colleges and at least six additional new Form VI colleges built. This will allow for significant democratisation. For instance, each year QEC attracts only 140 students of the corresponding Form I age group. As a Form VI college, the QEC will accommodate each year at least 400 from the Lower VI age group. Another example - at present the Form I intake of State secondary schools is approximately 4,400. In 2006, with the new construction, extension and upgrading of REDCO and MEDCO schools, the State sector will take on board 11,500 students newly three times as many. If that is not democratisation, what is?

Now, I take the term "Super Star Schools" to refer to the high demand school of the private sector. I do not subscribe to the use of such terminology. But, in any case, Government's attitude towards the private sector, within which we no longer distinguish between confessional or non confessional is as follows -

- (1) On a philosophical plan, government does not believe in the imposition of anyone model of schooling, that is, *l'Ecole Unique* on parents. The reform project is, therefore, formulated in a manner to allow for diversity, pluralism and flexibility.
  - (2) By virtue of the intimate connection between star schools and CPE ranking, it stands to reason that conversion of all perceived star schools into Form VI colleges would have allowed for faster and easier obtention of parity of public esteem for all secondary schools. Such was our preferred solution and that was made known to the private sector.
  - (3) However, in a sector as sensitive as education, to attempt to impose such a far reaching reform upon the private sector would have been a sure recipe for disaster. It would have brought things to a standstill and condemned the reform process to failure right from the start.
  - (4) The private sector has nonetheless been invited to consider the possibility of moving in the same or similar direction to the State so
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as to support the reform process. We have ample time on our hands and shall discuss the matter afresh in due course with the private sector. In the meantime, Government is forging ahead with practical preparation for the reform.

As regards part (b) of the question, it should be recalled that at present the State attributes form I places only in secondary schools on the so-called computer list which includes all State secondary schools, MEDCO schools, all private confessional schools and a few volunteering private non-confessional schools. The seats attributed by the State concern only half of the places in all confessional schools and allow a considerable room for manoeuvre for managers of private, confessional and non-confessional schools to admit who they wish. In addition, admission to non-computer listed non-confessional private schools is totally within the hands of the managers concerned. Computer listed places number 4400 representing roughly a quarter of the Form I intake. This is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir. At present, the State determines admission of only about a quarter of the Form I intake in the whole secondary sector. What is proposed for 2006 and thereafter is that the State attributes all seats in State secondary schools including MEDCO plus half of seats in all private secondary schools. Such seats should number 17,800 representing some 75%, 3/4 of the Form I intake. That in itself will allow for greater objectivity and transparency in admissions to the secondary sector.

Other places would be attributed as at present by management of private schools. However, it has always been Government's intention to ensure that transparency should prevail everywhere. As stated previously, the modalities of implementation of the reform project and, in particular, the admission system will be discussed with the private sector in the weeks to come.

Turning to part (c) of the question, the document released presents a detailed analysis of the impact of the proposed reforms on the private sector with full details of demand and supply figures for places at both Form I and lower VI levels for 2001 and 2006. Being given that the increase in seat capacity of the State sector will be accompanied by increased demand due to generalised opening of pre-vocational classes and subsequently compulsory 11-year schooling, no closures of private secondary schools should ensue from the reform project *per se*. However, one should acknowledge the existence of some substandard secondary schools identified since 1983 and in relation to which there is a wide consensus as between all stakeholders that they should gradually be phased out. In such an eventuality, Government has given an undertaking of re-deployment for students, security of employment of staff and fair treatment for managers concerned.

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In any case, joint committees will be established between the Ministry of Education and private managers and their staff respectively to analyse the reforms and monitor their implementation. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will also have noted that the document includes a reference to a package of incentives for upgrading to be provided to managers of private secondary schools.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has taken twelve minutes to repeat a lot of things that he has said. May be he has good intentions and we had told him last week that we know the difficulties. But he, himself, has said in his statement yesterday - and he has repeated it in his answer today - that the preferred solution would have been that the private sector transformed their colleges into Form VI colleges, but they have refused. The Minister himself is saying that it is not his preferred solution, that he has failed to get the private sector to accept that they convert their schools into Form VI colleges like he is doing in the public sector. Therefore, by this admission itself, does he not agree that it is discriminatory? How is it possible that one section which he would have wished ....

*(Interruptions)*

It is not democracy! It is discriminatory! The Minister agrees that this is not what he wishes, but he is giving in to what they are saying, and on the other hand, he says that he will carry on. So, he is creating an education *à deux vitesses*. Does he not agree that it is discriminatory since he, himself, said that it is not his preferred solution?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** No, Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not agree. What I have said, and I repeat, at the present time, 75% of seats for Form I are attributed outside the ambit of supervision by the State. What we are going to do within the next five years is to turn the situation around. 75% of seats in Form I will be attributed by the State on the computer list thereby guaranteeing much greater objectivity and transparency throughout.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the private sector, we have opted for a relationship of partnership, consultation and dialogue, which have borne its fruits and the living example is the prevocational classes which have been set into existence a few months back and which now guarantee that education for all our children at age 12, whether they fail or pass the CPE, is available, if they so wish it. That in itself is a miracle and it was achieved through collaboration, partnership with the private sector, and that is our guiding principle. What we know is that the present situation is really traumatic, Mr Speaker, Sir. Yesterday, I received two heartbreaking letters

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from parents. One has a child in Std II in a school in the east and has to take tuition and he was complaining of how much he has to pay for tuition. The other is the parent of a child in Std V who is asking us to look again at availability of premises for private tuition because his child begins taking tuition at 7.30 in the morning, gets back home after 5.00 p.m., has dinner and then goes back to homework. That is what we are trying to change, Mr Speaker, Sir, and we had two options. We could have gone to the private sector with preconceived ideas, imposed a solution and then, only then, the private sector would, of course, have said no and we would have ended with a deadlock, with maybe a Court battle lasting years, and it would have been the end to any hope of reform. And the Leader of the Opposition knows what I am talking about. When he was Prime Minister, there were attempts, however good intentions there were, but because one went about it the wrong way, everything stalled, and there was no reform. I am saying that because of the dramatic situation one needs to move forward. The reforms we are proposing may not be the ideal solution to solve all problems for all times. But then, we do not live in an ideal world. We have our feet firmly rooted in reality. We want to make one step forward. That step is, in fact, a major stride forward. And then, with time things will change. I always give the example of Singapore where the State showed the way and the private sector freely followed.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, it would be good if you could ask the Minister to answer the questions. He is giving long statements and this won't leave time for me to put questions, unless you give me more time. He is denying me the opportunity to ask him further questions.

**Mr Speaker:** I have always said that I don't have any control on replies. Of course, if a question is asked...

**The Prime Minister:** He must make it sink into the head of the Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr Speaker:** Order! If the question asked is about education and the Minister replies about football, then I can say it's not relevant and stop him, but since his reply is relevant to education, I cannot stop him.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** What they are doing will sink into the heads of lots of people! The Minister says that we don't live in an ideal world. Of course, we don't live in an ideal world. Who does not know that we don't live in an ideal world? But what the Minister is saying is that he will give in to those who are powerful and have strong lobby.

*(Interruptions)*

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That's what he has said. He has said that he does not agree that that was the preferred solution, but that since they did not agree, he will impose the other solution on them. How can the Minister expect that the vast majority of the people of this country will accept this reform *à deux vitesses qu'il est en train de suggérer?*

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, I explained very frankly and honestly that we are not interested in having sterile quarrels and pointless controversies with the private sector. What we are interested in is moving forward. I am very attentive to the points raised by the Opposition. I am open to any positive suggestions that we can use to better our proposals. But we have the choice to either move forward or stand still through confrontation. Let me add that the stand of the private sector is, I understand, not to be frozen in time. The private sector has been invited to reflect, to debate with us and others, and eventually, I am convinced that with time the private sector will follow.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The Minister said he has ample time. We don't want the same thing that happened in the past to happen again. I know the hon. Prime Minister knows what I am referring to. You can't give one part now, and say you will give the rest later on. The package must be dealt with straightaway. On the one hand, the Minister says he is going to abolish the Forms I to V classes in public star schools to which admission is now being obtained by ranking and strictly on merit. On the other hand, he says that he will maintain the admission to similar schools in the private sector based on other criteria, not just merit. How does he explain that?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** With all due respect and without meaning in any way to be unpleasant, this situation has existed for many, many years - for 25 years as far as I am aware. Over the last 4½ years, the former Prime Minister did not manage to change that. I repeat, at least, what we are doing - hopefully, with his support eventually - is to move forward.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** It's not a question of our support. The question is that the plan is so lopsided. That is why we are opposed to it. The Minister is proposing part of the reform plan, but not the reform plan as he wanted it to be. That is the problem with his plan. How can he, for example, tell us that the grading system to admit students in Form I in certain star schools is alright, but that this is not the case for the other schools? Doesn't he agree that what is good for one should be good for the others?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, I am very surprised. I explained in clear and simple English that, at the present time, 75% of places at Form I

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level are attributed outside the computer list by managers according to criteria established by themselves and nobody else. What we are doing is to turn the situation around. If that is not addressing the needs of the vast majority, what is?

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I don't know who the Minister has consulted in the private sector and who he has consulted in the public sector. There is the NEC Report by Suren Bissoondoyal and a lot of other very able people. There is the Raymond Rivet Report which, I am sure, he has read and their own paper prepared by the Federation on this issue. All these documents recommend an identical treatment for star schools, be it private or public sector. Why has he changed all this?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, I have consulted as widely as possible. I have also sought to consult the Opposition through many meetings, and I am still willing to talk and discuss with the Opposition concerning the whole reform package. This is being approached in a non-partisan manner, looking first and foremost at the interests of our children, yours and mine. There have been many reports in the past. Some of the authors of those reports are today amongst my main and close advisers. We have looked at all the reports. The question now is no longer writing reports or writing major plans. The point now is action; to act! And that is what we are trying to do!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The Minister has made an appeal and he knows that I am always prepared not to put *les bâtons dans les roues*. He has again made an appeal to us to discuss. He, himself, said that he had ample time. Therefore, if he really wants to discuss, we are prepared to meet him half way - he freezes everything and we discuss. Otherwise, we will never accept that there is discrimination between the public and the private sector. There is no way that the vast majority of people in this country will accept this. If he wants to discuss, I am prepared to do so provided he stops everything. This won't be long. I am not asking him to wait for two years. We will discuss it with him and all those concerned, but we do not accept the basic premise that is discrimination between public and private sector. Will the Minister respond to that?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** First of all, let me explain what I meant by ample time. The system comes into place in January 2003. So, for the private sector to discuss, to reflect, to come to us for exchange of ideas and to tell us how they think they can move forward in a similar direction to ours, there is time. And that is what we are doing. We are already engaged in constructive dialogue with the private sector and we will continue to do so. But there is no ample time to build schools, to change the system. In fact, for several months now, with the help of my good friends, hon. Bachoo and

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PNG (22 May 2001)

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Replies

To

Parliamentary Questions

Of 22 May 2001

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Debate No. 10 of 22.05.2001

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

EDUCATION SECTOR - REFORMS - STAKEHOLDERS

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in view of the fact that there is a public outcry against his proposed reforms in education, he will say -

- (a) who are the stakeholders he has met since their publication;
- (b) if he is now aware of all the measures which are considered to be discriminatory and unfair by the various stakeholders and, if so, will he state them, and
- (c) whether he will now review his proposals in order to address those issues.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr. Speaker Sir, I take strong objection to the misleading allegation that there is public outcry against the latest Government Plan for structural reform of our educational system.

There is, in fact, wide consensus and overwhelming support within public opinion for 90% of the proposed reforms, namely -

- (i) the abolition of ranking at CPE to do away with the rat race affecting some 130,000 students of the primary sector, their parents and teachers at any one time;
  - (ii) replacement of ranking by the system of grading which is pedagogically sound and has proved its worth in other countries;
  - (iii) an accelerated programme for extension/conversion/upgrading and construction of State Secondary Schools throughout the island so as to democratise access to quality education and ensure that the State caters not only for a privileged few but for the many;
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unrevised

- (iv) pedagogical measures to guard against any “*nivellement par le bas*” and to ensure that special needs of the brightest as well as those with learning difficulties are specifically and permanently attended to;
- (v) the preservation of a healthy dose of competition within the system;
- (vi) the principal of regionalisation to bring education through schools closer to the child rather than having children of 11 criss-crossing the country in the quest for knowledge;
- (vii) improved measures for a proper and effective management of State schools;
- (viii) establishment of clear lines of accountability, and close monitoring of performance to obtain within time parity of public esteem for all public schools; and
- (ix) the enhancement of the strong partnership with the private sector in education through dialogue so as to promote educational excellence throughout the island.

There is only one dimension of the reform which has led to reservations being expressed in certain quarters.

As regards part (a) of the question, the latest reform plan was presented, in line with our policy of talking directly to stakeholders, to all stakeholders concerned on Thursday 10 May at the Vaghjee Hall. The stakeholders concerned included all Unions of secondary schools personnel, both Federations of Parent/Teacher Associations in existence, all Associations of Managers of private secondary schools including the *Bureau de l'Education Catholique*. Since then, I have embarked on a process of information and explanation concerning the Reform Plan while listening to all participants in the debate. I have thus met all Rectors of State Secondary Schools together with the Secondary Inspectorate and Principal and Senior Education Officers. I have also met the Hindu Socio-Cultural Organisations, the Catholic Authorities together with the *Bureau de l'Education Catholique*, the Council and staff of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute and various groups of students.

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D10/P01/mt/3

**(PNQ) CONTD.**

This very valuable process of explaining the reforms and listening to various views and opinions will proceed in the days to come with meetings scheduled with the Teachers Unions, students, representatives of the personnel of all secondary schools and private managers. Should the Opposition consider itself a stakeholder in the education of our children, I remain at their disposal to meet and discuss their concerns.

As regards part (b) of the reform, I take, once again, strong objection to the insinuation that "various stakeholders" have expressed themselves against the reform. In fact, apart from rumblings of discontent at Royal College Curepipe and Royal College Port Louis, the response from students in general has so far been very positive. Apart from the Parent/Teacher's Association of Royal College Curepipe, parents of students have not expressed themselves against the reform. Apart from the public stand of one of the three Staff Unions of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the only other Union to have expressed itself on the reform has been the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees (UPSEE), which has given unqualified support to the reform. The private sector, both confessional and non confessional, initially reacted positively to the reform, but have yet to formally define their role within the reform plan.

It is very significant, that apart from one of the three Mahatma Gandhi Institute Unions and the Parent/Teacher Association of Royal College Curepipe and associated students, there has been no opposition from within the educational sector. The reaction of those just referred to was all the time predictable and perfectly understandable. Hence, Government continues its efforts to explain and convince.

It is also very telling, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the first, and indeed strongest, negative reactions should have come not from educationists, but from outside the educational field.

The one dimension of the Reform Plan which has indeed led to much debate relates to the eventuality of the non conversion of private star confessional schools into Form VI colleges with attended risks of inequity and injustice. But then, let me, once again, state loud and clear that it has always been Government's wish and preferred solution that all, I repeat all, perceived star schools do not have a Form I intake as from January 2003. Government's stand was made clear to the confessional authorities and there was indeed a difference of opinion in that respect. That is why Government has been very attentive to views and opinions expressed by others in that respect.

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(mr/d10/PNQ ctd...)

However, learning from the experiences of the past of which the Leader of Opposition is well aware, we decided not to impose and to take the road to confrontation which always leads to a dead end. Government opted instead to show the way by presenting a blueprint for the public sector of education and, thereafter, to argue its case and convince confident that reason always prevails. I am now, in the light of ongoing discussion and debate, in a position to sound a note of cautious optimism.

Turning to part (c) of the question, we believe that to the extent that the fundamentals of the Reform Plan are very widely accepted, we must forge ahead with extensions, conversions, upgrading and constructions of schools and all other points I referred to earlier. As regards the one problematical dimension of the Reform Plan, we anticipate positive developments in the days to come and, in the meantime, we remain open to helpful and constructive ideas and suggestions. Let me stress the unfortunate fact that criticisms, so far, have been leveled at specific proposals of the Reform Plan and no viable or alternative formula proposed to abolish CPE ranking.

Mr. Speaker Sir, there are two categories of persons speaking out against the Reform Plan. There are the conservatives and reactionaries, the "*passéistes*" who wish the anti-pedagogical CPE rat race to remain as it is and who issue any notion of structural reform in education. Then, there are those who may have reservations on a specific point, I do hope that the Opposition falls within the second category, in which case eleven days after the presentation of the Plan, I still await their positive contribution to the debate.

Mr Speaker Sir, history is replete with examples of progress eliciting negative reactions from a few and that is indeed unavoidable. Rather than to choose the comfortable position of sitting tight on such a sensitive issue, indulging in mere rhetoric and otherwise enjoying the trappings of power, we have chosen to rise to the challenge of proposing a far reaching and democratic transformation of our educational system. Let each one of us now take his stand. History will judge.

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*(mr/d10/PNQ ctd...).02*

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, again I see that the hon. Minister has taken over twelve minutes to answer simple questions, but never mind. Who were the stakeholders the hon. Minister met after the publication and what were the complaints? The hon. Minister must be living in an ivory tower, Mr Speaker, Sir. He does not know that there is a public outcry outside. Where is he living? In what planet is he living? He will take his responsibility, because I can tell him that there is a public outcry and we maintain it; and he will see more and more as the days pass by. Furthermore, it is telling for somebody who has supposedly been the shadow Minister for Education for so many years! What proposals did he make when the Action Plan of ex-Minister Pillay came up? What were the proposals when he was in the Opposition? Nil. He was just criticising it and nothing else. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander! The hon. Minister gives the impression that there is no public outcry, that there is only one issue that is separating the proposals of the Government and the rest of the people, that is, the issue of whether the private star schools will be left to carry on as they want to carry on against the wish of the Minister, that is, not to have Form VI colleges. Can I tell him that this is only one of the elements of the disagreement with his plan. I have told him at the beginning - and I am telling him again - that the Opposition is prepared to cooperate and help him as much as it can, but there are fundamental differences not on one point, but on many points, that is why I asked him last time to freeze his plan. Is the hon. Minister aware that the general view is that the star colleges in the public sector should not be transformed into Form VI colleges as he is planning to do because these are institutions of excellence and they have been institutions of excellence just as the star colleges in the private sector?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me, first of all, remind the Leader of the Opposition that this is the plan of Government. Let that be very clear; it is not my plan; it is the plan of Government. Secondly, the Leader of the Opposition states that the Opposition is willing to support; support means discussing matters of concern. I, as Minister of Education, have taken the unprecedented step, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, of inviting the Opposition and, indeed, all Members of the House systematically, on three occasions, to come and share views and opinions on the Reform Plan. Unfortunately, to my utter regret and dismay, the Opposition did not turn up on the last two occasions and I repeat, once again, that I am at the disposal of the Opposition to sit down together and discuss in a dispassionate non partisan manner the issues of concern to the Opposition. I am there to explain, to try and convince and to listen to any positive suggestions.

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*(mr/d10/PNQ ctd...).03*

Thirdly, as regards the transformation of the so-called star schools, the Leader of the Opposition's former Action Plan which was the plan of the former Government provided precisely for the same thing. The report of the NEC in 1995 provided for precisely the same thing. And what did the Action Plan say? It said that we cannot have star schools taking Form I intake, all secondary schools in existence will become colleges and there will be middle schools everywhere for Form I intake. Because, Mr Speaker, everybody who has carefully looked into this matter has come to the very same conclusion, that the rat race, CPE ranking, is intrinsically linked to the phenomenon of star schools, one cannot exist without the other. If the Opposition, today, can provide me with an alternative route to abolish CPE ranking, I'm willing to listen.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Instead of inviting the Opposition to come and talk to him, as I have said to the hon. Minister, as far as the plan is concerned, there is such a big difference between us and him that there is no point in trying to cooperate. Unless he freezes the plan, and then we'll sit down and discuss on what could be the possibility. But I'll ask him again; if he has read the Action Plan of ex-Minister Pillay - now that we hear that he is copying the Action Plan - does he know that the Action Plan is based on the middle schools? It is not the same plan. If it is based on the middle schools, that is a different proposal altogether. I'll ask him again the question: does he agree that the star colleges in the public and private sectors have been centres of excellence?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in all good faith, I am willing to lend my copy of the Action Plan of the previous Government to the Leader of the Opposition. That plan with which we said we agreed with the broad direction of democratisation and decentralisation provided precisely that all existing secondary schools, not only the eleven star schools or the fifteen star schools, but all would go to act as colleges. All Form I intake would be in new middle schools. That is the essence of the Action Plan, Mr Speaker and everybody knows that. That was, therefore, until September of last year the official position of the previous Government. Now, what has changed since then? I am asking again the Leader of the Opposition to tell me if we keep star schools ....

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(mr/d10/PNQ ctd...).04

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The hon. Minister should answer the question.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Yes, I am answering, if we keep star schools as they are, who in this House, can tell me how we abolish CPE ranking? That is why I said earlier, there are two categories of persons. There are those who fundamentally are defending the *status quo* and do not want any change, but are somehow afraid of saying so. There are those who agree there must be reform and then there is room for discussion, there is room for debate. So, if the Opposition says we must abolish CPE ranking, then it cannot logically come and say that there must be *status quo* for the star schools otherwise it will have to propose an alternative. When they were in Government there was no other alternative. Before they were in Government, the Bissoondoyal Report of 1995 showed there were no other alternatives, hence our proposals.

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**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister forgets to say that we did not implement the Plan precisely because there was disagreement.

*(Laughter on Government side)*

Precisely because there was disagreement. This is not a laughing matter! Furthermore...

*(Interruptions)*

Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask my question? You must give me extra time.

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Order!

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister lifted the Action Plan as if he is defending the Action Plan now! When he was in the Opposition, he was all against it. He had no proposals to make for he was all against it. I would have wished the hon. Minister to answer the question that I have asked him. Would he care, after seven minutes of more explanations, to answer the question that I have asked him?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** If the question relates to freezing the reform plans then we should be clear.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The hon. Minister has forgot the question, Mr Speaker. Let me ask him again: does the hon. Minister agree that the star colleges, be they in the public or private sectors, have been centres of excellence?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** The star schools both of the public and private sectors have been the best institutions in education in existence. That is why they are called star schools!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Hon. Dr. David!

**Mr Obeegadoo:** But these star schools cater for 1000 of 28,000 sitting the CPE. Our responsibility as a Government, my responsibility as Minister of Education, is to cater for the brightest, is to cater for students presently in the star schools, but not only for that, and that is the problem!

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**PNQ (contd)**

The duty of the State cannot be limited to the privileged few. It must extend to each and every child of this land!

*(Applause on Government side)*

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The hon. Minister said that "the duty of the State should not be limited to the privileged few", but this is exactly what he is doing. He is succumbing to the powerful lobby of the few, because he does not have the guts or the courage to say no of what is being imposed. This is what he is doing. So, why is he talking about the "privileged few"? Now, that he has answered the question at long last, he is therefore agreeing that these colleges are the best and this is where the poor children of this country has managed to get their education. Now, what is the hidden agenda to try to destroy these very schools which he agrees have been centres of excellence?

**Mr Obegadoo:** It is very simple and I have explained it.

In any one age group, each year, only 140 students get into the QEC. By uplifting the QEC into a centre of advance learning, into a Form VI college, each year, the QEC will open its doors, not to 140 but to 400 students.

*(Applause on Government side)*

And that reasoning, Mr Speaker, will hold for each of these 15 star schools we hope, and are doing our best, to see transformed in the very near future!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Can I then ask the hon. Minister why is it not possible to continue with the construction of good secondary schools in all regions, the programme that we started after the previous Prime Minister had stopped ...

*(Interruptions)*

...It is a fact. Not one school has been constructed. Whether you like it or not, it is a fact, zero school has been constructed. We constructed twelve schools!

*(Interruptions)*

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D10P03CO3  
PNQ (contd)

**Mr Choonee:** Six schools only!

**Mr Bachoo:** Yes, six schools only!

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Shut up, you do not know! *Zero! To pas ti même là toi!*

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Bachoo, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is putting the question.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Can I ask the hon. Minister why he does not continue with this construction of secondary schools while, at the same time, upgrading all the schools – I think he mentioned that in his answer just now – and maintaining the star colleges in the public and private sector? What is needed is massive investment in the construction of schools, which was stopped for 13 years.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, let us be serious. We may construct schools, but as long as the so-called star schools have a Form I intake, you need a very sharp and necessarily arbitrary instrument of selection. That is the crux of the matter. You will have, year in and year out, to select 1000 students to go to the star schools. You will have to select 150 who will have a chance of getting into the QEC. How do you do that without the CPE ranking? And, as long as you have, the CPE ranking, how do you prevent the rat race imposed upon 130,000 of our school children, their parents, their teachers, year in and year out? I ask the Leader of the Opposition to answer me the question he has been unable to answer over four and a half years!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would have thought I am the one who asked the question and he is supposed to be the one to answer.

**Mr Speaker:** This is what I was going to point out. I think the role has been reversed!

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**D10P03CO4**  
**PNQ (contd)**

**Mr Duval:** Mr Speaker, we agree that star schools are only star schools because the SC and HSC pass rates are better than those of the other schools. The question that the Opposition is asking is: why does not the Minister of Education devote some of his time to get in the rest of the secondary schools system – the 34 schools or whatever that are left and the additional ones that can be constructed - to become star schools on their own without having to destroy the institutions that exist already? That is the question.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, if the hon. gentleman took some time to look at the history of our education system, he would understand. It is very simple.

**Mr Duval:** *Arrogance!*

**Mr Obeegadoo:** No, I am not being arrogant! I am not! All I am saying ....

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** All I am saying, Mr Speaker, is that a detailed look at the reality .....

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** *To passe to le temps voyager!*

**Mr Cuttaree:** *(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition and hon. Cuttaree!

**Mr Cuttaree:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition keeps telling me that I spend my time travelling.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Minister does not have the floor!

*(Interruptions)*

Order! Order.

**Mr Cuttaree:** He is stating that I am travelling whereas he has spent Rs40 m. on travelling.

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D10P03CO5  
PNQ (contd)

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I do not know what he is talking about!

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr Cuttaree** (*Interruptions*)

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Cuttaree, would you please...?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, let us be very clear. I am not concerned with party politics. I am not.

*(Interruptions)*

In the past, there have been constructions of secondary schools. I do not mind by which Government! There had been attempts to set up a QEC North. There had been talk of having quality institutions. Let us take examples for girls : you have Droopnath Ramphul which is an excellent school in the North; Maurice Curé which is an excellent school in Vacoas. Do you know the reality, Mr Speaker? There are 140 places in QEC and the last girl admitted is ranked 150<sup>th</sup>. So, despite their being Maurice Curé, Droopnath Ramphul and other schools, there is still intense, merciless, abhorrent competition from age 5 to enter into the one top star school. We are in the business of democratising; we are in the business of expanding access, of breaking the bottleneck. And I state it again, let us sit down and talk. I am willing to explain to you the rationale, the logic, which is the same logic of all reports in education over the last ten years which tell us that for as long as star schools exist, you cannot abolish the rat race.

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D10p04cl/1

UNREVISED

PNQ (cont'd)

**Mr Duval:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it seems to me that the Minister is downgrading instead of upgrading the schools. I would like to ask the Minister whether he will agree with me that the greatest injustice of all in the primary sector is that tens of thousands of children are attending below par schools all over the island, be it in towns, in rural areas and in *cités*.

*(Interruptions)*

These children are suffering the greatest injustice of all and they leave school after the CPE without being able to write or read. The proposed plan of the Minister of Education does not cover this at all.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I disagree, Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me explain why. We have some 280 primary schools in existence. Practically, 230 belong to the State. So, the State is doing its duty of providing education throughout the land. We must do more for the primary sector. That is why we have come with the curriculum renewal proposal; that is why we are coming with the *zone d'éducation prioritaire*; that is why we are introducing new subjects in primary schools. There is a lot of work to be done there. But the problem is the bottleneck - everybody knows that; we can look at all the reports - after primary to access the secondary.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Duval, you have asked a question. You should listen to the reply.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** It is that bottleneck which we have to break and I would hope we had a shared understanding on that issue because it is so fundamental to the future of our children.

Cont'd...

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D10p04cl/2

## UNREVISED

PNQ (cont'd)

**Mr Duval:** I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he has had any discussions with all the components of Government because it seems to me, at least, that the PMSD is going in exactly the opposite direction as the rest of the Government and he is asking for 100% seats to be given to the private sector.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I am having and we will have discussions with everybody, including the hon. Member.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The Minister said earlier in his reply that he is maintaining a healthy dose of competition, if needed. So, he agrees that there must be a healthy dose of competition. He should not say that he does not agree with competition while at the same time he says that he agrees.

Secondly, the Minister mentioned two schools which are doing well. These are SSS Droopnath Ramphul and SSS Maurice Curé. Therefore, he is also admitting at the same time that new good schools, if constructed over a short period of time, are becoming good secondary schools. What is the difficulty in constructing good schools all over the island?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I really think the Opposition should meet with me, sit down and discuss, because clearly, despite all my efforts, I am not getting through to the Opposition. They are not being able to understand. What did I just say? I said that despite there being SSS Maurice Curé, despite there being SSS Droopnath Ramphul, despite there being a host of well perceived good secondary schools for girls, practically everyone, if given the choice, will go to QEC and QEC only. You need an instrument to distinguish students 150 from 14,000 girls attempting the CPE. That is why you have an instrument as harsh, as unjust, as arbitrary as CPE ranking. That was my point and that is the point which has led all reports to propose what we are proposing now.

Cont'd...

D10p04cl/3

## UNREVISED

PNQ (cont'd)

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I have a last supplementary. First of all, I will invite the Minister to come with me to the different regions where we are having meetings with the people. He will see what is their reaction. Secondly, the so-called leader of the PMSD has said that 100% seats should be given to the private schools. I would like to say two things. Firstly, the 50% reserved seats is a different question and he should not try to mix it with the issue. Secondly, we maintain that there is a public outcry and, therefore, I will ask the Minister whether he would freeze his plan and discuss with the people he had met.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Let me say, first of all, that I agree entirely with the first point made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The question of 50% seats or whatever in private schools is a completely different issue; it has nothing to do with the reform plan and should not be brought into the debate on the reform plan. I am very happy that there is a clear understanding between the Opposition and the Government side on that issue.

Secondly, I say again that for 90% of the reforms starting with the construction of schools with all the measures that I listed earlier, there is wide consensus and it would be a crime against the country not to proceed. On the one issue of conversion of star schools into Form VI colleges, the plan has been presented only ten to 11 days ago. This is not implementable before January 2003. The debate is continuing. I am at this point in time optimistic as to developments which are and will be happening. We shall closely monitor and review the situation hopefully in discussion together as the situation evolves.

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UNREVISED

DR/D10/P16/1

**MINISTER OF EDUCATION/LORD BISHOP OF PORT LOUIS -  
MEETING**

(No. B/433) **Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will make a statement on the meeting he had on Tuesday 15 May last with the Lord Bishop of Port Louis on Government's proposals to reform the primary and secondary system of education.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I met the Bishop of Port Louis on 15 May 2001 to discuss the general philosophy of the projected reforms in the education sector.

I seized the opportunity to apprise the Bishop of the salient features of the Reform project and explained the importance of the collaboration and co-operation of all stakeholders so that the measures advocated in the plan could be successfully applied. In particular, I stressed in no uncertain terms the wish and desire of Government that the four star schools of the BEC be transformed into Form VI colleges to allow for the early phasing out of the CPE ranking system. I was informed that the BEC would initiate a process of internal consultation with the management and staff of its secondary schools before a stand is finalised.

**Dr. Boolell:** Has BEC given a time frame as to when they would revert to the Minister?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** No, Sir, but we did impress the urgency of the matter so that we could see clearly where we were going.

**Mr Dulloo:** Will the Minister inform the House whether, in fact, the stand of the BEC and the confessional colleges are that they want to maintain their specificity and to ensure that the educational programme is aimed to take care of the children right from the beginning till the end to ensure that the programme and formation of character be taken care of in their scheme of education?

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## UNREVISED

**DR/D10/P16/2**  
**(No B/433 cont'd)**

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I am not actually certain whether the terms so eloquently used by the hon. gentleman were exactly the same terms. Clearly there was, at some point in time, a difference of opinion; and I am now confident that things are moving in the right direction. That is why I said this morning that I was in a position to sound a cautiously optimistic note.

**Mr Dulloo:** We would like to know for the information of the House exactly what is the stand, so far, of the BEC on behalf of the confessional colleges on the proposal that has been made. They want to maintain the star schools as they are now, that is, to take care of students from Form I to Form VI. And what is the main reason given for that?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** There is at present no stand. The stand, I hope, will be known very soon.

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Replies

PNG (4)  
(29 May 2001)

To

Parliamentary Questions

Of 29 May 2001

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mr/d/1/1/PNQ

Debate No. 11 of 29.05.2001

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

### EDUCATION SECTOR - REFORMS

**The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam)** (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in view of the fact of a growing resentment to the many shortcomings and weaknesses in the education plan, namely the inequitable grading system, the doubling of the number of examinable subjects, the reduced weightage and importance of English and Mathematics and the inevitable fall in standards, amongst others, he will, reconsider the plan whilst -

- (a) continuing the construction of quality secondary schools;
- (b) assisting in the upgrading of private secondary schools, and
- (c) replacing ranking by an improved grading system.

**The Minister of Education and Scientific Research (Mr S. Obeegadoo):** Mr Speaker, Sir, on Government side we are, of course, in total disagreement with the hon. Leader of Opposition as to the alleged growing resentment to the education plan. In fact, without repeating what I stated in response to last week's PNQ, it is obvious that despite the attempts of some to stir up opposition to the plan to the extent of disrupting normal school activities in some schools, there is widespread and growing popular support for this Government's intention to democratise the structure of the educational system. Allegations of shortcomings, as Members of the House have noted, do not come from educationists, but, from a few parents and teachers of the so-called star schools supported by the political Opposition.

To understand the reform process, and in particular, the altogether different role attributed to the CPE within the new scheme requires a fundamental shift of our mind frame, a mind frame moulded by decades of immobility and stagnation in educational thinking. Therein, lies the problem.

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(mr/d/11/PNQ etc...)

As at present the CPE examinations are the end point of free compulsory schooling. It becomes thereby a life or death issue for parents and their children in that it determines who is entitled to go into secondary education and who isn't, it decides once and for all the academic potential of the student, it decides the admission or otherwise to a State secondary school and access if relevant to a star school according to a rigid hierarchy of preferences. Within such a system attribution of precise marks, number of subjects studied, weightage of different subject for marking and decimal point ranking assume dramatic importance. To give, but one example, the last child to obtain admission to the QEC rankwise last year obtained 817.04 marks whereas the next in line who did not obtain QEC got 817.00, .04 difference in marks. Such is the degree of arbitrariness and unfairness of the system. Can such a system by any stretch of the imagination be said to serve any pedagogical purpose? It has no parallel in the whole wild world of education, to my knowledge.

The grading system has been described as inequitable by the Opposition because, as argued, a child, under the new system, with 3 As and 1 B could theoretically obtain more marks than another with 4 As. This leads some to argue in favour of the status quo while others have called for a grading "*plus serré*". We disagree, because according to the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, students, obtaining 75% in any one paper, have reached the level of desirable learning competences, hence the threshold for an obtention of an A in the proposed system. In any case a grading '*plus serré*' could only serve for streaming as between institutions thereby preserving star schools, the present educational system à 10 vitesses and boils down to preserving the same degree of competition as at present in which case we might just as well preserve CPE ranking as it exists.

It is noteworthy that, at present, only one out of three candidates at CPE are ranked; the others obtain a grading system which is *moins serré* than the one which we are proposing, because as at now it is 70 to 100 for an A.

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*(mr/d/1/PNQ etc...)*

Doubling the number of examinable subjects in 2004, as proposed in the curriculum renewal project for primary education, represents, in the words of the MIE, a broadening rather than a deepening of the curriculum, with a view to providing a more relevant and all round education to our children on the basis of international best practice. Existing subjects will be reorganised to render them more appealing and accessible to our children. The only new subject, Information Technology, by its very nature, will not constitute an additional burden for the child. That is why, you will have noted, Mr Speaker Sir, that all professional educationists have expressed themselves, not against, but for the curriculum renewal project.

Issues of individual subject weightage at CPE become utterly irrelevant, and indeed redundant within the new scheme. If the CPE is no longer the end point, but merely a half way mark within a process of eleven years of free and compulsory schooling; if the CPE no longer has, as its prime objective, selection for star schools, but becomes instead a pedagogical tool for assessment of students or rather of the learning process itself; if the CPE follows six years of effective schooling incorporating modern tools such as standard achievement tests, a national literacy and numeracy strategy, close monitoring of individual school performance and value added together with timely remedial education, why, oh why do we need differential subject weightage at CPE?

Accordingly, the whole reform process is based on Government's commitment before the people of this land to open up access to education while waging a relentless campaign to raise standards of educational achievements in all schools and for all children. As stated time and time again, the structural reform now being proposed is, but a stage following introduction of prevocational streams and primary curriculum renewal and, in turn, will be followed by the secondary curriculum renewal project, review of status and training of teachers and a pedagogical rethinking.

I am pleased to note that the Opposition is now supportive of the plans of this Government for an unprecedented programme of construction of quality secondary schools, for a package of incentives to promote upgrading of private secondary schools and replacement of ranking by a grading system.

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*(mr/dt/PNQ etc...)*

I also note, of course, that the request of the Opposition is no longer for the freezing of the reform plans, but for the reconsidering. Such a commendable attitude, together with many other voices outside lead us to conclude that 90% of our reform proposals are almost unanimously supported whereas a few issues are still being debated within public opinion. We have requested and expect that the private confessional authorities will heed the voice of reason and fully integrate the reform project in a matter of days. That would allow for the debate to return to where it belongs, that is, in the educational and pedagogical domain.

Let me recall that the abolition of ranking, implementation of grade system and the reshaping of the structure of the education system does not begin before the end of 2002 or January 2003, which allows ample time for the exchange of ideas, debate of pedagogical issues and formulation of suggestions or proposals as appropriate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there has been no fundamental reform in the structure of our educational system for several decades whereas all experts agree that the State of Mauritian education is an important, if not the most important constraint to sustainable economic growth, to promotion of employment opportunities and to social integration of the poor.

This Government has now assumed its responsibility under the guidance of the Prime Minister in coming forward with a comprehensive plan for the abolition of CPE ranking and the democratisation of education. The issue is so vital to the future of our children and to that of the country that there can be no place for arrogance, for ego trips just as there can be no justification for divisive and demotive campaigns to reap political dividends. We have always been, and we remain open to dialogue, open to ideas and suggestions from all quarters in order to better, if possible, the reform proposals if these allow, and only if these allow, for the abolition of CPE ranking and the democratisation of education.

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**D11P02CO1**  
**PNQ (contd)**

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, again you have seen that the Minister has taken quite some time in answering the question. So, I will ask whether he will allow me to make two comments on what he has said. First of all, it does not do anyone any good by burying our heads in the sand and by saying that there is no problem. There are lots of problems and growing resentment to the plan. And I purposely listed some – amongst others – of the weaknesses and shortcomings. If I have listed all of them it would be very long. And, of course, you will say that there are too many words. So, I have listed some of them.

Secondly, I have not asked the Minister to freeze the plan for the simple reason that twice he has said he will not freeze the plan. I would have preferred to use “abandon” the plan. Obviously, the Minister would have objected to the word “abandon”, so we are saying “reconsider” to be more equitable towards him, if I may say so.

Thirdly, we are not supportive of the Government plan about construction of new schools. We are saying to continue the programme that we started in 1995. That is what we should have said.

Having said that and as the Minister has said that there is no place for arrogance we are very happy about that, because he has been very arrogant twice last week. Can I ask him why then he has rejected the proposals of many educational experts about narrowing the width of the grading system?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, let me explain once again. This plan is not my plan; it is the plan of Government; and it is the plan of Government which has not been worked out by political heads. This is the fruit of deep thinking by the best brains within the Ministry of Education and all specialised institutions and taking on board the experience of all plans and reactions to plans that have come since 1995. This is the latest realistic formula to do away with the abolition of CPE ranking. I have said it before; we have assumed our responsibility; if the Opposition, if anybody else can come up with an alternative plan which would allow us to abolish CPE ranking, which would allow us to democratise access, to regionalise education, then please do so. We are open to ideas, but then we have assumed our responsibility without losing any time within seven months of assuming power. We have come forward with the plan as per the commitment taken towards the people of the land; we are now open and if anybody can provide better ideas to do so, but, of course, we have been waiting for many, many years.

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D11P02CO2  
PNQ (contd)

**The Prime Minister:** For four and a half years ...

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The Minister himself said that we do not live in an ideal world, this is why at the first time I asked questions I said repeatedly that we know that it is a difficult problem, that we do not want to impair any kind of progress, but the way the Minister is going about it is not acceptable to many of us in this country. The Minister said that there were experts who decided, but the very experts that he mentioned had themselves recommended in the past that there should be a narrow grading system. Can he say therefore how these experts now change their minds?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, let me explain very clearly. Let us face the facts. Right now, 28,000 children take the CPE only a maximum of 9,000 or 10,000 get ranked. The rest are graded and they are graded according to a scheme for which the A is 70 to 100. Presumably when the Opposition is calling for a grading which is *plus serré* they are referring to the range of marks for A. This matter has been given careful consideration and the opinion of the experts which is reflected in Government's plan is that as from 1975 - as the hon. Leader of the Opposition might know - for CPE there were two levels of attainment : the essential learning competencies and the desirable learning competencies. The programme is framed, the examination papers set in order to evaluate children according to these two levels of attainment. Today the experts of the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, which has the reputation it has throughout the land, say 75% onwards you have attained the desirable learning competencies. That is why after a thorough-going debate it has been proposed that there should be A as from 75 and not 80 or 85 and that there should be no A<sup>+</sup> or A\*. I repeat : I have heard no educational expert, any pedagogical expert coming to argue in favour of an A<sup>+</sup> or A\*. Once you do that, you are back to square one. Everybody will strive to obtain A<sup>+</sup>, whether 85 or above, everybody will take private tuition from 7.30 in the morning to 6 in the evening. And what will be the use of the A<sup>+</sup>? You then have to keep the star schools. The A<sup>+</sup> will only be a means of selection - not attainment, there is no pedagogical attainment problem. The only motive for establishing an A<sup>+</sup> or A\* as from 85 or whatever would be to decide on two decimal marks who goes into QEC and who does not, who goes into Royal College of Curepipe and who does not, who goes into St Esprit for that matter and who does not. That is why we are saying that pedagogically there can be no reason, no justification for narrowing further the A range of marks.

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D11P02CO3  
PNQ (contd)

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The hon. Minister said that no pedagogical experts have said so. In fact, Mr Bissoondoyal who is here – I do not want to refer to him – has himself said that we should go for a narrower grade. We know the problem of decimal points and this is precisely why he mentioned narrower grade if one reads what he has put in his paper. But does the hon. Minister not agree that with the width of the grading system, the inconsistency that will happen with it and the unfairness that will go with it together coupled with the fact that the proximity of residence will play a key role in that selection – if I may use that word – and also parental choice will lead to further inconsistencies, further abuse and further unfairness?

**Mr Speaker:** I'll request the hon. Leader of the Opposition and the Minister to refrain from bringing the name of experts in the House. It is not proper. You can refer to a report, but you can't refer to Mr Bissoondoyal as an expert in the debate.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I meant the Bissoondoyal report, Mr Speaker, Sir. I will explain again if the hon. Minister does not understand. Since he is keeping a wide range – obviously, he himself has given the example of somebody with 4 As with 75 points gets 300 marks and somebody with 3 As and one B gets actually more marks than the one with 4 As. With that kind of wide range, with the fact that we will couple this with the proximity of residence to the school being taken on board, the fact that allow parental choice will be allowed, does he not agree, therefore, that those who live further away, having more or less the same grade, will be penalised, and therefore, he will put in, in the system now, a degree of unfairness, a degree of injustice and a dangerous allowance of people to interfere in the system and abuse the system?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I have been very attentive to the points made by the Opposition outside the House and I have researched those points. Let me give one example about this issue of 3 As and 1 B. According to the results, the fruit of the research, as at present, this problem does not arise. The first boy to get 3 As and 1 B at the exams is ranked 1006 and the first girl 3 As and 1 B is ranked 1171, so that on the basis of the present grading system there can be no question of a child with 3 As and 1 B doing better than a child with 4 As and, therefore, gaining admission to a so called star school on the basis of an even wider range scheme as presently exists.

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**D11P02CO4**  
**PNQ (contd)**

As regards regionalisation again, I mean, how can you do better? We have four wide regions, they are small enough not to make a child cross the country at the age of 10 to have access to education, but they are wide enough to provide a very fair degree of parental choice, choosing between a school in the countryside or in an urban area, between State and private, between private confessional and non confessional, I really do not see what is the problem. Now, again, Mr Speaker, very sincerely, if the Opposition can come with a better regionalisation scheme, please do so, we shall study it, we shall discuss it.

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D11p03cl/1

UNREVISED

Pnq (cont'd)

(Mr Obeegadoo)

But we have done our duty. We have proposed what is to us the fairest regional scheme; and I must say again, apart from my good friends of the Labour Party, I have heard no other voice outside questioning the regionalisation scheme.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I am not questioning the regionalisation scheme.

*(Interruptions)*

The fact is that we are not against the regionalisation programme. Let us get it very clear in our mind. In fact, we are for the regionalisation, but we think the way the Minister has enlarged the grading system, the way that he is allowing parental choice and flexibility in it, it is going to lead to abuse and probably also corruption. We are not going into that but it could well be. The Minister has given one example of 4 As and 3 As. There are many examples which we can give like this. We don't go by one example, but already we can see the difference. With this system when parental choice will be allowed, when residence will be taken into consideration, when the student who is nearer the school will, obviously, get to that school, can the Minister tell us that this will not lead to unfairness and injustice?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I do not see the problem. Let me say it again, Mr Speaker. There are no selective examples. The statistics we have used are the MES' statistics. If there is any enlightenment sought by the Opposition concerning this matter of ranking, precise statistics, I am willing, in a spirit of consultation, dialogue, transparency to provide all data which the Opposition requires. There is nothing to hide; we are there to show all the figures to justify the stand which has been taken. I repeat, Mr Speaker, very sincerely, I do not see how the regionalisation scheme proposed can cause any injustice. If the Opposition has any concrete matter which it wants to raise, it can please do so, and we shall respond.

Cont'd...

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D11p03cl/2

## UNREVISED

PNQ (cont'd)

**Mr Dulloo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am referring to the question of Mathematics and English. The hon. Minister has been referring to his curriculum renewal about literacy, numeracy, information technology and the whole of Mauritius would like to see Mauritius become a cyber island. But is the Minister aware that now as it is, English and Mathematics represent 600 marks on 1000, that is, three-fifths of the weightage and, at the same time, this is reflected in the syllabus, in the load of work. But now with his introduction of eight subjects all at par, English and Mathematics would represent two of eight, that is, one-quarter by way of weightage. There was the question that EVS was too loaded at a certain time and it was offloaded. This would mean a drastic reduction of the time allotted to English and Mathematics, of the weightage of English and Mathematics, of the syllabus for English and Mathematics within the new curriculum renewal; and this is dangerous for an island that is aspiring to be a cyber island as Mathematics and English are very important for information technology. Is he aware of the danger that we are confronting with this?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** If only the hon. Member has responded to my many invitations to come and discuss, all that would have been cleared. Mr Speaker, Sir, what we are saying is that CPE is no longer the end point, it is only a half-way mark for 11-year schooling and in the process we have done what no Government has been able to do before, which is to give Asian languages exactly the same status as all other subjects. Today what we are saying is that all subjects taught within the primary curriculum are important for the development of the child. Look at what pertains in the United States, in England, in India, in Australia and everywhere where we do not have this absurdity of different weightage, different ranking, all that pressure on children of 10 or 11 years. That is unseen, unheard of, Mr Speaker. We have really to change our mentality to understand that henceforth CPE is just one step on the long route leading us to 11 years free and compulsory and comprehensive education for all our children.

Cont'd...

D11p03c13

## UNREVISED

PNQ (cont'd)

**Mr Dulloo:** We must call off the bluff of the Minister on the question of Oriental Language which is very dangerous. With what he is advocating, the end result would be the elimination of Oriental Language in the school curriculum. Now with four subjects, the students are doing Oriental Language, but with the new curriculum, they have to do eight subjects and an additional ninth subject and this will, ultimately, result in the elimination of Oriental Language because of the load of work and also because of the fact that there is no competition whereby Oriental Language could be an attraction. With the elimination of competition, students would not take the extra burden of one additional subject after they have taken eight subjects. Therefore, this is clearly hoodwinking the whole population and this bluff should be called off at once.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me say it again. Load of work is not going to increase. There is only one subject which is new, it is Information Technology. Information Technology is creativity. It is not a stressful subject. It is not something that you can learn by heart and come and recite before the blackboard. Secondly, when the hon. Member says that there will be a problem because it is the ninth subject, it is because we are looking at it with the present mentality. It is a number of subjects that students should take for CPE, but if CPE is no longer the dramatic affair it is now, so where is the problem if students learn eight, nine, ten, eleven to twelve subjects as in all other countries? As regards Asian languages being the same status, we have said that, to the extent that certain schools have a higher demand than supply of seats available and that they have to exercise selection, they will be looking at grades and Asian language grade will count as grade in any other subject without any differential weightage.

**Dr. David:** In the grading system that the Minister is proposing, 4 As may be equivalent to 400 and 4 As may be equivalent to 300 as well. Is the Minister, therefore, agreeing that there should be classes of mixed ability in

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PNQ (cont'd)

the one same class, having students scoring 75 or plus and 99 plus, that is, between 75 and 100? Is the Minister agreeable with mixed ability classes?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the previous Government abolished streaming at primary level. The previous Government introduced *dans les faits* mixed ability classes in all our primary schools throughout the land; and I congratulate them for doing so! This has not been contested and it is the right step. There was mixed ability in all our schools when the former Minister of Education, hon. Chedumbarum Pillay, was Minister. That was a very good thing. Now, what we are saying is that at the secondary level, there will be grading, therefore, this image of that in the same class, you will have 4 As and 4 Es or 6 As and 6 Es is not the truth. If you look at the plan carefully, you will understand. That is not possible. A fair degree of mixed ability is, indeed, desirable and pedagogically it makes sense. I have heard no pedagogical objection to that. We are going one step further. We are saying that, in certain secondary schools where it is the wish of parents and management, the Ministry will be flexible, will allow for streaming between Forms I to III whereas the previous Government abolished streaming between Forms I to III at secondary level as well. So, the hon. Member did not understand. Let me take this issue of the Action Plan again which was approved by Cabinet under the last Government. The Action Plan went much further. The Action Plan proposed not even grading, but continuous assessment in all subjects. So, I fail to understand really how the opinions of the hon. Member could have shifted round so far, so dramatically today.

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PNQ (CONTD)

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Minister aware that both in UK and in France mixed ability has not worked and they are going back to streaming?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Certainly not, Mr Speaker. As at present, the concept of comprehensive education continues to found the education system both in the UK and in France. The actual debate in France is what? It is how, within comprehensive education, within *l'école pour tous*, you can accommodate special needs. In England, it is exactly the same debate - whether there should be re-introduction of pre-vocational education, which we are now doing in this country. So, I've got to disagree with the hon. Member.

**Dr. David:** I am not referring to mixed ability in the same school, but mixed ability in the same classroom.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, again, I do not see the point. Mixed ability in the classroom was established by the previous Government in all primary and secondary schools.

**Mr Dulloo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, I have to come back to the question of oriental language because the Minister is misleading the whole Mauritian population on this issue. Is the Minister aware that, as it is presently, students are ready to take one additional subject, apart from the four subjects? Because the oriental language is competitive in the sense that there are reserved seats for those scoring good performance in oriental languages in the MGI or other good secondary schools, whereas, by eliminating this possibility for competition, the Minister would be eliminating altogether the taking of oriental languages at primary school level?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, frankly, I am not sure I understand the position of the hon. gentleman to be that of the Labour Party because what he seems to be arguing now is that competition as at present should remain. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying yes to grading, then that would be completely contradictory to the position of hon. Dulloo. So, what we are saying, Mr Speaker, is that we are going further by ensuring that on the time-table Asian languages are accessible to all children of this country; that Government will fund free classes, free tuition for all children willing to take an Asian language and who have not done so before. We are taking every step, with the idea of creating

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KV/11/P4/2

PNQ (CONTD)

three/four little MGIs called by another name in each region to offer the whole range of Asian languages to all our children. I sincerely cannot see how this can be termed the way the hon. gentleman is saying.

**Mr Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister, himself, has made a plea that he is prepared to talk to people who disagree with the reform plan. Obviously, there is disagreement in many areas. Maybe an agreement could be found concerning some areas if we sit down because the disagreement may be caused by a misunderstanding or because we are speaking from two different angles. But there is disagreement not only with the Opposition here, by with people outside. If the Minister is sincere in his wish that there should be a consensus - and we are in a situation where he should have tried to reach a consensus - doesn't he think that the suggestion made by one of his own supporters in L'Express is good one, that is, to have a round table with the parties concerned and try to reach a consensus, especially as he, himself, has said that he is going to allow people to express their views?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, let me stress again on the point that there can be consensus on educational reform. Otherwise, there will be no educational reform. There are too many divergent interests people are poles apart. However, I have taken the unprecedented step of holding parliamentary briefings, inviting everybody from the Opposition. I have spoken to the Leader of the Opposition, offering my interest in meeting to discuss all these issues. I am not competent to decide on a round table or whatever. What I am saying very frankly, very sincerely and very directly is that I am willing to meet with the hon. gentlemen of the Opposition any time, today, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow to discuss all these issues because, even if there can be no consensus, there should be some shared understanding on the importance and urgency of these reforms.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have been informed that PQ No. B/444 will be answered by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister at the end of question time.

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KV/20/P8/5

**EDUCATION SECTOR - REFORM PLAN - ADMISSION TO  
LOWER VI**

(No. B/503) Mr M. Dulloo (Third Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, in regard to the Government proposed plan of reforms for the educational sector, he will state what criteria and procedure will be adopted for the admission of students to Lower VI with a view to ensuring equality of treatment, transparency, discipline and character building and to guarding against frustration and *nivellement par le bas*.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, according to the proposed plan of educational reforms in the secondary sector, admission to Lower VI in 2003 will be on the basis of net aggregate and sub-aggregate in the subject combinations opted for, as is presently the practice for filling of vacancies at Lower VI level in State secondary schools.

Net aggregate is the aggregate of the score for the six best subjects at SC while the sub-aggregate is the aggregate for the three subjects at SC which will be taken as main subjects in Lower VI. Normally admission is based on net aggregate but in case of tie-ups the sub aggregate is used for selection purposes.

Admission to Lower VI will, therefore, be on a meritocratic basis thus ensuring equality of treatment and transparency.

True it is that during the wide consultations held with stakeholders, it has been suggested that, just as is presently the case for Form I, there should be a mechanism to ensure that the best candidate for all secondary schools should secure a place in a Form VI college, but that idea is only under study now and no decision has been taken.

I wish to inform the House that with regard to discipline and character building, a committee with representatives of my Ministry and all stakeholders of the secondary sector in education is already working on the "*Projet Pedagogique*" for Form VI colleges. The terms of reference are wide enough to cover management issues with reference to discipline, curricular and co-curricular aspects that will give our youth all the opportunities for character building in schools.

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KV/20/P8/6

NO B/503 (CONTD)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when measures are being taken to set up and to run Form VI colleges on principles embedded on meritocracy and transparency, I can see no cause for frustration. Our guiding principle will remain excellence in education.

Of course, as always, any constructive ideas from the hon. gentleman are most welcome.

**Dr. Chady:** May I ask the Minister whether seats will be allocated in the Lower VI colleges on a regional basis?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can only despair of my honorable friend. I have made a copy of the proposed reform document available to each and every Member of the House. I have proposed to hold at least two briefing sessions. It is clearly stated in the reform document that admission to Form VI colleges of the State will be on a national level on the basis of SC results. What can I say more?

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CA/D20/P09/1

(No. B/503) (Contd)

**Dr. Chady:** I just want to ask the hon. Minister again whether admission in the Form VI schools will be made on a regional basis?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Form VI colleges will operate on a national basis. Therefore, admission will be open to any student, from any part of the island, on the basis of results obtained at SC level.

**Dr. Chady:** Will the Minister agree, therefore, that we are bringing the same concept of competition from Standard VI to Form VI?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Yes, Sir, absolutely and rightly so. The hon. Member, being a medical practitioner, is, of course, ideally placed to understand that at the age of 16 a student is much more in a position to undergo whatever pressure is linked to exams and a selection process than at the tender age of 10 or 11.

**Dr. Maudarbocus:** Being given that there will be more places and more classes available with the coming into operation of the Form VI colleges, can I ask the Minister whether his Ministry is considering giving different combination of subjects? Because, actually, many students cannot study the subjects that they choose at principal level. Many universities ask for chemistry, biology and physics at advanced level to do medicine. And, many colleges do not give this combination of three subjects. Can I ask him whether his Ministry is going to look into this matter and try to give as many combinations as possible?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Absolutely, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. In fact, this matter is presently being looked into at the Ministry's level. On the one hand, we are considering the issue of specialisation, whether Form VI colleges should offer streams of specialisation rather than doing everything from the arts to technical studies, for reasons of cost effectiveness in terms of outlay of investment, while maintaining the choice as wide as possible for students all around the island. On the other hand, the vexed issue of specific combinations offered at 'A' level which is linked to availability of teachers for the different subjects is also being actively considered. Once again, if there are any specific suggestions, they will be most welcome.

**Mr Dulloo:** In the proposed Plan of the Minister, we see that the criteria for admission will be CPE grade aggregates as well as residence. There is, therefore, this element of regionalisation. On the question of character and discipline, the worry around is that we should not have the same experience as the famous Form VI Ebene college which ended in disaster.

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CA/D20/P09/2

(No. B/503) (Contd)

**Mr Obegadoo:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't wish to be unkind to the Opposition but, at least, they should be able to distinguish between Form VI and Form I. What the hon. Member has just quoted is the admission criteria to Form I, not to Form VI. At Form VI level, the criteria will be only results at SC. Furthermore, as I said, we have brought in all the stakeholders of the secondary sector, so that at the end of the day we have *un projet pédagogique* worthy of the name which serves the interest of every young person in this country.

**Mr Dulloo:** In the Plan, Sir, there is a combined consideration for primary and secondary. New regions have been worked out and there are the regions of Port Louis and the North. So, I understand that the intake for Lower VI for those living within the Port Louis and Northern region would be Port Louis and the North. They cannot go to the Plaines Wilhems region. There is an element of regionalisation, because for the North there will be only one Form VI college, and then others will go to Port Louis. So, there is an element of regionalisation. This is a combined consideration for CPE and Form VI.

**Mr Obegadoo:** Let me say it again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I am willing and available to the Leader of the Opposition and all his MPs for yet another briefing session, if necessary. Let me make this, once again, very clear. Concerning admission to primary schools for Standard I, the *status quo* will be maintained. Admission, save in exceptional circumstances, will be strictly on a catchment area basis. Admission to State schools in the future, as from 2003, will be on a regional basis, i.e. parents will have the choice of any State school as within one of the four regions to be introduced shortly. Within that region where the demand for places exceeds the availability of places in any specific school, that school will welcome students on the basis of firstly CPE grades; secondly, if in exceptional circumstances there is need to distinguish between which of the last seven students who have identical grades have to be considered, then and only then will the residential factor come into play; thirdly, at Lower VI level, Form VI colleges are being built to operate on a national level. Form VI colleges will, in no way, be linked to the regional set-up; Form VI colleges will operate on a national level and will be open to any student from any part of the Republic, be it Agalega or Rodrigues, on the basis of results, and only results, at SC level.

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EDUCATION SECTOR - REFORM PLAN - FORM VI  
COLLEGES

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(No. B/554) Mr M. Dulloo (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, under the proposed strategic plan for reforms in the educational sector, he will state -

- (a) which confessional colleges will be converted into Form VI colleges and the number of seats for admission in Lower VI that will be available in each of them;
- (b) which other private secondary college/s will be converted into Form VI colleges; and
- (c) the criteria and procedure for admission in each of the categories of colleges mentioned in (a) and (b) above.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, as the hon. gentleman is surely aware, the catholic authorities have given their agreement to participate in the process of structural reforms within secondary education which involves, *inter alia*, conversion of so-termed "star" secondary schools into Form VI colleges. Such agreement was conveyed by way of a public communiqué some seven weeks ago.

Subsequently, a technical committee, comprising representatives of my Ministry and of the catholic authorities, including the *Bureau d'Education Catholique*, was set up to study in detail the contents of the said communiqué and the practical implications thereof.

The technical committee has not as yet completed its task and I am, therefore, not in a position to provide the precise information requested in parts (a) and (c) of the question, except that as far as non-catholic confessional schools are concerned, the Hindu Girls college has expressed a definite interest in setting up a Form VI college.

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CA/D21/P09/2

(No. B/554) (Contd)

As regards part (b) of the question, various committees with the stakeholders of the secondary education sector are actively examining the reform programme and considering, for instance, the *projet pédagogique* for Form VI colleges. The work of such committees will place non-confessional private secondary schools in a better position to consider conversion into or setting up of Form VI colleges as appropriate in due course.

**Mr Dulloo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, therefore, with regard to confessional colleges, as at today we don't even have an indicative list as to which colleges that could be converted into Form VI colleges.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** As I explained, we can group the confessional schools into two categories. There are the catholic confessional schools and the non-catholic confessional schools. As amongst the non-catholic confessional schools, the one institution which has come out, showing a definite interest to set up its own Form VI college, is Hindu Girls college. As regards the catholic confessional schools, in their communiqué, it is stated clearly that four would be transformed into Form VI colleges. There is now a committee working on this whole issue. Different ideas have been mooted and the matter is being looked at in details. It is no simple matter; it is very complex, having regard to location, identity, number of places, mode of operation. It ties up with the *projet pédagogique*. For instance, what will be the student/teacher ratio or the student per class ratio for Form VI colleges, and once the work of this committee is completed, we shall see clearer.

**Mr Dulloo:** The Minister is talking about the sites. But, the question is about which of the existing catholic colleges that could be converted into Form VI colleges.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** In the communiqué, it was not mentioned. This is the subject of discussions, and we shall see to it that we find a solution that is in the national interest.

**Mr Dulloo:** So, the Minister has not asked them which colleges they intend to convert. There is a communiqué. But, has the Minister asked the catholic authorities which colleges they would be offering as Form VI colleges?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** As I explained, many things have been asked and many replies have been forthcoming. That is the natural process of discussions. Unless and until everything is finalised, I think it would be premature to say what has been asked and what has been replied.

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**STATE SECONDARY FORM VI COLLEGES - LOWER VI SEATS**

(No. B/553) Mr M. Dulloo (Third Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, with regard to the proposed conversion of the present "high demand/star" State secondary schools into Form VI colleges as mentioned in the strategic plan, he will state:

- (a) the number of seats to be available for admission in Lower VI for each of these colleges;
- (b) how the seats would be allocated in case the demand for admission in any of these colleges far exceeds the number of seats available, and
- (c) whether a ranking system based on school certificate results would be established.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, I am informed that, according to initial projections, the provisional estimation of the number of seats available for admission in Lower VI in State Form VI colleges to be converted, that is, the figure for 2003, will total 2,125. A breakdown college-wise will be circulated. Some 1, 820 additional places will be provided by the four new State Form VI colleges to be operational in January 2003. The total will thus be around 3,945 Form VI seats in 2003 as compared to 3,087 seats offered in 2001. Naturally, the number of Lower VI places in converted Form VI colleges will gradually increase as the conversion will be effected gradually over a number of years. **(Appendix III)**

As regards the allocation of seats, it will continue to be effected on the basis of net aggregate and sub-aggregate in the subject combination opted for and, according to our forecast from a global standpoint, the demand will not exceed the number of seats available.

**Mr Dulloo:** The Minister, on the last occasion, said that there would not be any consideration on a regional basis. Now, since he is going by aggregate, there will be a limited number of seats at Royal College, Queen Elizabeth College or Dr Maurice Curé State Secondary School or whatever, and there should be a cut-off point, that is, the number that can be admitted. Therefore, if the demand for Royal College or Queen Elizabeth College far exceeds the number of seats available, the Minister should adopt a system of ranking. This is what we are saying.

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KV/21/P8/6

NO B/ 553 (CONTD)

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, I don't know why the hon. gentleman is obsessed by the idea of ranking. That must rapidly become something of the past. No concept of ranking exists in education in most other countries. My point is simply this: the system proposed is just like the system that now prevails - when five seats are available at the Royal College, Curepipe, for example, these seats are advertised, parents apply and the best students are selected on the basis of their SC aggregate. In the future, it will be exactly the same thing - the number of places available in a school will be made known; students will apply according to their choice of institution, according to the subject combinations offered in each respective Form VI college, and where demand exceeds supply of seats, the seats will be offered to those with the best aggregates.

**Mr Dulloo:** Therefore, the Minister means to say that there would be a grading amongst the colleges - Royal College will perhaps be the first for boys and Queen Elizabeth the first for girls, and then all the students will be admitted to Lower VI, according to their performance, to the best colleges according to the various ranks of the colleges. Is this what the Minister means?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I fail to see why again the notion of grading should come in. There will be a choice.

**Mr Dulloo:** Therefore, admission to Lower VI would be based purely on performance, as to the various grades of colleges in existence.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, admissions to State Form VI colleges will be just as it is at the present time, i.e on the basis of aggregate of results. As regards private colleges, we are actually in the process of discussing this *projet pédagogique* for the Form VI colleges with all the stakeholders.

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KV/21/P8/4

**EDUCATION SECTOR - REFORM PLAN - ADMISSION TO HSC**

(No. B//552) Mr M. Dulloo (Third Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, with regard to the proposed strategic plan for reforms in the education sector, he will state what changes he proposes to introduce in the conditions of eligibility for the Higher School Certificate.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, there is no proposed strategic plan for reforms in the education sector relating to conditions of eligibility for the Higher School Certificate.

For information, I am circulating the present criteria for admission to Lower VI in both State and private secondary schools. (Appendix II)

Further, at the request of the managers of private secondary schools, as from January 2001, Form VI students are being allowed to take either three subjects at principal level and one subsidiary subject or two principal subjects and two subsidiary subjects for the Cambridge "A" levels.

True it is that in line with the concept of life-long learning, the prevailing criteria will, in due course, be reviewed having regard, for instance, to the age bar and to the group certificate examination concept.

**Mr Dulloo:** May I ask the hon. Minister why then in the reform plan that he has circulated and to which he refers as his strategic plan, he states clearly that, as far as secondary education is concerned, the conditions of eligibility for admission to HSC will be changed? Can he explain in detail what he means by that?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I am sure the hon. Member will agree that we should not argue as to terminology. There has been no use of the term "strategic plan", but that being as it is, what has been stated was that, in line with the concept now of life-long learning, the criteria for admission to HSC will have to be reviewed. The stakeholders agreed as to this proposition and this review will be undertaken in the future.

**Mr Dulloo:** Le ministre est en train de renier son propre plan!

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**2002**

**EDUCATIONAL REFORMS – STAKEHOLDERS - CONSULTATIONS (14/05/02)**

**(No. B/304) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to educational reforms, he will state the number of consultations held with the BEC, UPSEE and the Union of Managers of Private Secondary Schools, indicating the outcome in each case.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, since the presentation of the reform proposals in May 2001, my Ministry has embarked on a complex exercise of information, consultation and negotiations involving not only the *Bureau d'Education Catholique*, the Union of Private Secondary Education Employees or the Federation of Managers, but all the stakeholders in the field of education. The broad objectives of that exercise are to –

- (i) explain in details the reform proposals and their objectives;
- (ii) identify the prospective partners in the implementation of the reforms and secure their active involvement;
- (iii) study the implications of the implementation plan, and address ancillary issues arising out of the implementation; and
- (iv) ensure a harmonious and holistic approach to the implementation of the reform plan.

In addition to a task force under my own chairmanship which is steering the reforms, there are other coordinating and consultative meetings at various levels which are handling specific issues whether on an *ad hoc* or standing basis. As such it is not practical to consider such committees in isolation. However, I can confirm that we are progressing satisfactorily and we are now at the stage of fine tuning and tying up of the loose ends to evolve a shared understanding of the reform process.

**Mr Chumroo:** Sir, being given that the reform has already started and it will be taking shape as from January 2003 and given that the new schools are being opened, this will definitely lead to the closure of some schools in the educational sector. What proposals has the Minister for those which are bound to close down?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, I have explained many a time that it is not anticipated that the reforms in education at secondary level should or will lead to any closure of private secondary schools. True it is, Government is constructing, is extending, is upgrading secondary schools which belong to the State. True it is also that Government is making eleven-year schooling compulsory, in other words, places will have to be found for all these thousands of students who, in the past, either failed the CPE repeatedly and dropped out of schooling or abandoned secondary schooling before reaching the age of 16. So, the logic of sheer numbers would have it that there is no necessity for closure of any private

secondary schools to follow from the reform proposals. On the contrary, we are engaged in a race against time to create the sufficient number of seats at secondary level to be able to legislate in favour of compulsory schooling up to age 16. As the hon. gentleman knows, since 2001, we have said that any child having twice failed the CPE can have access to secondary education in the pre-vocational stream and we have had difficulties finding places only in January last to be able to accommodate the demand; fortunately, we have been able to do so. So, we are engaged in a race against time to provide as many places as possible. Whenever closures have occurred since the coming into office of this Government, Northern College, Stratford College, as the hon. Member knows, that had nothing to do in any way with the reform process. In fact, we have set up a committee with the Ministry of Education and Managers of private secondary schools to look in detail at the implications of the construction programme of new State secondary schools.

**Mr Chumroo:** Another supplementary question, Sir, which is of a different nature. The Minister must surely have come across a difference of culture within different sectors when it comes to State schools, private schools or confessional schools. All these schools have got a different culture. What has the Minister got from the different stakeholders which is of interest in maintaining the reform process?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I am not sure I have quite understood the question.

**Mr Chumroo:** I mean what are the interesting things that have come out of these meetings which have to be maintained in the educational sector?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** I take it that the hon. gentleman wants to know what will be the involvement of the private sector in the reform process. If that is the case...

**Mr Chumroo:** For example, the BEC, UPSEE and the Union of Managers must have proposed some interesting things to the Minister which are worthwhile retaining in the new programme that the Minister has for the sector.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** This is a question which would take a lot of time to answer, but very briefly I can say that as regards the BEC; as the hon. gentleman would be aware, from a communiqué they have just published in the press a few days back, the catholic church is now agreeable to join in the reform process. We have been discussing over many months as to which of its schools would become Form VI colleges which would become I to V, how this is going to be done, when, what will be the precise mechanism to trigger this whole process and these negotiations are coming close to finalisation. In parallel we have been discussing with some non-catholic confessional schools of the private sector which have also indicated some interest in joining the reform process and I do hope that, in the near future, we will be able to make public whatever conclusions have been arrived at.

In the meantime, as you know, there has been a broad committee with Managers, Unions working on a pedagogical project for Form VI colleges chaired by Mr Mahadeo of the Ministry of Education and large chunks of the report have been published, I believe, in the press. We are also meeting regularly the UPSEE which is committed to the philosophy of the reforms while insisting that the Ministry should monitor closely the actual situation on the ground in certain private secondary schools as referred to earlier by hon. Gungah. The Federation of Managers have been also very supportive in discussing the democratisation of access to education, in general, while we are working with the Managers on specific issues to ensure that we do evolve this shared understanding of the reform process which is so essential to its success.

D25P01CO2

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

## EDUCATIONAL REFORMS - IMPLEMENTATION

**The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam)** (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the implementation of education reforms, he will state -

- (a) the provisions and procedures for admissions in January 2003 to Form I and Lower VI;
- (b) how the new Form VI schools will be managed and administered;
- (c) the number of subjects taught and examined at CPE and the arrangements made for their teaching, and
- (d) the reasons behind the deteriorating relations between Government and primary school teachers and their consequences on the reforms.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, may I be allowed, at the very outset, to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his renewed interest in the educational reforms.

Principles governing admission to Form I in Year 2003 were spelt as far back as in May 2001 in the document produced by my Ministry entitled "Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education and Breaking the Admission Bottleneck at Secondary Level". At pages 24-25 of the said document, it was clearly explained that, and I quote -

"For the purpose of admission to and management of schools in the new system, the island of Mauritius will be divided into four regions while Rodrigues will be considered as a separate region as follows -

Region 1	Port Louis and North
Region 2	Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, Centre and East
Region 3	Curepipe and South
Region 4	Quatre-Bornes, Vacoas-Phoenix and West
Region 5	Rodrigues

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**PNQ (contd)**

Each region combines rural and urban areas so as to ensure effective parental choice in as much as within any particular region, parents may apply freely to any State Secondary School.

What will be the admission criteria?

Where any secondary school is over-subscribed, selection of students to be admitted by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) in the academic mainstream will be effected on the basis of the following criteria in order of importance -

1. CPE Grade Aggregate
2. Residence"

The CPE aggregate, Mr Speaker, Sir, is of course the sum of numerical grades obtained by students in the examinable subject. In the case of oriental languages, these subjects will be conferred the same status as all other examinable subjects at the CPE exams of 2004.

For admission to Form I in 2003, the present arrangement in terms of reserved seats in State Secondary Schools for oriental languages will be maintained but on a regional basis. It should be pointed out that since January 2002, Form I at the Rabindranath Tagore Institute provides for an additional number of 48 reserved seats for the oriental languages. Such reserved seats should also be available in the new Mahatma Gandhi Secondary School planned for coming into operation in January 2003 in Centre de Flacq, Moka and Solferino, Vacoas.

Further, as is presently the case, the best overall performance for each primary school shall be brought to the place in a State secondary school. Practical arrangements for the 2003 Form I admission procedures are in the process of being finalised with the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate which, as in the past, will have overall responsibility for the marking of CPE examinations scripts, processing of results and attribution of places in Form I. What is presently envisaged is that all students taking the CPE Examinations in 2002 would be provided with a regional computer list offering all available places in State secondary schools, including Mahatma Gandhi secondary schools, subject to the earlier mentioned reserved seats for

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**PNQ (contd)**

oriental languages. Furthermore, the regional computer list would also offer half the seats available in Private secondary schools, both confessional and non-confessional. It stands to reason that in each region, there would be 2 computer lists; one for boys and one for girls.

In line with the CPE results, successful candidates will be offered places in secondary schools of their regions and will also be at liberty to seek admission in any private secondary school of the country. As explained in the May 2001 document, private secondary schools will be encouraged to adopt the regional set-up but whether they do so would be within their discretion. For recall, the State sector will in 2003, be offering some 8,500 places in Form I as opposed to 6,400 in 2002 and 5,200 places in 2001. In other words, with the new set-up, there would be, in addition, some 3,300 places in Form I.

As regards admission to Lower VI in 2003, I will again refer to the May 2001 document of my Ministry which clearly stated that admission would be on the basis of grade aggregate obtained at the School Certificate examination and combination of subjects offered. Here again, practical arrangements are being fine-tuned with the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, but what has already been announced holds good in that admission to Lower VI will be on a national basis with the number of seats in State secondary schools rising from 3,200 in 2001/2002 to 4,200 in January 2003. Some 17 Form VI colleges will be operational and all students completing Form V in a State secondary school, subject to obtention of basic requirements to accede to HSC, will be guaranteed a place in 2003 in a State Form VI College.

As regards part (b) of the question, there will be no significant difference in the management and administration of Form VI colleges as compared to present Form I - VI colleges. It should be recalled that of the 17 State Form VI colleges, 11 will be embarking on a gradual conversion process with no Form I admission and it is therefore only in 2007 that they will become full Form VI colleges. Whereas five (5) new Form VI colleges will accommodate only Lower VI in January 2003 - five in Mauritius and one in Rodrigues, six in all.

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PNQ (cont'd)

Accordingly, the Ministry will maintain for year 2003 present administrative arrangements while studying all suggestions formulated for the management of Form VI colleges, keeping in mind international experience and local specificities, before we gradually evolve our own Form VI management system in the years to come.

As regards part (c) of the question, a circular letter was issued to all teachers and parents of CPE students at the beginning of the year to clarify the situation for Standard VI and CPE in 2002. In addition, the MES earlier this year produced its annual regulations and syllabuses for the CPE Examinations. In 2001, 8 subjects were taught in Standard VI: Mathematics, English, French, Creative Education, Movement Education, oriental languages, Religious Instruction and EVS. In 2002 the number of taught subjects has increased to 10 with the splitting of EVS into 3 distinct parts: (1) Science, (ii) History and Geography and (iii) Citizenship Education. In fact, as from January 2002, components of the existing EVS syllabus for Standards IV-VI had been spread across the 3 abovementioned subject areas: Science, History and Geography, Citizenship Education, but for Std VI, the very same EVS textbook used in 2001 is being used.

For CPE 2001, there were 4 examinable subjects, being Mathematics, English, French and EVS, whereas in 2002, the number has been increased to 5 with the replacement of the EVS paper by 2 distinct papers for Science on the one hand and History & Geography on the other. Parents and teachers have been provided with all details as to how the EVS syllabus has been rearranged, implying no additional burden for either students or teachers.

Regarding the arrangements for teaching, it is to be noted that all Standard VI teachers have had briefing sessions at the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (NCCRD) regarding Citizenship Education, Science and History and Geography.

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PNQ (cont'd)

Sir, the final part of the question refers to the publicly aired disagreement of some trade unionists of the primary sector with the Ministry of Education concerning conditions of employment of teachers. These trade unionists claim that they have been for many years campaigning for an increase in salary for primary school teachers and that they have been taken for a ride by the previous Government in that the announced revision of conditions of employment never took place. Their argument, in a sense, is that since the quasi-totality of new recruits into the primary teaching profession, since 1999 are HSC holders, the scheme of service for that post should be amended to redefine the entry qualification as HSC rather than SC and salary of all teachers presently in post, whether SC or HSC holders, to be upgraded to the HSC salary scale within the PRB framework.

The stand of Government is as follows. Firstly, although it is true that some 20% of primary school teachers are now HSC holders, re-classification of salary scales and attendant benefits is a complex matter to be viewed within the global relativity perspective of public sector conditions of employment and can only thus be considered by the PRB which provides the acknowledged waged setting mechanism for employees of the State sector and of many para-statal bodies, as supported by the trade union movement nationally. Secondly, the fact that posts requiring SC are increasingly being filled by HSC holders is a phenomenon linked to the evolution of the labour market nationally and is as true of the nursing profession, the Police and Fire Service personnel and State clerical cadre as it is of primary education. Accordingly, re-classification of salaries cannot be viewed on a sectoral basis and can only be considered globally.

Nonetheless, Government remains committed to the upgrading of teachers' status as a gradual and multi-dimensional process involving earnings, but also training facilities, access to pedagogical aids, and the working environment generally. That is why the last Budget provided for a package of measures totalling some R 65 m. at least consisting of allowances for teachers involved in a new National Literacy and Numeracy Scheme, creation of 50 posts of Mentors/*Conseillers Pédagogiques* and free

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PNQ (cont'd)

computer proficiency courses for all primary school teachers in 2002-03 quite apart from the special classes for oriental languages which will yet further increase the take-home package for oriental language teachers at least in the primary sector. Hence, our belief that upgrading of teachers' status cannot be divorced from the process of reforms in education and reforms in education naturally entail upgrading of teachers' status.

It is a matter of great regret that at a time when Government is ushering in a trully historical reform in education aiming at democratisation of access, curricular renewal for greater relevance, pedagogical renewal and raising of standards of achievement generally, some trade unionists should place narrow corporatist interests before the common good. Nonetheless my Ministry will pursue its consultation and dialogue with all trade unions and I shall be personally be meeting those of the primary in the coming weeks.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, after this long explanation, let me assure the hon. Minister that it is not renewed interest. If he came to our meetings or if he looks at the NIU reports, he will see that we are talking about education all the time. As for part (a) of the question, he ended up by saying that the process is after all being finalised. So, it is not final. In spite of the fact that he mentioned the memorandum of May 2001, the finality of the process is still being done. Can he confirm that?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Let me first of all ensure the Leader of the Opposition that there was nothing wrong when I referred to renewed interest. It was merely to welcome their interest in educational reforms and I must say that the Opposition has been very supportive of the process of educational reforms. So much the better for it. My point, Mr Speaker, Sir, was that the principles governing the admission in 2003 - the mechanism and the criteria - have been fully spelt out as far back as May 2001 and today I was essentially repeating what I said in May 2001. But there are practical arrangements. For instance, we have invited all private secondary schools of the land to offer to the State half of their places for admissions.

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PNQ (cont'd)

This has to be discussed with managers. A shared understanding has to be involved with the federation of managers and we know that there are about 100 private secondary schools. This process is on the way and should be finalised shortly. In the same manner, with a major change in the CPE results, the ranking disappearing from the results slip, processing being altogether different, the computer list, instead of being limited to some 40 schools, next year, it will be 40 per region possibly. So, it is much more complex and we are now involved in capacity building at the MES because all this process, as we know, is a computerised process, an objective treatment of results and application for Form I seats, it is in that sense that I said that the practical arrangements are being fine-tuned and will continue being fine-tuned up and till the end of the year. We can always improve so that we ensure that the process at the end of the year be a smooth one causing no dissatisfaction to parents and students.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** In spite of the fact that the hon. Minister says there will be more places, can I ask him how he will proceed if there is excess demand for one college in one particular area?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** The objective of the reform is parity of esteem for all secondary schools. That is why, within the last Budget, we have provided for a new scheme to allow for upgrading of private secondary schools and we are discussing regularly with managers to see how, within the next five years, we can move towards parity of esteem. But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition is right - inevitably certain schools will be the exceptions - because all State star schools are becoming Form VI colleges. So, in terms of public perception, the State star schools should, in principle, be at par, except the few exceptional cases, as regards equal grade aggregates for the last places to be filled, then the residential factor comes into play, to give priority to students who live closer to that specific college.

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KV/25/P3/1

PNQ (CONTD)

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I wanted to have this clarification from the Minister, and I would like to tell him that this is why we don't agree at all with what he is doing. He should not think that we are approving of what he is doing, including the agreements that he has signed. If the Minister is going to use proximity as a criteria, doesn't he think that he is going to bring in an element of unfairness? In other words, we will have some sort of ranking in spite of the fact that we are abolishing ranking.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Certainly not, Mr Speaker. That has nothing to do with ranking. History is history; the facts are the facts. And I will recall that when my predecessor brought in his Action Plan, what did he propose? He proposed a formula, which was interesting, but which was unrealistic. He proposed that we would have entrance into secondary colleges, being in terms of a catchment area. So, we would have four or five schools whose students would automatically join the very same secondary college. And my good friend, Kadress Pillay, had no intention, I am sure, of substituting another form of ranking. He was merely looking at getting students to travel less, moving towards parity of esteem so that all secondary colleges would be considered on a par. It is the same principle that is being adopted now. Within a region - and a region is quite large - let us say Port Louis and the North, which is one single region, any student living anywhere in that region has a free choice of the secondary college which he wants to attend or which, at least, his parents want him to attend in the region. But, if for any college in that region, exceptionally, there should be tie as between the last students applying, then the residential address will be the deciding factor so that students do not have to travel huge distances, as is presently the case. So, there is no issue of ranking whatsoever.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I would like the Minister to know that we are not talking about the Action Plan. We did not accept the Action Plan. There has never been final approval of the Action Plan because of certain flaws contained in it. What the Minister is saying, therefore, is that proximity will be a factor, that is, the further you reside from a college, the chances for you to be admitted to that college are less. If that is not discrimination, what is discrimination then?

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KV/25/P3/2  
PNQ (CONTD)

**Mr Obegadoo:** Mr Speaker, residential proximity is a factor. For 2003 admissions, the first factor is reserved seats for oriental languages. The second factor, introduced by Mr Parsuramen or Mr Pillay, is a very good principle, that is, any child from any primary school, if he obtains the best grades, should be entitled to a seat in a State secondary school, and we are preserving that. Once we have gone past those two hurdles, the next hurdle is the attribution of places according to CPE grade aggregate. It is only if when attributing the last few places there is a tie in terms of grade aggregate that the residential factor comes into play. The residential factor comes into play so that priority is given to a child who lives closer to that specific college. That is certainly not discrimination. How do you go about attribution of places? At one extreme, you have the present ranking system which brings immense pressure to bear upon students, parents and teachers and any self-respecting educationalist of this country or any other country would say that the present ranking system in Mauritius cannot stand the test of a modern society in terms of fairness. That is out. The other extreme is the catchment area principle, which was canvassed by my predecessor, the then Minister, Kadress Pillay, and which was an interesting idea. Maybe in 20 or 30 years' time Mauritius might opt for that principle, as it exists in other countries like England, France and so on. Ours is a compromise. We have regions under the new system so that no student has to travel long distances. My attention was brought to cases of two girls in Form I travelling from Chemin Grenier to Bel Air. This can no longer be the case under the new system. There is region and within the region there is a great measure of caring for a choice. But, in exceptional cases, where a school is oversubscribed, the residential factor comes in just as according to the catchment area principle, just as is the case for primary schools. The Leader of the Opposition should know what decides admissions right now if you want your child to get admitted to primary school. It is according to catchment areas. Each high-demand primary school has a catchment area. This system existed under Mr Parsuramen, Hon. David, Mr Pillay and it still exists today. And nobody cries out that it is discriminatory. So, why should it be discriminatory for Form I?

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The hon. Minister knows very well that it is not the same thing. He knows very well! Would this not give rise to abuse? Won't people try to change address in order to be as near as possible to the school they want?

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KV/25/P3/3

PNQ (CONTD)

**Mr Obeegadoo:** This is a very pertinent point, Mr Speaker. Right now, we are discussing with the State Law Office on how to tighten up the control procedures for Standard I. We know - and it is true - that there is considerable abuse for some primary schools. So, I am firstly redefining catchment areas to ensure that you can no longer have certain schools where there exist more than 43 or 44 pupils in a class. So, we have to redefine catchment areas. Secondly - and this is a very complicated problem which has confronted all Ministers of Education - how do you ensure compliance with the law? How do you have a foolproof device and then, eventually, go and prosecute parents for false declaration of residential address? We are working at that and whatever solution we arrive at will apply for Standard VI as well as for Form I. We are looking at the possibility that, for Form I, when the parent submits his computer form, he is made to state once again the residential address of the child at the time of applying for admission in Form I. And we are discussing with the State Law Office on how to make this declaration operative in terms of inquiry and eventual prosecution. There again, if the Opposition has any constructive ideas, I will be very happy to take same on board.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Once the parent has declared the residential address on the form, is the Minister going to prevent them from changing address?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Order, please!

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, in any system of education administration, you need rules and regulations, which allow for flexibility. So much so that if ever a parent changes his address and can establish that this is genuine, of course, the natural results will follow.

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, coming back to this question of catchment and region, the Minister knows quite well that there is a difference between catchment and region. Catchment is defined in the regulations and the Minister himself, ...

*(Interruptions)*

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KV/25/P3/4  
PNQ (CONTD)

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please! Hon. Baloomoody, I am calling you to order!

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am certainly not giving way. The question is that the Minister himself has defined various regions for the admission to Form I in 2003. Consequently, the idea of catchment being mixed with region will not only create a lot of confusion, but this is also unacceptable. The question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: what will happen, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, if demand exceeds supply in one region? Will there not be geographical discrimination, that is, the one living nearer to the school may be admitted and the one within the region, as defined by the Minister may be left out?

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KV/25/P3/4  
PNQ (CONTD)

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please! Hon. Baloomoody, I am calling you to order!

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am certainly not giving way. The question is that the Minister himself has defined various regions for the admission to Form I in 2003. Consequently, the idea of catchment being mixed with region will not only create a lot of confusion, but this is also unacceptable. The question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: what will happen, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, if demand exceeds supply in one region? Will there not be geographical discrimination, that is, the one living nearer to the school may be admitted and the one within the region, as defined by the Minister may be left out?

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CA/D25/P04/1 PNQ (contd)

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Again, a very good point. Since we have been working on these reform plans as from end 2000, we have been very careful to ensure that supply of places and anticipated demand, in each and every region, tally. That is why certain regions, like Vacoas, Quatre Bornes West, are smaller than other regions like Port Louis North. The region has been defined as a function of the number of primary schools, the number of student population and the number of seats at secondary level. I would also invite the hon. Member to keep in mind that the other half of seats available in private secondary schools can be attributed, as the managers think fit, within the region or beyond the region; it can be national. Outside this august Assembly, you have London College. It may freely choose to offer us half of its seats, which will be attributed on a strictly regional basis, and the other half can take on board students from Beau Bassin, Rose Hill and elsewhere.

**Mr Dulloo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning admission to Form VI, I would like to ask the hon. Minister how, by going by grade aggregates, would students be admitted to Form VI at QEC, Royal Colleges next year, and whether he is not going to have recourse to ranking, since this is being done on a national basis.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** There will be ranking, as per grade aggregates. Right now, every year, we have a number of vacant places at QEC, Royal College Curepipe and Royal College Port Louis. These are advertised in a transparent manner; students apply for transfers from other schools, and those with the best aggregates are offered those places. So, the practice, the mechanism does exist. It will simply be generalised for January 2003. For instance, Royal College Curepipe Lower VI will offer such and such combination of subjects; those places will be advertised, stating the number of places, so that there is full transparency; applications will be considered, will be processed by the MES – not by the Ministry of Education – looking at the grade aggregates, and the best students will obtain the places.

**Mr Dulloo:** There would be ranking for admission in colleges. Therefore, may I ask the hon. Minister what would happen to those students who have just finished Form V? At what time will they have access to Lower VI? Where will they go, pending the results? Because there are no Form VI classes in the colleges where they are.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Those are all very good questions at which we have been working for many months. Let me state, once again, that all students of State secondary schools, completing their School Certificate, with the requirements to go on to HSC, will be guaranteed a place in a

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CA/D25/P04/2  
PNQ (contd)

State Form VI college. Right now, the MES is in the final phases of consultation with the Cambridge Syndicate, to ensure earlier obtention of SC results, which will allow for proper processing and admissions as early as possible in the year.

**Mr Speaker:** Last question.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** We would like to ask many questions, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if you say last question, I will accept.

The hon. Minister has, again, found it fit to insult trade unionists. Can I ask him why does he not make public the Sewraz Report?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** The Leader of the Opposition said there are many questions. Let me say, again, that I am at the disposal of the Opposition, to answer any queries, they may have, in this House. With the permission of my Prime Minister, I shall gladly meet the Parliamentary Labour Party, to answer any queries they may have as regards educational reforms. Let us take this issue of the Sewraz Report. Because we were genuine in our desire to upgrade status of teachers, I commissioned an internal report from my then Director for primary studies, Mr Sewraz, on status of teachers in general; sources of frustration, complaints and different avenues for policy making. The report was submitted to us, and it was leaked to the press by the president of the Government Hindi Teachers Union, who has bragged about it publicly. So, it is a secret to nobody that the Sewraz Report, on the one hand, says that working hours for all teachers should be extended. But, how do you do that, legally and administratively? On the other hand, it says that the excessive number of holidays for primary teachers should be cut. But, how do you do that? Then, it says that salaries should be upgraded. So, what Government decided was that this report, prepared by an educationist, needs to be analysed from the administrative point of view and from the financial perspective, and it is still being worked out. Eventually – this is my personal opinion – with the permission of Government, I would have no objection to publicising the recommendations of the report. That is no problem. But, what is the key issue? Why are trade unions asking for the Sewraz Report? It is not because it says that holidays must be cut, that working hours must be extended, but because it mentions increase in salary. In my answer, I have clearly explained what is the stand of Government, that you cannot, unilaterally, sectorally, go for salary increase, when you have the whole of the public sector, where there is the element of relativity governed by the PRB framework.

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KV/27/P01/1

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS - PUBLIC/PRIVATE SECTOR  
PARTNERSHIP

**The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam)** (*by Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, in regard to the agreements signed with non-governmental secondary schools, he will-

- (a) state the names of the parties with whom negotiations were held, the persons who attended each meeting and the dates thereof;
- (b) lay on the Table of the Assembly the minutes of proceedings of all the meetings, and
- (c) state whether any ceiling has been agreed on the amounts to be spent by each party on extensions and new buildings and the grants to be provided for repayment of the loans.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Sir, may I be allowed to bid the Leader of Opposition Good Morning and thank him for yet another opportunity to explain the strong public/private sector partnership underlying the process of structural reforms in education.

On 11 June 2002, five Memoranda of Understanding were signed by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research on the one hand and on the other hand the following parties respectively-

- (i) The Arya Sabha as represented by Messrs R. Neewoor, N. Ghoorah on behalf of the D.A.V. College;
- (ii) The Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Port Louis, Monseigneur Piat, the Provincial of Loreto Institution, Sister Paule Arunasalon and the Provincial of Filles de Marie Institute, Sister Rosaline M. O'Kane as responsible parties for the Catholic colleges;

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KV/27/P1/2  
PNQ (CONTD)

- (iii) The Halkae-Quadria Ishaat-I-Islam as represented by Messrs I. Ebrahim Dawood, Abdool Sackoor Husnoo on behalf of Aleemiah College;
- (iv) The Hindu Girls Association as represented by Miss Pochun and Mr Domah on behalf of the Hindu Girls College, and
- (v) the Islamic Cultural Association as represented by Messrs Heerah and Bashir Taleb on behalf of the Islamic Cultural College.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, Sir, to remind the House of the background to these agreements. In May 2001, Government presented its programme of structural reforms in secondary education, which provided, *inter alia*, for the conversion of all State 'star' secondary schools into Form VI colleges and the conversion of other State secondary schools into Forms I to V secondary schools. Thereafter, the general feeling, both in government and within public opinion, was that all very high demand secondary schools should likewise cease admission of Form I students. Hence, discussions got under way with the Catholic Church concerning their joining the structural reform process. As discussions progressed, Government received expressions of interest from other confessional colleges and accordingly initiated discussions with the latter so as to reach a broader and shared understanding of the reform process. Accordingly, at different times, between June 2001 and June 2002, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research met with representatives of the parties already mentioned culminating in the agreements of June 2002.

The Memoranda of Understanding were structured in the following manner-

- (a) A preamble wherein signatory parties subscribe to an effective partnership and continuous consultation, reaffirm their commitment to improving the teaching and learning process and to the further development of pre-vocational education in line with Government policy to introduce 11-year compulsory, universal and free schooling.
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KV/27/P1/3

PNQ (CONTD)

- (b) Fundamental principles which provide that there shall be no redundancy, no loss of acquired rights and same conditions of service for staff irrespective of posting in a Form I to V or Form VI institution. In addition, the present system of admission to the private confessional schools will continue to operate with criteria for admission in the case of the Catholic colleges being published and made known to all. In the particular case of Catholic colleges, it is agreed that there shall be no loss and no gain in the global number of seats offered at Form I mainstream and Lower VI levels.
- (c) As regards conversion and construction, all existing secondary institutions, including the pre-vocational departments of the Catholic colleges, with the exception of Loreto College Mahebourg and College de la Confiance, will be converted into either Forms I to V or Form VI colleges with signatory parties contracting soft loans from the Development Bank of Mauritius to finance conversion costs. Where the present set-up does not lend itself to the operation of such separate institutions such as in the case of Aleemiah College, D.A.V. College, Hindu Girls College and Islamic College, State land will be leased for the purposes of constructing a new secondary institution.

As regards to general conditions, the private schools concerned will continue to operate according to their own specific philosophies with Government grants being provided as per established policy except for a new grant formula for Form VI colleges which will be evolved by the Management Audit Bureau in due course. Further, all conversion costs will be met by the relevant colleges through concessionary DBM loans, the repayment of which will be facilitated by additional grants, as appropriate with safeguards for the State.

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KV/27/P1/4  
PNQ (CONTD)

In the case of construction on State land, financed through DBM loans, the buildings shall remain the property of the State, but leased to the relevant operator. Alternatively, if construction is self-financed, ownership of the building will pass to the operator.

The MoUs also stipulate some special conditions relating, *inter alia*, to preservation of existing posts, curriculum development, establishment of a pre-vocational stream, upgrading of teachers obtaining additional qualifications and eventual review of management structure.

Further, a transition period is provided for in the MoUs so that existing schools being converted into Forms I to V colleges achieve full conversion by the beginning of 2005 and those being converted into Form VI colleges by the beginning of 2007, with some degree of flexibility as, for example, in the case of BPS College.

As regards part (a) of the question, the different signatory parties may have had different representatives at various stages of the discussions, but the signatories I mentioned earlier were the key partners involved throughout. My Ministry does not hold a record of all persons that would have attended each and every meeting and the dates of all such meetings. It should be understood that while some meetings were chaired by the Minister, various sub-committees met on different occasions and there was no need for formal minutes of proceedings being drawn up inasmuch as discussions centred on a draft MoU. So much for part (b) of the question.

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KV/27/P1/5  
PNQ (CONTD)

As regards part (c) of the question, the financial arrangements agreed are as follows - insofar as capital investment for construction/conversion are concerned, the financial assistance provide by the State will take the form of loan to be contracted with DBM repayable over 20 years at a concessionary rate of interest to be determined. These loans will be subject to ceilings as follows-

- (i) conversion of existing schools into Forms I to V colleges, maximum R 3 m.;
- (ii) conversion of existing schools into Form VI colleges, maximum R 6 m., and
- (iii) conversion of pre-vocational departments into Forms I to V schools, maximum R 11.1 m.

For constructions of new Form VI colleges, the maximum loans would be of R 35 m. with a 20-year repayment period and concessionary rate of interest to be determined. As regards the recurrent costs, Government will maintain existing grants payable for operation and maintenance of the schools and will provide a special grant to each of them to meet the cost of repayment of loans contracted with DBM, except for the pre-vocational departments and new constructions where the operators will be called upon to use 80% of the annual rental value (ARV) element of the normal PSSA grant for loan repayment purposes. May I be allowed to remind the House that, in essence, the MoUs signed are identical except for the fact that the Catholic Church has opted for conversion of existing schools and departments whereas Arya Sabha, Halkae-Quadria Ishaat-I-Islam, Hindu Girls Association and Islamic Cultural Association have been offered the possibility of constructing new buildings. In any event, financial facilities for all parties are the same.

Mr Speaker, Sir, may I recall that the Memoranda of Understanding have been made freely available to any interested party as from date of signature. I am accordingly, and with your permission, Mr Speaker, hereby tabling a copy of each of the five MoUs signed on 11 June 2002.

*(Contd)*

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CA/D27/P02/1

PNQ (contd)

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister, but this very long answer. I am a bit surprised that he says there were no minutes of proceedings, no records of the persons who attended the meetings. Does he find it normal, for such an important agreement, that there are no records of the minutes of proceedings, no records of who were the persons who attended the meetings?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, I find that perfectly normal, indeed. What is important is the Memorandum of Understanding, the formal agreement, which was eventually reached and signed between the Ministry and the other party. That Memorandum of Understanding has been made public, ever since the date of signature. Before that, as I said, there were many, many meetings, various sub-committees, at different points in time, looking at PSSA grants, upgrading of teachers, curriculum development for Form VI schools, the pedagogical project for the new schools, the modalities of conversions of pre-vocational departments. These committees were chaired by different civil servants from Education. All that work came together in the form of a draft Memorandum of Understanding, which was placed on the table, and as meetings went on, this Memorandum of Understanding was revised and bettered until we reached the final agreement, which was signed in June.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Can the Minister say whether the negotiations with these parties were done separately or all together?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** The negotiations were separate, in that they began at different moments in time. We had to respect the specificities of each of the parties, but there was a common ceremony of signature when all the parties were brought together, explained the contents of the different MOUs which, as I said, are in essence identical and, therefore, there was a common ceremony for the signature.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Would the Minister be in a position to say how many meetings he had with each party?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** That would be very difficult, indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Can he say whether all the private sector non-Governmental schools were invited, one way or the other, to attend those meetings?

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CA/D27/P02/2  
PNQ (Contd)

**Mr Obeegadoo:** No, Mr Speaker, Sir. I would not like to repeat an answer, which the Leader of the Opposition considers to have been very long. Discussions started with the Catholic Church. Why the Catholic Church? Because everybody knows that there are a number of very high demand secondary schools operated by the Catholic Church. That is why, ever since the National Education Commission of 1995 and ever since the Action Plan, it was always foreseen that those schools belonging to the Catholic Church would cease admitting form I students. So, we started discussing with the Catholic Church. As things moved on, there were definite expressions of interest, for instance, from Hindu Girls College. So, discussions started with Hindu Girls College. At a later stage, there were other expressions of interest from, respectively, Aleemiah, D.A.V and Islamic Colleges. We had meetings with the different parties, discussing what would constitute an agreement, explaining the philosophy of the reforms, and, thereafter, things accelerated at the beginning of this year, ending up with these MoUs. Let me make it very clear that we did also try to see whether other confessional schools were interested, because all these MoUs concern the confessional schools within the private sector. I had a meeting with the association of confessional schools immediately following the signature of these Memoranda of Understanding. The only other school that has expressed an interest, is Muslim Girls College, with which we are now talking to see how we can accommodate their interest, although initially they had shown no interest. As regards the other non-confessional private colleges, I am meeting regularly with the federation of managers, working with them, in accordance with budgetary provisions in the last Budget, to progress towards parity of esteem, by helping assisting in the upgrading of the whole non-confessional private sector.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I am glad the Minister finally clarified that he started negotiation with the Catholic schools. But, can he say whether the others responded, by informing him that they were not interested, or were they not at all approached?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, should I repeat? In May 2001, when we presented the proposals of Government for structural reform, that is, the conversion of schools into either Form VI or Forms I to V, a number of private colleges, non-confessional, said that they were not interested. We then opened discussions with the Catholic Church, because there was a general feeling, as I said, both within Government and across public opinion generally, that to the extent that the Catholic

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CA/D27/P02/3  
PNQ (contd)

Church operates a number of very high demand secondary schools, they had to be involved if the structural reform process was to have any significant impact. That is why discussions started with the Catholic Church who gave their in principle agreement to joining the process. Thereafter, other schools that had their own projects, for example, the Hindu Girls College, which, as from early 2001, had told us that they were looking forward to establishing some sort of a Form VI cum polytechnic institution. So, they were very eager and happy to join in the process, and negotiations started early on. Others followed, and this is why, at the end of the day, of the confessional sector in private secondary education, four colleges have come in and signed Memoranda of Understanding with the Ministry of Education. As I said, there have been belated expressions of interest from Muslim Girls, which we are trying to accommodate.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Can the Minister say whether the other private non-confessional schools have shown any interest or have they said that they are not at all interested in joining in?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Since the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding, different private non-confessional colleges have asked for acceleration in the discussions concerning their part in the shaping of the future of secondary education. This is why we are now working with the federation of managers, discussing all the different aspects of the reform process, to see how they can fit in.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** When the Minister produced his paper "ending the Rat Race", he said that he would not review, he would not go piece-meal. That is exactly what he is doing now. He is actually going piece-meal. Reform is being done on a piece-meal basis.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** What was said in May 2001 was that Government was making known publicly its programme of structural reforms for the State sector, and the private sector would be free to join or not to join. In the days following this public presentation, there were strong feelings expressed in public that the Catholic Church should join in. Government made a special appeal to the Catholic Church; there was a public debate over many weeks, and the Catholic Church then said that they were agreeable in principle. We sat down and started discussing, and then followed all the events I have just described.

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CA/D27/P02/4  
PNQ (contd)

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** We are talking about public funds being involved here. So, does the Minister consider it proper to use public funds – public money, in other words - to build extensions and new schools, to be used for students who will be admitted not in accordance with the same criteria?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Let me say two things, Mr Speaker. First of all, these Memoranda of Understanding have nothing to do with admission criteria as regards private colleges. The previous Government had 4½ long years and chose not to put into question admission criteria. The Memoranda of Understanding which have been signed have nothing to do with admission criteria, which is a separate and totally different issue. We are talking about structural reforms, that is, for very high demand schools not to admit Form I students.

My second point is that we are committed to raising standards and offering good quality education in all of our institutions. We know that, today, the private colleges, which number more than 100, admit some 80%, if not more, of our students at Form I level. There is a choice. There was that of the Action Plan, which former Minister Pillay maintains was approved by Government, which proposed no less than the wholesale nationalisation of education, by having some 60 middle schools admitting all students at Form I level. Let us recall what it said. We have made the choice of a plurality, of a diversity of choice for parents. We believe in parental choice and we believe in providing a diversity of schools, with different types of education being offered to parents and to the public at large. That is precisely what is being done. As from January 2003, there will be a choice as between State schools and non-State schools. Within non-State schools, there are private fee paying and private subsidised, where you have free education. Within the subsidised sector, there are the confessional schools, within which the majority will be offering either Forms I to V or Form VI, and the non-confessional schools. We believe in parental choice, and Government is committed to assisting...

*(Interruptions)*

Mr Speaker, allow me to answer the question. The question raised...

*(Interruptions)*

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D27/IF/P03/1  
PNQ (contd.)

**Mr Speaker:** Order! I am calling the House to order. Order please. I have said in the House that I have no control over the replies. I have control over the questions, but I leave it to the Minister to be specific and reply to the questions.

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, what was the question? The question was whether the Minister of Education deems it fit that public funds should be used to assist private institutions which have their own admission criteria. I have explained that these Memoranda of Understanding have nothing to do with admission criteria. As regards the use of public funds, I have explained that the private sector is doing a service to the nation by accommodating more than 80% of our students. Was it not for the private sector, we would not have been able to offer secondary education to our students; and now we want the private sector to upgrade, how do we do this? There has been in existence for many years a loan scheme at the DBM. This loan scheme is not being used because the conditions offered are not attractive to private secondary school Managers. Government is committed not to nationalise or to abolish the private sector in education, but to work with the private sector in a healthy relationship as long as standards can be maintained and improved. To do so, there is a clear commitment reflected in the last Budget to provide ways and means for the private sector to be able to upgrade their institutions.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** It is misleading for the Minister to say that public funds have nothing to do with it. Public funds are involved and the criteria for admission....

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! I am on my feet. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I would like you to withdraw the word 'misleading'; it is not parliamentary.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Well, we'll use whatever word we want to use, if he is not misleading, he is trying to say untruths! I am asking the question again: is it not a fact that the State has no control on the admission criteria to these schools and yet it is using public funds for these schools?

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D27/IF/P03/2

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me remind the House that ever since 1977 almost all private schools have been non fee paying. Ever since 1977, that is, for the last 25 years, for the last quarter of a century, at the initiative of the then Labour Government in 1977 we have had a system whereby all the non fee paying private secondary schools are fully funded by the State. The present admission system exists since that time.

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. David:** See the reaction. *C'est la réaction de la peur*. They are afraid of questions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Speaker:** Order please! Hon. David, take your seat. I would like to draw the attention of the House that the world is watching us.

**Dr. David:** It is looking at a shameful Government! I know, Mr Speaker, Sir, that they are afraid when I ask questions. Let me refer to part (b) of the question. Does the Minister find it normal that for meetings held at the Ministry of Education, for issues that he considers to be important, there have been no minutes of proceedings, no names of persons attending, no number of meetings held. Consequently, for part (b) of the question, we will get absolutely no document laid on the Table of the Assembly. Do I get it that it is a negative answer for part (b) of the question?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the end result is what matters and it is embodied in the Memorandum of Understanding which has been placed at the disposal of everyone.

**Dr. David:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we are not referring to the MoU, we are referring to part (b) of the question about the minutes of proceedings of all meetings. So, do we take it that there will be absolutely no ...

**Mr Speaker:** I am expecting a question from you, hon. David.

**Dr. David:** This is the question, Sir.

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D27/IF/P03/3

**Mr Dulloo:** Sir, the hon. Minister has been referring to the various non-Government schools, including confessional schools, but I have not heard him mention certain confessional colleges like the St Andrew's College and the Adventist College. So, may I ask him whether they are parties to the agreement and what would happen to those colleges?

**Mr Obegadoo:** These colleges have been consulted after the signing of these MoUs. Before they showed no expression of interest and afterwards they stated in no uncertain terms that they were not interested in the structural reform process.

**Mr Dulloo:** Questions have been asked about the funding because we know that there are grants formula right now which are being practised. So, I understand that there are new grants formula that are being worked out by the Management Audit Bureau. When will this be made known to those colleges and also communicated to the House?

**Mr Obegadoo:** Other colleges are perfectly happy and we are in constant contact and discussing. These new grants concern Form VI colleges which will only come into operation in January next year. The grants will, in fact, be worked out in consultation with the operators concerned and that will be finalised in the coming months.

**Mr Clair:** Sir, since now we have not heard about the signature of the agreement between the Government and the Catholic and Anglican Dioceses in Rodrigues, I would like to know when the agreement will be signed.

**Mr Obegadoo:** Well, I am happy to announce to the House that discussions have now been completed and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Catholic and Anglican Dioceses of Rodrigues will be signed shortly.

**Mr Dulloo:** Sir, I understand that the whole management structure is being looked at. Am I given to understand that Form I to V and Form VI colleges will have to introduce a management structure which is akin to what is obtainable in Government State secondary schools?

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D27/IF/P03/4

**Mr Obeegadoo:** What I have said, Sir, is that initially there will be no basic difference in terms of management structure for Form VI colleges and secondary schools offering Forms I to V. For instance, a school which has a rector and which becomes a I to V school will preserve the post of rector and acquired rights will be fully respected. Now, in the future, as we take time to consider the Mahadeo Report on a new pedagogical project for Form VI colleges we will envisage changes which are acceptable to all partners and parents concerning management in the best interest of our children.

**Dr. Boolell:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has stated very clearly that there would be no loss of acquired rights, that Government will honour all its obligations. Can I ask him why is it that within one and the same system, where some schools have expressed their intention to participate in the reform, different facilities and incentives are being granted to the schools?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Government has a programme of structural reforms in education. Government encourages and welcomes any private college which joins the process. Government is therefore duty bound to assist in this transition to the new set-up, and that is why all the schools or the groups which have subscribed to the Memoranda of Understanding are being assisted.

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DR/D27/P04/1  
(PNQ CONT'D)

**Dr. Boolell:** Why is it then that in respect of the transition period, the time is different for D.A.V and Hindu Girls colleges compared to the other confessional schools?

*(Interruptions)*

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** Shame! Shame!

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please! Hon Dr. Boolell, Order!

*(Interruptions)*

I would like to listen to the reply. Hon. Boolell!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Obegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, for the conversion of existing schools into either Form I to Form V or Form VI, it is a gradual process with the time frame identical for all schools. For instance, a present school which is doing Form I to Form VI and which is going to convert into Form I to Form V will need two years to phase out the Form VI. And a school converting into a Form I to Form V will need five years to convert into a fully Form VI college. There is one exception which has been created for BPS and Notre Dame colleges. Why is that? In the case of the Catholic colleges, the MoUs have frozen the intake at Form I level and at Lower VI level. In other words, in 2002, the Catholic colleges taken together admitted 1,480 students in Form I. In 2003, irrespective of the reforms they will admit 1,480 and it will be the same in 2004, 2005 and 2006. There is a no loss no gain principle enshrined in the agreement with the Catholic Church. That is not necessarily the case for the other schools which are relatively small schools, like Hindu Girls, D.A.V., Islamic and Aleemiah; with a second institution they may increase their intake at Form I or lower VI. Because they may do so, there is no problem. They will build a new school and they will have greater intake capacity.

In the case of the Catholic schools, they are bound to admit no less and no more than the number of students admitted in 2002. Therefore, they have particular difficulties in terms of number of classrooms so as to balance the figures on the girls' side and for the boys because all these colleges are single sex. It has been necessary, I believe, for those two schools that it be put

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(PNQ CONT'D)

off by one year for the transition period to start. So, my answer is there is a difference only in the case of two institutions and that exception is linked to the no loss no gain principle in terms of seats applicable to the Catholic Church and not applicable to the other four partners.

**Mr Speaker:** Time is almost up. I am allowing a last question to the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** The hon. Minister made a point of talking about the agreement with the MGI as soon as he had signed the agreements. Can I ask him what negotiations he had with the MGI?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Thank you. I hadn't had time to broach that subject. Mahatma Gandhi Institute is a very important operator within the educational field and within the perspective of the global restructuring of the whole secondary education sector, we want to promote the Mahatma Gandhi Institute as an operator providing educational services. So, instead of, as I said, one MGI, we will have RTI, MGI and at least four Mahatma Gandhi secondary schools in operation as from January 2003. Now, all along we have been discussing with the Indian High Commission. We had also been in touch with the chairperson and Director of the MGI. These contacts are ongoing. I am told that only last week the Board of the MGI was discussing the matter and is coming up with new proposals for the new organisational structure of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute. So, we are endeavouring to take on board everybody, including all the unions of staff of the MGI.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to ask one more question because it is important for the follow-up.

**Mr Speaker:** I'll allow the hon. Leader of the Opposition a very short question for a short reply.

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I just want to ask the Minister since the MGI is a parastatal body governed by Statute, by an Act of Parliament, is he saying, therefore, that he negotiated with his own nominees on the Board?

**Mr Obeegadoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe I have already answered that question fully.

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**YEAR****2006**

## **EDUCATION SECTOR – REFORM (11/04/06)**

**(No. B/196) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection whether she will state if the reform being proposed in the education sector, with the creation of national and regional colleges, is in conformity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**The Minister of Education & Human Resources (Mr D. Gokhool):**  
Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this PQ and I would like to state the following.

I would like to refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to PNQ of 21 March 2006 whereby I asserted that this Government has already democratised access to free education at all levels and provides equal opportunities to one and all. Admission on a national and regional basis to State Secondary Schools forms part of a comprehensive programme and the philosophy behind it is: equity, ethics and social justice. This mode of admission promotes equal opportunity among children living in all regions of Mauritius, near and remote. Education is free and compulsory up to the age of 16. Moreover, at primary level, children are provided with free textbooks and at secondary level, needy students enjoy the same facilities.

This is in conformity with Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child which recognises the right of the child to education. Government's philosophy is also to look after the needs of children with special needs. In this connection, the needs of children with physical handicaps are being catered for by the Special Education Needs Unit whereas low performers living in deprived areas are taken care of in the context of the *Zone d'Education Prioritaires Programme*. CPE failures after two attempts are absorbed by the pre-vocational classes.

Furthermore, to improve access to education and provide equality of opportunities, Government has introduced free transport facilities. Each child in the Republic of Mauritius is taken care of according to his/her needs.

I want to assure the hon. Member that every effort is being made by my Ministry to "ensure that the proposed reforms secure access to free and compulsory secondary education for all children regardless of their social status and ethnic background" as recommended in the Second National Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, if you allow me, I have got three supplementary questions. The hon. Minister has just stated that this reform is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In fact, my question was addressed to the hon. Minister of Women's Rights. He quoted in his answer Article 28 based on education. Article 28 states that everything in education should be done on the basis of equal opportunity to all children. Making the difference between national and regional schools, how does the Minister reconcile the fact that this Article is in conformity to this Article of the Convention?

**Mr Gokhool:** I think I have indicated to the hon. Member that we are introducing comprehensive reform programmes and the access is just one aspect of the programme. We have to look at the reform programme in its totality and then we can appreciate if equal opportunity is provided or not.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just mentioned that he is taking care of the special needs of the children, can I ask him whether the needs of gifted children have been taken care of in his project?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have explained to the House, in any system we have children with different potentials, different capabilities and the system should cater for all children. That is one of the reasons why we have introduced access on a regional/national basis, particularly to care for children who are high performing children; and this is one aspect of taking care of children who are talented and gifted.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** I am just referring the hon. Minister to Article (2) of the Convention. Article (2) states very clearly and I quote, if you allow me, Mr Speaker -

"State party should take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all form of discrimination."

On this question of national and regional colleges is discrimination not being done to most of the children sitting for the CPE exams.

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, when you allow children to access to schools on the basis of merit and no other criteria, is this discrimination?

**Mrs Labelle:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just mentioned that he has to take care of talented and gifted children. May I know from the

hon. Minister what has been put in place to differentiate what he calls "gifted and talented" children?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have explained that the reform programme is a long process and we are now at the early phase of the reform programme. We are taking measures to address the needs of all children; we have addressed the issue of children with special education needs; we are addressing the question of children who have difficulty in coping with mainstream education in the pre-vocational area. We are also taking care of children who are high performing so that they can also access to those schools where they are to be found.

With regard to the issue that has been raised, this is being looked into and other measures will be taken to address the issue raised by the hon. Member.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I have one more question. Can the hon. Minister clearly state to the House how his reform reconciles with the Article (3) of the Convention?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the programme of reform is based on a few basic principles - democratising access, equity, social justice and these principles are embedded in all measures we are taking. So, we cannot make a selective reading of the reform programme. This is what I have been telling.

**Mrs Labelle:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has emphasised on the fact that he is only at the beginning of the reform. Must I take it that since he is at the beginning of the reform, he has not yet put in place structures which are going to differentiate the gifted and talented children?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, a reform programme is an ongoing programme. And as I have indicated, we are right at the beginning of the initial phase of the reform programme. We have to wait; we have to see how the reform programme is moving along, then we can make final conclusions about the reform.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he considers allowing special students who are gifted to be in the same institution in the national colleges sufficient to cater for their needs?

**Mr Gokhool:** We are not modifying the system, which has existed.

We are just introducing measures to democratise access on the basis of merit. This is what we are doing.

**Mrs Navarre-Marie:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in January, this year, the Ministry of Women's Rights deponed before the UN Committee on children in Geneva where the issue of the counter reform on education has been raised with concern. Can we, therefore, know the reaction of the Mauritian delegation at the Committee?

**Mr Sinatambou:** Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order, I am afraid, when the hon. Member is mentioning the word "counter reform", she is expressing an opinion. I think this is not allowed.

**Mr Speaker:** What "counter reform" is the hon. Member talking about? Can the hon. Member rephrase her question?

**Mrs Navarre-Marie:** I was saying that in that committee the issue of proposed reform in education was raised with concern. I would like to know the reaction of the Mauritian delegation at that committee?

**Mr Speaker:** Will the Minister answer?

**Mr Gokhool:** May I just read for the benefit of the hon. Member in the House what the Committee has recommended. In the first part of its recommendation, the Committee says, I quote -

"The Committee acknowledges the remarkable improvement made in the field of education including the ongoing reforms of the education system".

This is part of the recommendation.

*(Interruptions)*

The other part of the recommendation is that -

"The Committee expressed concern that the proposed reform may introduce ..."

*(Interruptions)*

This is not affirmative, this is not conclusive; it is a matter of opinion and we cannot take that to base ourselves to draw a conclusion out of it.

**Mrs Martin:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would just like to know from the Minister when the remark that he just mentioned was actually made?

**Mr Gokhool:** I cannot say the date, but it was during the Convention when discussions were held on the reform on the education sector, Mr Speaker, Sir.

### **EDUCATION REFORM – IMPLEMENTATION (28/11/06)**

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha)** (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the implementation of the reform in the education sector, he will state –

- (a) what are the measures announced in February 2006 which have been implemented so far, and
- (b) when the new measures that he has announced recently regarding curriculum development, assessment and examinations will be implemented.

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Leader of Opposition for this PNQ which comes at a critical junction when we are embarking on a major and unprecedented review of the curriculum both at primary and secondary levels. I would like to invite the attention of the House to the wide consensus and national support which the Curriculum Reforms document recently issued by my Ministry has canvassed. I have also noted with satisfaction the support of both the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the MSM to these reforms.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it gives me an opportunity to apprise the House of latest developments and to reaffirm the commitment of this Government to carrying out fundamental reforms in the education sector in order to set the base for a World Class Quality Education accessible to all as announced in the Government Programme 2005-2010.

Mr Speaker Sir, we are at a moment where we need to remind ourselves that Education is the birthright of every citizen. Education is also the life blood of all societies because it is a privileged engine of change and transformation particularly in countries like Mauritius which do not have resources other than human. It was against this backdrop that the present Government proposed a new vision for a World Class Quality Education accessible to all and its corollary that “*no child should be left behind*”. This Government seeks to bring a paradigm shift in the education agenda in line with modern realities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the whole nation knows the Labour Party's history is the history of conquest of rights – and the right to education is one of the fundamental rights which the labour Party has fought since its creation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1930's, the Labour Party fought against the closure of schools during the depression. In the 1940's we fought to admit all our children in the primary schools. In the 1950's we fought and set up the first State Girls School – that is the Queen Elizabeth College and in the 1960's we brought a silent revolution and gave every village a primary school.

Mr Speaker, Sir, our faith and commitment to education is unparalleled in the history of this country. We have set up the John Kennedy College, the Industrial Trade Training Centre, the University of Mauritius, the MIE, the MES, the MGI – the UTM. More important is the historic decision by the father of the nation to give free secondary education, an achievement without parallel in a developing country.

Mr Speaker, Sir, all this background is very pertinent because the reform agenda puts a lot of emphasis on the issue of access to education. This is the link I am trying to develop. All these measures show Labour Party's commitment towards the democratisation of access to education. It is our faith and commitment that only education can unlock the potential of every child and provide him with a wide array of opportunities so that he can take his destiny in his own hand. This has been the philosophy of the Labour Party right from the start. And it is this torch bequeathed to us from the constellation of patriots who had been at the helm of the Labour Party that we are proud to carry in the 21st Century. When I look around here – almost all of us are the proud products of the educational system set up by the Labour Party.

*(Interruptions)*

All of us, on both sides! This is a truism, this is a fact!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, it is against this backdrop and today's context changed the demands of our increasingly sophisticated economy and a more complex and changing society we require a highly skilled and



innovative labour force for social, cultural and economic growth for our country.

Faced with these challenges, our commitment to education remains deep and profound.

Conscious of the inherent weaknesses of a fragmented piecemeal and *ad-hoc* strategy, my Ministry has opted for a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive approach to reforms in the education sector on all fronts from preprimary to secondary, from post-secondary to tertiary without forgetting the pre-vocational sector, the ZEP schools and the Special Needs Education sector. Our overriding philosophy is that no child should be left behind and our central objective behind the policy of a World Class Quality Education accessible to all is precisely to uphold the Mauritian society and its people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is very important. When a Government comes to power, it has the blessing of the population and we have to go by our mandate. I would like here, Mr Speaker, Sir, to remind Members of the House, especially on the other side, that they should go back to our electoral manifesto...

**Mr Speaker:** May I remind the hon. Minister that this is not a debate.

*(Interruptions)*

Order! There is a Parliamentary Question and he has to answer the question.

**Mr Gokhool:** I bow to your ruling, Mr Speaker, Sir. What I am trying to say is that there is a faithful link between what we promised in our electoral manifesto and what we are doing in terms of Government Programme. Paragraph 148 of the Government Programme talks about fundamental reforms in the education sector. That's why I have highlighted that we are looking at reforms across the board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in line with the public mandate which we sought and obtained in July 2005 and on the basis of our electoral manifesto, we have remained consistent and steadfast in our approach.

In January 2006, my Ministry came up with the document - "Quality Initiative for A world Class Quality Education 2006", a copy of which I am now tabling. I hope it is the document which the Leader of Opposition is referring to. This has been made public and it is the public domain.

As regards part (a) of the question, in line with this vision that has been spelt out, we made it a point to embark on a set of actions of a qualitative nature so that no time gap should exist between the articulation of the vision and its implementation. In fact, so far, a set of twenty-five quality education initiatives – this is not an exhaustive list and I am going to table a copy of the initiatives which my Ministry has undertaken over the last sixteen months - has been put on the rails. Allow me to cite only a few to give an example.

(i) Bridging the gap initiative which takes the child from preschool to first standard of primary schools.

(ii) The implementation of the school IT project in all primary schools, with the provision of five computers and 1 printer in every school;

(iii) The publication of the Special Education Needs Policy Guideline Document;

(iv) Ensuring the provision of clean and safe drinking water – it is a basic need for our children - as well as the upgrading and cleanliness of toilets in schools;

(v) Provision of ADSL High Speed Internet Connectivity for school learner empowerment in our secondary schools.

These are only a few of the initiatives which I have just mentioned.

It has been our credo that we need to provide quality education and this has become an integral part of our educational landscape. As from 2005,

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the domain of education, the concept of quality is now an integral part of our educational landscape. I made a pledge to provide an education that satisfies the notion of access, relevance, equity and inclusiveness.

Mr Speaker Sir, it's good that I remind the House that during the 100 days, there are some of the initiatives which we have taken. First, free public transport to all students, we have also re-established .....

*(Interruptions)*

These are the initiatives! In fact, I am referring to the initiatives which the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to know as to whether they have been implemented. This is from the document which I have tabled and I am referring to the initiatives which we have taken. I think they have to listen to my reply, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Bodha:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir, there are fundamental changes which have been brought to the education system.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Can I know the point of order, please?

**Mr Bodha:** The hon. Minister is not answering the question.

**Mr Speaker:** I have so many times repeated in this House that I have no control on the answer of Ministers, but I must tell the Minister that he must be relevant to the question which has been put.

*(Interruptions)*

Order, order! The question refers to measures announced in February 2006. I think the hon. Minister must take it from there and answer the question, please!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to the document which I have tabled.

**Mr Bodha:** No, I am referring to the Government Gazette.

**Mr Gokhool:** This is the set of initiatives which my Ministry is implementing. We have also the Government Programme. What I am stating is in line with the programme we have announced in Parliament and also at the level of the Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, concurrently, a series of reflections started on different aspects of Education Reforms Agenda inclusive of the Curriculum Review which led to the organisation of a national debate in December 2005 and finally, the release of the Curriculum Review Report. I must stress that quality education for all pupils is an inclusive education and this is brought out in the curriculum reform document. We want to provide that inclusive education to all children. This is the overall aim of this Government. This is the rationale behind our efforts to bring world quality education to all.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the curriculum reforms, I wish to point out that though there has existed for a long time a recognition of the fact that the curricula of both primary and secondary are outdated and out of touch with social needs, this national debate has captured the aspirations of the

public. A wide range of stakeholders gathered to express their views, which constituted the baseline for the document 'Towards a quality Curriculum, Strategy for Reform', which has been made public. It has got a series of measures. I would not like to go back to the details. These can be looked at in the document, which has been submitted.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as education reforms for the curriculum are concerned - I have said it in public, I am saying it now in Parliament and many of our colleagues are conversant with the educational processes - it usually takes 7-8 years to review a school curriculum. The examples are U.K, Sri Lanka, Canada, India and many Commonwealth countries. This can be verified, but we have adopted a time-frame of three to four years. There are very important stages of development in the process of curriculum renewal. Some of them are –

- Identification of learning competencies and outcomes which is being done by the National Curriculum Steering Committee which is going to come with a National Curriculum Framework by the end of December;
- Conceptual design;
- The actual drafting of textbooks
- Teacher training
- Empowerment of school leadership
- Development of a monitoring and supervision of quality education.

These are different sets of processes which are engaged when we go for curriculum reforms.

Mr Speaker, Sir, a number of committees have been set up. A National Curriculum Advisory Committee has been set up at my Ministry.

The National Curriculum Steering Committee has been commissioned and is working towards the development of the national curriculum framework.

A Technical Committee has been set up at the level of my Ministry of work on admission into Forms I and VI.

In the light of the above, I must state that the implementation of the document has already started and the work will continue.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I would like to say that the hon. Minister got me wrong. There is a Government Notice No. 234 of 2006,

published on the 18 of February 2006 whereby this Government has decided that they will have nine State Secondary Colleges as National Colleges, introducing the refined grading system which they call the A+. These are the measures I am referring to. I am shocked, Mr Speaker, Sir.....

**Mr Speaker:** Now, the Leader of the Opposition put his question.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, isn't it shocking....

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, put your question. I won't allow you to make any comment on the answer of the hon. Minister.

**Mr Bodha:** Isn't it shocking, Mr Speaker, Sir, that he has not referred at all to the measures taken? May I ask him now a certain number of questions? First of all, how long will the present CPE selection exercise continue, because there have been three stages.....

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Leader of the Opposition has put his question.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain! There was the first Minister Gokhool's proposal with A+ and the nine colleges. Then, there was a second one where he took the nation for a ride and in which he said that he was making a U- turn. And he came with a third proposal the other day when he came with the curriculum. Now, I want him to answer questions to the nation. First, up to when will the present selection exercise on the CPE basis continue?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition has set a question about reform in the education sector. If we read the line question, it is about reform. And the second thing I want to mention, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that there is a reform programme, a reform strategy...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Order! I think the question is clear, hon. Minister: in the three proposals you have made, how long it is going to last?

**Mr Gokhool:** I am just giving a clarification. I have answered the question and I am not irrelevant. I will insist, Mr Speaker, Sir, that I have answered the question.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Coming to the point of selection to Form I on the basis of A+, this has been publicly canvassed. We have made it clear that it is the MES that makes arrangements for the admission of students who have expressed the wish – it is an option – to be considered for admission.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** But, Mr Speaker, Sir, they have made an application for admission on a national basis to the nine colleges. This is a matter which is being looked after by the MES.

**Mr Bodha:** My second question is until when will the selection exercise for secondary schools continue at the age of 11?

**Mr Gokhool:** It is precisely what I said, Mr Speaker, Sir. In matters of reform we cannot rush.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** I have to remind the Members of the Opposition ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** I would like to warn hon. Members of the Opposition that if they have questions to put, they should not shout from a sitting position, they should stand up and put questions. I will not tolerate anything.

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to selection at CPE, selection has always existed. What we have done is brought a refined grading in line with our policy and that is what we are implementing. We have to implement that policy, because we are mandated by the people to do so. According to law we cannot remove the CPE before two years. We have to give advance notice. That is why - to answer to the Leader of the Opposition - we have given a time-frame of three to four years because we have to prepare the new system and introduce it. We cannot change it before two years. It is by law. We have to give notice to the people.

**Mr Bodha:** Why then, did the Minister change from the selection process to A+ without notice?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about curriculum reform where the modalities for evaluation and assessment will have to accompany the reform proposals. But we have not changed the curriculum, we have not changed the system of assessment. It is only the grading that has been modified.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is: until when will the national colleges exist in the system?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, this Government is committed to provide access on a national basis. In the context of the reforms, we are maintaining the principle of admission on a national access to State colleges, but the modalities will have to be worked out by the committee in order to determine the mode admission to these colleges.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Minister taking the whole nation for a ride? Doesn't it mean that 1260 seats will remain for years and years with what we have called *un crime contre les enfants de ce pays*? Until when will the hon. Minister continue with the A+ and the 1260 seats in nine colleges?

**Mr Gokhool:** I cannot reconcile the contradictions of the Opposition. They find the proposal of the Government in order, going in the right direction. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to say I have strong reservations on such words like "crime" being used. We are giving more opportunities to children unlike the Opposition.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Hon. Bhagwan, order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in the previous system there is a criteria of proximity which has been used and we want to improve on that. Can you imagine, Mr Speaker, Sir, two children of the Republic of Mauritius have the same grade, but if there is one seat available, the previous Government used proximity, geographical distance to admit children. Is this a valid criteria? Should we not change this criteria?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Minister confirming that the 1,260 seats will remain as is for the years to come? May I ask him - for the exercise of January 2007 - to publish the list of 630 boys and 630 girls who are going to the nine colleges?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, once the admission has taken place, the names of those who are admitted will be published. There is no problem about it. This is transparent.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, if a parent is not happy, how will the MES be accountable to the grading that has been given to this ward?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as has been the practice, marks are not revealed. This is the international practice. But if there is a query by a parent, he can refer it to the MES and the latter, as per normal procedures, will deal with it.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** That refers to the answer. There is no need to go into publication of marks.

**Mr Gokhool:** There is no need, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Minister inform the House on the number of parents who have expressed their wish to get their children admitted to the nine national colleges?

**Mr Gokhool:** I have the figures but I have to check. 16,059 parents have expressed the wish when they filled in their forms.

**Mr Dayal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, insofar as the national debate held in December last is concerned, will the hon. Minister say to the House who were the stakeholders involved. Secondly, whether there is a record of the debates, and if so, will he lay a copy on the Table of the National Assembly?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I need to say that it was Sir Kher Jagatsing who carried out a national debate on education policy matters. This Government has also taken the initiative to go to the stakeholders. That debate was attended by a broad spectrum of stakeholders.



Secondly, as regards the records, I am certain that these are available at the Ministry, but what is important is the document which came out of the debate, and, this has been made public.

**Mr Lesjongard:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister mentioned transparency. For the sake of transparency, will the Minister or Government remove the political nominee at the Head of the MES?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** I am sorry, this question is out of order! Hon. Guinness!

**Mr Guinness:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has just said that 16,059 parents have made an application for the national colleges and we have only 1,260 seats. Is it not fair for the parents to know who are the 1,260 students who will get the seats and their marks?

**Mr Gokhool:** I have answered this question.

**Mr Ganoo:** Mr Speaker, Sir, has the hon. Minister taken cognizance of what Mr Surendra Bissondoyal has said ..

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Let the hon. Member puts his question. Order!

**Mr Ganoo:** and whose credibility and reputation in the field of education is known? He says ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Ganoo:** He says he welcomes the curriculum reform as a breath of fresh air, but he says also that the A+ and the national colleges will have to be abolished and he even suggests a calendar. He has asked the Minister whether he has proposed a calendar for the above. Is the hon. Minister aware of this?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member has referred to the gentleman in terms of somebody who has a lot of experience, but I must say that the gentleman to whom the hon. Member is referring, was an adviser in the previous Government.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Gokhool:** I am just giving information and if I had continued with that practice, he would have different views.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Dayal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, being given the crucial importance of education in the economic development of this country, is the hon. Minister prepared to have a debate in the National Assembly regarding this document so that hon. Members on both sides of the House can air their views?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am prepared to have a debate in this House and if a proper debate is organised outside, I am prepared at any time to go and debate.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister, if he is convinced that selection cannot be done at the age of eleven, why is he insisting of having selection at CPE? Because he mentioned that national schools will be maintained and I think that, as long as national schools will be maintained, we need a selection process. In his document, he states that the CPE will no longer be used as a tool for selection and certification.

Then, my question to the hon. Minister is: what type of selection will prevail and whether he does not think that it is unfair to ask the nation to accept a reform without telling the people what they are going to face?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, firstly, selection has always been part

of the primary school system and, secondly, for students to go from primary to secondary, we will always have to have a recourse to a selection exercise.

What we are proposing is that the examination should have, on one side, the selection, and on the other side, the certification. Right now, the CPE combines both. This is one of the difficulties. Therefore, we are going to look at the process of entrance to the Form I and devise new modalities.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Bhagwan:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister give an undertaking to the House and the nation that Government won't tolerate any political interference at the level ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Order!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Bhagwan:** Let me finish my question!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Bhagwan:** Will the Government give a guarantee to the House that there won't be any political interference at the level of the MES when the choice of 1200 children ...?

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

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not prepared to answer to the insinuation of the hon. Member. We will stand by our policy.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Bhagwan, are you imputing motives to the Minister? I heard you saying that he was phoning.

**Mr Bhagwan:** No, not him! People are phoning.

**Mr Speaker:** Be careful! Hon. Guinness, put your question, please.

*(Interruptions)*

Order, I said. Order!

**Mr Guinness:** Mr Speaker, Sir, can we know from the Minister how, the assessment will be done? Will it be on a national level? Will it be a uniform assessment for all schools or will each school do its own assessment? And I would also like to know how the transition from Standard VI to Form I will be done? How parents will know which school their ward has got?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, at the end of the primary cycle, the assessment will be done on a national basis.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** I am in charge of the proceedings of this House. Order, I said!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, at the end of the primary cycle as well as at the end of Form III, the assessment will be done at the national level.

**Mr Bodha:** Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister agree that he is totally contradictory with himself? On the 18 November, in an interview, he said –

*« A onze ans nous ne pouvons choisir l'élite »*

And today, in this House, he is saying the contrary, Mr Speaker, Sir!

*(Interruptions)*

Is the hon. Minister convinced of what he is doing? The impression that we have is that he does not know where he is sailing, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition should not put words in my mouth.

*(Interruptions)*

I have never said...

*(Interruptions)*

In fact, he is quoting my reply in the interview. He should read the question as well, because people have been accusing me of promoting the elite. This is what I answered to and the explanation I gave. He is misquoting.

**Mr Speaker:** Time is over! I have an announcement to make. Parliamentary Questions Nos. B/1484 and B/1488 have been withdrawn. Question Nos B/1486 in regard to climatic changes addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will now be replied by the hon. Minister of Environment and Quality of Life. In keeping with the practice, this question will be answered after Question Time, if time permitting. Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister!