

## **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!