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PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTION

ASIAN LANGUAGES – EXTENSION SCHOOLS –

EXAMINATIONS

Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka): Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move the motion standing in my name on the Order Paper, namely –

"This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should conduct all examinations concerning asian languages taught in extension schools."

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to congratulate all the pioneers, the architects who, in one way or other, have contributed towards the promotion, propagation and preservation of ancestral languages in Mauritius.

I should also like, in the first instance, to describe the situation as it was and has evolved over time. We all know that this was done at a time when there were no proper facilities and infrastructure, that is, the teaching and learning of the Asian languages were dispensed in Baitkas, Madrassahs, Mandirums, Kovils and so many other similar places and, above all, Mr Speaker, Sir, on a voluntary basis in the afternoon, mainly on Saturdays and Sundays.

All these pioneers, Mr Speaker, Sir, were driven not for their personal or selfish aims, still less for remuneration. In fact, their sole motivation was a high sense of duty, of commitment, of responsibility towards the reinforcement and preservation of our ancestral languages and cultures.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should like to pay tribute to all those stalwarts who had militated strongly without fear or favour in the advancement of the Asian languages and culture. Mr Speaker, Sir, in fact, I bow down to that, at the same time, we cannot forget the laudable effort and devotion of the Arya Sabha, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, the Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Urdu and Chinese organisations; all these institutions which, in their own right, have marked the history of the country and left indelible imprints in the emancipation of our ancestral languages, values and cultures.

Today, when I rise to present this motion to the House, it takes me down memory lane, some 65 years of the History of Mauritius. Mr Speaker, Sir, here, I have in mind, the Father of the Nation, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. Why I am referring to him, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is simply because he is the one to have shaped the future of the Asian languages in this country and to have given these languages the status that they deserve and their *lettre de noblesse*. His love for his unflinching support and commitment to the promotion, propagation and preservation of our ancestral languages, values and cultures cannot be erased. I would fall in my duty if I do not recognise, in this august Assembly, what he has done for the Asian languages. On 29 December 1942, during the sixth meeting of the Select Committee appointed to study the Ward Report on Education, as a Member of that Committee, this is what Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam stated and I quote –

"The Indian community of this island has a strong attachment for its languages. We may spend all our life learning other languages and imbibing other cultures, but until we know what is ours, we will never be able to become a man in the true sense of the word, nor we will be able to understand and cherish our culture. The study of other languages than our own, however excellent and useful in itself, must occupy a secondary place in our heart, if we are to preserve our identity and make a special contribution to the sum total of the happiness and welfare of the people. The Indians of this island must be taught their languages and that properly and effectively, because that is the only way in which they can preserve their culture and also, because they have not the least intention of being denationalised in the process of time."

There is so much wisdom in this statement, Mr Speaker, Sir. I am sure Members of this House will not only appreciate, but will be inspired by these words of wisdom. Mr Speaker, Sir, in the same breath, it would also be relevant to refer to what late Pierre de Sornay said, because of his faith and belief in languages and cultures, and I quote –

"La culture ne s'acquiert que par sa propre langue. Le meilleur trésor d'un peuple se trouve dans sa langue, seuls peuvent et savent les utiliser, ceux qui arrivent à leur plein épanouissement intellectuel par l'emploi de leur langue maternelle."

Again, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me quote from the statement of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam during the inaugural address of the Second World Hindi Convention held in Mauritius on 29 August 1976 at the MGI. I quote –

"It is our belief that if the languages of Mauritius are preserved, it will help preserve the essential cultural values of our different communities. Through the synthesis of these various cultures alone will be created a united culture of Mauritius in which all can cooperate."

Mr Speaker, Sir, nobody can deny that Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had laid the foundation of our ancestral languages. Indeed, he will remain as one of the architects of the Asian languages in this country. If, today, Asian languages are taught in our schools, be they at primary level, secondary level or tertiary level and, even in the extension schools, it is thanks to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, Father of the Nation. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam was also the first one to give allowances to teachers teaching in the extension classes. Is it a coincidence that the current Prime Minister has taken that process one step further? That was during his first mandate, Mr Speaker, Sir, as part of his vision for the development of Asian languages, values and cultures. The hon. Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam had these allowances increased from Rs300 to Rs2,000, that is, those who were holders of School Certificate and teaching got an allowance of Rs1,000, HSC holders: Rs1,500 and degree holders: Rs2,000 and this has stayed there since 1998 and it requires an increase. The same thing applies for the ratio, 1 to 25...

Mr Speaker: I think I will have to remind the hon. Member that we are talking about the examinations.

Mr Dayal: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am just making the basis of my point. Today when we look at the statistics, we see that there are over 52,474 students being trained and educated in the Asian languages. A few examples, Mr Speaker, Sir: Hindi: 28,854 students, Urdu: 16,481, Tamil: 4,225, Telugu: 945, Marathi: 1,270 and Mandarin: 699. Likewise we have some 450 Hindi schools - I mean extension schools. 247 Urdu Schools, 60 Tamil schools, 25 Telugu schools, 24 Marathi schools and 6 Mandarin teaching schools. Over and above all this, Government has obligated a sum of around Rs52 m. annually to assist these schools in the advancement of the ancestral languages. Rs52 m is quite a substantive amount of money! This is why in presenting this motion to this House, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to emphasise the need for harmonising the manner in which examinations for the Asian languages are conducted, for the award of certificates, diplomas, but also for more judicious use of public funds.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am the first one to admit in this House and even outside that the extension schools as well as those institutions that are engaged in the provision of teaching and training in Asian languages have done an excellent job, be it in imparting knowledge and education or conducting examinations. I say 'hat off' to all these institutions, to all these organisations. The level of training has always been highly valued, but it would also be a good thing to add value to the certificate and diploma being awarded by these same institutions, hence the motion we are debating in this House.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when I tabled this motion, I had received proposals and comments from many stakeholders, particularly the Mauritius Andhra Maha Sabha, the Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha among others. I made it a point to discuss further with them. I listened to them and I must say that I have not remained insensitive to their proposals. The comments and proposals are fair and have prompted me to make a small amendment to the original motion I tabled. With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move the following words to be added to my original motion so that the revised motion will read thus—

'This House is of the opinion that the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning asian languages taught in extension schools'.

As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, this amendment will go a long way in doing justice to all these institutions that played such a crucial role in upholding and preserving our ancestral languages.

I believe, Mr Speaker, Sir, that some of these organisations have acquired sufficient knowledge and experience that can be fully tapped by the MES. Such collaboration with the MES is vital, not only for the future of Asian languages, but also for the long term survival of the institutions themselves. We all know that the MES is a professional examining body. It is equipped with a plethora of highly qualified staff with long experience and expertise in the organisation and conduct of examination. I have no doubt that all of us, including the stakeholders will stand to benefit from the expertise of the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate. In terms of harmonisation of syllabuses, level of teaching, uniformity of examinations, but importantly the recognition of the certificates and diplomas not only locally, but also at international levels. Beyond the question of recognition, Mr Speaker, Sir, such certificates and diplomas will earn respectability and acceptability. I should inform the House that I have raised all these issues with the representatives of the organisation that I mentioned earlier. They are very enthusiastic and supportive. During my meetings with the stakeholders, it also emerged that very often, students want to take an asian language as a main subject at the Higher School Certificate level, find a lot of difficulties in choosing the right combination of subjects. Consequently, because of the love for the language, they are compelled to turn towards the extension schools. I am personally alive to this situation in my capacity as an education officer first and secondly as a Manager of an extension school.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no doubt that this motion, if approved, will address that situation because these certificates will henceforth be recognised and the same certificates will open up new avenues for the student to pursue higher studies in recognised universities and institutions as well as job opportunities.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in presenting this motion, I was also made aware that there is a serious problem of assessing the equivalence of asian language certificates and diplomas. The point I am making here is that in future this problem of equivalence will no longer arise given that the syllabus would have been harmonised, the examination for all the asian languages would be organised and conducted in collaboration with the existing institutions.

Before I resume my seat, Mr Speaker, Sir, allow me to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to the representatives of the organisation who have provided valuable inputs in presenting the motion. Mr Speaker, Sir, I now wish to commend this motion to the House.

Dr. David rose and seconded.

Mr Speaker: Now that there is an amendment to the motion, the debate goes on the amendment - not on the original motion - and then we will decide.

(3.50 p.m.)

Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am glad to note that the mover of the motion has decided to bring this amendment because it would seem to be more plausible for us, Members of Parliament, to start with, to congratulate, as the hon. Member has just done, all the institutions which have till today ensured the teaching of Asian languages – Hindi, including all the other Asian languages, Tamil, Marathi, Telegu and even Urdu in the informal education sector - be done and have ensured that for years examinations are carried out in a proper manner.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I was a bit surprised to hear from certain Members of the Arya Sabha and the Hindi Pracharini Sabha that they were not consulted earlier, before the motion was moved. Now when I heard that the Member has brought this amendment, I realise that this consultation must have taken place now.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we consider the work that has been done for years and when we consider the type of examination that has been carried out, we realise that these people have been working in a very professional manner. Since the 1950s the Hindi Pracharini Sabha had been carrying out examinations which were prepared and corrected by the Hindi Sahyta Sammelan Prayaag of Allahabad University and that the level has never been challenged. In Mauritius, we have a National Equivalence Council which normally deals with equivalence matters and no such problem has really arisen till today. We must not forget that, apart from the teaching of Asian languages in schools and colleges, we also have Hindi and other Asian languages being taught in the baitkas, in the small *sociétés* as we call them in different villages and towns. I am told that there are about 200 different baitkas around the island which are affiliated to the Arya Sabha of which the hon. Member, himself, is an executive member, if I am not mistaken. What I find a bit strange is that we are coming to state today that this examination has to be conducted by another body. I don't know whether the other institutions like the Urdu Institute and the Urdu Speaking Union have been consulted or not, but then I wonder whether we should try to change the way these examinations are conducted because till now I have not heard anyone complaining about it. What is also a very important feature that we have to

consider is the cost of these examinations. We know that the number of students who opt for studying these languages in the informal sector is very small and that the cost of holding examinations by the MES might be very, very high; so high as to be prohibitive. Today we know that parents have to deal with a lot of expenses and it might deter people from sending their children to Hindu schools if you start asking them or impose upon them examinations that are conducted through the MES. I am not saying that the MES does not have name, that the MES cannot conduct exams but I am trying to talk about the practicability of this motion. Mr Speaker, Sir, I have tried to contact a few members of the MES and I have talked to some other people who are responsible for the conduct of the exams. They are telling me that at the MES they are already overloaded with a large amount of work and it might not prove to be that easy for them to set up papers. We know that you will need not only paper setters, but also supervisors, moderators, and to ensure the confidentiality of the whole process. I am sure the Minister of Education will agree that it is not easy to have supervisors and invigilators and the whole cost of conducting the exams through the MES might be extremely high. Will that help to further the cause of these languages in the island? We know that for years, people have been learning and teaching these

languages without hoping for any remuneration for it. It has been done because they care and they are convinced that they need to pass on this treasure, that is, our language and our heritage to our children. By asking the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate to conduct these exams, although in collaboration with these institutions, I fear that this might make the case more difficult for the furtherance of these languages in our island.

Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that Government before and even today has always acted in favour of the teaching of languages. It has started a long, long time back. The hon. Member, himself, talked about the contribution of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam but, after that also, successive Governments have shown lots of concern for the teaching of languages. I must say it has culminated very recently in the acceptance of placing Asian languages at par with other subjects for CPE exams. Yesterday we received the CPE results and we know that having an A⁺ in Hindi, Urdu or Tamil is equal to having an A⁺ in Mathematics, Science or any other subject being taken at CPE level.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I do agree that there is a need to uniformise, but then where I beg to differ from the hon. Member is to say that it will create more confidence in these exams because I do know that the Hindi Pracharini Sabha

carries out examinations as from Parichay, Prathama, Madhyama and Uttama, of the Hindi Sahyta Sammelan Prayaag which are exams accepted worldwide. With these qualifications only, people have been recruited as educators and have received places at the University to carry out their Master's and all. Stating that this will give a better status to the certificate, I do not really think that this question arises, Mr Speaker, Sir. But then I need to mention here that apart from these important examinations being carried out, the Arya Sabha Mauritius carries out examinations for standards I, II, III, IV, V and these examinations are all conducted in the same way in all the schools where Hindi is being taught. They are not different examinations for different schools. Once again, I would think that if there is a system which is performing, obviously we do have to support them and try to come up with other ways to scaffold so that they might reach their objectives more easily. It is a bit our role as Members of the Parliament to give a helping hand whenever it is needed. But I do feel, Mr Speaker, Sir, that these people are doing a fantastic job and that we should, as far as non Government organisations are concerned, try as far as possible encourage them to carry out their work in the right direction, the way they are doing instead of trying to take over the work that is already being done.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(4.00 p.m)

The Minister of Local Government, Rodrigues & Outer Islands (Dr. J. B. David): M le président, je voudrais ajouter ma voix à celles qui se sont déjà exprimées pour dire deux ou trois choses. Premièrement, tout le monde reconnaît, des deux côtés de la Chambre, la contribution de tous ceux qui, à un certain moment, ont, contre vents et marées, étaient des précurseurs et ont permis aux langues ancestrales, aux langues orientales, d'être transmises de génération en génération et cela, à un moment, très difficile de notre histoire.

Permettez-moi, M le président, quelques minutes de jeter les bases historiques avant de venir à la question d'examen - le MES ou non.

Je suis certain que la majorité des parlementaires, sinon tous, et je le souhaite, ont lu le roman historique « *Sea of Poppies* » qui nous permet de revoir les travailleurs engagés, dès le

premier jour, sortir de l'Inde pour atterrir sur les côtes mauriciennes. Et c'était à une époque excessivement difficile et, croyez moi, M le président, ces travailleurs engagés qui sont venus de l'Inde, qu'on méprisait, dédaignait comme des coolies, n'avaient que leur souffrance, mais ils avaient aussi une puissance intérieure incomparable. Expliquez comment dans des moments difficiles de notre histoire, ces travailleurs engagés ont pu transmettre les coutumes, la religion, les langues, les chants, les prières ! C'était vraiment un défi presque ! Ils ont su préserver l'essentiel de leur humanité, l'essentiel de leur âme et, en quelques minutes, je voudrais faire un parallèle, M le président, tout simplement pour dire que d'autres venus, par exemple, de l'Afrique n'ont jamais eu cette possibilité. Ils ont été broyés par le système et, en quelques secondes, permettez moi de dresser le parallèle et de voir comment nous avons perdu l'africanité à Maurice. Aucun nom africain. Tous les noms ont été européens ! Je m'appelle David et si je remonte à mes ancêtres, je ne connaîtrais pas certains noms. Je ne connaîtrais pas les noms des ancêtres. Ils ont été broyés et disparus complètement. Ceux qui viennent de l'Afrique ont perdu leur totem. Ils ont perdu leur identité. Comment ne connaissons-nous pas aujourd'hui le Swahili ou les langues du Sénégal, le Wolof ? On ne connaît pas tout cela. Et pourquoi ? De l'Afrique on a que le déhanchement du tam tam, de notre séga et de la ravanne, qui nous font revivre quelque peu la nostalgie africaine. Alors quand on établit ce parallélisme, on comprend ce qui a été la force, la puissance, l'engagement, si je peux me permettre ce jeu de mot, des travailleurs engagés pour transmettre la culture, la langue.

Les racines sont donc très importantes et, probablement, faudrait-il, avant de parler du MES, voir l'enceinte des écoles, les baitkas et les Madrassas où les langues et la culture orientales continuent à être transmises de génération et génération et ce sont des enseignants bénévoles. Qu'est-ce qu'ils avaient ces enseignants dans les baitkas et dans les madrassas ? Ils n'avaient que l'amour de la culture. Ils n'avaient aucune formation universitaire, mais ils transmettaient. Si j'entends encore des enfants et ceux de notre génération parler l'hindi, le tamili, le telugu, le marathi, l'urdu, toutes les langues orientales, c'est grâce à ceux qui, malgré les difficultés, ont su transmettre. Ils ont sacrifié leur temps, leur énergie pour que soit enseigné les langues orientales. Et à chaque fois que je vais dans les fêtes et que j'ai l'occasion de prendre la parole dans les fêtes pour les associations socioculturelles, je lance toujours l'appel aux aînées, pour leur dire s'il y a des enfants dans la salle, ces enfants ont besoin de vous parce que si vous ne transmettez pas, ne serait-ce que de façon informelle à la maison, le temps viendra ou on aura oublié ou on aura ignoré la culture.

Voilà pourquoi je crois qu'on devrait à un moment où l'on parle du MES pour venir *collaborate with existing recognised institutions*, c'est bon d'entrer dans les racines de l'histoire et c'est bon aussi de dire que la question des langues orientales dans le cursus mauricien a été un combat, M le président.

Faut-il remonter à Manilal Doctor pour voir comment ce combat à été acharné et rude ! Manilal Doctor a voulu, après l'arrivée de Gandhi, ouvrir des écoles ça et là. On n'a pas voulu inclure les langues orientales dans le cursus scolaire de l'époque. Revoyez les rapports Ward et d'autres rapports sur l'éducation pour voir comment cela a du être un combat.

Alors, aujourd'hui, qu'est-ce qu'on réclame ? On réclame que le MES vienne collaborer avec les *recognised institutions*. J'ai écouté le point de vue de l'honorable membre de l'Opposition. Il y a deux aspects. Le premier : est-ce qu'on devrait prendre en considération l'aspect argent ? Est-ce que cela devrait nous décourager pour aller de l'avant ? Je me souviens également quand l'éducation devait être gratuite à Maurice en 1977, c'était les mêmes arguments : qu'on n'avait pas d'argent, qu'on n'avait pas suffisamment de moyens financiers. Et, pourtant, on ne peut pas établir une équation éducation et argent.

Cela s'est fait avec les difficultés qu'on connaît, mais aussi avec les succès qu'on connaît. Alors je ne crois pas que la question d'argent ou de personnel devrait être un facteur pour empêcher cela.

Deuxièmement, on devrait – et cela a été le point de vue des deux côtés de la Chambre – permettre à ces *existing institutions* de respirer demain, de ne pas subir le poids et la contrainte du MES et de tout un système. Cela est aussi vrai. Voilà pourquoi des deux côtés de la Chambre on a suffisamment honoré ceux qui, à un certain moment, ont donné leur temps, leur argent pour que, finalement, les langues orientales puissent avoir leur statut à Maurice.

Mais, aujourd'hui, M le président, il n'y a pas que les *baikas*, que les *madrassas* et que quelques institutions seulement. Bien sûr, on devrait saluer la collaboration du Hindi Pracharini Sabha, du Arya Sabha, du Marathi Mandali Federation, du Mauritius Urdu Institute, et d'autres institutions de ce genre là. Parlez de Arabad University, c'est déjà une très bonne référence, mais, croyez moi pour qu'on ait aujourd'hui les langues orientales à l'université et au MGI, donnant même des diplômes universitaires, cela n'a pas été facile. Il y a tout un combat derrière et ce que réclame, mon ami, l'honorable Dayal, c'est précisément pour encadrer de façon officielle, avec beaucoup plus de statut, pour que ces écoles puissent continuer à transmettre leur enseignement. Probablement ces écoles pourraient aller encore plus loin. Des enfants qui vont dans ces écoles pour apprendre les langues orientales, il y a deux filières - la filière informelle et cela les après-midi, les samedis, les dimanches matin, personne n'empêche à qui que ce soit d'y aller et de recevoir ces instructions. Mais il y aura aussi la filière formelle - les deux peuvent coexister - avec le soutien officiel du MES, parce qu'aujourd'hui, si dans

certaines écoles, ils ont réussi à trouver un consensus concernant le programme d'études, il y a beaucoup de manuels scolaires écrits pour toutes les langues orientales, mais on pourrait mettre à profit d'autres institutions, pas seulement le MES ou le MGI.

Et si l'honorable Suren Dayal demande à ce que le MES soit mis à profit, je le comprends, c'est pour plusieurs raisons. Permettez que j'en mentionne certaines. Premièrement, pour que l'étude de ces langues ait finalement un *recognition at the end of the year*, qu'ils ont maintenant, mais qu'ils doivent avoir avec un institut national beaucoup plus équipé, beaucoup plus performant et qui a une référence ; la référence c'est le MES. Le MES ne fait pas seulement des examens au niveau local, mais des examens au niveau international. Le MES a déjà fait ses preuves et je crois que pour, précisément, relier tout ce qui se fait au niveau local avec le niveau international, pour donner ce statut international, il faut absolument qu'il y ait une institution de liaison et le MES peut très bien jouer ce rôle de liaison. Mais personne n'empêche aux autres d'entrer dans une filière informelle et je ne crois pas que l'honorable Suren Dayal serait contre l'idée que dans les filières informelles, les samedis après-midis ou les autres après-midis, les élèves soient là écoutant les récits et être formés par des maîtres qui, eux-mêmes, sont formés pour le faire. Et je crois que les deux systèmes peuvent coexister.

Mais je crois qu'on devrait aller encore plus loin. Et avant d'aller plus loin, permettez-moi que je fasse une remarque, M. le président. Pour qu'on formalise ce lien entre les *existing institutions*, comme dit l'honorable Dayal, et le MES, il faudrait qu'il y ait un protocole d'accord, un *Memorandum of Understanding*, que ceux qui offrent ces examens en ce moment, qu'il y ait une requête formelle des deux côtés, de ces *existing institutions* et du MES, pour qu'on puisse arriver à trouver un programme qui pourrait satisfaire l'ensemble des étudiants parce que quand on parle du MES, on parlera des examens nationaux, on ne parlera pas des examens de différentes organisations. Il faudrait qu'il y ait l'acceptation d'un programme commun. Alors, on pourrait, à la rigueur, déterminer les différentes étapes.

On n'est pas contre ! Permettez-moi que j'aille encore plus loin que les langues, M. le président. L'honorable Suren Dayal disait tout à l'heure que la langue c'est l'expression même de la culture, l'expression même de l'identité.

Mr Speaker: Can I interrupt the hon. Minister? I think the debate now is specifically on the fact that whether the MES should collaborate with other institutions recognised to carry out these examinations. Once we dispose of this element, then the debate will come back to the motion, if the amendment is accepted.

Dr. David: Voilà pourquoi je disais, M. le président, que le MES doit certainement collaborer pour donner une dimension d'une stature internationale à ce qui est enseigné dans *these existing institutions*. Je pense sincèrement qu'on devrait le faire. On disait - *I am putting two in one* - simplement pour dire qu'il y aura toujours cette formation informelle, que là où le MES ne devrait peut-être pas apporter sa collaboration, cela existera toujours. Moi, je veux

apprendre une langue, pas seulement pour passer un examen, je veux tout simplement apprendre cette langue pour sa beauté, pour m'épanouir, pour essayer de communiquer ; moi, j'aurais personnellement souhaité apprendre une langue orientale. Je crois que c'est une faiblesse dans ma formation. J'aurais souhaité apprendre une langue orientale. Il n'est jamais trop tard. Si, demain, je prenais la décision de le faire, je ne passerais pas par le MES pour prendre part à un examen. Mais je crois que au-delà de cet aspect informel, on doit certainement trouver la collaboration avec le MES.

Ce que je voudrais, c'est que ces différentes institutions arrivent, en accord avec le MES, à déterminer un programme acceptable et, probablement, on devrait dépasser ces langues – j'étais à cela au moment où vous m'aviez arrêté, M. le président - qui sont l'expression d'une culture. Pourquoi ne pas enseigner en même temps sa littérature et sa philosophie?

En collaboration avec le MES, on devrait aller encore plus loin, voir dans la langue la possibilité de découvrir autre chose. En ce moment, je suis en train – bien sûr je ne lis pas dans la langue originale – de relire Gitanjali de Tagore et je suis en train de travailler une traduction philosophique de Gitanjali. Mais, croyez-moi, j'aurais voulu lire cela dans la langue d'origine. Impossible ! Et ce n'est pas le MES qui demain me donnera cette possibilité. Ce qui me donnera cette possibilité, c'est ma propre curiosité, mon propre goût. Voilà pourquoi je disais que nous avons deux voies possibles : oui, à la collaboration avec le MES, important, mais pas nécessairement avec le MES, si on veut tout simplement avoir accès à la langue.

Et je terminerais, M. le président, pour dire ceci, c'est que ces *extension schools* ont une histoire. Très souvent, on ne connaît pas l'histoire de ces *extension schools*. Il faut plonger dans le passé et comprendre ce qui a été l'effort des uns et des autres. Aujourd'hui, probablement, à une époque où il n'y a plus de culture dominante, à l'époque où ces écoles commençaient à naître, il y avait une culture dominante qui pesait. Aujourd'hui, on devrait pouvoir avoir accès à ces documents d'archives, à ces anciens qui ont vu ou qui ont su comment ces écoles ont commencé et nous donner la possibilité de mieux les connaître pour mieux les apprécier.

Je terminerai en félicitant mon ami et collègue, l'honorable Suren Dayal, et en disant qu'on devrait réfléchir sur les modalités maintenant. Oui, à une collaboration avec le MES, quelque soit les difficultés d'argent ou de personnel, on trouvera toujours les moyens ; oui, également, pour l'épanouissement des langues et, oui, pour ceux qui ne veulent pas prendre part aux examens.

Merci M. le président.

(4.18 p.m.)

Mr M. Peetumber (First Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac): Mr Speaker, Sir, the languages that people speak, the religions that they practise, the cultural values that

they uphold, the songs that they sing, the plays that they enact, the dress that they wear, the traditions that they uphold, they indulge in, all these contribute in forging the identity of a group of people of a community and language, I understand, being the most important of them all because language is the vehicle of expression.

Language can help the propagation of cultural, religious, social and human values and, therefore, all the organisations, all the institutions that have been fighting against all odds over the years, having had to face all kinds of difficulties to keep alive their values, their cultures, their languages, must no doubt be congratulated.

I'll seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to all these socio-cultural organisations, lingual groups namely the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Mauritius Sanathan Dharma Temple Federation, the Mauritius Arya Sabha, the National Urdu Institute, the Andhra Maha Sabha, the Andhra Parishad, the Chinese Cultural Centre, the Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation, the Tamil Temple Federation, all these have spared no efforts to promote the different languages, which we call Asian languages or ancestral languages and which contribute in building up or forging the identity of the different groups of people.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the motion is very clear that this House is of opinion that the MES should collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools. Of course, the question is not sidelining these organisations. We are not talking about eliminating all these organisations, which have been, for decades, for years on end, promoting these languages, against all odds, all difficulties, as I said. But, the question is that the MES, which has acquired an expertise, a lot of experience, a know-how, which has got the skills and has been doing the job excellently well, I must say, should collaborate with these organisations, so that the level can be improved, enhanced, so that we bring excellence in the organisation of the examinations. We can take several examples in various sectors of education itself, where, previously, years back, everything was organised in a very informal manner, where quality, excellence was not there, and with the passage of time, Government realised that something had to be done to improve the level, to boost up the standard, and to bring about this excellence. Mr Speaker, Sir, in Mauritius, we have no mineral resources, no petroleum products, no gold, no silver, no nickel. Our only resource is our people, and if we aspire to make of Mauritius an intelligent island, a knowledge hub, if we nourish the ambition of becoming the Tiger of the Indian Ocean by emulating countries like Singapore, we must necessarily invest in our people, in their education, in their formation and training, in increasing their knowledge, their know-how, their skills and expertise, the educational infrastructure, equipment, technology, and pedagogical backup.

The desire to make of Mauritius a knowledge hub is, of course, not a recent phenomenon, Mr Speaker, Sir. Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam had been striving to realise this dream of ours since the 60s, by the setting up of the University of Mauritius, to start with. I know that he was censured when he invested massively in the University of Mauritius, and for many other projects that he believed in, invested in, because people thought he was just

lavishing money, he was just wasting public funds. With hindsight, we realise that he was the visionary; he was doing the right thing, and what he did some 30, 40 years ago, are bearing fruits today; that has put us on the track of modernisation, that has improved our infrastructure in general and, more particularly, infrastructure in education. The construction of the Junior Secondary Schools throughout the island in the 70s, the advent of free education at secondary and tertiary levels in the mid 70s, the creation of the MIE, the establishment of the MES, the construction of the MGI, with the help of the Indian Government, with a view to promoting Asian languages and Indian culture.

However, as I said earlier, certain education sectors were operating in an informal manner. At that point in time, we had adopted a flexible approach, for instance, the pre-primary sector was working as an informal sector, and there was lack of proper accommodation, teaching facilities, other infrastructural facilities, no teacher training, no control and supervision. We know how it was operating, Mr Speaker, Sir. Many people, especially girls, when they had failed their CPE examinations, had nothing else to do, they would open a pre-primary school in what we used to call a godown or a small room in a house, and that became the pre-primary school, without any facilities, without any trained teachers, without the teachers themselves attaining a certain standard; that was the informal sector. I think, some months back, we debated the Early Childhood Care & Education Authority Bill, and we reached a consensus that this sector cannot be left as it was years ago, it had to be improved, the level had to be boosted up, and we had to mean business. Similarly, when we talk about the oriental languages, the Asian languages, the ancestral languages, of course, for decades on end, several organisations have been catering for the teaching of these languages, and they have devised their own methods, in collaboration with the universities in India for Urdu, Hindi, to conduct examinations. Of course, it is not the ideal situation. Despite all the goodwill, the best intentions that they have, there are certain deficiencies, certain things have to be improved and, certainly, if there is collaboration between these organisations and the MES, these shortcomings and lapses can be eliminated, the standard and level can be improved, and that will add to the excellence of those examinations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the teaching of the Asian languages in Mauritius has spanned several decades now. It has, indeed, become a long tradition. This is so, because the immigrants identified themselves completely with their languages, religions, sacred books and cultures. They came to Mauritius with their Bhagawad Gita, Hanuman Chalisa, Quran, Teeru Kural, Ramayan, and so on. Obviously, they were bent upon preserving these values and bequeathing them to posterity.

Hindi was taught in Baitkas, which were transformed into schools, where free Hindi tuition was given every evening for three to four hours. The teachers were the same people who toiled in the cane fields during day time. The Hindi Pracharini Sabha, which was registered in December 1935, the Mauritius Arya Sabha, which runs at present no less than 200 Hindi schools in the country, the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Sanathan Dharma Temple Federation have all been engaged in the teaching of Hindi and Sanskrit over the years. The Hindi Pracharini

Sabha has been organising the Parichay and Prathama Examinations since the early 60's and the Madyama and Uttama Examinations since the early 70's in collaboration with the Allahabad University, India. The exams are conducted in six centres in Mauritius, namely –

- (i) The Mauritius College in Curepipe;
- (ii) The Modern College in Central Flacq;
- (iii) The Universal College in Rivière du Rempart;

Mr Speaker: I think I will stop the hon. Member here and suspend the sitting for half an hour for tea and then the hon. Member can continue after that.

At 4.30 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 5.10 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

Mr Peetumber: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was dwelling upon the point that the Mauritius Arya Sabha was involved in the organisation of examinations. I was talking about the Hindi Pracharini Sabha conducting examinations in six centres in Mauritius, namely –

- (i) The Mauritius College in Curepipe;
- (ii) The Modern College in Central Flacq;
- (iii) The Universal College in Rivière du Rempart;
- (iv) The International College in Triolet;
- (v) The Manrakhan College in Montagne Longue, and
- (vi) The Hindi Bhawan in Montagne Longue.

250 schools are affiliated to the Hindi Pracharini Sabha and around 8,000 children take part in the yearly examinations at four different levels.

The Arya Samaj organises –

- (i) The Siddhant Pravesh, and
- (ii) The Siddhant Vachaspati in collaboration with the Kurukshetra University, India.

As regards the Urdu language, when the 'Ulemas' arrived from India, they spoke and preached in Urdu. Hence, the Muslims in Mauritius felt the need to teach Urdu to the younger generations. The mosque was not only a place of worship but also a place of learning. In all the 'Madrassas' and the 'Maktabs' provision was made for the teaching of Urdu.

The National Urdu Institute in collaboration with the Jamia Millia University, India conducts the Urdu exams at five levels, namely –

- (i) The Kablé Ibtedah;
- (ii) The Ibtedah;
- (iii) Adeeb;

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general purpose teachers. Today we know that the conditions of work are the same and people no longer look down upon those who are associated with a certain set of values, a certain set of languages. That was a time, Mr Speaker, Sir, when oriental languages were taught in a very select few schools in the country and we can see today how the situation has evolved, how the situation has changed. Hindi and the other oriental languages are being taught in the rural areas as well as the urban areas. The oriental languages are being taught in the private/secondary schools, at the State Secondary Schools and at University level as well. The oriental languages are being taught in the confessional schools and this is giving recognition to a set of values upheld by certain sections of the community. I understand that there is no culture that is superior or inferior. There is no language that has got an edge over the others and, in the same breath, I would like to say for those who believe that English and French are foreign languages, I refuse to believe that they are languages that have been imported from other countries and that they are languages of oppression. I refuse to believe that because today whether it is French - French is spoken everywhere in the schools, in the secondary schools, at the University, in the offices, in the private/public sector, at Parliament, in the shops, over the phone - English language is very much our national heritage. We are using English as an official language, we are using it in Parliament, in the schools, in various instances to express ourselves. We are using English and French in international fora to interact with the international community. When there are international conferences, when there are negotiations between Mauritius and the other countries, these are the two languages that we utilise. Over the years, English and French have become part and parcel of our own linguistic culture. They are part of the Mauritian culture and heritage now. There is no superior or inferior language. These are all values that are cherished by different sections of the community and as such, they must be given an equal footing. They must be placed at par, on a level playing field as the Vice-Prime Minister said.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the MES is the official examining body which organises, conducts, invigilates, supervises examinations in Mauritius and I had a word with the Deputy Director of the MES over this issue and I also contacted the heads of the various organisations which are organising examinations in various languages. There is one apprehension on the part of these social, socio-cultural, lingual organisations, when we are coming with this project, there is the fear, the apprehension that they would get totally eliminated and the whole process will be taken over by the MES and they will have no role to play at all. I do not think that the motion of the hon. Member goes along this line. He proposes that there should be some kind of understanding and collaboration because the MES has attained a certain standard, it has got its expertise, its skills, it has been organising examinations for decades now, it has attained an excellence, I must say. It is good that when we are talking about Mauritius as a Centre of Excellence, about world class education, about excellence in every field that we embark on. We are talking about Mauritius as the Tiger of the Indian Ocean in the like of Singapore, Hong Kong. So, all our systems have to improve, all the structures that we have put in place must be ameliorated and if we continue to do business as usual, continue to organise examinations in the manner it was done some 20 years ago. Of course, I do not think we are not making any

headway, we are not moving forward, we are not making any progress. It is absolutely important that this collaboration takes place, that there are meetings that take place between representatives of the various organisations and the MES so that they reach a consensus, that when we are proposing this, we are not trying to eliminate the Hindi Pracharini Sabha, Andhra Maha Sabha or any other organisation for that matter. What we are suggesting is that the collaboration must be there, this understanding must be there, these organisations must be able to benefit from the expertise, the know-how, the skills, the experience that the MES has acquired over the years. This is our suggestion. For the kind information of the hon. Members, Mr Speaker, Sir, the MES conducts over 100 examinations in a year. Apart from the CPE examinations, the SC, the HSC examinations, it also organises the ACCA examinations, the City & Guilds examinations, the Pitman examinations, the Chartered Secretaries examinations amongst many others. As I gave you the example earlier, about the pre-primary schools, how they were operating in the past, all in a disorganised, haphazard manner where the level itself was very low because there was no authority to regulate the whole business. As I said, especially girls who had failed their CPE examinations, finding no other options, would open a pre-primary school and start running classes. Where was this done, Mr Speaker, Sir? In very small rooms, in the godowns, ill-ventilated rooms without any infrastructural facilities. The teachers themselves were not qualified, they did not have the competencies. There was no pedagogical backup. Today we have got the Ministry of Education which imposes a certain standard with all kinds of facilities, all kinds of equipment so that when the children arrive there they can develop and groom themselves, they can learn in view of the various facilities that are available in the school environment. Similarly, what was done say twenty-five years ago? Of course, they have been doing it and we have congratulated them all for the good work they have been doing, for the destigmatisation of the set of values including the languages. They have got a big contribution in this. Today, Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't think there is anyone who is ashamed of speaking either Bhojpuri, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi or any other oriental or Asian languages anywhere in Mauritius. There has been this recognition of the Asian languages; Aapravasi Ghat has become one World Heritage Site which we are all proud of. This stigma has altogether been removed. This complex has been removed altogether. Somebody is speaking English! Fair and fine! Somebody else is speaking French, there is no harm, there is no problem, but for a third person who is speaking either Bhojpuri or Hindi, he also does not develop any complex, he does not have any problem with that and he does not feel inferior at all in the presence of others who were using other languages. I remember once when I went to Rose Hill, I was speaking Bhojpuri, my friend stopped me and he told me that I had got no right to speak Bhojpuri in Rose Hill. This was not done. I was his junior so I had to abide. This was the condition at the time. This was the type of complex that prevailed in the country. All this has changed today. I understand that if you know English and French, it is very good but if you know English, French and an oriental language, this is a plus. The acquisition of an additional language is always a plus because the language brings along with it a set of values, an additional knowledge. You come to learn more things about life, about the different conditions of life through the language. You can learn about the cultural values of a particular nation, of particular people, of a particular community through the language. If you can master an additional language or if you can master two additional

languages, certainly you have got an edge over the others who can master only one or two languages. It becomes, as my hon. friend said, an advantage. As I said earlier, we cannot afford to remain static. The world is changing and moving ahead. People are moving ahead and if we think that we are staying static, we are in the same position, in fact, we are not. We are overtaken by the rest of the people, in

fact, we are regressing.

It is a system that played its role; that was good for a certain epoch, some fifteen or twenty years ago, with changes, with innovations, with all the revolution taking place in all the fields of life, we have got to change, we have got to innovate, we have got to improve, we have got to perfect the system. I understand that the MES is the right body with all the experience, all the expertise and know-how that it possesses for having organised, as I said, hundreds of examinations each year to be able to help those organisations which are, at present, organising examinations in these different languages.

For the country's credibility, Mr Speaker, Sir, and to maintain this quest for excellence in education, it is important that the examination system be characterised by a certain rigour, by a certain stringency and professionalism. That is why I am in favour of a joint collaboration between the MES and the socio-cultural organisations, which are engaged in the organisation of examinations in different languages at different levels. If you would allow me Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll just drive home a point. I said I had a word with the Deputy Director of the MES and, of course, they have got certain preconditions that they are going to impose so that they maintain the standard and credibility of the MES. They say that they have to be very cautious, very careful because in the event that there will be this collaboration between the two parties, the MES will be accountable. In view of this accountability, the MES wants to have control over the questionnaires to avoid leakage. It has to maintain the standard of questionnaires, which have to be prepared by professionals. The MES must also take charge of the storage of questionnaires, of invigilation, supervision, and the control of slips should all be ensured by the MES staff.

Before I round off Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a general tendency in the world in favour of the RPL, that is, the Recognition of Prior Learning. This was the point I made when I was talking about that Early Childhood Care and Education Bill. There was one clause in that Bill which says that those people, who are underqualified, who do not possess all the qualifications that were required to become the teachers in the pre-primary schools, though they have been in service for a number of years, they must be dismissed, they must be got rid of. I said that this was not the correct attitude. This was not the right decision because when we talk about qualifications Mr Speaker, Sir, it is not only the academic qualifications that matter. The experience of the candidate matters. The knowledge that he has acquired over the years in the service always matters. He has interacted with the students, with the pupils. He knows their problems very well. He knows the environment. He knows how to do the job.

He knows how to tackle the problems. When we are talking about qualifications and we limit these qualifications to academic qualifications, I am not on the same wavelength. I understand that when we talk about qualifications, academic qualifications are important but the experience is important, the knowledge is important, the person has been in the service for a number of years is equally important. All these are qualifications and they must be taken into account when we are interviewing a candidate, when we are trying to select people for a specific job. I am certain that these people, who have accumulated the knowledge, who have interacted with people, who have been able to solve problems over the years, will no doubt do better than those who are supposedly more qualified academically. We know very well having been in the private school for a number of years. I am sure hon. David will agree with me that when you come with a diploma, with a degree, with a certificate, with the best of results, that is not a guarantee that the person is going to deliver the goods, that the person is going to be a very good teacher, that he is going to perform in the classroom, that he will be able to help and coach the students effectively and efficiently. There are many other factors that should be taken into consideration. I understand that the experience, the knowledge, the skills must be taken into account.

Once again, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to place on record my gratitude to all those organisations which I mentioned at the start of my intervention; they must be congratulated for the laudable and excellent job that they have done over the years. They have preserved the values, they have preserved the languages against all kinds of onslaught. I do not know whether you are going to tax me for repetition, Mr Speaker, Sir, but before I round off, if he allows me, once again, I would like to place on record my thankfulness and my gratitude to the socio-cultural organisations for the good work that they have been doing over the years, over the decades and, of course, we cannot afford to suppress mention about the beautiful and excellent job that they have done in the preservation of these languages and other values.

I round off, Mr Speaker, Sir, by once again congratulating the Hindi Pravachari Sabha, the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Mauritius Sanathan Dharma Temple Federation, the Mauritius Arya Sabha, the National Urdu Institute, the Andra Maha Sabha, the Andhra Parishad, the Chinese Middle School, the Chinese Cultural Centre, the Mauritius Marathi Mandali Federation and others and, of course, ...

(Interruptions)

I mentioned earlier the Tamil Temple Federation but, unfortunately, it is not there in my notes, I just forgot it, but I mentioned at the start of my intervention the *Union Tamoule* and others. Of course, I will fail in my duty if I do not talk about the Bissondoyal Brothers. They did a laudable and excellent job in the preservation of the oriental values and mainly in giving a boost to the Hindi language. I understand that they have been selfless people who went throughout the island to organise all kinds of all lectures and people flocked in huge numbers to listen to their

messages and they indeed did a very good job as regards the propagation of culture and language. They have got to be congratulated.

Finally, Mr Speaker, Sir, for all that has been done to boost up the status of ancestral languages, oriental and Asian languages in the country, for all that has been done officially on behalf of the successive Governments, namely the Government headed by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, the boost that was given to the oriental languages, the teaching of oriental languages in the primary schools, the decision to give them equal pay, to place them at par with the general purpose teachers, I think he deserves our congratulation and our applause and we are talking about the Father of the Nation, Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam.

Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I understand that there is no other hon. Member who is going to speak on the amendment, I am going to put the question. The question is that the words –

“conduct all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools” appearing in the main motion be deleted and replaced by the following words “collaborate with the existing recognised institutions in conducting all examinations concerning Asian languages taught in extension schools.”

The amendment was, on question put, agreed to.

28/4/09
7

PUBLIC BILLS

First Reading

On motion made and seconded the Community Service Order (Amendment) Bill (No. VII of 2009) was read a first time.

Second Reading

THE HINDI PRACHARINI SABHA (AMENDMENT) BILL (No. IV of 2009)

Order for Second Reading read.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that the Hindi Pracharini Sabha (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2009) be now read a second time.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the object of the Bill is to amend Section (6) of the Hindi Pracharini Sabha Act 2004 to make provision for the election of the Committee members of the Sabha to be held every three years and for elected members to hold office for three years instead of one.

The Hindi Pracharini Sabha, Mr Speaker, Sir, is well known and much appreciated in Mauritius for its laudable work in the promotion and propagation of Hindi language and literature.

The legislation of 2004 provided a proper legal framework for the Sabha to carry out its operations and gave it the status of a body corporate.

Today, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha is running Hindi classes in the evenings and during weekends in some 100 educational institutions around the island. •

About 4,000 students take part in the Parichay, Pratama, Madiama, Uttama examinations, which are held in Mauritius every year. To date, about 100,000 students have taken part in Hindi Pracharini Sabha examinations and have been awarded certificates.

At present, the Sabha is managed, as provided for at Section 6 of the Act, by a Committee comprising 12 members who are elected at each annual general meeting and hold office for one year. They are also eligible for re-election.

It has proved difficult for members of the Committee to honour their commitment and fulfil the objectives of the Sabha during their one-year tenure of office, which is considered, too limited a period of time. Moreover, the costs of running such yearly elections conducted by the Electoral Commission are substantial and have had a financial bearing on the Sabha.

With a view to addressing this issue, the Sabha has resolved at its annual general meeting that elections of the Committee be carried out every three years and that the members of the Committee hold office for three years. Such a course of action would alleviate the financial burden of the Sabha and allow it to devote the savings made to its core activities.

The proposed amendment, Mr Speaker, Sir, technical in nature, is in line with the requirements of the Sabha. The transitional provision at Section 4 of the Bill allows members of the Committee in office at the commencement of this Act to continue holding office for the remaining period for which they have been elected.

I would like here to draw the attention of the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the amendment concerns mainly the holding of election and the duration of tenure of office of members of the Committee.

However, the Bill before the House today may, Mr Speaker, Sir, give the impression that within the course of the three years there will be no annual meeting. In fact, I must say very frankly that in the course of the weekend, the hon. Leader of the Opposition drew my attention to the possibility of confusion in there. Therefore, I am proposing, at Committee Stage, an amendment to the amendment to make it very precise and allow the Sabha to organise once every year an annual general meeting.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with this note of clarification, I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr rose and seconded.

(5.20 p.m)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am given to understand that the Hindi Pracharini Sabha started doing a very good work for the promotion and propagation of Hindi in 1948 under the guidance of JNR, *Jainarain Roy*. Since then, the good work has continued and, in fact, as the hon. Minister said, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha does not just promote Hindi, but it organises very important elections as well. Of course, there are a lot of other organisations that did good work in the promotion and propagation of Hindi.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am given to understand that the Hindi Pracharini Sabha started doing very good work for the promotion and propagation of Hindi in 1948 under the guidance of Jaynarain Roy. Since then the good

work has continued and, in fact, the hon. Minister said that the Hindi Pracharini Sabha does not just promote Hindi, it organises very important elections as well. Of course, there are a lot of other organisations that did good work in the promotion and propagation of Hindi: Arya Sabha, the Arya Ravived Pracharini Sabha, the Government Hindi Teachers Union. And we are very, it is not lucky, because we work hard for that - the previous Government and the present Government - for the World Hindi Secretariat to be hosted here in Mauritius; it is a great privilege, it is a great honour. We also have a Hindi Speaking Union just as we have other Speaking Unions. I have no quarrel with the idea of having the Executive Committee elected for three years. I don't think that it is a question of savings really. I think it is more a question of allowing a new team to settle down and to work, because if it is one year, it is very difficult. It is as if you have general election every year and before Government has time to start writing a programme, elections are here again. If there are savings, *tant mieux*, but I think it is more for the good performance of the Hindi Pracharini Sabha that I go along with this idea of elections taking place every three years. I was sitting next to the hon. Minister at the Sunday afternoon Tamil Temples Federation activity and I pointed out to him that there is confusion the way the amendment had been drafted. It could have been interpreted as meaning that not only the Executive is voted for three years, but that general meetings are held every three years only. I don't think this would have been good for the health of the Hindi Pracharini Sabha. It is good that there is at least - because the Executive Committee can call more than one annual general meeting - one annual general meeting, not for electoral purposes, but to discuss the work of the Sabha in general, to make suggestions and so on. I am glad that the hon.

Minister took my point on board and therefore the required amendment has been circulated.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(5.22 p.m.)

Dr. Bunwaree Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there is a consensus. I just wanted to point out that I mentioned in my speech the two reasons. The question of savings is not the main reason, of course. The main reason is for them to settle down and to work for three years, but there is also the question of the elections being organised in presence of Electoral Commission. I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for having mentioned a few words.

I commend the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a second time and committed.

COMMITTEE STAGE

(The Speaker in the Chair)

THE HINDI PRACHARINI SABHA (AMENDMENT) BILL (NO. IV OF 2009)

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (Section 6 of principal Act amended)

Motion made and question proposed: "that the clause stand part of the Bill."

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Chairman, I move that clause 3 be amended as follows –

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Chairman, I move that clause 3(a) be amended as follows –

“by adding, after paragraph (ii), the following new paragraphs –

(iii) in paragraph (c), by deleting the word “and”;

(iv) by adding, after paragraph (d), the following new paragraph, the full stop at the end of paragraph (d) being deleted and replaced by a semi colon –

(e) organise a general meeting every year.”

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 4 and 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The title and enacting clause were agreed to.

The Bill, as amended, was agreed to.

On the Assembly resuming with Mr Speaker in the Chair, Mr Speaker reported accordingly.

Third Reading

On motion made and seconded, the Hindi Pracharini Sabha (Amendment) Bill (No. IV of 2009) was read a third time and passed.

At this stage, the Deputy Speaker took the Chair.