

PRIMARY
SCHOOLS/TEACHERS
YEAR2001

24.10.00 U

PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN – PACKED MEAL

(No. A/17) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he has taken steps for all primary school children to be provided with a packed meal as from January next.

Reply: For quite some time, Primary School Children had been receiving milk, a loaf of bread, cheese and dried fruits in the context of the World Food Programme. The programme, however, was gradually phased out as from 1990 and, at a certain point in time, only a loaf of bread and milk were distributed to the school children.

With the complete phasing out of the programme in 1997, Government took over the financial responsibility to supply a loaf of bread to each student. This is still on.

I am informed that Government then embarked on an exercise to consider various options for a School Feeding Project. In June 1998, it was considered that the supply of a pack of pasteurised fortified milk to primary school children would be the best and most realistic option. The details of the scheme were worked out and the tender exercise was conducted last year. However, this did not materialise because of the tedious process of clearing certain issues regarding the conditions for the delivery of the milk to the schools and the acceptable time span for consumption of the milk after delivery. The Central Tender Board has advised that a fresh tender exercise be carried out with better defined tender specifications, terms and conditions to avoid difficulties at the time of evaluation of the offers.

The priority of my Ministry is now to implement the scheme for the supply of pasteurised milk. A Technical Committee will look into the matter so that the tendering exercise can be effected as soon as possible.

After the successful implementation of the scheme, in good time a policy review may be envisaged and consideration given to the supply of packed meal and its financial and practical implications studied.

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS - SHORTAGE

(No. B/352) **Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the present shortage of primary teachers, he will say if it is contemplated to recruit teaching assistants on the resumption of schools in January 2001 with a view to alleviating the problem.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, although there is no shortage at present, it is a fact that there will be a shortage of teachers during the year 2001 based on the forecast that every year 150 or so teaching staff leave the system, either because they retire or proceed on long leave. However, it is not proposed for the time being to recruit teaching assistants for the primary sector.

Other measures are being taken in consultation with the Mauritius Institute of Education for the early release of 261 trainee teachers for posting in schools during 2001 as part of their practical training.

This will ease the staffing situation in the primary sector in the short-term. The Ministry is currently working on the medium and long-term human resource requirements so that a proper planning exercise may be undertaken and recruitments and training effected accordingly.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have seen classes being left without teachers for this present academic year. For example, at Colonel Maingard school, a teacher was posted in Std I only in July. May I request the hon. Minister to see to it so that we don't have to face such a situation where kids, aged five, have to wait up to July to have a teacher?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. lady, is once again, underlying the fact that I have inherited a burden, which is very heavy indeed. In fact, I am appalled by the situation whereby there is no proper planning mechanism for the situation to be reviewed year by year and the future problems anticipated in the right time. So, as at present, there is no shortage.

At the beginning of next year, there will no problem for the resumption of classes in January, but at some point during the academic year, yes, there will be a shortage.

We are not envisaging the recruitment of teaching assistants because in the past that procedure has not been conclusive. There have been other problems arising from the use of so-called supply teachers, which are also called teaching assistants. Exceptionally, we are making arrangements with the

MIE so that trainee teachers, who are already there, be released for their practical training at some point in time during the course of next year so that we can respond to any anticipated shortage of teachers.

For the following academic years, the planning exercise is to begin right now so that at the end of next year we are not faced with the same problems.

05.12.00 (4)

16EME MILLE, FOREST SIDE – PRIMARY SCHOOL

(No. B/404) Mr G. Paya (Second Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, in view of the fact that –

(a) there is a large increase in the number of residents at 16eme Mille Forest Side, and

(b) families are facing great difficulties to send their children to primary schools, he will consider the advisability of putting up a primary school in that locality in the near future.

Mr Obeegadoo: The Ministry is currently in the process of conducting a survey to determine our infrastructure needs for the primary sector. In case the survey reveals that there is justification for the setting up of the new primary school at 16ème Mille, the matter will be given due consideration.

Mr Abdoola: May I ask the Minister whether he is going to consider other areas where Government can put up more schools?

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, as I have said, there is a survey which is ongoing and which is looking at the global picture nationally. Where there is an urgent necessity of putting up new primary schools we will do so. But I am sure the hon. gentleman would agree that the national priority now is the accelerated construction of secondary schools for speedy implementation of the process of regionalising admissions to secondary schools and also the implementation of the 11-year schooling concept.

19.12.00 (3)

LA TOUR KOENIG GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – HEAD TEACHERS

(No. B/492) Mr J. C. Armance (Third Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, in regard to the old La Tour Koenig Government School, he will, in respect of the period January 1996 to date, state:

- (a) the number of headmasters –
 - (i) posted thereto and
 - (ii) transferred therefrom; and
- (b) what remedial measures are being envisaged for the benefit of the *pupils* of the school.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the reply is as follows –

- (a) (i) I am advised that since January 1996 to date, 6 Head Teachers have been posted to the school;
 - (ii) Only Mr Seepaul who has posted to La Tour Koenig Government School as Officer-in-charge was transferred as soon as he was promoted Head Teacher in a substantive capacity. Other changes in Head Teacher were mainly due to either promotion to the post of Primary School Inspector in the cases of Mrs Chan Wai Lin.
- (b) I am informed that despite the changes at the level of management *at* the school, the Regional Directorate has spared no effort to ensure continuity.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to state that I, as the new Minister of Education, do not deem it proper that any educational institution should experience six changes of Head Teachers within a period of 5 years.

I wish accordingly to inform the hon. Member that I share his concern

and will ensure that such practices do not hold sway any longer in my field of responsibility. In fact, I am initiating a review of the general policy concerning posting and transfers of Head Teachers so as to guarantee continuity and stability having regard to both provision and management of education in our schools.

Mr Armance: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Education, and I would ask him to consider the advisability to keep the actual headmaster in post and give him ample time to reorganise his work and to continue to work for the benefit of the pupils.

Mr Obeegadoo: My understanding, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that the actual head teacher was posted to the school in August of this year and, of course, the proper approach would be to make amends for what has been past practice by ensuring that Mr Gunpath – unless, of course, he reaches retirement age – stays in post for as long as possible to give the necessary stability to the school.

GRAND' BAIE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL & NORTHERN COLLEGE - LACK OF DISCIPLINE (10/04/01)

(No. B/164) Mr A. K. Gungah (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he has been made aware of certain problems arising out of lack of discipline at the Grand' Baie Government School and at the Northern College and, if so, will he state what measures he has taken or proposes to take to remedy the situation.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am informed that there is no reported problem of lack of discipline at Grand' Baie Government School save for the case of two teachers with frequent late arrivals and that is being dealt with.

With regard to Northern College, a Fact Finding Committee has been initiated and is to submit its report within three weeks of the date it was set up. I am nonetheless closely monitoring the situation at the college.

(7)

10/7/01

44

D20/IF/P10/1

**PETITE RIVIERE GOVT SCHOOL – TEACHING STAFF &
FURNITURE**

(No. B/507) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to Petite Rivière Government School, he will state what measures he proposes to take with a view to ensuring that it is provided with –

- (a) a permanent teacher in each class for the remaining months of this school year; and
- (b) adequate furniture.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,

- (a) I am informed that the school is, at present, adequately staffed with 16 teachers for its 16 classes and there is no shortage of teaching staff for the time being.

Necessary arrangements have been made as from 11 June 2001 to replace a Standard IV teacher who has emigrated to Canada and as from 15 June 2001 to replace a Standard III teacher who has been absent during the period May-June 2001 due to pregnancy related problems and who is expected to proceed on maternity leave. Furthermore, the Directorate will ensure that there is no shortage of staff until the end of the year.

- (b) I am further informed that there is no problem of lack of furniture at the school. There was such a problem at the beginning of the year, but appropriate remedial action has been taken.

Mrs Labelle: Sir, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank the hon. Minister for the immediate response he gave to the need of furniture. In fact, the children are happy not to have to bring their chairs from home because this is the situation which my colleague, the hon.

D20/IF/P10/2

Minister inherited. Kids at this school have to bring chairs from home to school because of the lack of chairs.

Regarding teaching, in fact, we do have a problem of staffing in this school due to a high rate of absenteeism. I would like to ask the Minister whether he can find a solution as teachers over there are absent very regularly. Yesterday, for instance, six teachers out of 16 were absent. So, may be, we can look for a system of floating teachers so that kids are not being left on their own so often in this school.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the problem, in fact, is of national dimension, if I may say so. As at now, there is no specific ratio of floating teachers to teachers in substantive positions. So, we are looking at the problem globally to ensure that in terms of our recruitment and staffing policies we have an adequate number of floating teachers in any and every region so that whenever there are absences, there is somebody in a position to go into that class and handle the students.

Mrs Labelle: Sir, we know that there are schools where the rate of absenteeism is very high; perhaps the Minister can take actions in these particular schools sooner than other schools.

Mr Obeegadoo: Yes, Sir. We will attend to that problem.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

(Primary) Schools



52

17/7/01

CA/D21/P09/3

TROIS BOUTIQUES GOVT. SCHOOL – INCIDENTS

(No. B/555) Mr M. Dulloo (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, with regard to the problems arising out of the spreading of chemical substances next to Trois Boutiques Government School, he will state –

- (a) the number of such occurrences and the dates thereof;
- (b) the number of students who were affected on each occasion and the treatment and care given to them;
- (c) the representations he has received following each incident and the action/s taken thereon; and
- (d) the action/s taken or proposed to be taken to avoid such incidents in the future.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, as regards part (a), I am informed that the problem has occurred on two occasions, on Monday 30 April 2001 and Friday 29 June 2001 respectively.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am further informed that on the first occasion, 30 pupils were affected, while on the second occasion some six students were affected.

On the first occasion, when some pupils complained of severe head and stomach aches and smell of pesticides was felt, the sanitary section of the Ministry of Health at Rose Belle was informed. An officer came on the spot, requested the headteacher to provide milk to the pupils who were then conveyed to Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital. Seven were discharged on the same day, 15 were kept under observation up to 01 May 2001 and the remaining eight were discharged on 02 May.

When the problem occurred for the second time, the headteacher immediately informed the parents of the six pupils concerned. These six pupils were taken to Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, where they were kept under observation before they were discharged on Saturday 30 June 2001.

As regards part (c) of the question, following the first incident, the PTA and parents expressed serious concern regarding the state of the environment to which the children were exposed. The regional directorate of the Ministry of Education organised a meeting with the planters concerned in the presence of representatives of Ministries of Health, Environment and Agriculture. The planters gave their word that they would not spray pesticides during school hours, so as not to affect the pupils and staff of the school.

CA/D21/P09/4

(No. B/555) (Contd)

Training sessions to sensitise planters as to the use of pesticides were organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Health, but that did not meet with success due to lack of interest on the part of planters.

When the second incident occurred on 29 June, officials of my Ministry met the PTA and parents in the presence of the other Ministries concerned. Parents naturally called for an urgent solution to the problem, given the security and health risks for the children. I met a delegation of the PTA and parents on 09 July to listen to their suggestions and discuss proposals for remedial action, and at that meeting it was decided with the concurrence of parents not to hold classes at the school until a solution was found.

At a second meeting held on Wednesday 11 July 2001 in presence of all the Ministries concerned, Health, Environment, Agriculture and Labour, together with the Police, the planters and land owners, the PTA and parents of children, it was agreed that there was no other solution than to prevent the planters concerned from using pesticides, so as to safeguard the interest of the staff and children of the school. The planters and land owners concerned were present at the meeting and informed the Ministry that such a measure would entail losses for them, and I have invited them to make written representations for further consideration. It was also decided, with the consent of parents, that classes would resume on Monday 16 July. Appropriate arrangements would be made for the students to be able to catch up during the winter vacation for time lost.

At a third and subsequent meeting, the decision was taken that in order to enforce this ban on the use of pesticides, prohibition notices and notice of removal of nuisance would be issued and such notices have, indeed, been issued and served on Friday 13 July by the Ministries of Environment and of Health respectively, and the Police have been requested to reinforce the monitoring and to take action against contravening planters.

Mr Dulloo: The Minister, himself, has indicated that the planters said that losses might be incurred. Will Government consider paying compensation for the losses that will be incurred?

CA/D21/P09/5

(No. B/555) (Contd)

Mr Obeegadoo: As I indicated, Mr Speaker, Sir, the planters concerned have been requested to submit a memorandum, which I have not as yet received. The Ministry of Agriculture has also been requested to assess what the exact situation is in terms of plantation in the vicinity of the school, and the State Law Office has also been asked to provide its opinion on the matter. When all information is received - if it is received - the matter will be brought to the attention of Government as appropriate.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past, Government was considering acquisition of the land around the school, because the school is very small, with no sports facilities, and to set up especially a swimming pool, and extend the school. So, will the Minister look into the question of acquisition of the land, which will solve the whole problem and at the same time boost up the school there?

Mr Obeegadoo: I am completely unaware of such ideas having been mooted in the past. But, if the hon. gentleman has the information, could he please convey it to me?

D21/IF/P10/1
No.B/555 (contd.)

Mr Collendavello: Sir, may I ask a supplementary question. Can I ask the Minister if he will take steps to hold serious discussions with the planters so as to work out a timetable for the spraying of pesticides, herbicides so as not to affect the school? The original suggestion of non school hours seemingly has not been retained, but we've got to find a solution on this.

Mr Obeegadoo: That, of course, was my initial view, Mr Speaker and that was cried out. After the first incident, planters were told not to spray pesticides during school hours, but then it did not work. We do not know whether they did spray within school hours or not, but what happened was that there was a second incident of poisoning of the children. We have now been informed by the Ministries of Health, Environment and Agriculture that the use of pesticides, even outside school hours, even during weekends, could still affect students when they resume their classes the following day or whatever. Therefore, there is, unfortunately, no other solution than to ban completely the use of pesticides in the immediate vicinity of the school and that is what we have had to do.

At 1.00 p.m. the sitting was suspended.

On resuming at 2.30 p.m. with Mr Speaker in the Chair.

• • •

30 OCT. 2001

58

(9)

CANOT - SCHOOL CHILDREN - TRANSPORT FACILITIES

(No. B/749) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state what measures he is contemplating to take for the children of Canot to be provided with transport facilities to attend school at Gros Cailloux or Petite Rivière, as is the case for the children of Albion.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am informed that 69 pupils residing Canot attend Pierre Desveaux de Marigny Government School at Gros Cailloux and that no pupil residing at Canot attends Petite Rivière Government School.

I am advised that a few weeks ago the Parent/Teacher's Association has verbally requested for transport to be provided to all pupils of Canot attending that school.

At present transport facilities are provided to pupils mainly on the following grounds -

- (i) closure of primary school; and
- (ii) great distance to be travelled from place of residence to schools by pupils.

My Ministry will now consider the possibility of providing transport facilities for conveyance of pupils residing at Canot and attending Pierre Desveaux de Marigny Government School as from next year.

13 Nov. 2001

70

10

CA/D29/P14/3

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS – CONDITIONS OF WORK & SALARY

(No. B/795) Mr D. Roopun (Second Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether, having regard to the reforms in the education sector which comprise *inter alia* the abolition of ranking at CPE level next year and the introduction of new subjects, he will state if Government is proposing to review the conditions of work and salary of primary school teachers in order to upgrade their status.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, earlier this year, a committee comprising officers of my Ministry and the MIE, under the chairmanship of Mr Sewraj, Director for Primary Education, was set up to carry out an audit of the situation prevailing in the primary sector, and to make recommendations in a bid to review the conditions of work and salary of teachers with the view to improving their status.

The recommendations of the Sewraj Report have just been finalised and are presently being scrutinised and all their implications assessed. The report will thereafter be communicated to Government and discussed with the different stakeholders.

The Sewraj Report deals, amongst other things, with:-

- The upgrading of the entry requirements into the teaching profession for the primary sector and the introduction of an aptitude test prior to appointment.
- A compulsory pre-service Teachers Diploma with electives in Asian languages, Health and P.E., the Arts, Science, History and Geography.
- The introduction of a new training cum career ladder for teachers with incentives and facilities for in-service courses.
- Proposals for a new salary structure.
- The possibility for dedicated teachers to earn more and move up the promotional ladder while remaining in teaching rather than becoming Deputy Head Teachers or Head Teachers.
- The eventual integration of Asian languages staff into the General Purpose stream without any loss of benefits.
- Revision of school hours.

It is obvious that the Sewraj Report, with its promise of a review of both conditions of employment and salary of primary school teachers, constitutes a further and most important step in the reform project and will be publicised in the not too distant future.

10 DEC 1977

(11)

SHELTERS – TEACHERS - POSTING

(No. B/880) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in view of the fact that children in shelters are encountering difficulties to attend school, he will consider the advisability of sending 1 or 2 teachers to such shelters.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, it is the policy of my Ministry to provide education not only to all school-going children but also as far as possible to those who cannot attend school.

In line with this policy, teachers have been posted at the correctional youth centre, the rehabilitation youth centres (boys and girls), the Beau Bassin Central Prison and the Richelieu Prison.

My Ministry will consider any request for teachers to be posted to shelters which, however, has not been forthcoming as yet. Should such a request be communicated to my Ministry, the implications will have to be considered with all interested parties and a *modus operandi* worked out.

YEAR 2002

NICOLAY GOVT. SCHOOL - PREPRIMARY CLASSES (26/03/02)

(No. B/22) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state if the construction of the new block meant for preprimary classes at Nicolay Government school will be undertaken this year.

The Minister of Economic Development, Financial Services and Corporate Affairs (Mr K. Khushiram): Mr Speaker, Sir, a new block for preprimary classes at Nicolay Government School will not be constructed this year.

However, the Ministry of Education is considering the possibility of upgrading the two classrooms in which preprimary classes are run, and would provide toilets, a bathroom and a kitchenette for the exclusive use of small children of preprimary age.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS - FOOD POISONING (26/03/02)

(No. B/27) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether in regard to cases of food poisoning recorded in a number of educational institutions, he will state what measures he has taken to prevent a recurrence of same.

The Minister of Economic Development, Financial Services and Corporate Affairs (Mr K. Khushiram): Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that only one case of food poisoning in our educational institutions has been reported to the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research. On 14 March 2002, twelve pupils of Hugh Otter Barry Government School, Curepipe, who had consumed fried noodles prepared and sold at the school canteen complained of vomiting, nausea and weakness. The pupils were taken to Curepipe Health Centre for appropriate medical care. From there, the pupils were referred to Victoria Hospital, Candos. They were all kept in hospital under observation for twenty-four hours and were discharged on 15 March 2002.

There exist circular letters which explain to all Heads of School what are the foodstuffs which are authorised for sale on school premises. Such circulars also spell out the conditions which should be respected in the handling of foodstuffs.

However, in the case under reference, I am informed that the food on sale was prepared by the canteen keeper using noodles which had been produced in unhygienic conditions by a manufacturer. The report from the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life,

after analysis of a sample of the food sold, has revealed that the noodles were unfit for human consumption..

Consequently, the Ministry of Health has established a contravention against the canteen keeper under Section 62(2)(B) of Food Regulations, 1999 for selling noodles containing E-Coli. Furthermore, as the manufacturer of noodles does not hold a trade licence, a "Prohibition Order" has been served upon her by the Ministry of Health on 18 March 2002 to discontinue forthwith the said activity.

With a view to monitoring the type of food on sale in school canteens, a collaborative action is being taken involving the Ministry of Health. Thus, the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life will effect, through the Public Health Offices, regular visits in the school canteens and will also collect samples of food for analysis. During these visits, the Health Inspectors will also check the date of expiry of all the food items put on sale in canteens. In the light of the reports obtained, appropriate action will be taken, should there be any unsatisfactory feature. It is also intended to intensify the frequency of the visits to schools where specific problems are reported.

A copy of the report following these regular visits will be submitted to the Ministry of Education for follow-up action.

Mr Speaker Sir, I am also informed that it is the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) which has the overall responsibility to arrange for the operation of the canteen. The Head Teacher is involved in the process. However, for better effectiveness of the system, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research is considering the possibility of setting up a canteen committee in each school, comprising staff, parents and pupils to advise the PTA on quality and price of food sold, the hygienic conditions which the canteens should respect and all other related matters.

The Education Regional Directorates have also been instructed to exercise a closer control over the operation of school canteens.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, from what the hon. Minister has stated, do we take it that prior to this incident, Health or Sanitary Officers were not regularly visiting those canteens and that they were not registered with the appropriate competent authorities? May we know also when was the last visit effected to that particular canteen by Health and Sanitary Officers?

Mr Khushiram: I don't have the information on the last visit effected by the Ministry of Health officials to school canteens. Obviously not, but what I have indicated is that there will be closer collaborative action now between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health which will ensure that these regular checks can provide more revealing results on improper practices at school canteens.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is known that most of these canteens operating in our schools do not have a licence to operate and we don't have any control on them. What specific measures the Ministry has taken in order to regulate those canteens?

Mr Khushiram: As I said, there are proposals to tighten the operation of school canteens notably by drawing attention to all concerned, the PTAs and Headmasters of schools to the circulars that already exist governing the operation of school canteens. Moreover, the Ministry of Health visits will ensure that proper health certificates have been provided to the school canteen operators and finally the school canteen committee which is proposed to be set up will ensure that all proper licences are in the possession of the operators.

9 APRIL 2002

14

81

D06P15CO3

**PRIMARY SCHOOLS SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING
PROJECT**

(No. B/130) Mr F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, having regard to the amount earmarked in the budget 2001-2002 under Primary Schools Supplementary Feeding project 2001-2002, he will give the number of -

- (a) schools in which such project has been implemented, and
- (b) pupils who are benefiting from such measure?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, funds under the Primary Schools Supplementary Feeding Project are being used to finance the daily provision of a loaf of bread to pupils of primary schools. Such distribution is being effected in all 262 primary schools and 128,879 pupils are benefiting from same. This figure includes 6,311 pupils from pre-primary units attached to Government primary schools.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Minister whether it was not supposed to give additional food to those children in less favoured areas under the Supplementary Food Feeding Project, as has been the case in some schools in the south, in Souillac, where children were receiving something else than bread? We know that bread is being provided, but something else for children in particular areas.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, according to the information which has been provided to me this is the same budgetary item as the Primary School Feeding Project, about which, of course, there is an old story where for many years there have been attempts to provide pack-lunch, pasteurised milk and each time the project has met with practical difficulties from the health authorities or in terms of practical organisation, so much so that it's gone on and on. The present situation is that we are giving a loaf of bread to each child. However, my sincere hope is that with the coming into operation of the *Zones d'Education Prioritaire* Project, we may target those resources to students in need in the areas of great poverty, the low-achieving schools, to give better support to the children who need it.

SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME (14/05/02)

(No. B/306) Dr. B. Hookoom (Second Member for Piton and Riviere du Rempart) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will make a statement on the policy of his Ministry regarding the school feeding programme.

Reply: I am informed that prior to the 90s, primary school children were receiving milk, a loaf of bread, cheese and dried fruits in the context of the World Food Programme. However, with the gradual phasing out of this programme, as from the year 1990, only a loaf of bread and milk were distributed to school children.

In 1997, when this programme was completely phased out, the then Government decided to supply a loaf of bread to all school children.

In the 1998 Budget Speech, it was announced that the distribution of loaves would be replaced by the provision of packed pasteurized milk with a view to improving the health of primary school children. This measure was to take effect as from January 1999. However, due to certain practical difficulties and some technical reasons, this project could not be implemented.

At present, all pupils of primary schools are receiving a daily loaf of bread and this is financed from funds available under the Primary Schools Supplementary Feeding Project vote of my Ministry. It is feared at the level of my Ministry that the distribution of a loaf of bread is not serving the purpose the school feeding project is meant for. A scheme is therefore being worked out to target resources to pupils who are in dire need of supplementary food. With this end in view a special programme will be introduced in the context of the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire* Project to supplement the nutritive value of food for school children.

D27P06CO7

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS - PRINTING

(No. B/505) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the printing of primary school textbooks, he will state -

- (a) the total amount spent in the year 2000;
- (b) the company which was awarded the contract, indicating if there was a tender exercise in connection therewith;
- (c) the number of copies that remained unused, and
- (d) the overpayments effected and the measures initiated to recover same.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the answer is as follows -

- (a) The total amount spent for the printing of primary school textbooks in the year 2000 was R 26,632,392.
- (b) The printing of textbooks was carried out by -
 - (i) the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (NCCRD) of my Ministry;
 - (ii) private printing companies; and
 - (iii) the Editions de L'Océan Indien (EOI)

The NCCRD and the private companies printed the textbooks for the lower primary (i.e. Standards I - III). In fact, out of the 36 lower primary textbooks to be printed, the NCCRD produced 14 textbooks whilst the remaining was handled by private companies following tendering exercise.

D27p07c/1

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. B/505 (Cont'd)

As regards the 33 books for the upper primary (i.e. Standards IV – VI), the approval of the Government and the Central Tender Board were sought and obtained to award the contract to the *Editions de l'Océan Indien*.

As regards part (c), though the number of copies that remained unused was 8,534 out of a total of 792,300 textbooks that were ordered.

As regards part (d), I am informed that in year 2000, an overpayment arose because there was a reduction in the cost of printing of Standard VI Mathematics textbooks.

At the same time, a significant number of copies of Environmental Studies and French textbooks for Standard IV were printed using a paper which was different from that originally specified. Payment was effected on a revised price basis submitted by the NCCRD and which was not acceptable to the EOI. Thereafter, the NCCRD submitted a revised claim, which according to the Government Printing Office, is fair and reasonable. A meeting has been held with EOI and action is being taken to offset this amount against the amount initially paid to EOI.

Mr Dowarkasing: Was there any open tender made in terms of the allocation of the contract for printing of those books?

Mr Obeegadoo: As I explained, Mr Speaker, there were tender exercises concerning the private companies involved. As regards EOI as per normal practice, the approval of Government and of the CTB were sought before the award of the contract.

Mr Dowarkasing: My information is that about R 20 m. of the contract were allocated to one company without any tender exercise. Am I right?

Cont'd...

D27p07cl/2

UNREVISED

P.Q. NO. B/505 (cont'd)

Mr Obeegadoo: That would be a serious allegation indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I would invite the hon. Member to provide any information to that effect that may be in his possession.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, this comes out from the Director of Audit's Report. I am not stating anything new, it is said in the report that R 19.4 m. contract was given to a contractor without any proper tender exercise. I have a second question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is there any sort of copyright issue involved in the printing of those books?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, I think the figure mentioned by the hon. Member may relate to *Editions de l'Océan Indien*. My information is that *Editions de l'Océan* has claimed that it holds copyright in respect of textbooks Sts IV to VI. Legal advice obtained from the State Law Office is that my Ministry cannot go for another printer without the authorisation of *Editions de l'Océan Indien*. The possibility of having these books printed by recognised foreign companies has been obtained to, but this idea could not materialise due to certain practical problems concerning time schedule, higher prices being requested. Since the texts are the property of my Ministry and the design and layout are the property of the *Editions de l'Océan Indien*, we have no other choice than to consider *Editions de l'Océan Indien* as a strategic partner in the printing of these textbooks. Furthermore, *Editions de l'Océan Indien*, due to its acquired expertise in the field of editing, has recently redesigned textbooks for French and Environmental Studies for Std IV and has also, as our strategic partner, agreed to reduce its prices considerably. Experience has shown that printing carried out by different printers does not favour good quality textbooks being produced. The approval of Government, as I said, was sought and obtained for direct contracting with *Editions de l'Océan Indien* in view of the *Editions de l'Océan Indien*'s expertise in book production, the copyright issue which has been just alluded to, a downward revision in prices, the time factor and the need to maintain quality in book production. In any event, the Central Tender Board's approval was sought and obtained.

Cont'd...

Mr Obeegadoo: I did provide that information earlier. As I said, out of a total of 792,300 textbooks produced, 8,534 remained unused. I am further informed that the number of books ordered is determined on the basis of requirements worked out by the different educational regions. Secondly, the projected sale of textbooks to private fee paying primary schools and then the estimated number of defective books will have to be replaced at no extra costs for the students and also provision for exceptional cases where books were either lost or destroyed. There is always a safety margin which is clearly not always reliable. What is now being envisaged is that we shall reduce the number of extra textbooks which are ordered to constitute this safety margin and also for the sale of books which are meant to replace those that are defective and books that are, in fact, sold to private schools.

Mr Dowarkasing: Is the Minister aware that Std VI repeaters are being given new books whereas the texts have not changed and about 1,500 or 2,000 copies are being wasted in that sense?

Mr Obeegadoo: I am not aware of this and I will certainly look into it if the hon. Member provides the relevant information.

Doc. Unit
13 MAY 2003

PRIMARY EDUCATION SECTOR - GO-SLOW

(No. B/306) Dr. S. Chady (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the go-slow in the primary sector, he will give the reasons which have motivated same and say whether the consequences of such go-slow has been assessed, and whether he will make a statement thereon.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, there is no go-slow in primary schools. There was a threat of a go-slow publicly voiced on 28 April 2003 by the "*Front Commun du Primaire*" which groups a number of Unions of the primary education sector. The main grievances of the "*Front Commun*" reportedly concerned -

- (i) the payment of the 5% interim allowance to all public officers;
- (ii) the so called Sewraz Report; and
- (iii) the allowance in respect of special coaching classes in the Oriental Languages.

In an attempt to clear any misunderstandings, I invited the "*Front Commun*" to meet me on 30 April 2003 to review the situation.

The meeting afforded me an opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of my Ministry to the enhancement of teachers' status as an integral part of the ongoing reforms in the education sector. I explained specifically to the "*Front Commun*" that -

- (i) insofar as the 5% interim allowance was concerned, the position of Government, as already conveyed to the Unions by the Prime Minister, was clear and unequivocal. In short the 12% incentive allowance granted to teachers for the implementation of the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategy as from January 2003 was inclusive of the 5% interim allowance payable to public officers;
 - (ii) as regards the Sewraz Report, the commitment taken by the Government was to refer it to the PRB for consideration in its current
-

mrl/d08p08.02

unrevised

review exercise. Government has fulfilled its obligation and the PRB, as an independent organisation which regulates salaries and other conditions of service in the public sector, will act as it deems fit, and

- (iii) in respect of the allowance of Special Coaching Classes, there was some unavoidable delay in effecting payment thereof due to practical difficulties to compute the effective number of working hours of teachers.

At the end of the meeting there was a shared understanding that, at this stage, the stand of the Unions in regard to the outcome of the PRB Report could only be speculative and could in no way constitute an item of dispute between the Ministry and the Unions. We also agreed to allow matters to follow their normal course and to endeavour to improve industrial relations. It is in that very spirit that we are meeting anew at my initiative on Thursday 15 May to follow up on issues already discussed.

I again wish to confirm, Mr Speaker Sir, that there is no go-slow in the primary sector and that schools are operating normally.

Dr. Chady: Could we say that, in the forthcoming publication of the PRB, some of the conditions laid down in the Sewraz report will be taken into account?

Mr Obeegadoo: I would be delighted to share in the secrets of the PRB, Mr Speaker, but I do not.

Dr. Chady: The Minister said that the Sewraz report has already been submitted to the PRB, which is studying it. Can we expect that, in the forthcoming month, it would.....

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, as I have said, the Government has stood by its commitment. The Sewraz report was referred to the PRB many, many months ago, as everybody is aware. Since then, as in the normal course of things, the unions have made their submissions, the official side has done likewise and the PRB will now come up with a report in the near future.



UNREVISED

DR/D08/P06/4

SCHOOLS (PRIVATE PRIMARY) - BUDGETARY PROVISIONS

(No. B/297) **Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether in regard to Vote Item 31.161.005 of the current Estimates, he will -

- (a) state the amount of money spent under this item; and
- (b) list the schools which have benefited thereunder together with the respective amounts of contribution received.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, of the amount budgeted for the current financial year under Vote Item 31-161.005 - Contribution for Renovation of Private Primary Schools, Rs 4 m. represents the regular budgetary provision for Government funding of capital projects in respect of non-fee paying private primary schools. For information, there are 48 such schools: 46 run by the Bureau of Catholic Education (BEC) and 2 by the Hindu Education Authority (HEA).

The formula for allocation of funds to these Authorities may from time to time be reviewed depending on circumstances. The formula is indeed presently under review hence the delay in payment. Matters are being expedited and funds will be disbursed in the coming weeks.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether there are schools which have applied for such contribution, but have not been able to benefit from it and the reason thereof?

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, in the case of BEC, there has been an application for refurbishment and construction of an additional block of classrooms concerning Queen Victoria RCA at Argy, Flacq and in the case of the Hindu Education Authority, projects in respect of infrastructural works at Aryan Vedic schools, at Laventure and Vacoas have been submitted.

UNREVISED

PRIMARY SCHOOLS - TEACHERS - COURSES

(No. B/331) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to courses followed by primary school teachers, he will state whether the latter are attending such courses during primary class hours.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the point in issue in the question put up by the hon. Member, which is release of teachers during school hours is indeed a pertinent one which is of prime concern to me.

There are, I am informed, three types of releases from which teachers benefit and are as follows -

- (i) release to attend briefing sessions in connection with curriculum development or introduction of new textbooks;
- (ii) release to attend in-service courses at the Mauritius Institute of Education, and
- (iii) release to attend self-chosen courses.

It is an open secret that, until recently, the practice was to allow teachers to attend briefing sessions and other courses, whether in-service or self-selected, during school hours. That resulted into disruption of school activities and very often classes were left unattended. It was even reported that in certain cases teachers took upon themselves to tell pupils not to attend school on days when they were to attend briefing sessions.

When my attention was personally drawn to that most unsatisfactory state of affairs earlier this year, I immediately decided to cancel all the briefing sessions and to remind heads of schools, by way of circular, that under no circumstances should they release a teacher to attend briefing sessions during school hours.



D09/P06/mt/4

(No. B/331) contd.

In addition to briefing sessions, teachers and deputy headteachers also attend in-service training courses such as the Advance Certificate of Education (ACE), the Certificate in Educational Management (CEM) and the Teachers Diploma. These in-service courses normally start as from 15 00 hours extending up to 17 00 or 18 00 hrs, but each month the trainees have to attend the MIE on one half-day or one full day, as the case may be. In such cases it is incumbent upon the heads of schools to make such *ad hoc* arrangements as are necessary in order to avoid disruption of schools.

However, I am still not personally satisfied with such a state of affairs and my Ministry is currently working with the MIE in order to revisit the whole gamut of courses for the members of staff of the primary sector and to actively consider the possibility for all in-service courses to start running not earlier than 16 00 hrs in order not to disrupt school activities at schools. I am personally following the matter.

As regards the self-chosen courses, no release is given to members of the teaching staff who can embark on such a course, only if they are held after school hours.

My Ministry is certainly monitoring the situation, but if the hon. Member is aware of any case where there is a possible departure from the agreed policy, which has just been stated, I shall be glad to look into the matter once it is brought to my attention.

17 June 2003

(20)

PRIMARY SCHOOLS - PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER

(No. B/429) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will give the number of primary schools where -

- (a) a physical education teacher is posted, and
- (b) there is no physical education teacher.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, as far as physical education at primary level is concerned, the policy of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, up to September 2002, was to have a specialised grade of Physical Education Instructors to carry out Movement Education in schools.

However, while there are 213 State primary schools and 48 Aided primary schools, only 41 posts of Physical Education Instructors were created and with drop-outs there are only 35 incumbents.

→

D17P07CO2
PQ No. B/429 (contd)

When the curriculum renewal project was presented in March 2001, the initial intention was to maintain the policy of entrusting to Physical Education Instructors the responsibility of carrying out Health and Physical Education in our schools. However, with only 46 Physical Education Instructors for 274 primary schools, we realised that our objective to give a new dimension to physical education in the primary school sector would be seriously undermined. On the other hand, the recruitment of the required number of Physical Education Instructors to adequately service all our primary schools was fraught with difficulties and would have taken an inordinate time while entailing significant costs.

From an International best practice perspective, it is considered that, in the primary school sector, a multitude of teachers servicing each class is not desirable and that the best option was to have one class teacher to whom assistance and support could, however, be provided in specific areas, as and when required. We, therefore, entrusted to the General Purpose teachers responsibility for Health and Physical education. These teachers are trained to teach health and physical education both through their initial teacher training course at the Mauritius Institute of Education and through the briefing sessions that are currently being organised by my Ministry during school vacation. In any case, on the basis of their scheme of service General Purpose teachers are required to teach all subjects constituting the curriculum.

As regards the Physical Education Instructors in post, since the ZEP strategy offers considerable room in terms of pedagogical innovation, they have been re-deployed to the future ZEP schools in order to assist in the organisation of Physical Education activities and also to perform ancillary duties related to the health and nutrition component of the ZEP project. In this respect, the Pay Research Bureau has restyled the post of Physical Education Instructor Health and Physical Education Instructor.

30 June, 2000

34

21

D11P07cl/4

UNREVISED

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – ICT TEACHERS

(No. B/394) Dr. R. Beebeejaun (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the ITC teaching training, he will state how the human ware component of 327 or so ICT teachers recruited, trained, and posted to primary schools are discharging their duties of ICT teaching according to a transitional syllabus in the absence of the two other major components, namely, laboratory and provision of hardware and software.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, the decision to introduce ICT in primary schools reflects the overall objective of my Ministry to impart life skills to our pupils through a broad-based education tailored to meet the needs of the country.

In 2001, the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications came up with the School Information Technology Project which had the similar objective of imparting IT skills to our pupils at an early stage and improve the quality of education through the use of IT as a supporting tool. Accordingly, when the primary curriculum renewal project was announced, it provided for the introduction of ICT within the primary curriculum.

The SITP, as it has been conceived is certainly unprecedented in Africa and has few known precedents in the whole developing world. Government was, therefore, fully conscious of the scope and magnitude of the project as well as of the likely constraints and possible delays. Nonetheless, Government had the required farsightedness to make of the SITP one of its priorities.

Cont'd...

D11P07cl/5

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. B/394 (Cont'd)

In spite of the fact that two major components of the SITP, namely the construction of IT laboratories and the procurement of the relevant hardware/software are still outstanding many conditions which have already been fulfilled to pave the way for the full scale implementation of the SITP in due course. In this respect, I wish to point out the following -

- (i) the transitional syllabus for the teaching of ICT in Stds I – VI which sets out the basic competencies and skills which the pupils need to acquire has been finalised. The syllabus provides for the introduction of ICT as a subject before being integrated in later years across the curriculum;
- (ii) a plan has been worked out for the construction of IT laboratories including the conversion of existing available classrooms. On the basis of that plan, action is proceeding with the imminent launching of tenders for the construction of the IT laboratories in phases, one overlapping with the other;
- (iii) concerning the procurement of the hardware and software, an international request for information was issued in July 2001 and a request for proposal, that is, an international invitation to tender was issued in December 2002. The tenders are currently at evaluation stage; and
- (iv) finally, regarding the human ware, if I may so expressed myself, 330 ICT teachers have been recruited and trained at the MIE and have been posted in the schools as from January 2003.

As regards the specific point raised by the hon. Member as to the teaching of ICT in the schools, I wish to point out that, in anticipation of possible delays and practical difficulties, teachers have been trained to use whatever number of PCs available in school to which they are posted to attempt first level computer awareness. My Ministry is fully supportive of the Cyber Island ambition of Government and pending the full scale

Cont'd...

D11P07cl/6

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. B/394 (Cont'd)

implementation of the SITP, pupils are being exposed to ICT and all stakeholders are being sensitized to the need to be proactive to sustain the process. The response is most encouraging and I am pleased to point out that at this stage, there is an IT corner in more than 60% of our schools whereas in the remaining schools there is at least one PC. Furthermore, private sector organisations have volunteered to donate second hand computers to our schools. The modalities of which are being worked out.

Sir, if one is not ambitious, one achieves nothing and there can be no progress without risk taking. The ICTP is a case in point.

Dr. Beebeejaun: I thank the Minister for the reply. Maybe through ignorance on my part. I always thought that computer teaching was about 'see and touch' and if you do not have 'see', and you do not touch, you cannot progress. I am a little curious. About three weeks ago, we had water therapy without water. This week we had ICT courses without the appropriate equipment. I would ask the Minister – we had the same reply two months ago – if he can tell us what is the situation as far as the 34 IT labs are concerned.

Cont'd...

CA/D11/P08/1
(No. B/394) (contd)

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, a couple of weeks back, further to the intervention of hon. Dowarkasing at adjournment, I referred to the fact that for many, many years, including the years when the Labour Party was in Government, instead of teaching practical for science subjects at SC or HSC level, students were taking a paper called 'alternative to practicals'. This is nothing new. As regards ICT, I wish to state, again, I would rather be ambitious for my country and achieve half of my ambitions than, over five years, neither attempting nor achieving anything. Let us be very serious about this. There are now serious delays because no other Government - not the previous Government - thought of introducing IT in schools. So, I thought that my hon. friend, the good doctor, would have spared himself the embarrassment of provoking me to remind the Labour Party of its standstill act in the educational sector over five years before the change in Government. So, let me repeat, Mr Speaker, Sir...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order. please!

Mr Obeegadoo: We are very serious about providing opportunities to all children, wherever they live across the Republic, whatever the social status of their parents, access to ICT in schools, and we will achieve our target.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, could we have a simple reply? Two months ago, it was said that tenders had been launched. Have they been launched? Where are we with the 34 IT laboratories?

Mr Obeegadoo: As I have explained, there are type designs established by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure for IT laboratories. On that basis, there is a first batch of some 30 IT laboratories, for which the tenders are being launched.

CA/D11/P08/2
(No. B/394) (Contd)

Dr. Beebeejaun: It is such a serious matter. I concur entirely with the declaration of the Minister, and this is why I am disturbed of what is going on. We have children who are learning about computers and who have seen a computer once and never again. A little girl of seven years old informed me that last year a computer was shown to them once and that's all. How can we teach children about computers if there are no computers? How many second-hand computers have been donated to the Ministry, how many are functioning, and how many are in use?

Mr Obeegadoo: Let me again state that, up to September 2000, there was no project implemented in schools for introduction of ICT. Right now, there is an ongoing exercise for the procurement of hardware and software. We have reached the evaluation stage. The whole process should be completed within a few months. This is an unprecedented exercise. Government is being very careful, very cautious, taking on board international expertise, to make sure that we don't go wrong in a field where developed countries have gone wrong, and it has cost billions to these States. As I said, all our schools, right now, have, at least, one or two PCs. In some schools – the most fortunate ones, in well-to-do areas – the PTAs have contributed and have, themselves, set up an IT laboratory, and we are very thankful to them. We have invited head teachers and ICT teachers to be proactive, working with local community organisations, NGOs, to obtain computers, to create IT corners where students can start familiarising themselves with ICT. I just mentioned the fact that 60% of our schools – that is a tremendous response and I would like to place on record our appreciation of the role of teachers and head teachers – now have their own IT corners, although there is no IT laboratory as such. Private organisations have been coming to us - If the hon. Member puts a direct question, I will provide the figures – proposing to provide us with second-hand PCs. It is not just a question – I am sure the hon. gentleman will agree – of taking up the organisations on their offers without the required technical advice being made available by the Ministry of IT as to the possibility of adapting those PCs to our needs and their practical installation in schools. But, the process is on and I can confirm that as a fact.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Where are we with the project management or project management team? There was going to be an appointment very soon.

CA/D11/P08/3
(No. B/394) (contd)

Mr Obeegadoo: The tender for project management service is being evaluated at the very same time as the tender for hardware and software procurement. So, within a number of weeks, I expect that the tender will be awarded.

Mr Duval: May I ask the hon. Minister how he can reconcile the fact that we are here left with asking or waiting for second-hand computers in our schools, with the billions of rupees that have been spent on buildings in the cybercity? How are we going to arrive to a cyber island if this is the situation in our schools?

Mr Obeegadoo: Across the world, this is what is done. It is one way of involving local business, NGOs, community organisations in schools. The school IT project is an ideal project for the school to root itself within the community and for organisations operating in the vicinity of the schools to partake in the life of the school community. So, in the most developed countries of the world, it is standard practice for private sector organisations, firms working with schools, so that given the rapid replacement rate of computers in business organisations, the school community stands to benefit.

Dr. Beebeejaun: I would like to know whether there has been a problem of vandalism at schools regarding ICT equipment and the measures he is taking.

Mr Obeegadoo: There has been no reported case of vandalism concerning ICT equipment, but we are very alive to the importance of properly securing whatever ICT equipment will be placed in schools.

Dr. Boolell: Is the Minister aware of a case of vandalism that was reported to his Ministry in respect of an RCA school in Vieux Grand Port?

Mr Obeegadoo: Concerning ICT equipment, I am afraid I would not be aware.

21/10/03

53

CA/D37/P09/5

**ROSE BELLE NORTH GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - CHILDREN -
INTOXICATION**

(No. B/672) **Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle)** asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will state if the causative factor which had led to the intoxication of school children at Rose Belle Government School on Monday 13 October 2003 has now been fully established.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, following the incident on 13 October 2003, at Rose Belle North Government School, various Governmental departments, including the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, the Agricultural Research & Extension Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Technology & Natural Resources, the Ministry of Environment, the Police Force and the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research have actively investigated all possibilities to try and establish the exact cause of the state of ill health of the 19 intoxicated pupils.

A preliminary report from the Ministry of Environment suggested that gases could have been blown towards the school due to the oxidation pond of an alcohol plant found 750 metres away from the school and which, according to the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, was not operational during the week preceding the incident. Although the faulty equipment was repaired on the day following the incident, that is, on 14 October, the odour still marginally subsists.

/...

21/10/03
(23)

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

B/672 The Honourable Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and
Rose Belle (Dr Boolell)

*To ask the Honourable Minister of Education and Scientific
Research:-*

Whether he will state if the causative factor which had led to the
intoxication of school children at Rose Belle Government School on
Monday 13 October 2003 has now been fully established?

DRAFT REPLY on 21 October 2003

Sir,

Following the incident on 13 October 2003, at Rose Belle North Government School, various Governmental departments including the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, the Agricultural Research and Extension Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Technology and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Environment, the Police Force and the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research have actively investigated all possibilities to try and establish the exact cause of the state of ill health of the 19 intoxicated pupils.

2. A preliminary report from the Ministry of Environment suggested that gases could have been blown towards the school due to the oxidation pond of an alcohol plant found 750 metres away from the school and which according to the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life was not operational during the week preceding the incident. Although the faulty equipment was repaired on the day following the incident (i.e. on 14 October), the odour still marginally subsists.

However, another report from the Chief Sanitary Engineer of the Ministry of Health and Q.L. has indicated that the alcohol plant could not be directly incriminated and pointed instead to a vegetable garden within the school compound exploited by a private planter and where pesticides were used during the week-end preceding the incident. A report from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Technology and Natural Resources went in the same direction. In the circumstances, arrangements have been made with the Agricultural Research and Extension Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Technology and Natural Resources and the Central Water Authority to abate the pesticide nuisance, if any.

3. Investigations are still underway and at this stage there is no definitive indication as to the cause of the reported sickness of the 19 pupils of Rose Belle North Government School.

4. As regards the exploitation by a private planter of the vegetable garden within school premises, the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research is undertaking an enquiry to assess the facts. It would seem that the parent of a pupil of the school has been authorized by the PTA and the Head Teacher to exploit same. If cases of negligence or malpractice are established, appropriate action will be taken.

29 July, 2003

22

- (i) HARRYPARSAD RAMNARAIN GOVERNMENT SCHOOL
- CLASSROOMS, SCHOOL POPULATION, ETC.
- (ii) TERRE ROUGE - PRIMARY SCHOOL (NEW)

(No. B/530) Mr D. Hurnam (Third Member for Pamplémousses and Triolet) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will -

- (a) state, in regard to the Harryparsad Ramnarain Government School
 - (i) the school population;
 - (ii) the number of classrooms;
 - (iii) whether the school has an excess of students per class,
and
-

(No. B/530) contd.

- (b) say if consideration is being given to the construction of a new primary school in the Terre Rouge Village Council area on a plot of land next TO Terre Rouge football ground already identified by the Terre Rouge Village Council, which school may also accommodate students of Cité Bois Marchand where no school exists.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, the Harryparsad Ramnarain Government School is a four-stream school with a school population of 973 pupils accommodated in 27 classrooms. It does not have an excess number of students except in Std V where there are 162 pupils for four classes, *i.e.* an excess of two pupils, given that the prescribed maximum number of students per classroom is 40.

As regards part (b), I am informed that the Terre Rouge village council has indeed resolved that a new primary school be built in its village council area on a plot of land situated next to the Terre Rouge football ground.

While I acknowledge the interest that the village council is showing for the construction of an additional primary school, I wish to remind the hon. Member that the current policy of my Ministry is precisely to depart from the practice of considering requests for construction of new primary schools on an *ad hoc* basis and to focus rather on improvement of access to primary schooling within a national perspective. In that respect, it is the declared objective of my Ministry to construct two new primary schools each year on a demand-driven basis. Obviously, because of the absence of a systematic construction programme in the past, there is already a waiting list.

Apart from Grand Sable, Bambous and Plaine Verte, where construction of new primary schools is scheduled to start in the course of the present financial year, other regions in need appear to be in alphabetical order:

1. Albion;
2. Argy in Central Flacq;
3. Forest Side (16^{eme} Mile), and
4. Grand Gaube.

.....

UNREVISED

(No. B/530) contd.

As regards the Terre Rouge region, I wish to point out that in addition to Harryparsad Ramnarain Government School, there is another school, namely Morcellement Raffray Government School, which has been operating since January 2001. It is expected that admission possibilities of Morcellement Raffray Government School will greatly alleviate the situation at Harryparsad Ramnarain Government School.

As regards pupils coming from the region of Bois Marchand, they should normally have attended, or be attending Arsenal Government School, which is undersubscribed with a school population of only 260 pupils that have been allowed admission to Ramnarain Government School to the extent that vacancies existed. However, for greater clarity it is proposed to revisit the existing catchment areas of Harryparsad Ramnarain and Morcellement Raffray Government Schools in the context of the impending global exercise for the redefinition of school catchment areas. In the meantime, if the hon. Member has any suggestions, I would be very happy to consider them.

D01P011cl/5

UNREVISED

**ROSE BELLE NORTH GOVERNMENT SCHOOL -
UPGRADING WORKS**

(No. B/21) Dr. A. Boolell (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state the measures being taken by his Ministry to create an enabling environment at the Rose Belle Government School to enable school children and teachers to improve performance and to ease off tensions amongst pupils.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I wish at the very outset to remind the hon. Member that in the most unfortunate case of Rose Belle North Government School as in previous such cases, the priority of my Ministry has always been the safety and security of the pupils. That being said, I am not aware of any tension among the pupils.

Be that as it may, since the incident of 26 February, I have personally had not less than four meetings with the Parent/Teachers' Association of Rose Belle North Government School in order to take stock of the situation and discuss the best course of action to be adopted in the circumstances.

Quite apart from the immediate measures of despatching a joint team of officials of the relevant Ministries on site and which has allowed us to detect the most probable source of the problem and to serve the subsequent Prohibition Notice on Alcodis Ltd, my Ministry, in consultation with the Ministry of Environment, has agreed to undertake the following upgrading works as a matter of priority -

- (i) conversion of the existing vegetable garden into a green playfield;
- (ii) tarring of the yard around the school building; and
- (iii) construction of wall and fencing around the remaining two unwallied sides of the school and removal of boulders.

Cont'd...

D01P011cl/6

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. B/21 (Cont'd)

Further, the school will be provided with 40 wall fans and curtains by the end of March. External and internal paintings will be carried out, twelve Naco frames and all iron sheets covering the toilet blocks will be replaced and mobile dustbins will be provided as soon as possible. In addition, at the suggestion of the PTA, the Ministry of Health has been requested to organise a medical check-up for the whole school population before the end of the first term in order to reassure the parents concerned.

It is hoped that these measures will go a long way towards restoring the confidence of the local population in the school and in enhancing the quality of education.

Dr Jeetah: Would the Minister state whether he will extend all these facilities to the rest of schools in Mauritius?

(Interruptions)

Mr Obeegadoo: I would suggest that the hon. Member should come to some agreement with his colleague, hon. Boolell. The question asked by hon. Boolell related to specific problems which have occurred at Rose Belle North Government School. It stands to reason that there are specific measures which must be taken to recreate the appropriate psychological environment in relation to Rose Belle North Government School. The fact that we are not necessarily in a position to do everything in all schools of the land should not deprive the students and parents of students of Rose Belle North Government School from specific attention justified by the unfortunate occurrences of the last two weeks.

Cont'd...

D01P011cl/7

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. 21 (Cont'd)

Dr Jeetah: Would the Minister, for the benefit of the House, tell how many students failed the CPE this year?

Mr Obeegadoo: Could the hon. Member repeat the question? I did not hear him.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Jeetah, you should start learning good manners. When the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker is on his feet, you have to resume your seat right away. I myself had a problem. I cannot hear you. Please adjust your microphone so that I can hear your question.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Dr Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, given the concern of my good friend, I would like to know the number of students who failed the CPE this year.

CA/D01/P12/1
(No. B/21) (Contd)

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: This question is not relevant to the original question.

(Interruptions)

Order, please! Order! Hon. Dr. David! I think it is the duty of every Member of this House to guide this new Member. Next question, please!

16/3/04 187
25

mr/d01w02.01

**ROSE BELLE NORTH, RICHELIEU AND CITE LA CURE
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS - INTOXICATION CASES**

(No. B/48) Mr G. Paya (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether an inquiry has been carried out in the cases of intoxication of children at Rose Belle North Government school, Richelieu Government school and Cité La Cure Government school and, if so, what has been the outcome thereof.

Reply: I wish to thank the hon. Member for his interest in matters relating to the safety of pupils and to reassure him that each time an alleged case of intoxication is reported, a thorough inquiry is undertaken to establish the causes thereof and to allow for remedial action so as to forestall any recurrence.

In regard to the first case of intoxication at Rose Belle North Government school on 13 October 2003, various Governmental Departments actively investigated all possibilities to try and establish the exact cause of the problem. It was finally concluded that the intoxication was caused by pesticides used in the vegetable garden within school premises. Accordingly, action was immediately taken as the hon. Second Member for Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle may testify to in as much as cultivation of vegetables at the premises was stopped there and then.

Besides, an administrative inquiry was carried out at the level of my Ministry has established certain administrative shortcomings on the part of the Head Teacher whose explanations have been sought. My Ministry is following up the matter.

Unfortunately, on 26 February and 02 March 2004, it was reported that pupils and staff of the same school were intoxicated after being affected by a foul smell. A joint team of officers from the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Health has carried out site visits at school and at a nearby industrial plant to determine the cause of the nuisance. After carrying out investigations, the Ministry of Environment has issued a Prohibition Notice on the company concerned on 03

mr/d01w02.02

March and the latter was requested to carry out improvement works. The Health Inspectorate of the Ministry of Health also served a sanitary notice on the said company on 04 March for the latter to cart away residual *vinasse*, which was found in an open basin. My colleague, the hon. Minister of Environment and NDU, reported on the latest developments.

My Ministry has requested the Ministries of Environment, Health, Agriculture and the Police to continue exercising a close monitoring of the situation and to inform my Ministry immediately in case any problem arises.

Concerning Richelieu Government school, on 11 February 2004, 53 pupils were reported to be suffering from rashes on their faces and bodies immediately after consuming the yoghurt provided to children in that school. Medical investigations could not establish the definite cause of the rashes. However, the inquiry of the Ministry of Health has established certain inadequacies in the manufacture of the yoghurt, which led to the issue of a Prohibition Notice on the supplier. The supplier having stopped the issue of yoghurt to students and the legal implications thereof are being looked into in consultation with the Central Tender Board and the State Law Office. The situation is, however, back to normal at Richelieu Government school.

In the case of Marcel Cabon Government school at Cité La Cure, the intoxication of around 60 pupils was initially attributed to the yoghurt and *pains fourrés* provided to children.

However, after detailed analysis by the Ministry of Health, including an analysis of samples of yoghurt and *pains fourrés* secured at school, it was confirmed that -

- (i) the bacteriological and chemical analysis of food samples show that same are within permissible limits in accordance with Food Regulations 1999;
 - (ii) all the tests carried out have shown no chemical abnormality and no pathogen.
-

SCHOLARS - INTOXICATION - MEDICAL INVESTIGATIONS

13/4/04

(No. B/180) Mr A. K. Gungah (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will make a statement on the outcome of medical investigations in intoxication cases involving scholars carried out or inquired into during the last 2 months.

26

Mr A. Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, during the last two months, one incident relating to intoxication of students has been reported at Richelieu Government School, followed by two incidents at Rose Belle North Government School and one at Unity College.

UNREVISED

DR/D05/P10/3
(No. B/180 Cont'd)

Richelieu Government School

A case of suspected food poisoning was reported to my Ministry on 10 February 2004 at Richelieu Government School, under the "Zone Education Prioritaire" (ZEP) scheme, where stuffed bread, yoghurt and banana were distributed to the school children.

Fifty-three students were reported sick complaining of nausea and had developed skin rashes. They were sent to Dr. A. G. Jeetoo Hospital where they were examined by medical officers and paediatricians on the same day. Their conditions were satisfactory and none of them were admitted.

The Health Inspectorate seized samples of the stuffed bread and yoghurt which were sent on the same day to the Central Laboratory, Victoria Hospital for bacteriological examination and to the Chief Government Analyst for chemical analysis. No chemical deterioration was detected in the samples.

Bacteriological examinations showed the presence of E-coli in numbers much above the recommended mandatory level in the yoghurt samples. Accordingly, the stock of unwholesome yoghurt was seized and removed from the company. The company has also been served with a Prohibition Order on 13 February 2004 and 11 March 2004 respectively to discontinue the manufacture of yoghurt. It has been allowed to produce samples only for analysis purposes.

Results of analysis of water samples taken at the school for investigation were found to be normal.

Furthermore, on 12 February 2004, a medical check-up of the pupils was carried out by medical officers and a dermatologist. Thirty pupils were found to have rashes, which, according to the dermatologist, were not due to food allergy but to the heat.

26(c)

UNREVISED

DR/D05/P10/5
(No. B/180 Cont'd)

Results of specimens submitted for toxicological analysis were negative. No specific cause could be established.

Mr Gungah: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether any monitoring of the state of health of the scholars who have been intoxicated, has been carried out and, if yes, for how long has the monitoring been carried out?

Mr A. Jugnauth: It is an ongoing process again, Mr Speaker, Sir. Usually, there are other Ministries also which are involved and we are closely monitoring the situation.

26(d)

D05/P11/mt/1

UNREVISED

(No. B/180) contd.

Dr. Beebeejaun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the toxicology tests were to rule out some specific suspicions or of a general nature?

Mr A. Jugnauth: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, toxicological examinations were carried out. As to whether they were specific or general, I don't know.

HEAD TEACHERS - REQUESTS

(No. B/181) **Dr. R. Jeetah (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart)** asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will, in respect of the period July 2002 to June 2003, give the number of requests made by head teachers of primary Government schools as regards -

- (a) health and safety;
- (b) infrastructure, and
- (c) IT and whether he will give details in respect of each item.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am given to understand that requests made by head teachers of State primary schools are considered as routine matters. Requests are made on a quasi daily basis and can be either verbal or written. Same are then channelled to the respective zonal directorates through the primary school inspectorate. There is, therefore, no record of each and every request made to allow for precise figures to be computed as regards total number of requests made by head teachers in respect of any particular period. These requests may pertain to the improvement of the school environment, security and safety of schoolchildren and staff or other matters.

However, independently of requests received from head teachers, pursuant to policy decisions, major initiatives have emanated from the Ministry proper, for instance, the construction of new primary schools at Grand Sable, Bambous and Plaine Verte. Another example would be the redefinition of norms and standards for school toilets and the launching of a very ambitious campaign to renovate and upgrade toilets in schools.

D05/P11/mt/2

UNREVISED

(No. B/181) contd.

As a result of the combination of the above two procedures, requests from head teachers and initiatives of the Ministry proper, over a period of three years projects such as water logging and blocked drains, installation of fire extinguishers and cleaning/replacement of gutters have been implemented. Fire extinguishers have been provided in some 30 schools so far, of which one could quote the example of Arsenal State primary school and Nicolay State primary school. Gutters have been replaced at Adolphe De Plevitz State primary school at La Laura and GRSE State primary school. I am equally informed that shelters, road humps, zebra crossings or handrails have been provided when the need is badly felt. Two such schools are Grand Bay State primary school and Jean Lebrun State Primary school, Port Louis.

Requests concerning infrastructural works relate essentially to leakages, electrical works, fencing/erection of block walls and construction of additional classrooms. Water roofing works have been carried out at the New Pailles State primary school and l'Esperance State primary school. Fencing works at Soortee Sunnee State primary school, Port Louis are near completion. Electrical works have been completed at Marcel Cabon State primary school, Cité La Cure and Dr. E. Millien State Primary School, Port Louis. The construction of boundary walls at Nuckchady State primary school, Rose Hill and Reverend Walter State primary school, Quartier Militaire has also been undertaken. Eight new classrooms and a new toilet block have been built at Dr. I. Goomany State primary school, Plaine Verte; likewise extension works for 4 classrooms have been completed at Bon Accueil State primary school. Roches Brunes State primary school has been favoured with an additional four classrooms.

As mentioned earlier, Government has embarked on an unprecedented programme for the upgrading and construction of toilet blocks in a number of primary schools (nearly finished). The implementation of this project spans over several years. A contract has already been awarded to the Development Works Corporation for the construction of new toilet blocks in six primary schools, Quatre Cocos, Congomah, Union Park, Wooton, Mohunlall Mohit at L'Avenir and Remy Ollier, Rose Hill.

UNREVISED

(No. B/181) contd.

Works have already started in the first four and are expected to be completed by the end of June 2004 and works are due to start shortly in another eight schools, which are the Vale, Calebasses, Cottage, Moka, Shri R. Gandhi, Flacq, Henrietta, Barlow, Chooroomoney at Quatre Bornes.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister. Will the hon. Minister inform the House as to the estimated costs of acceding to such requests?

Mr Obeegadoo: If a substantive question is put, Sir, I shall be delighted to furnish the details which would testify to the massive investment that this Government has made in education and training.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister explain to the House how is it that he has not spent 89% of the sum budgeted for improvement and maintenance of primary schools?

(Interruptions)

I refer the hon. Minister to the document provided before. Will the hon. Minister not concede that he has failed in his duty towards primary schools, when out of Rs225 m. allocated for the welfare of children, he failed to use 89%?

Mr Obeegadoo: That will be for the people of Mauritius to judge at the appropriate time, Sir.

13/4/04

201

CA/D05/W01/1

Debate No. 05 of 13.04.04

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRIMARY SCHOOLS' STUDENTS - ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION

(No. B/162) Mr A.K. Gungah (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he will ensure that Road Safety Unit actions are directed towards primary school children, so as to sensitise them over the dangers of road accidents and their possible causes with emphasis on the effect of alcohol on drivers.

Reply (The Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping):

Road safety education forms part of the national road safety strategy adopted by my Ministry and is being implemented in all primary schools throughout the island.

The rationale behind delivering lectures at schools lies in the fact that children constitute a vulnerable group on our roads, as they cannot judge traffic safety and understand fully the dangers to which they are exposed as road users.

An Action Plan has been prepared to cover all the 274 primary schools, including non-aided schools, within a period of two years.

Since the beginning of this year, in collaboration with the Police Road Safety Unit and the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research, 42 schools have already been visited.

The lectures which are given in the primary schools encompass both theoretical and practical sessions by way of talks and posters, and road usage through traffic playgrounds respectively.

In fact, with the ever increasing density of traffic, practical teaching of road usage is viewed as indispensable and vital in sensitising younger elements of the society.

...

CA/D05/W01/2
(No. B/162) (Contd)

Six specific lessons with a strong practical element have been designed by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit targeting students of Standards I to VI.

These lessons cover such topics as –

- roads, traffic and accidents;
- crossing the road;
- safety in buses and cars;
- safe cycling, and
- safe routes to school.

In the primary school curriculum also there is a module on road safety and the precautions to be taken to avoid road accidents.

I wish to point out that, at present, road safety education in primary school does not lay emphasis on the effect of alcohol on driving. The advisability of introducing any such topic would be considered in consultation with the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research.

However, my Ministry carried out two campaigns on the subject of drink and drive, targeting the general public in December 2002 and 2003 respectively.

**CREVE COEUR GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - POLLUTION
PROBLEM**

20/4/04
29

(No. B/234) Mr M. Chumroo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, in regard to the Crève Coeur Government School, he will state -

- (a) there is an acute pollution problem in the school compound and, if so, since when, and
- (b) if his Ministry has proposed solutions to overcome this problem in 2001 and, if so, what actions have been initiated.

The Minister of Industry, Financial Services and Corporate Affairs (Mr K. Khushiram): I would like, with your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to reply to this question.

I am informed that the head teacher of Creve Coeur Government school had reported in February this year of a problem of pollution in the school compound. It appears that used engine oil and fuel discharged from a neighbour's premises flows through gaps in the fence into the school

Cont'd...

D06P06cl/3

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. B/234 (Cont'd)

compound. Used tyres are also being stacked against the school fence by that same neighbour. These tyres accumulate rainwater and are hotbeds for mosquitoes. These two elements cause a lot of discomfort to the pupils and staff of the school.

The Ministry of Health & Quality of Life was apprised by the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research Zonal Directorate 1 (Port Louis/North) of the situation on 19 February 2004. Furthermore, the head teacher of the school lodged a formal complaint at the Health Office of Pamplemousses. Two sanitary notices under the Public Health Act, were served upon the author of the nuisances on 03 March 2004.

As for part (b) of the question, I was advised that the Ministry of Education & Scientific Research has initiated action for the replacement of the damaged chain-link fencing by a new blockwall on the left side of the school as well as the replacement of rusted and damaged chain-link fencing on the front side of the school. Tenders have already been launched and works are scheduled to start by the end of May and will be completed by the end of July this year.

Mr Chumroo: Being given that the Minister is not present, I will only make a request that the pollution which exists there should be immediately eliminated.

Mr Khushiram: Steps are being taken, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to resolve this issue.

20/4/04
30³⁹

D06P06cl/7

UNREVISED

SCHOOL PREMISES - FOODSTUFFS - SALE

(No. B/238) **Dr. R. Jeetah (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart)** asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether, in regard to the sale of sweets and other food items within and near school premises, he will state if his Ministry has taken all steps to ensure compliance with the Food Act and regulations made thereunder.

Mr A. Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to the sale of sweets and other food items within or near school premises, I wish to inform that all food handlers are required under Regulation 47 of the Food Regulations 1998 to follow a food hygiene training course before being issued with a Food Handler's Certificate.

Inspections of all foodstuffs offered for sale on or around school premises are carried out regularly by the officers of the Health Inspectorate Division to ensure that school children are provided with wholesome food.

In addition to inspection of canteens, the kitchens of hawkers, who sell items near school premises, are also inspected to ensure compliance with the food sanitary norms.

Samples of foodstuffs are also taken at random and sent to the Central Health Laboratory and the Chief Government analyst for bacteriological and chemical examination, respectively with a view to ensuring that they are fit for human consumption.

Preparation and cooking of food on school premises are prohibited except for canteens which are duly licensed for that purpose in secondary schools. From January 2004 to date, 551 inspections were carried out in

Cont'd...

D06P06c1/8

UNREVISED

P.Q. No. B/238 (cont'd)

schools. Following these visits, 12 improvement notices and 10 prohibition orders were issued and 3 contraventions in connection with unwholesome foods and foods sold in unhygienic conditions, were established. Moreover, 101 places where food sold in schools is being prepared, have been inspected and 14 improvement notices served. Seizure of foodstuffs, not complying with the Food Regulations, have also been effected on the school premises and include yoghurt and stuffed bread distributed in ZEP schools, unlabelled lollies, crystallised foods, *alouda*, cooked or fried noodles, crushed maize and prepacked flavoured milk.

Moreover, following the recent cases of food poisoning reported in schools, my Ministry has tightened control in respect of preparation, transportation, distribution, storage, supply and sale of food items on and near school premises. In this respect, a protocol has been prepared and will be issued for implementation in every school after clearance from the Attorney General's Office.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister. We are all concerned with the quality of food that our children are eating. Could the hon. Minister tell us of the frequency of sampling and the number of schools sampled?

Cont'd...

CA/D06/P07/1
(No. B/238) (Contd)

Mr A. Jugnauth: I have just given the information, Sir. I have not given the number of visits for each school, but in general, from January to date, the number of visits that have been made and whatever have been seized.

Dr Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just want to get an idea of the frequency. How often do they go and visit the schools?

Mr A. Jugnauth: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Mauritius is divided into regions, and each region has its Inspectorate Division. It is at their discretion, because they don't have only schools to visit; they have hospitals, other places to visit. During my management meeting every Thursday, I do ask questions about the number of schools that have been visited. Roughly, I would say that about 10-12 primary schools and about eight or ten secondary schools are visited during schooling days, to be more precise, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir,

Dr. Boolell: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the question is very relevant. Can I impress upon the Minister to see to it that the system is well structured? Because very often the oil is used over and over again, lots of salt is put in the food, with the consequence that this defeat the very objective of Government's policy in respect of prevention.

Mr A. Jugnauth: This is exactly what we are doing. Before, we were not having management meetings. Now that there are such meetings, we are controlling all these and we are trying to put order, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

DE LA SALLE RCA - PTA - REPRESENTATIONS

4/5/04
31

(No. B/333) Dr. R. Beebeejaun (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state if he has received or been made aware of representations by the Parent-Teachers Association of the De La Salle RCA regarding security and risks of accidents of children attending that school and, if so, will he state the decisions taken and when are these likely to be implemented.

Reply: As a matter of fact, I had neither received nor been made aware of representations made by the Parent Teacher's Association of De La Salle RCA regarding the security and risks of accidents of children attending that school.

However, following the question put by the hon. Member, my Ministry inquired from the Roman Catholic Education Authority (RCEA) which was, itself not aware whether representations of such a nature had been received.

DR/D08/W01/7
(No. B/333 Cont'd)

After further inquiry by the RCEA, I have been informed that on 19 August 2003, one Mr Mike Ayacootee, a parent of a pupil of De La Salle RCEA School wrote to the Municipal Council of Port Louis to inform the Council that the bridge adjoining the school was a threat to school children during rainy periods and requested that same be covered with slabs. In October 2003, the PTA of De La Salle RCEA School also wrote to the Municipal Council of Port Louis to the same effect.

On 06 January 2004 the Municipal Council of Port Louis informed the PTA that following a joint site meeting by the National Development Unit and the Municipal Council of Port Louis on 10 November 2003, it had been decided that handrails would be constructed along the drain to prevent the children from having access thereto and that the works would be undertaken by the National Development Unit.

I am informed that the National Development Unit is planning to carry out the relevant works before July this year.

RAOUL RIVET PRIMARY SCHOOL PTA - REPRESENTATIONS

18/5/04
32

(No. B/405) Dr. R. Beebeejaun (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he has received representations from the Raoul Rivet Primary School Parent-Teacher's association regarding -

- (a) the toilets which constitute a dangerous health hazard with dripping faecal matters;
- (b) overcrowding;
- (c) lack of space for computer technology;
- (d) library;
- (e) sports activities;
- (f) absence of basic facilities such as staff room and proper oriental class, and, if so, the remedial measures his Ministry intends to take and when.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, I have indeed received representations from the Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) of Raoul Rivet Primary School concerning various infrastructural shortcomings at that school.

Raoul Rivet Primary School, in its present form, has been operational for some 25 years now and it is obvious that the present unsatisfactory state of affairs is the result of inadequate attention given to school infrastructure including that of Raoul Rivet in the past.

.../

UNREVISED

(No. B/405) contd.

Since I assumed the office in the year 2000, the present Government has made an unprecedented investment in the provision of new educational infrastructure, although priority has, by and large, been given to the secondary sector within the perspective of secondary schooling being made compulsory as from next year.

As regards the case of Raoul Rivet Primary School, I, myself, visited the site on 18 March 2004, accompanied by representatives of the Parent-Teacher's Association. I am informed that works undertaken, over the last three years, include repairs to the stonewall, plumping works, replacement of flushing tanks, consolidation of windows, painting of false ceilings, replacement of squatting pans and tiling works as well as reparation of water tanks for the toilets. In addition, according to information provided to me, the school gate has been repaired and waterproofing on the roof carried out.

Further, the school, I am advised, has been repainted. Moreover, at my request, the possibility of acquiring additional land for the school is being explored.

As regards the specific points raised by the hon. gentleman, the answer is as follows -

- (a) According to repeated surveys carried out by the Health Inspectorate of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, the toilets do not have dripping faecal matters, although there is slight dripping of wastewater and external seepage of wastewater which, I am informed, is being attended to.
 - (b) The school is, indeed, relatively over-populated, as are several schools in Port Louis, due to the absence of new construction projects in years gone by. Fortunately, the present Government is working on the construction of a new primary school in Port Louis.
 - (c) As many other primary schools, Raoul Rivet Primary School does not possess a spare room for ICT and will be provided with an ICT laboratory in line with the school IT project in the future.
-

D10/P06/mt/2

UNREVISED

(No. B/405) contd.

- (d) Likewise, as in many primary schools, the separate library or reading-room does not exist, although reading periods are organised in the classroom.
- (e) Sports facilities are severely constrained by the scarcity of space on the premises. The hon. gentleman may note that in an unprecedented attempt to address the problem, negotiations are ongoing with the Ministry of Youth and Sports for the sharing of facilities, which will undoubtedly benefit the children of Raoul Rivet Primary School, as well as other schools.
- (f) The issue of staff room and additional classrooms will be addressed in the light of the availability of additional land.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Raoul Rivet Primary School is a perfect example of the inadequate facilities in primary schools, resulting from lack of foresight and improper management, as well as inadequate investment in education in years gone by. All the mistakes of the past cannot be corrected within a few years, but we are resolutely working to better the working and learning environment of schoolchildren and staff alike.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Is the Ministry agreeable to the purchase of land adjacent to the school so as to be able to extend the facilities?

Mr Obeegadoo: Yes, Sir. When I was there in March, my attention was brought, for the first time, to that fact. True it is that land in the centre of Port Louis is very expensive indeed. Nonetheless, my Ministry has approached the Ministry of Housing to consider the advisability and practicability of purchasing additional land.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Will the hon. Minister confirm that he, himself, witnessed wastewater spillage/faecal matter dripping? He was there when all these things were happening. May we know how much of it has been corrected?

.../...

UNREVISED

(No. B/405) contd.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me again stress that I am not an expert in the matter. I cannot say whether it was faecal matter or wastewater. However, the sanitary services of the Ministry of Health have assured my Ministry that they have not seen any faecal matter dripping, but state that there is wastewater. We have given instructions and that matter is being attended to as far as possible in the present state of the premises.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid that Raoul Rivet Primary School is not in a very happy condition. Ideally, we would have to reconstruct the whole building. Yet, I was surprised to learn that the present premises were constructed only 25 years ago.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the lack of space for libraries in most of our schools, will the hon. Minister consider the possibility of having a class/library....

Mr Speaker: The question relates to Raoul Rivet Primary School.

Mrs Labelle: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, to the libraries in our schools...

Mr Speaker: No, no. This question relates to one school, Raoul Rivet Primary School.

Mrs Labelle: So, let's stay on the case of Raoul Rivet Primary School. Since there is a lack of space there, will the hon. Minister consider the possibility of having a class/library, which will consist of some shelves in the class for the books?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is rarely possible, because according to past norms the classrooms are too small. We even tried to have lockers installed in classrooms, but that's not possible. Now, we have defined new specifications for classrooms with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, so that the new schools, for instance, at Bambous, which will be built, will have much larger classrooms to allow for such initiatives.

D10/P06/mt/4

UNREVISED

(No. B/405) contd.

Dr. Beebeejaun: My concern is not yet addressed. Will the hon. Minister tell us - wastewater is not clean water - whether there is still spillage of such water? Because my information is that, up to this morning there was still spillage. How long will it take to get rid of this problem? This is a serious health hazard, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me repeat that measures are being taken. Many things have been done at that school. Unfortunately, in years gone by measures were not taken. Over the last three years, I have listed a host of measures taken and the issue of dripping wastewater is being attended to.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: Is the hon. Minister aware that his Government voted a budget of Rs225 m. and that 89%...

Mr Speaker: No, this is a specific question about Raoul Rivet Primary School.

Dr. Jeetah: It is related, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you allow me. 89% of that budget was not spent and this is why all these schools are suffering now.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Beebeejaun, next question!

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me explain again.

Mr Speaker: No, it is not relevant. Next question!

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, a simple question - I call it simple - of wastewater spillage cannot be addressed in two months! It has already been two months since the hon. Minister visited the premises. When will it be addressed?

.../...

D10/P06/mt5

UNREVISED

(No. B/405) contd.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't like being nasty. The hon. gentleman is the local Member of Parliament. He was in Government as a Minister for a period of nearly five years...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please! Hon. Dr. Beebeejaun!

Mr Obeegadoo: The PTA of that school has acknowledged that a lot has been done over the last three years, but that we still have some catching up to do in respect of past neglect.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I go along with the hon. Minister that there is overcrowding and that it will take time, but addressing a public health problem should not take all that time. There was no faecal matter dripping when I was a Minister. Now, there is!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Beebeejaun, next question, please!

(PQ No. B/406 - see after PQ No. B/404)

22 June, 2004

23

37

D20/IF/P08/6

PANCHAVATI AND POINTE DES LASCARS - STUDENTS

(No. B/550) **Dr. R. Jeetah** (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether, he is aware of financial hardship of students of Panchavati and of Pointe des Lascars and, if so, will he -

- (a) arrange for a study to assess the effect of same on attendance and performance at school, and
- (b) consider providing free school bus service to and from school.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have not been aware of any financial hardship of students of Panchavati and Pointe des Lascars. I wish to mention that according to information obtained by my Ministry, 22 pupils from Panchavati and 76 pupils from Pointe des Lascars presently attend Bheewa Mahadoo Government School, Rivière du Rempart.

Panchavati and Pointe des Lascars are found three kms and two kms respectively from Rivière du Rempart and students travel daily to and from school at their own costs. So far, there has been neither a formal representation concerning financial hardship nor any request for free school bus service, for instance, for students of the localities.

However, the House may wish to know that my Ministry with the support of the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups has identified a number of projects in the education sector, aiming at increasing attendance and performance of needy students at school.

A social inquiry has already been initiated by the Trust Fund among some 5000 children who have scored less than 40% at the Standard V examinations of November 2003 in both State and RCEA Primary Schools. Following the social inquiry, the number of children requiring food, school materials or transport support, will be determined, and the necessary measures will be taken accordingly to meet their various needs.

Dr. Jeetah: Sir, I understand that the parents have not made any representation. Would the hon. Minister consider my representation on behalf of those students and provide them with a free bus service?

Mr Obeegadoo: We shall certainly look into the matter, Sir.

26/10/2004

(34)

86

D33/P15/4

**TEACHERS & STUDENTS – TOXIC SUBSTANCES INHALATION –
2001-2004**

(No. B/801) Dr. R. Jeetah (First Member for Piton & Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will give the number of teachers and students affected by the inhalation of toxic substances in the air whilst being on school premises for each of the years 2001 to 2004 to date with full details thereof and say what remedial action, if any, his Ministry has taken or proposes to take to limit same.

The Minister of Training, Skills Development, Productivity and External Communications (Mr S. Fowdar): Mr Speaker, Sir, the information is being compiled and will be placed in the Library of the National Assembly as soon as available.

35 15/2/05

60

CA/D01/P11/3

DIOUMAN, MRS FAEZA – TRANSFER FROM MESNIL PRIMARY SCHOOL TO PANDIT SAHADEO PRIMARY SCHOOL.

(No. B/88) **Dr. A. Boolell** (Second Member for Vieux Grand Port & Rose Belle) asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will state the reasons for which Mrs Faeza Diouman posted at the Mesnil Government School since August 2003 –

- (a) was interdicted as from 17 January 2005, and
- (b) has been transferred to the Pandit Sahadeo Government School during term on 28 January 2005.

Mr Obcegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mrs Faeza Diouman, Arabic teacher, was posted to Mesnil primary school on 18 August 2003. On resumption of studies on Monday 17 January 2005, she was still in post at Mesnil primary school and was not interdicted. However, she was not allocated any class in view of parental protests and her frequent absences for the period 17 to 27 January 2005.

According to information imparted to me, the main reason for the transfer of the teacher from Mesnil primary school to Pandit Sahadeo primary school as from 28 January were her reported strained relationship with members of the staff, frequent absences and use of abusive language, which reported adversely affected the good management of the school and the overall learning environment.

Moreover, I am informed that the PTA of Mesnil primary school made representations to the Ministry for the transfer of the teacher on account of the low performance of pupils who sat for the CPE in 2004 in Arabic.

Therefore, with a view to avoiding further disruption of normal schooling at Mesnil primary school, it was decided to transfer Mrs Faeza Diouman to Pandit Sahadeo primary school, where her performance and behaviour are being closely monitored.

Dr. Boolell: Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know whether the transfer was punitive or not. I have here two relevant papers that I would like to lay on the Table of the Assembly to certify that, probably, the transfer was inappropriate and punitive.

...

CA/D01/P11/4
(No. B/88) (Contd)

Mr Speaker: Where does the paper come from?

Dr. Boolell: It comes from the Head Teacher of the Mesnil Government School.

The Prime Minister: Signed by whom?

Dr. Boolell: Signed by Mrs Elaheebocus. I am laying it on the Table of the Assembly.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member can take copies of it.

Mr Speaker: That's the reason why I asked the hon. Member the question. This Table is not a bin. We allow Members to put in documents, so long they are reliable. This is why I asked the Member from where it comes and whether it was an anonymous letter or document or whether it was signed.

Dr. Boolell: It is a relevant document signed by the Head Teacher, and I am going to lay it on the Table of the Assembly.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is saying that the Head Teacher has signed the document. I have no doubt about what he has said.

YEAR 2005

PRIMARY SCHOOLS - HYGIENIC CONDITIONS (01/03/05)

(No. B/177) Dr. R. Jeetah (First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state the measures taken to maintain proper hygienic conditions in the primary schools.

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the term hygienic conditions is undefined in the question, I propose to address the issue from three perspectives -

- (i) general cleaning of school premises and toilets;
- (ii) proper maintenance of apparatus such as water tanks, and
- (iii) food sale in school canteens and by vendors.

To be very short, as regards general cleaning of school premises, this is entrusted to labourers under the supervision of head teachers.

As regards apparatus and water tanks, these are cleaned twice yearly.

The last circular on cleaning and maintenance of water tanks was issued to all Heads of primary schools in July 2004 and Head Teachers are regularly reminded to ensure strict compliance with guidelines for the cleaning and maintenance of water tanks issued by the Environmental Health Unit of the Ministry of Health.

As regards sanitary conditions in school canteens, again by way of circulars, Head Teachers have been informed that canteen keepers and all vendors or hawkers who operate within and outside school premises need to have a valid trade licence issued by the respective local authority and a food hawkers certificate issued by the Ministry of Health.

Canteen keepers and food vendors/hawkers are made to comply with the list of food stocks or price for sale in school canteens by the Ministry of Health and proper control is exerted on these school vendors operating outside school premises.

Canteen keepers who do not comply with sanitary norms as well as food vendors in such a situation are reported routinely to health officers and to the Police.

At the level of ZEP schools, a School Development Unit has been set up at the level of each school to ensure amongst other things the efficient and proper distribution of the three meals provided in good hygienic condition according to the guidelines set by the Ministry of Health.

As regards the Food Supplementary Programme in primary schools generally, my Ministry is presently preparing guidelines for the handling and distribution of bread to pupils.

In addition to those measures, the Maintenance Unit of the Zonal Directorates of my Ministry attend regularly to identify minor and maintenance works in the primary schools.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that, because of privatisation of some of the cleaning services, much of the schools go unclean, and the headmasters are unable to do anything?

Mr Obeegadoo: This is an interesting point, Mr Speaker, Sir. In fact, we have been, in a recent past, reviewing this whole privatisation policy, which was meant to ensure greater efficiency but which, in certain schools, has not been properly managed. We will be filling a number of positions in a substantive capacity, so as to address the problem.

Mr Michel: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether he is satisfied with the sanitary conditions in the primary schools?

Mr Obeegadoo: One can never be totally satisfied, Sir. There are nearly 300 publicly funded primary schools and we have to be on the look out, closely monitoring the situation in all schools. We depend a lot upon the performance of our head teachers, of our inspectors. Generally, I believe the conditions are satisfactory, but from time to time there is mismanagement in certain exceptional cases.

**ROBERT EDWARD HART GOVERNMENT SCHOOL –
SURINAM - TEACHER – ABSENCES (06/09/05)**

(No. I B/209) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if he has been made aware of the problems faced by the students of Standard I of Robert Edward Hart Government School at Surinam due to the frequent absences of a teacher and, if so, will be state what remedial measures are envisaged.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed that on 23 and 24 August 2005, some parents of pupils of one of the two classes of Standard I of Robert Edward Hart Government School (Surinam) made verbal complaints to the Head Teacher regarding the absence of the class teacher on 22 August 2005. In fact, the absence of the teacher was mainly due to examinations the teacher had to take part in.

On Thursday 01 September 2005, the Head Teacher convened all parents of the pupils of that class, to explain to them that their complaint has been investigated and found not justified. The President of the Parents Teachers Association of the school was also present.

I assure the hon. Member and the House that my Ministry, through its zonal directorate, is monitoring the absence as well as the performance of the teacher. Should there be a need for remedial action, the needful will be done.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Can the hon. Minister say whether he has checked the absences of the teacher concerned during the past year?

Mr Gokhool: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have the details. I have checked the absences. The absences amount to 4½ days' sick leave, 11 days' casual leave, including 4 days for examination purposes.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: In view of the unrest among the parents of those students, can the Minister say whether he can give urgent attention to this problem?

Mr Gokhool: I have already replied. There was no unrest, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The Head Teacher has spoken to the parents and also to the PTA and the situation is being monitored.

**AGALEAN STUDENTS – END OF SCHOOL YEAR 2005 -
RETURN TO AGALEGA (13/09/05)**

(No. I B/252) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Agalean students attending secondary education in Mauritius, he will state if he proposes to arrange for their return to Agalega at the end of the school year 2005 and, if so, will he state –

- (a) when, and
- (b) by what means of transport.

The Ag. Prime Minister (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am advised that the Outer Islands Development Corporation will make arrangements for the return of the Agalean children attending secondary education in Mauritius at the end of the school year 2005, as was the case for the past four years.

With regard to the date, this will be fixed subject to the availability of

'The Vigilant' and if this is not possible alternative transport arrangement will be made.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may ask the Ag. Prime Minister if arrangements could be made for either 'Le Dornier' or 'Catovair' to return these children after their school year, because as the ex-General Manager of OI DC, I know the problems which we got last year?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Member for this suggestion and we will take it on board. As you are well aware, there are problems regarding 'Le Dornier', 'The Viligant' and also accessibility.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Ag. Prime Minister whether arrangements could be made to bring back these schoolchildren at the beginning of the school year 2006?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Yes, of course, we will make arrangements for their return.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS - PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (13/09/05)

(No. B/275) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq & Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if there is an established set of performance indicators in public primary schools and, if so, indicate –

- (a) the rate of teacher absenteeism;
- (b) the rate of pupil absenteeism;
- (c) the running cost per pupil;
- (d) the actual and desirable ratio of administrative to teaching staff.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, I am informed that presently we do not have a comprehensive set of performance indicators in public primary schools. However, the two main indicators being used for pupil's performance in our primary schools - Standard I to Standard VI - are the term tests and end of year examinations.

As regards parts (a) to (d) of the question, I am informed that –

- (a) Presently, there exists, at the level of the schools, a mechanism

whereby the teacher's absence is computed on a monthly basis and appropriate returns are forwarded to the respective Zones Directorate for close monitoring. However, the rate of teacher absenteeism, *per se*, is not computed and is therefore not available.

(b) Pupil's absences are monitored through the existing system of attendance register. However, the rate of pupil absenteeism, *per se*, is not computed and is therefore not available.

(c) The running cost (defined as operating costs which include salaries, other related costs, utilities, teaching aids and other recurrent costs) per pupil on average for public primary schools, excluding RCA, Hindu Aided and the ZEP schools is around Rs13,000 per annum (financial year 2004-2005), and

(d) As regards the actual and desirable ratio of administrative to teaching staff, these have not been worked out so far.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must state that these are very simple statistics which are important elements for the education reform process, but are presently not available.

As this Government is giving a new dimension to education reform which aims at improving cost-efficiency across the primary school system, clear measurable performance indicators at all levels will be worked out for proper monitoring, control and assessments.

Dr. Mungur: I thank the hon. Minister for this valuable information. If the curriculum is a road map for quality education, then performance indicators are the informational signs along highways of educational journey. So, will the Minister look into the possibility of making the performance indicators a reality in the near future where the parent/teachers and the students can make use of standards in the educational system. This is where we can start with.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have inherited a system where I have indicated that even simple statistics which are very important for monitoring and policy making are not available. In the context of the education reforms, this is essential and this is being addressed and I can assure the hon. Member that these statistics will be compiled so that we can assess how the reforms are impacting on the quality of education.

**DOORGACHAND HURRY GOVT SCHOOL, GOODLANDS -
OVERFLOW PROBLEMS (08/11/05)**

(No. I B/440) Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he is aware that the toilets of the Doorgachand Hurry Government School situated at Goodlands is in a deplorable state and, if so, will he state what remedial measures are envisaged.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to information given to me, there are two toilet blocks for the pupils of the school and these are around 50 years old.

Overflow problems in the toilets were resolved by the Wastewater Management Authority in April 2005. The discharge pipes were repaired and one pipe was replaced in October 2005.

Following a site visit carried out last week by the maintenance unit of my Ministry, a number of defects has been identified. A survey has subsequently been carried out and the scope of works is being finalised so that part of these works may be attended to during the November/December 2005 school vacation. The remaining works which are of a complex nature will be carried out in the early part of year 2006.

**GRAND RIVER SOUTH EAST GOVT. SCHOOL - PTA -
COMPLAINTS (15/11/05)**

(No. I B/500) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the Government school located at Grand River South East, he will state if he has received from the Parent-Teachers Association -

- (a) any complaints in regard to the dilapidated state of the corrugated iron sheet roof and the false ceiling, and
- (b) a request for the construction of a children's corner and a volleyball cum basketball pitch and, if so, will he state what action has been initiated in respect thereto.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Speaker,

Sir, yes, complaints have been received since 24 November 2004 and no appropriate action was taken.

The remedial works, that is, the replacement of the corrugated iron sheet roof and of the false ceiling, are programmed for the third week of November 2005 and expected to be completed before the resumption of studies in January 2006. The works will be entrusted to the DWC. Quotations from the DWC have been received by the MPI and are presently being assessed.

As regards part (b) of the question, the NDU had, on its own initiative, started in July 2004, preliminary procedures and submitted the project to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in September 2004 for approval and confirmation of funds. The Ministry of Education will review anew the project in the light of its priorities and its budget allocation, taking into consideration that it was estimated at more than Rs500,000 at the time.

SIR SATCAM BOOLELL GOVT. SCHOOL -
PTA - COMPLAINTS

Sebate 15 of 17/11/05

(No. I B/501) Mr L. Bundhoo (Second Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if he has received any complaints from the Parent Teachers Association of the Sir Satcam Boolell Government School at Sebastopol, in regard to -

42

- (a) office and classroom requirements;
- (b) repairs and maintenance, and
- (c) extension of the school yard and, if so, will he state what actions have been initiated in respect thereof.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Speaker, Sir, yes, a request was received on 15 September 2005. The request is only additional to the standard requirements obtained each year from the Head Teacher.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am advised that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources has already examined the request and initiated the necessary procedures for the procurement of those items which are deemed acceptable.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I am informed that works have started and are expected to be completed during the November/December 2005 vacation.

As for part (c) of the question, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources will consider acquiring additional land adjoining the school. Furthermore, the backyard will be fenced so as to release space.

6/12/05
61

62/05

**CHATEAU BENARES PRIMARY GOVERNMENT SCHOOL
- CLOSURE**

(No. 1 B/600) Mr V. Mardemootoo (Second Member for Rivière des Anguilles and Souillac) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if the inhabitants of Chateau Benares have lodged protests following the closure of the Chateau Benares Primary Government School resulting in inconveniences both to the pupils and their parents and, if so, if it is proposed to reopen that school.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the question relating to the protests by the inhabitants of Chateau Benares, I am informed that a petition was, in fact, lodged by them. I wish to point out that Chateau Benares Government School has not yet been closed down. As such the question of reopening at this stage does not arise. However, there is a gradual closing down of the school which started in January 2004 with the non registration of Standard I pupils and the ultimate closing down will be in 2007. In January 2006, there will be only one class of 12 pupils in Standard VI. Students residing in the region of Chateau Benares are redirected to Rivière des Anguilles Government School following a review of the catchment area of that region which is facing a dwindling population resulting in an under populated primary school.

This was prompted to avoid criticisms from the Director of Audit regarding optimisation of existing resources. A policy decision was taken to use a student population of less than 150 as criteria for the closing down of primary and secondary schools on an *ad hoc* basis. You may wish to note that the student population of Chateau Benares Government School was 65 in 2001.

I am also informed that although there were protests in 2004, there were consultations held between officers of the Ministry, the PTA of the school and parents who were agreeable to the transport arrangements made by the Ministry for the students between Chateau Benares Government School and Rivière des Anguilles Government School.

Mr Mardemootoo: Will the Minister envisage, at least, to take measures to facilitate transportation of these unaccompanied kids? Because the bus stop is quite far away and if some bus shelters could be implemented as well.

Mr Gokhool: Yes, I'll look into this aspect of this problem and I assure the hon. Member that action will be taken to alleviate the problems of the children.

Mr Mohamed: In light to the comment of the hon. Minister with regard to the school and the impending closure of the school, would the hon. Minister consider the possibility of making use of the premises for the setting up of a school, obviously not for school children, but for the overpopulation of unemployed, for instance, for them to be able to be given courses that would enable them and allow them to find a job in the future like a training school?

Mr Gokhool: I see a note, Mr Speaker, Sir, which says that there is a possibility of using the premises for putting up a prevocational school or a similar project.

YEAR 2006

SCHOOLS – PEAK HOURS – SERVICES OF POLICEMEN (04/04/06)

(No. B/80) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will impress upon the Commissioner of Police the need to have Policemen posted outside all schools during peak traffic hours, especially immediately after school hours.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that arrangements already exist for one Police Officer to be posted daily outside all schools. In the morning, that is, from 0730 hours to 0900 hours, and in the afternoon from 1430 hours to 1600 hours. Such arrangements are also made at bus stands and drop-off points of school buses.

The primary aim of this deployment is to regulate traffic and help children crossing the road with a view to ensuring their safety and security.

Police Officers in charge of stations liaise with the Head Teachers of the various primary schools on a regular basis and provide any assistance needed to enhance safety and security at schools. Moreover, with a view to sensitising school children on safety and security issues, regular talks are delivered by the Road Safety Unit, the Crime Prevention Unit and the Family Protection Unit.

Having said that, I must say that I have been told that sometimes, there are practical difficulties to do so.

I have asked the Commissioner of Police to look at ways and means to ensure that such arrangements can be adhered to and road signs are put up, clearly indicating that there are schools in the vicinity.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I draw the attention of the hon. Prime Minister on the state of affairs, particularly, at Royal Road, Belle Rose where there is Regis Chaperon Secondary School and four other secondary schools also. Buses are parked on both sides of the road and an accident is waiting to happen. Several times, when I passed there, I have, personally, not seen any Policeman.

The Prime Minister: I will certainly take up the matter with the

Commissioner of Police.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, pupils of most schools leave schools at five o'clock after tuition. The Police Officers are there at four o'clock. So, we have a problem at five o'clock when these pupils leave schools. Can the hon. Prime Minister see to it that arrangements are made for the safety of the pupils when they leave school at five?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have asked the Commissioner of Police, because there are practical difficulties concerning the number of Policemen in the Police station and all this. That is what they told me. They will have to look at alternative arrangements.

SCHOOL PREMISES - STUDENTS - SAFETY & SECURITY (04/04/06)

(No. B/135) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will consider the advisability of requesting schools' staff to supervise the orderly exit of students from school premises in order to prevent accidents which may occur due to chaotic runs for buses parked outside school premises.

Reply: I wish to thank the hon. Member for the question and to say that the safety and security of students both within and outside school compounds are of central concern to us as a caring Government.

I am informed that it is the responsibility of the management of the schools to generally ensure discipline as well as the safety and security of the students. The Head of school assisted by the teaching and non-teaching staff should normally ensure that there is an orderly exit of students and they do not leave the school before the whole process is over.

However, each school has its own specificities and the matter has to be examined also from the point of view of the external factors affecting the exit of students, like traffic congestion particularly in urban areas, lack of sufficient parking for cars, buses and vans.

Although the existing arrangements are, by and large, satisfactory there is still room for improvement.

Arrangements do exist for the orderly exit of students from schools after school hours and Head of Schools are constantly reminded of these arrangements.

**DOORGACHAND HURRY GOVERNMENT SCHOOL –
LARCENY BREAKING (25/04/06)**

(No. B/357) Mr R. Guttee (Third Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to whether thefts have been committed on or about 04 April 2006 at –
(a) the Sharma Jugdambi State Secondary School, and
(b) the Doorgachand Hurry Government School and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that no theft has been reported at the Sharma Jugdambi State Secondary School.

As regards Doorgachand Hurry Government School, a case of 'larceny breaking' was reported at Goodlands Police Station on 04 April 2006. On the same day, the local Crime Investigation Department (CID) and the Scene of Crime Office (SOCO) attended to the case.

The value of goods and money stolen is estimated at Rs42,900 and damage caused to furniture is Rs31,500.

On 20 April 2006, Police arrested a suspect residing in Goodlands. The investigation is still underway.

Since Doorgachurn Hurry Government School and Sharma Jugdambi SSS are found in the vicinity of a Police station, they are covered mostly by foot patrol. Likewise, mobile patrols are provided by personnel of the Divisional Support Unit, ERS and CID.

I am also informed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources that with a view to strengthening security in our primary and secondary schools, security services (watchmanship) have been contracted out.

TEACHERS – TRAINING AND PROFESSIONALISM (25/04/06)

(No. B/403) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire

and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the policy of his Ministry in respect of the continuous training of teachers.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the policy of my Ministry is to ensure quality education through quality teaching. Thus, my Ministry is focused on ensuring the professionalisation of the teaching staff through a number of ways, including through a process of continuous training. In fact, teacher training and continuous professional development of teachers is a priority of my Ministry.

The answer is very long, so if Mr Speaker does not mind, it can be circulated. There are many details. **(Appendix I)**

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much.

SVR GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - SPEED BREAKER (09/05/06)

(No. B/451) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether he will state if he has received a petition from the residents of Sodnac Avenue for the installation of a speed breaker in the vicinity of the Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo Government School and, if so, will he state where matters stand.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a petition from the inhabitants of the Sodnac Avenue requesting for speed breakers in the vicinity of the Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo Government School was received at my Ministry on 18 April 2006.

Following a survey by the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit, my Ministry proposes to convert the existing zebra crossing in front of the Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo Government School into a flat top hump pedestrian crossing. The works will be carried out shortly.

CHITRAKOOT GOVT. SCHOOL – VALLEE DES PRETRES – MINISTRY/PTA – MEETINGS (13/06/06)

(No. B/752) Mrs K. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North &

Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Chitrakoot Government School, situated at Vallée des Prêtres, he will state the decisions taken, if any, after the meeting held with the Parent-Teacher Association.

Reply: I assume that the meeting refers to the one held on 26 May 2006 under my chairmanship.

Since the submission of a structural report by the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping in March 2006 recommending that all pupils and staff of the school be moved to a safer building in the near future, my Ministry has had regular meetings with the Parent-teacher Association and parents of the school.

The following three options were taken up during the discussions –

- (i) accommodating all the 108 pupils of Chitrakoot Government School at Vallée des Prêtres Government School which has a school population of 424 pupils, or
- (ii) housing the pupils of Standards I to III at Vallée des Prêtres Government School and those of Standards IV to VI at Guy Rozemont Government School Tranquebar, Port Louis where rooms are available, or
- (iii) accommodating all the pupils at Dr. Onésiphe Beugeard Government School.

The preferred option for the Ministry was to transfer all pupils to Vallée des Prêtres Government School. However, neither the parents nor the teaching staff agreed to those proposals. Consequently, I chaired a meeting on 26 May 2006 with the Parent-Teacher Association to arrive at a definite decision with them over the issue.

During the meeting the following decisions were taken –

- My Ministry will request the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to construct a light structure within the school premises to accommodate the whole school population. The request was subsequently made on the same day.
- In the meantime, the pupils will be immediately shifted to the safe classrooms within the school.
You may wish to know that needful has already been done to move the pupils to the safe classrooms.

I am also advised that the Ministry of Environment & NDU is carrying out a study of the Chitrakoot region after the landslide of March 2005. A first phase of geotechnical investigations has already been carried out. Tenders for a second phase have been launched and the closing date is 28 June 2006. That study will indicate, *inter alia*, whether a new primary school could be constructed on any one of the two alternative sites already identified by the Ministry of Housing & Lands in the Chitrakoot region.

**PRIMARY SCHOOLS SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING PROJECT
AND SC AND HSC EXAMINATIONS FEES (20/06/06)**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) (By Private Notice) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to Government decision to rethink its priorities in social protection to the needy, as announced in the Budget Speech, he will state the number of –
(a) school children and schools benefiting from the Primary Schools Supplementary Feeding Project, and
(b) beneficiaries under the subsidy for the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate Examinations Fees Scheme;
indicating, in each case, the estimated expenditure for the financial year 2005-2006

The Minister of Education & Human Resources (Mr D. Gokhool):
Mr Speaker, Sir, the overall philosophy of the Labour Government has always been supportive of vulnerable sections of the population. In line with this philosophy, Government has set up the Welfare State, which is still thriving today.

In the present Budget, Government is further consolidating the concept of the Welfare State, with the clear objective of providing better support to the most under-privileged members of the Community.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said it in very clear terms in his Budget Speech that every rupee of the taxpayer money will be spent judiciously. In almost every area of public spending there is scope for improvement. And this Government is not saving money by cutting on the delivery of services. Nor is it putting into question the need to support the needy and the vulnerable groups. On the contrary what it is seeking to do is to reorient its social programmes so that those who are really in need receive yet greater and more effectual support from

Government money.

It is obvious that our social net today comprises unfocused programmes that provide generous benefits for many that do not need them but fails to support many that do. The distribution incidence of such a policy is, therefore, largely regressive.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we are attaining the noble objective of helping the vulnerable but in a very costly way. Our present system of social net is dysfunctional and ineffectual. And most of all unfair to the neediest of our citizens.

Mr Speaker Sir, two thirds wealthiest Mauritians absorb over Rs200 m. more than half the benefits of the rice and flour subsidy programme that is meant for the needy. They also receive three quarters of the subsidy on SC and HSC examination fees. And the primary school feeding programme is also known for a certain amount of wastage and inequity. What is wrong with reorienting, the money spent on these programmes to increase the support given to the most needy? What is wrong with reorienting taxpayer money from where it is wasted and not needed to where it meets the needs of the neediest of our citizens and improves their welfare?

As stated in the Budget Speech, now is the time to stop irrationality that has characterised some of the programmes in our social safety net system for years and spend taxpayers' money in a way that really achieves our noble objectives. Now is the time to muster the courage, to reallocate these expenditures in ways that bring greater benefits to those who need government support the most.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said in my reply to PQ B/306, prior to the 1990s, primary school children were receiving milk, a loaf of bread, cheese and dried fruits in the context of the World Food Programme, which was introduced in 1970 by the then Labour Government to combat malnutrition and to improve school attendance and performance. However, with the gradual phasing out of this programme, after the year 1990, only a loaf of bread and milk were distributed to school children.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in 1989, the then Government agreed to the proposal of an Evaluation Mission of the World Food Programme to phase out gradually the project in view of increasing demands on the World Food Programme reduced development resources by more needy countries.

The World Food Programme definitely ceased its assistance to the

School Feeding Project in Mauritius in December 1996. Government, consequently, decided to take over at its own cost the supply of bread to primary school pupils. Under this School Feeding Project, a bread is distributed to each primary school student.

As regards the number of schools which receive bread, I have the figures. The number of schools benefiting from Primary School Supplementary Feeding Project is as follows –

Mauritius - 233

Rodrigues - 12

Agalega - 2

The total number of schools is 247.

The number of pupils benefiting from Primary Schools Supplementary Feeding Project is as follows –

Mauritius - 19,913

Rodrigues - 4,649

Agalega - 51

Total number of schools is 14,613.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Budget provision for the School Supplementary Feeding Project for 2005-2006 was Rs26 m. The actual expenditure was Rs16.9 m approximately. This is the figure. So, this is with regard to the number of schools, the number of pupils and the Budget for the Primary School Supplementary Feeding Project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question which relates to School Certificate and Higher School Certificate fees, I wish to remind the House that the previous Government had already decided - I hope that this reminds the Leader of the Opposition of the Budget Speech of 2004-2005 – to target the grant of 50% subsidy on SC and HSC exam fees.

(Interruptions)

The decision was there....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: We are talking about SC and HSC examination fees. This meant that at the end of the day only a particular category of students would have been eligible to the 50% subsidy. So, the targeting idea was

already there in the minds of the previous Government.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one of our key objectives is to provide support to those who need it most. The philosophy of the Government is to provide support to those who are most in need of that support. In line with the philosophy of the Budget for greater solidarity and support towards the neediest members of the community, we are ensuring that all needy students obtain not 50%, but 100% of subsidy on SC and HSC students...

(Interruptions)

As stated in paragraphs 154 and 157 of the Budget Speech, I quote –
Paragraph 154 –

“Since our objective is to increase assistance to those who really need it as from 01 July, we will provide them with a monthly income support payment of Rs225, representing a 15% bonus.

Paragraph 157 -

“In addition, the scheme to pay half the SC and HSC examination fees will be discontinued except for the needy students. Government will continue to pay the other half of the fees for these needy students. Henceforth, the fees of these students will be paid in full by the Ministry of Social Security.”

Mr Speaker, Sir, as concerns the number of students who will be concerned with regard to 2005-2006, for SC the figure is 13,000, for HSC, the figure is 6,500 and the subsidy which was earmarked was Rs72 m.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is called *taillé, rasé!*

(Interruptions)

May I ask the Minister of Education whether this is not the unkindest of all the cuts in the social net? Are we not refusing a poor child a loaf of bread every day and a young student a passport for a better life?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained the philosophy of the Labour Party and Labour Government has always been to protect the neediest. The Leader of the Opposition is talking about care. I would refer him to the previous Government which, in the context of this project, had already decided that this feeding project should be targeted. To enlighten the hon. Leader of the Opposition, may I ask him to refer to a Parliamentary

Question which was set to the then Minister of Education by hon. Mrs Labelle on this issue. To enlighten the House I would just like to quote - that was in 2002 - with your permission –

“At present, all pupils of primary schools are receiving a daily loaf of bread and this is financed from funds available under the “Primary School Supplementary Feeding” vote of my Ministry. It is feared, at the level of my Ministry that the distribution of a loaf of bread is not serving the purpose of the School Feeding Project which is meant for (...).”

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order please!

Mr Gokhool: Hon. Bérenger was saying that....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: I have not finished. Let me add...

(Interruptions)

So, the previous Government, looking at the project, stated that it was not serving the purpose of the School Feeding Project for which it was meant and, therefore, decided on a scheme. A scheme was therefore being worked out to target resources to pupils who are in dire need of supplementary...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: They were targeting the project...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the Minister finish.

Mr Gokhool: With regard to the SC and HSC examination fees, again the Leader of the Opposition is trying to imply that we do not care and we

are not a caring Government. Let me remind the Leader of the Opposition what his leader had to say about the SC and HSC fees.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: Let me quote from the Budget Speech 2004-2005, par. 295-296 –

“A second fundamental reform that this Budget introduces is the targeting of Government transfers. Government transfers are simply not sustainable if they are universal and open-ended. This puts a limit on our capacity to do more for the poorer segment of the population. I believe that this is an issue that calls for a bold decision”.
The intention was there, but they did not have the courage to go and deal with the problem and provide the support to those who were in need.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: This is what the leader of the MSM said...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, I have not finished. Let me add what the Leader of the MSM had to say...

Mr Gokhool: This is what the ex-Minister of Finance stated – ‘targeting will also be extended

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I said.

Mr Gokhool: Truth hurts, that is why they are not listening. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what the ex-Minister of Finance had to say about fees.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please! Listen to the answer.

Mr Gokhool: This is what he said - targeting will also be extended to the subsidy on SC and HSC Exam fees, which means that the idea of targeting was already there in the programme. The students were benefiting from a 50% grant in respect of the examination fees, irrespective of the income level of the parents.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he knows how many children were denied a loaf of bread yesterday. Because, in some schools, this was not distributed.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me inform the Leader of the Opposition that, yesterday, I went to two schools - Lady Ringadoo Government School and Vuillemen Government School. In my presence, the bread was distributed.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Gokhool: I don't know about the information of the Leader of the Opposition because the programme of bread distribution goes up to 30th June.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Cuttaree, please! If the hon. Member has a question to put, he can put it later on. I don't know why people are so excited and there is so much heat in this House.

Mr Bérenger: It is because there was no distribution of bread yesterday.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister is answering. Let him answer.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I inform the House that yesterday at Bambous Virieux Government School, there was no bread for the children.

Mr Speaker: Is the Minister aware that there was no bread yesterday at Bambous Virieux Government School?

Mr Gokhool: I am not aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

How do I take it that what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying is a fact? I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, why is it done when the Budget has not yet been voted?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the Leader of the Opposition should know, there are so many suppliers; there may have been a problem of supply, but as far as the distribution is concerned, it is going on.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that on Thursday last, schools received calls from his Ministry stating that there would be no bread distribution as from Monday 19th June, that is, yesterday.

Mr Gokhool: If the hon. Lady is referring to calls that were made by my Ministry, I am not aware of these. But all I know is that the bread distribution programme goes up to 30th June.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether he has a report from his officers about the bread distribution yesterday?

Mr Gokhool: This is not a regular practice that we have daily reports. If there is any problem, then the schools will report through the Zone Directors and then we intervene and we take corrective measures. If the hon. Member is asking right now whether there is any report, I cannot say. I'll have to check.

Mr Cuttaree: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has been made aware that in certain schools, especially in deprived areas, there were problems yesterday as a result of the fact that no bread was distributed? I'll give the example of my Constituency at Camp Levieux where the poorest of the people live. There was no bread distribution and school children spent the whole day without having even a bite of bread.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is talking about the children who don't receive the bread. I have explained the philosophy. The project is being re-oriented.....

Mr Speaker: The question is a very direct question, hon. Minister: “are you aware that, in deprived areas, there was no bread yesterday?” This is straightforward.

Mr Gokhool: I cannot agree with the hon. Member because I am not aware of this.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the aim of this school feeding project was to combat under nourishment in the schools. How would the hon. Minister guarantee that the income support payment that is effectuated, in fact, will be benefiting the children in terms of food items?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the idea of the food income support is meant for all the needs of the family, including bread. This is how we have provided for the support so that the bread part is taken care of the income support which is provided.

Mr Cuttaree: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he has inquired from social workers and been informed that the issue of the children going to school without any bread is very often – if not most of the time, due to the fact that the mother, often single parent family, leaves the house at 6 o’clock and the children go to school without any food. I hope that the hon.

Members, on the other side, realise that I am talking of a humanitarian problem. I am not doing politics about that because they, themselves, in their own Constituency, have this problem. Has the Minister been made aware that a situation happened in the schools whereby....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Please keep quiet!

Mr Cuttaree:children don’t have any food and that in....

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put his question. What is the question?

Mr Cuttaree: ...certain cases, for example, in the Camp Levieux Government school, the teachers pooled their money together to buy bread and *du beurre pistache* to give to the children. If he is not aware, he should go and ask the Attorney General.

Mr Speaker: OK, is the hon. Minister aware?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, Camp Levieux is a ZEP school and, as far as the ZEP schools are concerned, the food programme is continuing. There is no problem with that. In fact, the hon. Member does not know.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Cuttaree: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware - I'll say it again and he checks it from the Attorney General, I am not used to lie in the House....

Mr Speaker: What is the question of the hon. Member?

Mr Cuttaree:that there was no bread in the school.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, the hon. Minister has already answered this question. Order!

Mrs Grenade: Est-ce que le ministre veut nous faire comprendre, qu'en privant nos petits enfants d'un pain, cela pourrait renforcer les caisses de l'État et est-ce que le ministre n'est pas en train de taxer l'appétit de nos petits enfants?

Mr Gokhool: I have already said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that our policy is to direct subsidies support to those who are neediest. This is our point.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, was such hardship worth a saving of only Rs16 m? This is my question to the Minister.

Mr Gokhool: In fact, this is not correct, Mr Speaker, Sir. Whatever is being saved will go to the Empowerment Fund. We are redirecting the income support to the Empowerment Fund to help those people who are unemployed, those who are jobless, those who want to start a small enterprise. We are helping them to stand on their own feet. This is what we are doing. We are giving them the means to earn their living and this is what we are doing.

Mrs Martin: In fact, by going to the Empowerment Fund, it is not serving the purpose that the school feeding programme is actually meant for, that is, feeding poor children. My question is: whether any study has been carried out, Mr Speaker, Sir, to determine the number of children who are really in need and how can we ascertain that they are, at least, guaranteed a meal a day now that the school feeding programme is being removed?

Mr Gokhool: As I have stated, as far as the ZEP schools are concerned, the food programme is continuing; and I have already explained the purpose of redirecting the subsidies to the income support and also to the Empowerment Fund.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me come to SC and HSC exam fees. The philosophy of the 2005/2006 Budget was that money should not be a barrier to education. Can the hon. Minister enlighten the House as to the exam fees for somebody sitting for SC and somebody sitting for HSC? I mean the full fees. Can he enlighten the House about that?

Mr Gokhool: I don't have the exact figures because, Mr Speaker, Sir, the fees change.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: The fees vary from one year to another.

Mr Bodha: Can the hon. Minister inform the House that, for the SC exam fees it is Rs9,000 and for the HSC exam fees, it is Rs16,000? The majority of the students are going to pay, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can I ask the hon. Minister what is going to be the budget allocated by Government for the payment of SC and HSC exam fees in the current budget 2006/2007 and for how many students will benefit in each case?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the issue of exam fees, they vary from year to year, depending on the number of subjects that students take.

(Interruptions)

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister whether the children of a sugar industry labourer or a machinist working in a textile factory earning Rs5,000 to R6,000 will benefit from the payment of fees?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was going to answer a PQ, but I think it will be included in this PNQ. We have provided for 100% of fees being paid to those who are entitled to it. As a Government which is concerned with the students welfare, there are cases of students who are needy, we have set up a mechanism between the Ministry of Social Security and my Ministry to look at those cases which will be considered on a case to

case basis.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! There are only two minutes left.

Mr Bodha: My one before the last question, Mr Speaker, Sir, is whether the Minister is aware that the payment of the SC/HSC fees is a one-off payment given in a deadline of 10 days and that it is going to be an undue hardship on about 80% of students sitting for SC and HSC.

Mr Gokhool: We have taken steps to ensure that these difficulties do not arise.

Mr Speaker: Last question from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are talking about 4A+. Nous allons nous retrouver avec une catastrophe ...

Mr Speaker: 4A+ is not relevant to the question.

Mr Bodha: Est-ce que cela n'est pas une éducation à deux vitesses pour quelques privilégiés, contraire à l'esprit de l'éducation gratuite de Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition is referring to l'éducation à deux vitesses. I am not sure whether he knows that our education system is characterised by diversity. We have different types of schools and systems.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Time is over. Order! Next item, 'Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister'!

NOTRE DAME GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – FENCING (18/07/06)

(No. B/1056) Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the fencing structure of the Notre Dame RCA Government School, he will state if he has received any complaints

from the Parent Teachers Association of the school and of the inhabitants of Notre Dame and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I assume that by Notre Dame “RCA” Government School, the hon. Member is, in fact, referring to the Notre Dame Government School. My Ministry has indeed received letters from the Head Teacher in May 2005 in connection with the fencing of the school.

Moreover, during a visit effected on 05 July 2006 at the school by the hon. Member with officers of my Ministry and the National Development Unit, the importance of the project was confirmed.

The project was placed in the priority list of works to be implemented during year 2005/2006. However, owing to lack of funds during that year, it was not implemented. It has now been earmarked for this financial year 2006/2007.

As is done in similar cases, the Ministry of Housing & Lands was requested to carry out a survey of the school, with a view to demarcating the boundaries of the premises. To that effect, a letter was sent by my Ministry to the Ministry of Housing & Lands on 06 July 2006.

Once the survey plan obtained from the Ministry of Housing & Lands, clearances will be sought from the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit and the District Council of Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart. Replies from these two organisations would then permit the scope of works to be put up. Owing to the magnitude of the project, my Ministry has written to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to undertake the construction. On the assumption that all the necessary clearances are obtained on time, the block wall would be completed around the end of February 2007.

Mr Speaker: Time is over.

Primary School Supplementary Feeding Programme (25/07/06)

(No. B/1113) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Primary School Supplementary Feeding Programme, he will state if parents have been requested to fill a form and, if so, will he state the date on which this exercise was carried out and the outcome thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that parents were not asked by the Ministry to fill any forms. However, there have been many consultations and discussions on the matter in my Ministry with various stakeholders. The consultations and discussions are still going on in my Ministry to decide on the best approach to take regarding this issue.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a matter of fact, on 04 July 2006, the Minister stated that no circular was being circulated in the schools. Is the Minister aware that on the very same day, maybe at the very same time, there was a circular given to school children?

Mr Gokhool: If I heard the hon. Member correctly, the question relates to requests for filling of a form. I do not know whether the circular makes specific mention...

Mr Speaker: No, I think there is a question which has been put by the hon. Member. If the Minister wants to have clarifications, he must ask for a copy of the circular.

Mrs Labelle: Maybe I have to rephrase my question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that on 04 July parents were requested to fill the form?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, I stick to the answer I have given.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, may I table a copy of a form which has been circulated in schools on 04 July?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I would plead with you to allow me to clarify this issue because if it goes without clarification, it may create confusion.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has all the right to clarify the issue.

Mr Gokhool: The hon. Member asked whether my Ministry has asked the schools to fill a form. I have answered no. Now the hon. lady has mentioned a question about a circular. I do not know the content of the circular. I need to take cognizance of the circular...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister can take cognizance of the circular and thereafter make a statement.

Mr Gokhool: We should not mix issues otherwise this will lead to confusion in the minds of the public.

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the Minister must clarify. The question is whether parents have been requested to fill in a form.

Mr Speaker: The Minister can be given the form.

Mr Gunness: The form is here.

Mr Gokhool: If the hon. Member is saying that there is a form, I'll take the pains of verifying and then I'll make a statement.

Mrs Labelle: With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I read the content of the form? Because there are only two single sentences.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please go ahead.

Mrs Labelle: It is a form from Reunion Road Government School where the circular reads as follows –

“I wish to continue/or not benefit to have a loaf of bread for my ward subject to the Primary School Supplementary Feeding Programme. Name of pupil:..... Std:..... Signature of parent:.....”.

(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take cognizance of the content and I'll make a statement.

Oral Answers debate no. 25
of 18/07/06 ~~109~~ (50)

UNREVISED

DR/D25/P18/05

NOTRE DAME GOVERNMENT SCHOOL - FENCING

(No. B/1056) **Mrs B. Juggoo (First Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the fencing structure of the Notre Dame RCA Government School, he will state if he has received any complaints from the Parent Teachers Association of the school and of the inhabitants of Notre Dame and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I assume that by Notre Dame "RCA" Government School, the hon. Member is, in fact, referring to the Notre Dame Government School. My Ministry has indeed received letters from the Head Teacher in May 2005 in connection with the fencing of the school. Moreover, during a visit effected on 05 July 2006 at the school by the hon. Member with officers of my Ministry and the National Development Unit, the importance of the project was confirmed.

The project was placed in the priority list of works to be implemented during year 2005/2006. However, owing to lack of funds during that year, it was not implemented. It has now been earmarked for this financial year 2006/2007.

CA/D25/P19/1

(No. B/1056) (Contd)

As is done in similar cases, the Ministry of Housing & Lands was requested to carry out a survey of the school, with a view to demarcating the boundaries of the premises. To that effect, a letter was sent by my Ministry to the Ministry of Housing & Lands on 06 July 2006.

Once the survey plan obtained from the Ministry of Housing & Lands, clearances will be sought from the Traffic Management & Road Safety Unit and the District Council of Pamplemousses/Rivière du Rempart. Replies from these two organisations would then permit the scope of works to be put up. Owing to the magnitude of the project, my Ministry has written to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping to undertake the construction. On the assumption that all the necessary clearances are obtained on time, the block wall would be completed around the end of February 2007.

Mr Speaker: Time is over.

PRIMARY SCHOOL SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING PROGRAMME

Circular Programme

Debate no 26 of 28/7/06

57

(No. B/1113) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Primary School Supplementary Feeding Programme, he will state if parents have been requested to fill a form and, if so, will he state the date on which this exercise was carried out and the outcome thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that parents were not asked by the Ministry to fill any forms. However, there have been many consultations and discussions on the matter in my Ministry with various stakeholders. The consultations and discussions are still going on in my Ministry to decide on the best approach to take regarding this issue.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, as a matter of fact, on 04 July 2006, the Minister stated that no circular was being circulated in the schools. Is the Minister aware that on the very same day, maybe at the very same time, there was a circular given to school children?

Mr Gokhool: If I heard the hon. Member correctly, the question relates to requests for filling of a form. I do not know whether the circular makes specific mention...

Mr Speaker: No, I think there is a question which has been put by the hon. Member. If the Minister wants to have clarifications, he must ask for a copy of the circular.

Mrs Labelle: Maybe I have to rephrase my question, Mr Speaker, Sir. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that on 04 July parents were requested to fill the form?

D26/IF/P11/4

Mr Gokhool: As I said, I stick to the answer I have given.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, may I table a copy of a form which has been circulated in schools on 04 July?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I would plead with you to allow me to clarify this issue because if it goes without clarification, it may create confusion.

Mr Speaker: The Minister has all the right to clarify the issue.

Mr Gokhool: The hon. Member asked whether my Ministry has asked the schools to fill a form. I have answered no. Now the hon. lady has mentioned a question about a circular. I do not know the content of the circular. I need to take cognizance of the circular...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister can take cognizance of the circular and thereafter make a statement.

Mr Gokhool: We should not mix issues otherwise this will lead to confusion in the minds of the public.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the Minister must clarify. The question is whether parents have been requested to fill in a form.

Mr Speaker: The Minister can be given the form.

Mr Guinness: The form is here.

Mr Gokhool: If the hon. Member is saying that there is a form, I'll take the pains of verifying and then I'll make a statement.

Mrs Labelle: With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, may I read the content of the form? Because there are only two single sentences.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please go ahead.

Mrs Labelle: It is a form from Reunion Road Government School where the circular reads as follows –

“I wish to continue/or not benefit to have a loaf of bread for my ward subject to the Primary School Supplementary Feeding Programme.

Name of pupil:..... Std:..... Signature of parent:.....”.

(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will take cognizance of the content and I'll make a statement.

D29/IF/P17/1

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

PRIMARY SCHOOL SUPPLEMENTARY FEEDING PROGRAMME

The Minister of Education & Human Resources (Mr D. Gokhool): Mr Speaker, Sir, following PQ No. B/1113 “whether, in regard to the Primary School Supplementary Feeding Programme, he will state if parents have been requested to fill a form and, if so, will he state the date on which this exercise was carried out and the outcome thereof”, I stated that my Ministry has not asked parents to fill any form.

The hon. Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal, Mrs Labelle, had laid on the Table an option form which was circulated at Reunion Government School asking parents whether they wish to continue to have a loaf of bread for their wards.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I stated in my reply, I wish to reiterate that parents were not asked to fill an option form by my Ministry. However, the Directors of Zones were requested, in a letter dated 05 July 2006 issued by my Ministry, to “consult the PTA’s to come up with suggestions/proposals to identify those needy students who would like to continue benefiting from a loaf of bread”. Thereupon, the Head Teacher of Reunion Government School took the initiative to devise an option form whereby parents were asked to choose whether or not they would like wards to continue to benefit from a loaf daily.

It is clear that there has been a misinterpretation of the letter of the Ministry as none of the other Zone Directors (i.e. 1-3) have issued an option form. They had instead consultations by way of meetings or telephone calls with the PTA’s.

The case of Reunion Government School is an isolated case and should be treated as such.

With this precision, I stand by my reply to PQ No. B/1113.

Thank you, Sir.

BAICHOO MADHOO GOVT. SCHOOL – STD V TEACHER - REPRESENTATIONS (31/10/06)

(No. B/1243) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas & Floreal) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if he has received a petition from some parents of the Baichoo Madhoo Government School, requesting that a teacher working with a Standard V class be transferred and, if so, will he state –

- (a) the reasons supporting the request, and
- (b) the actions taken, if any.

Mr Gokhool: Yes, Sir. My Ministry received formal representations from some parents of pupils of Std V Green of Baichoo Madhoo Government School against the class teacher on two occasions, namely on 17 September and 25 September 2006 respectively.

The representations related to -

- (i) pedagogical issues like lack of motivation and deterioration in performance of pupils with poor grading subject wise and
- (ii) strained relationships between some parents and teachers due to lack of proper communication.

Earlier in March and May 2006 respectively, some parents had made verbal representations with the Head Teacher of the school. The matter was dealt with at school level and the Head Teacher arranged for a meeting with the teacher concerned and some of the parents to clarify the situation. It then appeared to the Head Teacher that the matter had been settled.

However, from what I understand, some parents were still not satisfied with the performance of the teacher neither were they satisfied with the explanations or clarifications provided to them.

As regards the formal representations made, these were given due consideration and the following actions were taken –

- (i) firstly, there was a meeting between the Head Teacher and the pedagogical inspectors to verify the validity of these complaints and to monitor the performance of the teacher in the last week of September 2006;
- (ii) secondly, the inspectors carried out a pedagogical inspection in the same class. The inspections revealed no major shortcomings except for a few and the inspectors recommended remedial action to be taken;
- (iii) the Zone Director personally had a meeting with the Head Teacher, the parents and the incriminated teacher to clarify the situation.

In the light of the meeting it was again confirmed that most of the parents had nothing against the pedagogical performance of the teacher and the real issue was one of absence of communication between the two parties.

Consequently, it was agreed that the teacher concerned would

continue with his class and advice has been given to him to improve communications with the parents. The Head Teacher was also requested to monitor the situation closely.

Although, primary school is almost over – they are on holidays - I understand that the situation is back to normal.

Mrs Labelle: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware of the criteria used by the parents to complain about the pedagogical performance of the teacher?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I said there were pedagogical issues and there is a report by the Inspectorate. There were low performance and the children were not motivated in the class and also the communication between the teacher and the pupils was not good. These are some of the main findings that the Inspectorate put before the Ministry.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, is it not a fact that parents were complaining that their wards did not receive what they consider as satisfactory grades, that is, the A+?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think you will allow me to clarify one point. I expected the hon. Lady to bring in the A+. Mr Speaker, Sir, the A+ grading is but one initiative of the overall reform agenda and in this case, the A+ relates to the CPE examinations. I understand the point of view of the hon. lady and the Opposition...

(Interruptions)

They are against. In fact, the question asked by the hon. lady gives an indication. I checked personally, I read the report and parents spoke to me.

They said: “Mr Minister, just improve the communication and things will go on”. We have to bear in mind that it was September, the last month of the semester. I am appealing to the Members of the Opposition, they have made their point about A+. The public knows about it. I ask them not to overdo it.

Let the students go on with their education smoothly, let’s calm down the situation.

(Interruptions)

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I know the case of the teacher we are talking about. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether

the teacher – this is where we should not mix issues – we are talking about in this question is the one on whom there were complaints from parents to the Head Teacher concerning physical violence on children?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, some of the complaints were related to the relationship, but I am not sure about what the hon. Member is saying concerning physical violence. It is in terms of the language that was used...

(Interruptions)

This is serious. I take it very seriously. If the hon. Member has evidence to the fact that physical violence was used, I will certainly look into that. I checked my information and what I was told is that the language was harsh and could lead to problems.

Mrs Labelle: May I ask the hon. Minister whether, following the incident at Bachoo Madhoo Govt. School, his Ministry has given instructions to all schools so that grade A+ is not being put on the results?

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. The hon. Member should come with a substantive question.

Mrs Labelle: Maybe if you want, I am going to rephrase my question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Will the Minister say whether one of the actions is to ask schools not to put A+ on the result of the students?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. lady is reading too much. There is no connection whatsoever. I have said that.

YEAR 2007

CAP MALHEUREUX GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS – 09 MARCH 2007 – RELEASE TIME (27/03/07)

(No. B/47) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the time at which pupils of the Cap Malheureux Government Primary Schools were allowed to go home on 09 March 2007 on the occasion of the Flag Raising Ceremony, indicating if a circular letter was issued to parents informing them of the time the pupils would be released.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Speaker Sir, allow me to say how sad I was to learn that pupil Dylen Pillay Muneesawmy of Standard IV had met with a fatal road accident on his way back home from school on 09 March 2007.

I am informed that pupils of Government Primary School at Cap Malheureux were dismissed at 10.45 a.m. after the flag raising ceremony on 09 March 2007. I am also informed that, in accordance with the practice of the school, the Head Teacher had informed all the pupils over a week during the morning assemblies that school will be dismissed earlier at 10.45 a.m. on the day of flag raising ceremony. The pupils were requested to inform their parents accordingly. In addition, pupils of Standard I and of pre-primary unit of the school who may not have understood the teacher's message on account of their age, were given a written note to the same effect for the information of their parents.

Mr Guinness: It is, indeed, very sad what has happened. Can I urge on the hon. Minister to ask the Head Teacher of each school to provide the pupils with, at least, a notice to be given to their parents when schools are dismissed earlier?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the safety and security of pupils are very important and at the level of my Ministry, after this incident, we have looked at the issue and we are going to bring improvements, and I thank the hon. Member for his suggestion.

Mr Cuttaree: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the father of that kid normally goes to pick up the child near the school everyday at 12 o'clock and, on that particular day, because he was not aware that school was ending early, no one went to pick that child up and he met with the accident? From what I understood from the parents there is normally a note which is given to the children and, in this particular case, no note was given. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there is not such a practice at school?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was trying to understand what the hon. Member has said, that the father used to go and pick up the child at noon? Is that what the hon. Member is saying?

Mr Cuttaree: What I am saying is that normally, at the time the child leaves school – I do not know whether it is noon or half past twelve – the father goes to the school and accompanies the child to cross the road. But, on that particular day, he did not go at half past ten because he was not aware that he was leaving at half past ten and the information that I have

from the parents is that, in that school, normally, when classes end earlier, the parents are made aware through a note. This is what I am asking the hon. Minister whether he has investigated into that and whether this is a fact.

Mr Gokhool: I have tried to check as much as possible with regard to this unfortunate incident. As I said, the practice has been to inform the pupils at morning assemblies and the student was in Std IV. I have been informed that after the school was dismissed, the child together with his friends took the bus and went to the village where they live. It is when they alighted and the child wanted to cross the road that the unfortunate incident happened. But, as I said, I take very seriously the issue of safety and security of students. I am going to see to it that improvements are brought about so that, in future, the communication is made on such occasions.

Otherwise, I have to say that for emergency situations, there is already in practice where the students are given a note. What we are considering is to ensure that the policy is extended to all such occasions where students are going to be released earlier. This is being considered.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, in this particular case, we all know that for the flag raising ceremony, it is known well in advance that schools will end early. In future, all schools should make it a must to give a note to their students, because it is known well in advance. It is not as if tomorrow we are releasing students because of an event.

Mr Gokhool: I have to inform the hon. Member that I have checked and rechecked the information. In fact, the PTA and the Head Teacher meet together to decide on the flag raising ceremony event. As far back as 19 February, the date and the time were fixed up; in a way, the parents worry. It is very unfortunate, because it is a pupil of Std. IV. After the school has closed, many pupils go in groups. Not all parents come to pick up their children. In the light of what has happened, we are going to tighten the security aspects at the schools.

CITE VALLIJEE GOVT. SCHOOL – PTA & PARENTS’ DEMONSTRATION (10/04/07)

(No. B/93) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the Cité Vallijee Government School, he will state if he is aware of the problems which arose thereat, on Friday 23 March 2007, and, if so, will he state the reasons therefor.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, I am informed that on Friday 23 March 2007, a group of parents, among whom was the President of the PTA, staged a demonstration in front of the Cité Vallijee Government Primary School.

During the demonstration, the parents referred to a number of problems as follows -
infrastructure access and security overcrowded classrooms, and performance.

Concerning infrastructure, the Head Teacher drew the attention of Zone 1 to the state of the toilets at the beginning of March 2007. The Maintenance Unit of Zone 1 removed the rendering on 28 March 2007. The intervention team of the Ministry of Local Government repaired the ceiling of the toilets after one week, as a temporary measure, pending the national survey of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure on the state of the infrastructural needs of all schools in the zones for necessary action in due course. The survey will be carried out around mid-May 2007.

As regards access and security, I understand that the wall surrounding the school has been repaired by a team of the Ministry of Local Government to reinforce existing security arrangements. In this respect, my Ministry has already issued a circular emphasizing upon the reinforcement of security measures at school, and a follow-up is made thereon with Heads of schools.

On the issue of overcrowded classrooms, I understand that the class size at Cité Vallijee Government Primary School is within the range of 25 to 35 pupils. However, in STD V, where the student population is 39, there was a group of around 12 students who were in need of special and individual attention. In view of the fact that there were both a spare classroom and a teacher available at Cité Vallijee Government Primary School, the Head Teacher, in consultation with the Zone Director, decided exceptionally to split that class into two.

Finally, on the question of performance, I am informed that the percentage pass at CPE has gone down from 36.2% in 2005 to 32.8 % in 2006, that is, a decrease of 3.4 %. There is a combination of factors that account for this decreasing trend. I understand that measures are being taken to redress the situation in terms of pedagogy, classroom management and parents' mediation.

Contrary to what has been alleged, School Development Unit meetings are usually held at the end of each month. One of the purposes of these meetings is to promote dialogue among the different partners involved

in the educational process of the ZEP school. However, for this year, two meetings were held, one on Friday 26 January 2007 and one on Friday 23 March 2007. The meeting could not be held in February because of Cyclone Gamede. I understand from the Head Teacher that the parishioner of the locality, Father Mongelard, did not attend these meetings since the beginning of the year because of other commitments, while the President of the PTA did not turn up either.

I wish to assure the House, here, that my Ministry is closely monitoring the situation at the Cité Vallijee Government Primary School.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: M. le président, le ministre est-il au courant que le curé, notamment le Père Mongelard, qui participait à cette manifestation, a été brutalisé par des personnes manipulées par un gros bras d'une haute personnalité ?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am talking about school management, school administration matters. I am not aware that such an incident happened within the school premises.

N. SADDUL PRIMARY GOVERNMENT SCHOOL (24/04/07)

(No. B/256) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the ICT primary project, he will state the number of computers sent to the N. Saddul Primary Government School, Vacoas, since July 2006 to date.

Reply: I would like to refer to my replies to PQs Nos. B/1452 and B/1530 of 21 and 28 November 2006 respectively, wherein I stated that the School IT Project was introduced in January 2001 mainly to create IT awareness in the primary school sector. The project comprised the following components –

- (i) conversion of existing classrooms into computer laboratories;
- (ii) recruitment of ICT Teachers, and
- (iii) purchase of ICT equipment.

As from 2006, in a spirit of equity and fairness, there was a topping of the IT equipment originally meant for only 50 schools with a view to distributing the equipment equitably to all schools. The provision of infrastructural facilities in all primary schools with the collaboration of the Energy Services Division of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure preceded the distribution of IT equipment.

In the same context, N. Saddul Government School received 5 PCs and one printer in June 2006. My Ministry is targeting 20 PCs to each primary school in line with Government policy to promote an IT literate student population and to integrate ICT in teaching and learning. 5 additional PCs will be provided in June 2007.

During the specific period July 2006 to date, no computer has been sent to N. Saddul Government School. In fact, no school has been provided with any computer during that period.

05/6/07
59

TEACHERS - PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSES

(No. B/586) Ms K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of making the continued validity of a teaching licence dependent on teachers completing regular continuous Professional Development Courses.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, quality teaching is an essential component of our vision for quality education of an international standard and continuous professional training programmes are of paramount importance if we want teachers to broaden their knowledge and sharpen their practice to meet the challenges of a fast developing world.

At present, there is no structured approach to continuous professional development although teachers do follow from time to time upgrading courses. The situation differs from sector to sector. For example, in the primary sector, teachers used to follow a two-year Teacher's Certificate before they are sent to schools and later in their career, they had the opportunity to follow the Advanced Certificate in Education and the Teacher's Diploma. Now that the Teacher's Certificate has been upgraded to a Diploma, we need to develop a training ladder for the primary school teachers in order to place them in a continuous learning path.

As regards the secondary sector, Education Officers in the State schools are recruited from holders of a degree in their respective fields and are sent directly to schools to teach, whereas in the private secondary schools, teachers are administratively registered on the basis of their qualifications, depending on whether they hold an HSC, a Diploma or a Degree. Potential teachers are not required to have professional teaching skills prior to employment although in a few cases some persons, who aspire to become Education Officers, do follow the full-time PGCE course.

Such a situation is not conducive to the overall objective of my Ministry to achieve a world-class quality education. I am committed to change this, and it is precisely in this context that in the document "Towards a Quality Curriculum: Strategy for Reform", it is indicated that, henceforth, teachers will be required to undergo professional training before they join the profession.

.../....

DR/D13/P12/01
(No. B/586 Cont'd)
(Mr Gokhool)

My Ministry is therefore proposing to adopt a proactive strategy and to address the question of continuous professional development in a structured and coherent manner.

The training strategy will be premised on -

- (i) Formal "*pre-service*" and "*in-service*" training courses both for primary school teachers and Education Officers;
- (ii) general briefing sessions and workshops to address emerging issues and keep pace with changes in the world of education, and
- (iii) specialised *ad-hoc* training to take care of limitations of teachers and Education Officers in specific areas.

At the secondary level, a team of officials of my Ministry including representatives from the MIE, the PSSA, the HRDC and the MQA is currently working on a strategy towards the development of a pre-service training programme for Education Officers to equip them with basic skills related to pedagogy, psychology, subject didactics and curriculum. The programme which will be sanctioned by a Teacher's licence will be modular in nature and will allow the trainees to obtain credits for exemption for future higher courses like, for example, the PGCE or the B.Ed.

Eventually, it will be mandatory for teachers and Education Officers to follow continuous professional development courses leading to professional qualifications. We will thus provide a training ladder to the teachers for them to continuously upgrade their skills and knowledge and to maintain the validity of their teaching licence.

All this is in line with the overall policy of Government to promote lifelong learning especially in their teaching profession and ensure continued validity of the required competencies.

DR/D13/P12/02
(No. B/586 Cont'd)

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister if, right now, there are no pre-service courses dispensed by the MIE for Education Officers prior to their entry into the secondary schools?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. lady is a teacher and knows that, at present, this is not the situation and that is why the strategy being proposed is going to remedy the situation.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as I know, there is a pre-service course which is dispensed by the MIE for people coming out of university and wishing to join the profession of teaching. So, I am wondering how the Minister is not aware that such courses were being dispensed by the MIE previously and, as far as I know, until recently.

Mr Gokhool: I think the programme is available and those who subscribed for the programme are few and far apart. This does not respond to the need of my Ministry to have teachers who have got training prior to stepping into the classrooms. This is the objective that the policy that we are advocating is going to address.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister how many teachers are presently working in private secondary and State secondary schools and who are not holder of the PGCE?

Mr Gokhool: I do not have the figures, but there is a large number of teachers who have joined the teaching profession straight from university without any professional training in pedagogy or even classroom management for that purpose.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister then how he came up with the new proposal of starting a new course if he has not made any survey prior to taking this decision? From my information, most of the teachers who have joined the profession have followed the PGCE course and some have even gone for the MA education course offered jointly by Brighton University and the MIE.

DR/D13/P12/03

(No. B/586 Cont'd)

Mr Gokhool: I think the hon. lady is slightly confused, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because what is being proposed is to deal with a situation which exists. We are taking corrective measures so that those who are already teaching would be provided with continuous professional development programme, but the priority is that those who aspire to become teachers should have a basic minimum exposure in pedagogy and classroom management, amongst others.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask a last question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? The Minister has just mentioned that he proposes to come up with some modular form of training. Then, why would a newcomer in the profession opt for a modular course when the PGCE provided by the Mauritius Institute of Education is a full course of one year and once holder of such a licence, that person will be able to teach in private secondary schools?

Mr Gokhool: I grant this is a valid question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, because when we are bringing the change, there has to be a transition phase. For the next batch which is going to join in January, we will have to organize so that, at least, they have a minimum exposure to pedagogy and classroom management and other such aspects. And as we go along, we want to be flexible. Those who join a short programme will be allowed to enter the teaching profession and then they can go back to MIE and complete the programme. This is a transitional measure which is being proposed and the programme will be run on a modular basis.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Babajee!

Mr Babajee: Can the hon. Minister tell the House if, at present, there is a course called the induction course for the newly recruited Education Officers?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when I became Minister, I found that even the induction programme was not available. I have made it mandatory now that for any teacher who is recruited, is selected to teach in our schools, at least, the basic minimum should be in terms of an induction programme and this is now part of the policy of my Ministry.

05/6/07

52

PRIMARY SCHOOLS - MENTORS

(No. B/611) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the post of Mentors in primary schools, he will state the number in post as at 30 April 2007, indicating their main duties.

(Withdrawn)

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – MENTORS (19/06/07)

(No. B/683) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the post of Mentors in primary schools, he will state the number in post as at 30 April 2007, indicating their main duties.

There were 46 Mentors in post in Primary schools as at 30 April 2007. In fact, 50 Temporary Mentors were appointed on 16 May 2006 but four of them reverted to their previous posts. The resulting vacancies will be filled in the next financial year.

The main duty of the Mentors is to provide assistance, guidance and support to trainee Teachers and Teachers of both General Purpose and Asian Languages. They are also responsible for conducting counselling sessions for the above grades with a view to sharing good practices and finding solutions to problems of a pedagogical nature.

A Mentor is appointed from the grade of Teacher/Senior Teacher and performs the dual functions of teaching and mentoring. For the current year, Mentors have been posted in Standard I of two/three stream schools with average performance and they are made to operate in pairs. When one Mentor is teaching, the second one is mentoring in the second section of Standard I.

SCHOOLS (PRIMARY) – TEACHERS – ALLEGED CASES OF AGGRESSIONS AND/OR ASSAULTS (17/07/07)

(No. B/759) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to alleged cases of aggressions and/or assaults on primary school teachers, whilst on duty, since

January 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of reported cases, and
- (b) where matters stand in each case.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2007 to date, 10 cases of assault on primary school teachers, including 3 cases involving primary school students, have been reported to the Police. 9 of these cases are still under enquiry while one case is pending Court judgment.

I am also informed by the Supervising Officer, Ministry of Education and Human Resources that in 2003 following an increasing number of instances whereby members of the public have verbally or physically assaulted teachers or pupils, a circular was issued to all Directors requesting them to introduce security measures and to control access of members of the public to the school compound. In March this year, another circular was forwarded to Heads of Primary as well as secondary schools, stressing on the need to exercise adequate control to access on school premises.

However, there are still shortcomings with regard to security on school premises. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources has constituted a team to look into the matter and to revisit the existing arrangements and to make recommendations as regards security and access to schools by members of the public during school hours. The team will also set up a system of grievance handling, after taking on board the suggestions of the different stakeholders. Members of the public will be given the opportunity to submit their suggestions to the team.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, does the Ag. Prime Minister not think that there is a need to have a Police Constable posted at each school during school hours for security reasons?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I'll look into the matter, but I don't think this will solve the problem. The problem is much wider and we have to look at it globally.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the Ag. Prime Minister since when the team from the Ministry of Education has been set up and when is it expected to give its recommendations?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I understand it is only recently, about three weeks ago. This has not been set up, but this new circular was issued, I

gather, in April or May of this year to remind that there was a circular in 2003 and to reinforce the measures that were mentioned in the previous circular.

TRAINEE TEACHERS AND DEPUTY RECTORS - RECRUITMENT
(No. A/28) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the recruitment of trainee teachers and deputy rectors, respectively since July 2005 to date, he will give a list thereof, indicating their –

24/07/07

61

- (a) names;
- (b) addresses, and
- (c) postings

Reply: In the year 2005 and 2006, no Trainee Teacher (General Purpose) and (Oriental Languages) was recruited.

As from March 2007, 381 Trainee Teachers (General Purpose) and 164 Trainee Teachers (Oriental Languages) were recruited. Their names and addresses as listed at Annexes I to VII are being tabled. I wish to draw the attention of the House that all the Trainee Teachers (General Purpose and Oriental Languages) who were enlisted in 2007 are presently following a training course of two years and 3 months at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE).

With respect to the recruitment of Deputy Rectors since July 2005, their names, addresses and postings are being tabled at Annex A.

SCHOOL TEACHERS – ALLEGED AGGRESSIONS - JANUARY 2005 TO JULY 2007 (24/07/07)

(No. B/808) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to alleged cases of aggressions on school teachers, whilst on duty, since January 2005 to date, he will, for benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of reported cases, and
- (b) the remedial measures which are envisaged.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since January 2005 to date, 18 cases of assaults on school teachers have been reported to the Police.

Of these cases, 16 cases involved primary school teachers and 2 secondary school teachers. 14 cases occurred whilst the teachers were on duty and 4 cases occurred whilst they were off duty. 11 cases are still pending enquiry, in 1 case the victim moved for no further action, 3 cases have been filed, 2 cases are pending before Court and in 1 case the accused has been sentenced.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that policing arrangements are made daily at all schools throughout the island including Rodrigues, both in the morning from 0730 hrs to 0900 hrs and in the afternoon from 1430 hrs to 1600 hrs respectively. At each school, one constable or corporal is provided to ensure the safety and security as well as to regulate traffic and help children crossing the road.

In addition, mobile patrols are carried out by the Emergency Response Service (ERS) and the local CID. Special arrangements are also made at bus stands and drop of points for school buses. Police officers in charge of stations liaise with the heads of schools on a regular basis and provide any assistance needed to enhance safety and security at schools.

I am also informed that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources issued a circular in year 2003 restricting access to school premises and another circular has been issued on 01 March 2007 drawing attention to measures spelt out in the previous circular and for stricter compliances.

However, shortcomings still exist with regard to security on school premises. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources has constituted a team to look into the matter of security in schools and to revisit the existing arrangements, make recommendations thereof and to set up a system of grievance handling, after taking on board the suggestions of different stakeholders. Members of the public will be given the opportunity to submit their submissions to the team.

TEACHERS –VIOLENCE AGAINST – COMMITTEE (24/07/07)

(No. B/878) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to cases of violence against teachers, he will state if a committee has been set up to examine the issue and, if so –

- (a) when, and
- (b) its composition.

(Withdrawn)

31/07/07
64

SCHOOLS - TEACHERS - SECURITY MEASURES

(No. B/947) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to cases of violence against teachers, he will state if a committee has been set up to examine the issue and, if so -

- (a) when, and
- (b) its composition.

Reply: Further to PQ No. B/808 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister and the reply made, I wish to state that my Ministry has already requested Heads of schools to implement strict security measures and to exercise adequate control over the access of members of the public to the school compound in order to ensure security of both the staff and students. The security measures indicate the time at which parents may have access to the schools and under which conditions. It also provides for any incident or assault on a teacher to be immediately reported to the Police.

While these measures are working out satisfactorily in most schools, there are a few schools, in some specific regions, which have not been able to adequately implement these measures.

My Ministry has therefore set up a committee last week with the following terms of reference -

- to look into the matter of security and revisit the existing arrangements;
- make recommendations as regards security and access to schools by members of the public during school hours, and
- to set up a system of grievance handling, after taking on board the suggestions of the different stakeholders.

This team consists of the Chief Technical Officer, Director School Management, Directors of Zones, Director PSSA and representatives of the Unions. Members of the public will be given the opportunity to submit their suggestions to this team. In this respect a communiqué will be issued to invite the public to participate in the work of that committee.

SCHOOL CHILDREN – CHEESE & DRIED FRUITS – SUPPLY (06/11/07)

(No. B/1089) Dr. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the increasing cost of living, especially the increase in the price of milk, he will consider the advisability of reintroducing the scheme for the supply of cheese and dried fruits to school children to supplement their diet.

Reply: I thank the hon. Member for this question which relates to the nutrition of pupils.

I wish to inform the House that the scheme for the supply of cheese and dried fruits to school children to supplement their diet was first introduced in the Primary Schools in 1970 with the assistance of the World Food Programme (WFP) to combat malnutrition and to improve school attendance and performance, at a time when undernourishment was widespread among school going children in the country. The project, as it was then conceived, comprised 20 grams of cheese, a cup of milk, and a loaf of bread to all pupils daily.

In 1989, the then Government agreed to the proposal of an Evaluation Mission of the World Food Programme, to gradually phase out the project in view of increasing demand for similar facilities from more needy countries. In 1996, when foreign assistance was completely stopped, Government immediately implemented, as its own costs, the supply of bread daily to all pupils of the primary schools, excluding the ZEP schools, where provision is made for each student to be given in addition to the loaf of bread, one portion of soft cheese and either one pastry or a fruit within a comprehensive project.

Government has maintained the Primary School Feeding Project this year until a more equitable way is found to focus on greater assistance to children who really deserve it and a sum of MUR 30.6 m has been earmarked for financial year 2007/2008 to fund this project. The number of pupils benefiting from this Project, at present, stands at around 103,387 (including RCEA and Hindu aided excluding ZEP schools) for the Republic of Mauritius.

In view of the above and the tight economic situation, it is not in the programme of my Ministry to supply cheese and dried fruits to all primary school children at this point in time.

I can understand the concern of the Hon. Member and I wish to reassure him that Government is equally concerned of the importance of good health and of developing good eating habits among students. However, on account of budget constraints, it is not possible for Government to do as much as it would have wished. On the basis of existing resources, Government is implementing its policy of targeting needy students and of

providing assistance to those who are most in need of it. We are also ensuring that PTA.s of schools which have the resources are encouraged to come in and assist in the provision of meals to pupils in need thereof.

Should more funds be available to my Ministry, the proposed project will be given consideration

65-112-07
SCHOOLS (PRIMARY) - DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER - PROMOTION EXERCISE

(No. B/1293) Mr G. Guinness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the promotion exercise to the grade of Assistant Head Teacher, he will state if there is any disagreement between the primary school teachers unions and his Ministry.

Reply: I wish to inform the House that the grade of Assistant Head Teacher does not exist on the establishment of the Ministry, there is in fact a grade of Deputy Head Teacher. Moreover, I am not aware of any formal disagreement between the primary school teachers unions and my Ministry.

However, it seems some unions are not agreeable to any change in the actual mode of promotion to the grade of Deputy Head Teacher which is by seniority. This dissatisfaction is being voiced out in the context of the forthcoming Pay Research Bureau Report 2008.

I wish to point out to the House that according to Section 14(b) of PSC Regulation which reads as follows -

14(1) In exercising its powers in connection with the appointment or promotion of officers in the public service, the Commission shall have regard to the maintenance of the high standard of efficiency necessary in the public service and shall -

"In the case of officers in the public service take into account qualifications, experience and merit before seniority in the public service".

Both in the Public Service as a whole and the education sector in particular, appointments can be made either by selection or by promotion as provided for in the Scheme of Service for the post to be filled. In the case of a post which is filled by promotion, generally from one grade to another within a cadre, seniority is taken into account but is not the sole or absolute criterion for promotion. The other non lesser, criteria of qualifications, experiences and merit are also taken into account through confidential reports and *ad hoc* reports on work and conduct. It is to be noted that as per Scheme of Service, the post of Deputy Head Teacher is filled by "promotion on the basis of work experience and merit of officers from the grade of Teacher/Senior Teacher". Seniority contrary to what is perceived by some has never been the sole or absolute criterion.

Moreover, I wish to point out that the PRB had recommended in 2003 that a Performance Management System (PMS) be introduced in all the Ministries. The philosophy of PMS rests on the premise that the best performing officer be promoted. My Ministry has, therefore to ensure that the reforms agenda in the education sector takes into account the overarching principle of performance without neglecting the other criteria in identifying and committing resources for the delivery of a World Class Quality Education.

YEAR 2008

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – AUTOMATIC PROMOTION EXERCISE (25/03/08)

(No. B/47) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the exercise of automatic promotion in primary schools, he will state if his Ministry is considering abolishing same and, if so, indicate the measures that are being taken for its implementation and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Sir, I thank the hon. Member for this question on automatic promotion. Lately, the issue of automatic promotion has been commented in the media and the question of the hon. Member gives me an opportunity to explain and indicate my Ministry's thinking on the issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, opposite to "automatic promotion" is the principle of "grade repetition" whereby "pupils are held in the same grade in a school for an extra year rather than being promoted to the next grade with their age peers".

Many countries namely, UK and Scandinavian countries have implemented a policy of automatic promotion. On the other hand, other countries, mostly French speaking countries, have adopted a policy of grade repetition as a measure to control pupil under achievement because of different circumstances. Pupils whose academic performance is deemed insufficient for promotion to the next grade are made to repeat.

Each option, automatic promotion or grade repetition, is guided by a set of accompanying measures to enable optimum chances of achievement by the learner.

The Mauritian system is largely based on the practice of automatic promotion which has always existed whether at the time of ranking or even after the introduction of the grading system. A number of factors account for this state of affairs -

- (i) the existing legislation (Education Act Part III Section 11);
- (ii) the absence of policy for slow learners and pupils with learning difficulties;
- (iii) the limitations of the primary schools in terms of infrastructure;
- (iv) the insidious role of private tuition;
- (v) the fact that parents and teachers alike consider primary education as a six-year programme notwithstanding the two cycles of lower primary and upper primary each of three years

duration;

(vi) staffing implications;

(vii) parental attitudes, and

(viii) the disproportionate importance attributed over the years to the

CPE examinations both in terms of certification and selection. One of the inevitable consequences of the present policy of automatic promotion is that the quantity and quality of the educational output are major causes of concern for policy makers. For example, out of a hypothetical cohort of 100 children who entered Standard I in 1994, only 32 reached the last year of secondary schooling in 2006 and 28 passed the Cambridge Higher School Certificate examinations, some of them after a second sitting. Over the years this situation has not improved much.

This situation needs to be re-examined. My Ministry is committed to review this process of “*automatic promotion*” but in a holistic manner within the ongoing educational reforms as more fully described in the National Curriculum Framework for the primary.

The process has to be gradual and incremental with carefully thought out strategies.

Meanwhile indicatively, my Ministry has adopted the following set of measures -

(i) re-organising the primary education into three cycles of two years each (Standards I and II, Standards III and IV and Standards V and VI);

(ii) introduction of baseline profiling at the beginning of Standard I, evaluation of numeracy and literacy at the end of Standards II and III, and continuous assessment and competency based evaluation as from Standard III;

(iv) review of the National Assessment at the end of Standards IV and V;

(v) introduction of a National Assessment Framework culminating with a National Assessment at Form III level which will reduce the pressure on the CPE Examinations, and

(vi) the implementation of an unprecedented curriculum reforms and bold commitment to abolish the CPE as the last phase of a four-phased strategy as outlined in the document “*Towards a quality curriculum: Strategy for Reforms*”.

In addition to the above, my Ministry is also coming, as from the second term, with a detailed remedial education programme, the objectives

of which are to detect and solve physical, behavioural and emotional difficulties at all levels, ensure that the basic skills are acquired in the early stages for further learning and develop a liking for reading, writing and simple computational work.

All these measures are expected to contribute positively towards tackling first the root problems caused by “automatic promotion” and enabling my Ministry to prepare the ground for grade repetition if ever justified.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Minister has repeated what he has stated since his assumption of office. But, I think it will help the House if he gives us a timeframe as to when all the measures he has just mentioned will come into force.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have given an indicative timeframe, but reform is an ongoing process and it is difficult because we have to work out the strategies, the pilot tests. I have also explained in the House that reform is an ongoing process and I have indicated that we have to go by consultation. We have to talk to the different stakeholders and I have given the reasons why automatic promotion has been there for such a long time.

We cannot change it overnight.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, if I heard well the Minister, there will be three cycles of two years each and then the elimination of CPE. Can the parents, at least, know when the CPE will be abolished?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Minister has answered. There has no timeframe.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister what about the students who are presently having problems in their schooling, whether we are going to allow students who are having problems to keep on moving to the next classes without taking any remedial measures?

Mr Gokhool: The hon. Member who is a teacher/educator knows that you cannot introduce changes without carefully preparing the changes over time. The remedial education strategy is being prepared and will be implemented on an incremental basis as I indicated as from term II and it will target Standard III pupils. Then the project will be developed into a fullfledged project for remedial education across the primary school system.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: So, I take it that no remedial measures will be taken for students facing difficulties today?

Mr Gokhool: I have explained in my answer that the baseline profiling for pupils of Standard I is being done. This is to establish what is the baseline for the pupils to start learning. This is an innovative measure which we have introduced and it is an international practice to know where the children stand. As the Deputy Prime Minister indicated, children go to the pre-primary schools and some do not go, but all of them find themselves in Standard I. We have to do a baseline profiling so as to develop a strategy to adopt in terms of teaching and learning for these pupils.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has been talking about establishing a baseline. I consider it to be one thing, but we are talking about remedial system. Establishing the baseline does not mean that we have a remedial system in place. What we want to know from the Minister is whether there is this remedial system actually?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, the remedial strategy has never existed. We are putting in place a remedial strategy to tackle the problem of under achievement. This is what we are doing.

L'ESPÉRANCE – SCHOOLS - PTA REPRESENTATIONS (15/04/08)

(No. B/274) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to the preprimary and primary schools of L'Espérance, he will state if he has received representations from the Parent Teachers Association thereof, in relation to the renovation and painting of its buildings and, if so –
(a) when works will start, and
(b) the expected date of completion.

Reply: I wish to point out to the house from the outset that upgrading works in schools including painting of school buildings are a priority for my Ministry. At the beginning of each Financial Year, a list of works to be carried out in a number of schools islandwise is drawn up. Some works are targeted for implementation during school days while others are scheduled for implementation during the school vacations.

As regards L'Espérance Government School, I am advised that no representations from the PTA have been received either for the pre-primary school or the primary school at my Ministry. However, I wish to inform the House that arrangements and procedures for external painting are presently being made by my Ministry. Those works will involve

both the pre-primary and primary school buildings. The works are expected to start at the beginning of June 2008 and be completed by the middle of August 2008.

Moreover, several other works are scheduled to be carried out at the school in the near future namely -

- (i) tiling works in the computer room which started yesterday and will be completed after three days;
- (ii) Electrical works in the computer room which are scheduled to start by end of April 2008 and be completed by the middle of May 2008;
- (iii) repairs to the blockwall fencing which have been scheduled to start at the beginning of May 2008 to be completed by the middle of June 2008;

I should also like to inform the House that renovation works have been carried out at the school in the recent past. Indeed, comprehensive re-roofing works and replacement of false ceiling were carried out during the financial year 2004/2005.

STUDENTS – AUTOMATIC PROMOTION (15/04/08)

(No. B/279) Mr A. Jugnauth (First Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the automatic promotion in schools, he will state if Government proposes to abolish same and, if so, what will become of the students who fail their examinations.

Reply: I refer the hon. Member to the reply made to PQ B/47 where I stated the stand of my Ministry with respect to the issue of automatic promotion, namely that my Ministry will review the practice of automatic promotion in a holistic manner in the context of the ongoing reforms.

In term of the present legislation we do have age criterion which apply to the progression of students from one stage to another as well as to an upper age limit until when the child can stay in primary school. As and when the practice of automatic promotion is revisited, the age restriction will also have to be considered.

LE MORNE GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – TEACHERS, ZEP
PROJECT, ETC.

27/5/08
69

(No. B/594) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the Le Morne Government School, he will state –

- (a) the percentage pass rate at the Certificate of Primary Education examinations for the past five years;
- (b) if the successive Head Teachers posted thereat have been transferred shortly after their posting, and if so, the reasons therefor;
- (c) if an additional teacher is posted thereat for the purpose of replacing the teachers when they are on leave, and
- (d) the reasons as to why it is not included in the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire*.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, I am tabling the pass rate in respect of the Certificate of Primary Education examinations for the past five years. The figures indicate an erratic performance with a peak of 41.4% in 2006 which suddenly dropped to 8.3% in 2007.

SC/D09/P19/02
(PQ No. B/594 contd.)

As regards part (b) of the question, five Head Teachers have been posted to Le Morne Government School as from May 2005 to date. The first three of them served for short periods ranging from three months to one year before proceeding on retirement whereas the fourth one asked for a change in posting on account of long distance travelling after having served for one year.

The high mobility of Head Teachers is explained by the fact that Head Teachers are promoted on a seniority basis very near to their retirement and also by virtue of a policy evolved by my Ministry on a proposal of the trade unions in 2006 to the effect that the seniormost Deputy Head Teacher island wide should be identified to fill a temporary vacancy of more than 120 days in the grade of Head Teacher whenever and wherever it occurs. It should be noted that the turnover of Head Teachers is not limited to Le Morne Government School but applies to all schools across the island on account of the policy which I have just stated. This is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs which disturbs the stability of schools and adversely impacts both on the administration and management and teaching/learning. The whole issue of appointment and assignment of duties at the level of Head Teacher needs to be revisited.

With regard to part (c) of the question, on account of a dearth of qualified teachers, it is not the policy of the Ministry to have an additional teacher at a school just to replace teachers on leave. In such cases, the school administration sees to it that no classes are left unattended for teachers who are on casual or sick leave by asking oriental language and ICT teachers to replace or by merging classes. In the eventuality of a teacher taking vacation leave he/she is temporarily replaced by a Deputy Head Teacher or a Supply Teacher.

As regards part (d) of the question, the criteria for a school to be included in the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire* (ZEP) in 2003 at the inception of the project was that the school should have had a percentage pass rate of less than 40% at CPE for five consecutive years prior to 2003 or if it was a former Special Support School with an average CPE pass rate between 40% and 45% over the last five years. The Le Morne Government School has had a pass rate fluctuating between 40.9% in 1999 and 45.7% in 2001 and at

SC/D09/P19/03

(PQ No. B/594 contd.)

that time did not qualify for inclusion in the ZEP program during the selection exercise of schools.

The ZEP Project is undergoing a mid term evaluation and in view of the fact that the ZEP Plus concept has been endorsed by the ZEP Council, best practices in ZEP schools will be extended to non-ZEP low performing schools following the evaluation including Le Morne Government School over the next three years.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I won't take the time of the House, but there are so many problems at Le Morne Government School, the absence of teachers, so many Head Teachers come within a short span of time and so on. Can I appeal to the hon. Minister to see to it that Le Morne – for the reasons that he has just given – is as quickly as possible integrated within the *Zone d'Education Prioritaire*?

Mr Gokhool: As I have stated, Mr Speaker, Sir, that there is a ZEP Plus concept which will also concern low performance schools. In a way, the ZEP project will be taking care of these schools which are low performance schools.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether in the ZEP Plus concept there is any particular solution which will tackle the problem of Head Teachers which he has explained, particular those reaching the retiring age?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, I gave the answer that the present policy is on the basis of seniority where the Head Teachers are posted. Very often, most of these Head Teachers are near retirement. This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. I am looking into it and there will be some changes in this direction.

Mr Barbier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister whether the results concerning Le Morne Government School dropped by 8.3% or dropped to 8.3%?

Mr Gokhool: It dropped to 8.3%.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – COMPUTERS (01/07/08)

(No. B/760) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floréal) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the computers in the primary schools, he will state the average number thereof as at 31 May 2008.

(Withdrawn)

CUREPIPE – PRIMARY SCHOOLS – WASTE PAPER COLLECTION (08/07/08)

(No. B/808) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Local Government whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Municipal Council of Curepipe, information as to if it has distributed bins to the primary schools of Curepipe for the purpose of collecting waste paper and, if so, obtain details thereof.

Dr. David: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Municipality of Curepipe that no bin has been distributed to the primary schools of the town for collection of waste paper.

Mrs Martin: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the Municipality has publicly announced that bins would be placed for collection of waste paper for recycling purposes?

Dr. David: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Martin: Can we then have an indication as to when this project will start?

Dr. David: I'll check with the Municipality.

SCHOOLS - BLACKBOARDS/CHALKS – USE (22/07/08)

(No. B/913) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW & Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if he will consider the advisability of reviewing the use of blackboards and chalks in primary and secondary schools.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I presume the hon. Member is referring to the physical replacement of blackboard and chalk by whiteboards and markers. If that is so, I wish to inform the House, that there

is already a gradual process of replacement of blackboard and chalk by whiteboard and markers and all Parent-Teachers' Associations (PTA) are encouraged to participate in this process. To date, there are 36 out of 69 State Secondary Schools and 171 out of 259 primary schools which are equipped with whiteboards.

Beyond the utilisation of chalks and board, my Ministry is also implementing a policy of integrating the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

At primary level, each school has a minimum of 10 computers whereas at secondary level all schools have fully functional ICT labs with access to internet through ADSL.

In addition, projects like the NEPAD e-school demo or the physics data logging project whereby schools, equipped with added and more advanced technologies, are meant to support and uphold the use of ICT in teaching/learning. In the medium to long term, we aspire to have a fully ICT based approach in the education sector.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister has given statistics for State secondary schools and primary schools. Can he provide statistics for private secondary schools and say how we are moving ahead with this project?

Mr Gokhool: Presently, there are 138 private secondary schools and blackboards have been replaced in almost all laboratories, specialist rooms and audio-visual rooms. Concerning the other question, I do not have this information.

RODRIGUES – BASILE ATLAS GOVT. SCHOOL – DONATION ACTIVITY (22/07/08)

(No. B/941) Mr A. Nancy (First Member for Rodrigues) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state, if on 04 July 2008, while the students of the Basile Atlas Government School, Port Mathurin, were taking their examinations, the officer responsible for the Trust Fund for the Vulnerable Groups organised a donation activity thereat and, if so, indicate if –

- (a) music was played and speeches were delivered on that day and by whom, and
- (b) complaints have been made by the parents in relation thereto.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the

Commission for Education and Training in Rodrigues that there was indeed a donation of school materials to needy students at Basile Atlas Government School on 04 July 2008, from 0900 hours to 10 o'clock.

I am also informed that music was played before the start of the ceremony only, and speeches were delivered by –

- (i) the Deputy Chief Commissioner & Commission for Education;
- (ii) the Chairman of the Trust Fund for the Integration of Vulnerable Groups,
- (iii) and the responsible officer for the Trust Fund for the Integration of Vulnerable Groups in Rodrigues.

According to the Commission for Education and Training, no complaint was made by parents in relation to the function, and that the pupils did not take part in the school assessment during the function, but at the end thereof after 1000 hours.

ABDOOL RAMAN ABDOOL GOVERNMENT SCHOOL – MARILYN MANSON SUBCULTURE (29/07/08)

(No. B/977) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that some children of the Abdool Raman Abdool Government School have been affected by the Marilyn Manson subculture (Gothism), and if so, will he state if measures have been taken to avoid the further spread of this subculture in the primary schools.

Mr Gokhool: Mr. Speaker Sir, I am informed that on 12 June 2008, 10 pupils of the CPE class at the Abdool Raman Abdool Government School were found to have cuts on their forearms caused apparently by blades from a pencil sharpener. Their parents were called on the same day and were informed of the situation. Only seven parents turned up. At this stage there is no evidence that links this situation to the Manson subculture neither is there any conspicuous sign of adherence of the pupils to that subculture.

As informed in my reply to PQ B/824, notwithstanding the fact that there is no widespread adherence to the Manson subculture preventive action is being taken by my Ministry to curb the spreading of such subculture in schools and close monitoring is carried out at the level of the schools and zones. Clear instructions have been issued to Heads of schools to report any incident of such behavior immediately. Action is taken to provide psychological assistance to students in need.

However, in the case of the Abdool Raman Government School, I would deplore the fact that notwithstanding these arrangements, officers at

the level of the school and the zonal directorate have failed to report this incident in accordance with the standard operating procedures. In view this, I have requested my Supervising Officer to carry out an in-depth enquiry with a view to situating responsibility and instituting an enquiry against those responsible. Concurrently, my Ministry is extending psychological support to the students with a view to ensuring that there is no repetition of such behaviour.

I want to make an appeal to parents to exercise vigilance on their children lest they are following this cult. They may, if they so wish, seek the assistance of psychologists either from my Ministry or that of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection, should that be necessary. My Ministry has initiated action in connection with a survey to gauge the extent of the problem.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for having revealed the truth about the number of students, but there might be more. I want to draw the attention of the hon. Minister that there are two aspects of the issue. Firstly, many schools students adhere to this lifestyle, *c'est une question de mode*, without having got into the philosophical point of view of it. There is also the other aspect where they get into this subculture which is creating real havoc between the students and their families. Without stigmatising regions or schools, there is a lot of work to be done to enable the students and their parents to cope with the situation.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member is making a statement. I am sorry!

The hon. Minister has given an answer. The hon. Member can put a question on what he has said. He is advising the hon. Minister what he has to do. Next question, hon. Lauthan!

Mr Lauthan: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, it is a very serious issue

...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. I have called the next question!