

SECONDARY

SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS SCHOOL CLOSURE - E-LEARNING (03.08.2021)

(No. B/885) **Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to e-learning, she will state if consideration will be given for a review thereof after consultations with the stakeholders, indicating the measures taken and/or envisaged to ensure that all students follow classes.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, a system for online teaching and learning has been put in place by my Ministry to dispense education in case of school closure.

The House may wish to know that online classes were conducted from 21 June 2021 to 02 July 2021 for Grades 10 to 13, while pupils for Grades 1 to 9, relevant educational programs were broadcasted on the national TV. Schools were required to monitor the attendance of students for these online classes and heads of schools had to inform parents in case students did not attend to find out why they did not.

After the resumption of studies on 05 July 2021, a few areas were declared red zones leading to school closure in these zones. Remote classes were conducted for students of these schools. Similar measures were taken for schools where COVID-19 positive cases were detected, and which were closed temporarily for disinfection purposes.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as announced in my reply to parliamentary question B/648, we already have an e-learning platform, and my Ministry intends to come up with a more sophisticated one in the future. The Ministry is presently working in collaboration with the Mauritius Institute of Education on a pilot project; virtual classroom which will allow a blended mode of teaching and learning and that is a mix of face-to-face and online learning.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, merci. La ministre, peut-elle assurer la Chambre que toutes décisions prises autour de la question de *e-learning*, et cetera, et la

présence des élèves, le fait que les élèves puissent suivre les cours, est-ce que toutes décisions auraient pu être prise en consultation avec les différents partenaires de l'éducation, et que *no one is left behind* ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the question that I replied a few minutes back, I just mentioned that a committee has already been set up at the level of the Ministry to discuss with all stakeholders regarding any measure we are going to take in cases where online teaching will be required.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, les différents *stakeholders* concernent le corps enseignant certainement, et les parents également. Est-ce que les parents sont consultés sur le sujet ?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: M. le président, nous avons un travail à faire au niveau du ministère pour décider de la façon de dispenser les cours au cas de *school closure*. Bien sûr quand il faut parler aux parents, à travers les *PTA*, cela se fait au niveau du ministère.

SECONDARY

SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

NATIONAL E-LEARNING PLATFORM

(13.07.2021)

(No. B/648) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the proposed creation of a National e-Learning Platform to connect educators of secondary schools with the students, as announced in the Budget 20202021, she will state where matters stand.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, an e-Learning Platform is a tool that creates an interactive and virtual system for teaching and learning. It allows the creation of educational contents and permits interaction between students and educators. Presently, the e-learning is being carried out on two fronts.

Firstly, low secondary students, Grade 7-9, have access to educational resources available within the student support portal that has been set up by my Ministry in collaboration with the National Council of Educational Research and Training of India. The student support portal is a comprehensive resource that is comparable to India's *ePathshala* Platform that enables students to learn at their own pace and place.

Secondly, classes are conducted online for upper secondary students, Grade 10-13, using Microsoft teams. About 40,000 students and 8,500 educators have been provided with log-ins for Microsoft teams for educators to connect online with their students to ensure continuity in learning during the confinement.

To enable this endeavour to be sustained, my Ministry has renewed and upgraded some 100,000 Microsoft licenses with more features that are available under the Office 365 Ecosystem. This modular and flexile platform is a comprehensive cloud based solution that can be installed in any of the devices that educators and students own and can then be used both in schools and at home.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform the House that the National e-Learning Platform is also on the way. All the features I have mentioned will become an integral part of that platform which will be further enhanced phase wise, allowing monitoring of the virtual classes as well as assessments.

The e-learning transition is being reinforced with the advent of the pilot project known as the virtual classroom, which will be implemented in Grade 7 in the first instance to support blended mode of teaching and learning and internet connectivity will be enhanced in these schools.

Dr. Gungapersad: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether we are ready to switch to online teaching - she referred to *e-Pathshala* in India - and learning, in case schools have to be closed down at any point in time for one reason or the other?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is presently being done. In fact, I have just mentioned that we already have 40,000 students who have got logins and 8500 educators who have also got logins and online classes can be held using Microsoft Teams and a number of other links also through Zoom and other facilities.

Dr. Gungapersad: Regarding primary school students, hon. Minister, you know like me that tablets are kept at school...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Address the Chair! Not 'You Minister', address the Chair!

Dr. Gungapersad: Okay! Mr Speaker, Sir, the tablets are kept at school, instead of allowing those students to take the tablets home. Because we are talking of online education, will the hon. Minister consider allowing students to take these tablets home?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: This is not the policy of the Ministry, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell, your question! No. Hon. Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha! No. So, we move on to hon. Ameer Meea.

SECONDARY

SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

MATTERS RAISED

MBC - EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES - BROADCAST (14.06.2021)

Mr F. David (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West): M. le président, ma requête de ce soir s'adresse à Madame la vice-Première ministre et ministre de l'Éducation et concerne la diffusion d'émissions éducatives sur les quatre chaînes de la MCB, MCB 2, 3, Senn Kreol et Bhojpuri Channel.

M. le président, il s'avère que différentes émissions pour différentes Grades, notamment les Grades 1 à 6 sont régulièrement diffusées exactement au même horaires sur différentes chaînes ce qui pénalise évidemment les familles qui ont deux enfants ou plus alors qu'elles n'ont qu'un seul téléviseur à la maison. Puis-je solliciter, madame la ministre pour que son ministère fasse le nécessaire soit pour réorganiser la diffusion des émissions, soit pour proposer ces mêmes émissions sur les chaînes vidéos du web, je pense notamment à YouTube. Merci

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you much. Hon. Vice-Prime Minister!

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun Luchoomun): M. le président, je voudrais faire ressortir que l'année dernière nous avons eu le même problème et qu'on avait discuté avec la MCB de sorte à ce qu'ils donnent la possibilité et que ces cours soient dispensés à travers la MCB mais aussi sur les *devices*. Ils ont une technique particulière où ils arrivent à faire la transmission de ces programmes au même moment sur différents *devices* à travers *MBC Play*. Je dois m'assurer que cela se reproduise cette fois-ci.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you much, Vice-Prime Minister. Hon. Nagalingum!

SECONDARY

SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SOCIAL REGISTER OF MAURITIUS - GRADES 10 TO 13 STUDENTS - TABLETS (20.04.2021)

(No. B/243) **Dr. M. Gungapersad** (Second Member for Grand'Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity whether, in regard to the project for the distribution of 2570 tablets for students of Grades 10 to 13 of families registered on the existing Social Register of Mauritius, as provided for in the Budget 2020-2021, she will state where matters stand, indicating the –

- (a) number of beneficiaries thereof, and
- (b) name of the contractor therefor, and (c) cost

thereof.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that as at December 2020, there were some 1,124 children attending Grades 10 to 13 classes on the current database of the Social Register of Mauritius. The National Empowerment Foundation has however ordered 1500 tablets to cater for both students on the current database and new entrants.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that the consignment which reached Mauritius on 13 April 2021 has already been cleared by the Customs Department. Testing and commissioning of the said tablets ordered has started yesterday.

As for parts (b) and (c) of the question, I am informed by the National Empowerment Foundation that the contract for the supply, testing and commissioning of the said tablets was awarded on 25 January 2021 to Leal Communications & Informatics Ltd for the contract value of Rs17,279,152, inclusive of VAT.

Dr. Gungapersad: Thank you, hon. Minister. I would like one clarification from the hon. Minister. Once these tablets are distributed to these children, to these kids, who does the follow-up? Is it the Ministry of Social Integration, your Ministry, or the Ministry of Education?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: The National Empowerment Foundation.

Dr. Gungapersad: Has there been any precaution taken so that these students, to whom these tablets are distributed, they are conversant with using this pedagogical tool?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Well, of course, if the students need support to use the tablets, we will do the needful.

Dr. Gungapersad: And once these tablets have been distributed, hon. Minister, who is responsible for the maintenance, update, et cetera of these tablets?

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: NEF itself.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SECONDARY
SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

YEAR 2021

**DIGITAL TABLET PROJECT – DISTRIBUTION GRADE-WISE
(30.03.2021)**

(No. B/93) **Dr. M. Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand’Baie & Poudre d’Or)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the Allocation of Digital Tablet Project launched by her Ministry, she will state the –

- (a) number of digital tablets distributed, grade-wise;
- (b) cost thereof, and
- (c) outcome of the research carried out, if any, to assess the benefits drawn, if any, by the students in terms of enhanced quality performance from the use of the digital tablets.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): M Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out, at the very outset, that the project referred to is, in fact, the early digital learning programme. It is a national initiative undertaken with the collaboration of the Indian Government which is being implemented since 2018 as part of the educational reform. The specific aim is to induce a paradigm shift in the teaching learning process. I wish to highlight that this project also involves the development of digital contents that are frontloaded in the devices.

With regard to part (a) of the question, 51,133 digital tablets have been allocated to pupils of Grades 1 to 4 in State and aided primary schools in the Republic of Mauritius. The figures for the different Grades in Mauritius are as follows –

- Grade 1- 13,639
- Grade 2 - 11,227

- Grade 3 - 11,656
- Grade 4 - 11,590

In Rodrigues, the number of tablets provided is follows -

- Grade 1- 723
- Grade 2 - 719 • Grade 3 - 782
- Grade 4 - 761

A total of 36 pupils in the island of Agaléga have also been provided with the tablets.

With regard to part (b) of the question, the capital cost to the project amounts to USD20 m., out of which, an amount of USD14 m. was provided by the Government of India. I wish again to seize the opportunity to thank the Government of India for this very generous support in improving the digital learning ecosystem in our schools.

With regard to part (c) of the question, my Ministry is in presence of reports related to two evaluation exercises. The first one was carried out internally by the MIE and a second one by the University of Mauritius with the support of the World Bank at the behest of my Ministry. These evaluation exercises were primarily meant to be formative in nature. The MIE's first research phase focused on teachers' capabilities to integrate technology in the classroom. The classroom management skills and the modes of learning, including personalised learning, pair and group work with tablets, the use of specific apps as well as drawing and writing tools. The MIE found the results highly encouraging and promising. The University of Mauritius, for its part, has recently submitted its final report. The report states and I quote –

“The use of tablets in the classrooms deeply motivated pupils. They were more engaged, lively and participative. Most pupils indicated that they preferred the tablets over the traditional textbooks and it was further observed that the use of multimedia tablets increased the attention span of the pupils. The multimedia-based lessons and exercises provided the pupils with audio-visual stimuli which contributed greatly to the high engagement observed in most classrooms.”

The report goes on to say that the programme has been off with a good start in that it has succeeded as per its objectives in incorporating digital media in the classrooms. However, the report also recognises that teachers still require further training to translate meaningful

change in pedagogical practices and that headmasters should equally be more engaged in the follow-up of the project.

The House would wish to know that my Ministry has already embarked on a series of training sessions for headmasters and school inspectors so as to help them better monitor and support educators in the successful implementation of the project.

Dr. Gungapersad: I am not going to question the two studies carried out. The formative evaluations mentioned by the hon. Minister, but this is in strict contradiction with the Audit Report.

Mr Speaker: This is debate.

Dr. Gungapersad: My question is coming. We are told in the Audit's Report, hon. Minister, that children in 14 out of 40 schools visited could not use the tablets. And here you are saying that it has a good start, you are satisfied. You need to review that. There is a serious problem.

Mr Speaker: Put your question!

Dr. Gungapersad: My question is: is the hon. Minister satisfied with that situation?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like the hon. Member to just see the timing of the report. When was the report done and whether all the tablets were already distributed at that point in time, and obviously, there are cases that we have noted where due to some delay in the installation of electric wires there was a delay in the use of the tablets. But this does not, in any way, hamper the project. We obviously are sad that we could not start in those 14 schools at the same time but the delay was not a very long one. And as soon as the installations were done, the students were able to use their tablets.

Mr Speaker: Hon. Ramful!

Mr Ramful: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I just ask the hon. Minister with regard to the School Net 2 Project which is also relevant to this question because it pertains to internet connectivity, whether she can confirm, that Rs81.7 m. has been paid to a Contractor and that, at this stage, no connection has been done at the secondary schools and the money has not been recovered from the Contractor.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me make it very clear. We are talking about two different projects. The EDLP is a project being carried out in primary schools and

all primary schools have high speed connectivity today. The question is not related to the secondary schools.

Mr Uteem: Is the hon. Minister aware of the problems associated with these digital tablets because of lack of space they cannot be upgraded and they have very limited use because the programmes are preloaded. So, the next year they cannot use it.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: No, that is not true. We do upload and frontload certain programmes in the tablets and the tablets are used for different classes. Every year, we have been procuring new tablets for the next class, so, the tablets procured for Grade 1 are used for Grade 1 students and the next batch goes for the next group. It is not the case.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Is the hon. Minister prepared to lay on the Table of the National Assembly the two reports she mentioned?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have just mentioned that it is a formative report, that we are implementing a new project and the Ministry wanted to make sure that the project is being implemented successfully. And this report is meant for the internal use of the Ministry and was made at the request of the Ministry for our internal assessment and to ensure that the project is implemented according to our aims and objectives.

Mr Speaker: Last supplementary!

Dr. Gungapersad: Will the hon. Minister confirm that as at now in all primary schools, because on 24 September 2019, there were primary schools where tablets and projectors were still idle and today, when we are talking, has such a situation been remedied?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring some clarification to that issue. When we see that tablets are idle, we cannot expect students in Grades 1 to 4 to sit in class a whole day using tablets. Tablets are meant as a supportive device and we must not forget that the psychomotor development of the child has also to be done within the classroom. And we do not expect students to sit with their tablets throughout the day. Next, if ever, one particular teacher at one point in time is not using it, this does not mean that the next teacher coming in class would not be using it. And our aim is absolutely not to get students to sit with a tablet throughout the day.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

SECONDARY

SCHOOL TEACHERS/OTHERS

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

SECONDARY SCHOOLS - SCHOOL NET II PROJECT (08.12.2020)

(No. B/1016) Mr A. Ameer Meea (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Information Technology, Communication and Innovation whether, in regard to the School Net II Project for secondary institutions, he will state –

- (a) the contract value thereof, indicating the amount paid to the contractor;
- (b) if the telecommunication tests have been carried out and the project completed, and
- (c) if liquidated damages are due by the contractors and, if so, indicate the quantum thereof and the amount recovered, if any, and, if not, why not.

Reply: The Connectivity Project in Secondary Schools, also referred to as School Net II Project, aimed at providing high speed internet access and wireless connectivity in 164 sites to cover mainly secondary schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The bidding exercise for the project was carried out through the Central Procurement Board (CPB). Tenders were launched on 22 July 2014. As at closing date, on 30 September 2014, four bids were received.

The evaluation exercise was carried out by the CPB and was completed on 31 October 2014. On 13 November 2014, the CPB reported that it had approved the award of contract to the lowest evaluated substantially responsive bidder, Data Communication Ltd for the total contract value of Rs122,457,992.00, inclusive of VAT. After notification procedures to all bidders, two bidders, namely Emtel Ltd and Mauritius Telecoms Ltd lodged a challenge at the Independent Review Panel (IRP) on 03 December 2014. After hearing the case, the IRP set aside the representations of Emtel Ltd and Mauritius Telecom Ltd on 25 February 2015 and 06 August 2015 respectively and maintained the award.

In regard to part (a) of the question, the letter of award was issued to Data Communications Ltd on 25 September 2015. The contract was subsequently signed on 24

December 2015 for the sum of Rs122,457,992, inclusive of VAT. This amount represents the cost of equipment for the sum of Rs88,484,784.00 and rental of communication lines for two years for the sum of Rs33,973,208.00.

As at date, a total amount of Rs81,783,169.70 has been paid for equipment inclusive of variation cost amounting to Rs2,146,863.70, due to specific adjustments in some schools which required extra cabling works, cabinets, switches and labour. As regards rental of communication lines, Rs1,880,480.00 were paid for the period 12 September to 31 October 2016 for testing and commissioning purposes.

Therefore, only a total amount of Rs83,663,649.70, out of the contractual amount has been paid.

As for part (b) of the question, telecommunication tests were successfully carried out, in 2018, at 156 sites out of the 164. Tests could not be performed at eight sites for the following reasons –

- (i) renovation works were ongoing at Modern College, Flacq, and
- (ii) non-provision of connectivity between Mauritius and Rodrigues by the supplier to cover seven sites in Rodrigues.

Thereafter, the supplier was expected, as per the contract, to provide connectivity to those sites but failed to do so in spite of several meetings and exchange of correspondence whereby the latter took the commitment to complete the connectivity part of the project.

On 18 March 2019, the Ministry was made aware by the company BDO & Co that Data Communications Ltd had gone into receivership.

As at that date, the company had completed only the setting up of the equipment in the schools, without completing the connectivity part of the project.

With regard to part (c) of the question, in view of the non-implementation of the project within the approved time frame, liquidated damages at the rate of 1% of the contract value, up to a maximum of 10% are due by the supplier. This amounts to Rs12,245,799.20. This amount is yet to be recovered in view of the fact that the company is in receivership. However, procedures at the level of the Attorney General's Office have already been initiated.