

## **VIEUX GRAND PORT – NAVAL BATTLE – COMMEMORATION (30/06/09)**

**(No. B/683) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands)** asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether, in regard to Vieux Grand Port, he will state if Government has engaged into discussions with interested parties, with a view to commemorating the naval battle that took place thereat and, if so, the outcome thereof.

**Dr. Bunwaree:** Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, in 2006, Government had set up a Ministerial Committee under the Chairmanship of the Vice-Prime Minister, Ministry of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications to look into the preparations of the commemoration of the bicentenary of the Naval Battle of Grand Port in 2010. I was a Member of the Ministerial Committee and, subsequently, I chaired an Organising Committee to work out the detailed proposals for activities to be organised for the occasion.

Regarding the question of discussions with interested parties, yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have had wide consultations with a good number of stakeholders, both local and foreign, including the French Government, the St. Malo authorities and many Embassies in Mauritius to enlist their participation for the commemoration of the bicentenary of the Naval Battle of Grand Port in 2010. The list of stakeholders is too exhaustive to mention them by name. Furthermore, I have personally invited suggestions from the public at large through the press. I have received a number of proposals and many of them have been taken on board to make this historic event a resounding success.

A website in respect of this event will be launched shortly. The recommendations of the Organising Committee which had been approved by the Ministerial Committee were agreed by Government on 05 June 2009 and were made public on the same day. May I inform the House that the activities will be scheduled over a few months in 2010, and will coincide with the FIFA Soccer Cup to be held in South Africa, during which period we believe a number of extra tourists are expected to visit Mauritius. We would also wish the commemoration to bring us extra tourism mileage, especially at this difficult juncture.

Different sub-committees are working on individual activities and a Steering Committee under my chairmanship will steer the whole project. I welcome suggestions from the hon. Member, as well as other Members of the House who could be interested in this national project of importance.

**Mrs Martin:** I thank the Minister for his answer. I would certainly give him suggestions with regard to that. But, I wanted to ask him whether the Steering Committee which he has mentioned will take that into account and would be an umbrella

organization to help all the other sub-committees? Has it already been put in place, if yes, may we know how it is going to proceed?

**Dr. Bunwaree:** We are in the process of putting it in place. In fact, the core group has already been set up. And, of course, as and when if we have to enlarge, we will.

**Mr Bérenger:** This is going to be an event of historical dimension. Have there been any changes in the Organisation Committee? Can we know as at now who is the chairperson and the members?

**Dr. Bunwaree:** The Organising Committee was set up by the Ministerial Committee. In fact, I am chairing the Organising Committee. Insofar as members are concerned, I will have to look into that and then I can submit the names later on the Table of the Assembly. But, I am chairing it myself.

**Mr Dowarkasing:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the same breath, would the hon. Minister consider the fact of upgrading the historical spots in Ferney, which is the neighbouring village specially regarding the first landing station of the Dutch and where the first sugar cane were grown?

**Dr. Bunwaree:** In fact, a survey has already been carried out and all the locations have already been identified and with the help of the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism there is a programme of upgrading of many of these sites going on.

**Mr Rucktooa:** The hon. Minister just said that we have an exhaustive list of parties? Is the French Government participating to the maximum?

**Dr. Bunwaree:** Yes, even financially.

**Mr Rucktooa:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the battle there was a winner and a loser.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Put the question, hon. Member!

**Mr Rucktooa:** The question is: In commemorating this Naval Battle, will there be any problem with our relationship with the French Government?

**Dr. Bunwaree:** In order not to allow confusion to reign in the Assembly, I have to remind the hon. Members that the Naval Battle of Grand Port was the one and only battle which was won by the French in the Napoleon era and Mauritius was taken over a few months later by the British in another attempt. So, there is no problem with the French Government. In fact, they are most happy that we are organising it here and they are even participating financially.

**Mr Bérenger:** May I take that point? That was a very special naval battle. I know of no other naval battle throughout the world where guns were firing on British ships from the shore and the hills. So, there was a winner and a loser, *mais bien serré le course là*. So, I hear a lot of bias in favour of the French. Granted they won that and it is on *l'Arc de Triomphe* more or less the only naval battle. But I think we should take on board our UK friends also, I do not think we should be that biased in favour of France and of the French authorities.

**Dr. Bunwaree:** I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for putting this question. In fact, I mentioned in my reply that many embassies - I did not say the French embassy only - have been contacted and are still involved in the project and UK is one of them. So, let me give the names of the embassies, that is, the countries that are going to be involved because over and above the battle, we are extending it to all people who came to Mauritius in those days. So, we have France, of course, United Kingdom, India, China, Australia, Mozambique, Pakistan, South Africa, Senegal, Seychelles, Madagascar, Egypt, Oman and the Netherlands.

**Mr Bhagwan:** Can I know from the hon. Minister who is the coordinator at the level of Government or the Ministry for this project? Mauritius will be organising that event. I think the image of the country should be preserved. If you'll have somebody with his image especially of lots of things of the past, so, we'll appeal to the Minister to have the right person with a clean image.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is quite clear hon. Bhagwan.

**Dr. Bunwaree:** Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I mentioned in my reply that a website is going to be launched shortly where all the information will be obtained, but the coordinating person is the Director of the Culture Division of my Ministry.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Last question hon. Martin.

**Mrs Martin:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has any idea of the cost of this commemoration and who is going to bear the cost as well?

**Dr. Bunwaree:** Well, the cost is being worked out. In fact, it will cost some money but there will be some way. Tickets will be sold to tourists when they are going to visit the places because we are going to have exhibitions. We are going to have, in the programmes, the reconstruction of an old town of Grand Port, an old town of St Malo. So, they will have to come and visit; there will be film shows also. So, there will be some revenues also. I do not think we are going to have problems on that aspect.