

# SECONDARY

## EXAMINATIONS

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### MAURITIUS EXAMINATIONS SYNDICATE – EXAMINATION PAPERS – LEAKAGE – INTERNAL INQUIRIES

(29.11.2022)

(No. B/1175) **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 alleged tampering with the Primary School Achievement Certificate and the National Certificate Examination 2022 Examination Papers and leakage of the Mathematics Paper 1 for the Higher School Certificate Examinations 2022, she will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate, information as to the outcome of the internal inquiries initiated thereinto.

**The Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change (Mr K. Ramano):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate that one incident relates to an unauthorized access to confidential information pertaining to PSAC/NCE which occurred on 1 June 2022 and the second one is about access by candidates to information relating to certain questions pertaining to Mathematics Paper 1 on 10 October 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the first pertains to the case of a Senior Research and Development Officer, Mr V. S. B., who without authorisation had acceded to confidential files relating to the Primary School Achievement Certificate and the National Certificate of Examination for 2022.

As soon as the matter was reported to the Management of MES, an investigation by a team headed by the Deputy Director was carried out and Mr V. S. B. was requested to hand over the pendrive to the Director on the same day. Mr V. S. B. complied and submitted his explanations by way of an email and a pendrive was also handed over by him on the same day. His explanations were not found to be satisfactory by the MES.

In view of the seriousness of the matter, MES took prompt action forthwith and Mr V. S. B. was interdicted with immediate effect on 02 June 2022. The matter was reported to the

Police on 02 June 2022. Statements have been made to the Central CID by officers of the MES and the Police have collected all evidence related to the case. A full-fledged enquiry is ongoing.

I am further informed that an internal committee has been set up by the MES to look into the circumstances surrounding the incident, convene witnesses and request for documents to assist the enquiry committee in its task, to make recommendation on remedial measures for improving the security of the system as a whole, and to, *inter alia*, determine whether the accused officer had breached the clause of confidentiality tying him to his employer.

The Committee has met 11 times from 27 July 2022 to date to hear witnesses, interview of staff involved in paper setting and conduct site visits to the typing pool, strong room, etc. The work of the committee is in progress and it is expected to submit its findings to the MES by end of December 2022 following the completion of the internal enquiry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, MES has given the assurance that all information that may have been accessed by the officer has been discarded and has not been used for the preparation of examination papers. New papers were set for PSAC and NCE assessments. A new set of question papers were finalised thereafter and subsequently sent for printing in UK. These assessments were held as scheduled in August, September and October 2022.

Mr Speaker, Sir, following this incident, MES has taken additional measures to reinforce the security around the processors concerning paper setting, control of access, storage of data, use of unique passwords and encrypted pendrives, and forbidding the use of mobile phones in the confidential typing pools.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the second incident on 10 October 2022, MES was apprised at 16.41 hrs that the Manager of Loreto College Quatre Bornes had informed the Examination Centre Supervisor that he had received a WhatsApp message concerning information related to some possible questions of Mathematics Paper 1.

The examination, which started at noon, was of a duration of 1 hour 50 minutes. I wish to highlight that some 4,476 HSC Mauritian candidates had sat for the paper on the same day. At 16.43 hrs, the Manager was contacted and was requested to call immediately at the MES but he refused to do so.

Given the circumstances, the MES officers, Senior Examination Officer and two other officers proceeded to the school to gather more information on the matter. However, the Manager did not provide any additional information to the MES.

In view of the seriousness of the matter, the MES reported it forthwith to the Police who initiated an enquiry on the very same day, that is, 10 October 2022. The MES also reported the matter to the Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE) and communicated the information it had in its possession to the said organisation on the same day, and the CAIE initiated an enquiry at this end.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to report received from the Police, it came to light that a student of Loreto College Quatre Bornes had accessed information pertaining to some questions from a mobile application, Reddit. She had shared the information with a Mathematics teacher who in turn had forwarded it to a senior educator and the Manager of the school.

We have been informed that Reddit, the application, is a social news website and forum where content is socially curated and promoted by site members. The user mobile application is also a platform where past question papers are shared with all those who are on the application.

According to Police report, there is no screenshot as such of the questions concerned. So far, the Police enquiry had not revealed that there has been any other sharing or posting of the information on questions pertaining to the examination paper with other persons or social media platforms or that there has been further disclosure of information in Mauritius relating to the questions.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that as part of the investigation process, MES was requested to carry out an audit of the distribution chain of the question, starting with the dispatch of the question paper as from its shipment in the UK and up to its delivery to the MES, its safekeeping as well as distribution to examination centres on the day of the exam. As per information obtained by the MES, the dispatch and distribution had been carried out as per established norms and standards of the examinations protocol in place. With a view to beefing the security, the MES from there onwards decided to deliver papers in sealed conditions to coordinators twice a day, that is, at 05.45 for morning sessions and another delivery at around 10.00 for the afternoon papers.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that the Cambridge Assessment International Education has concluded its investigation on the matter based on the evidence gathered by the CAIE; they are not planning to replace or cancel the paper. The CAIE has also informed that

there is no evidence to suggest that the source of the information on questions was from any candidate or staff of any examination centre in Mauritius.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is closely monitoring the situation with the MES.

**Dr. Gungapersad:** Thank you, hon. Minister. I have no supplementary because the Minister of Education is not here. Thank you.

# SECONDARY

## EXAMINATIONS

### MATTERS RAISED

#### HSC EXAMINATION PAPER – LEAKAGE

(27.10.2022)

**Mr R. Uteem (Second Member for Port Louis South & Port Louis Central):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The matter which I would like to raise concerns the hon. VicePrime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology. Unfortunately, she is not here. It relates to the leakage of the examination paper for HSC which happened last week. The exam paper was pure Maths. I have received calls from various parents who are very worried about how such an incident happened, but also what would happen to that examination paper, whether it would be cancelled, whether new exam would be taken. And especially those competing for scholarships are very mindful that any student who may have had access to the leaked mathematics paper does not get an unfair advantage over someone who was very honest and did not have a look at any of the leaked papers. So, I would be grateful if the hon. Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education could at least make a statement to the Press or reassure all these parents as to what will happen with regard to the examination in pure Maths.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Local Government and Disaster Risk Management (Dr. A. Husnoo):** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will pass on the message to the Minister concerned.