

PRIMARY & SECONDARY (GENERAL ISSUES)

GENERAL ISSUES

ICAC - EDUCATION SECTOR - SEMINARS/TALKS

20/4/04

(1)

(No. B/216) Mr A.K. Gungah (Second Member for Grand' Baie and Poudre d'Or) asked the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether he will ensure that ICAC actions are directed towards primary and secondary school children so as to sensitize them over the differences between ill-gotten means and fruits of labour, with emphasis on the functioning of the civil society.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by ICAC that under Section 30 C (ii) and (ix) of the Prevention of Corruption Act (2002), the Corruption Prevention and Education Division (CPED) of ICAC is mandated to "assist in enhancing school curriculum so as to educate children on the dangers of corruption" and "enhance education on the dangers of corruption".

I am also informed that in view of the large size of the student population, ICAC has adopted a partnering approach in the education sector.

The strategy has been geared towards the forming of allies as effective multipliers of ICAC messages and has touched upon all levels and not only primary and secondary. ICAC has therefore targeted not only school children, but also the persons who work with and influence school children. From July 2003 to March 2004, the CPED has had face-to-face interactions with a total of 9,678 participants through 183 seminars/talks at all levels in the education sector to, *inter alia*, emphasise the values which would help in developing an integrity culture. This will, no doubt, constitute in the long run strong deterrents from corrupt behaviour. The CPED has had also some 39 working sessions with officials of the education sector.

At the pre-primary level, being fully aware that the pro-social activities could be more effectively conducted by educators who know the kids best, CPED has sensitised trainers during a seminar organised in July 2003. In addition, managers and educators at this level have participated in ICAC educational programme with the aim of transmitting pro-social values in the pre-school setting. A Committee comprising tutors from the Mauritius Institute of Education, the Mauritius College of the Air and CPED officers has also been set up to advise on the design and development of resource materials for educators and pre-school children.

CPED has undertaken research for the enhancement of primary school curriculum and has submitted proposals for consideration by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research with respect to moral and civil education. The strategy includes the use of games, story telling, comic strips, drawings and paintings to impart values. The CPED has also focused on an activity oriented and life exposure model to disseminate its messages at the primary level. At the same time, ICAC is collaborating with publishers and writers to encourage them to include CPED materials in language subjects. CPED materials on living values are already being published monthly in a magazine/workbook for pupils of standard IV, V and VI.

ICAC has promoted positive attitudes and honest habits in secondary school students. Besides face-to-face sessions, essay and poster competitions have been launched for HSC students. The aim of these activities is to create awareness of the dangers of corruption.

D06/IF/P01/4

Staff of tertiary and vocational institutions have been provided with the necessary tools and materials on corruption with a view to helping them transmit the right moral and ethical values to students. With respect to students, ICAC's campaign was designed in such a way as to prepare them as would-be professionals to take the right decisions in the face of ethical dilemmas.

I am further informed that ICAC will shortly embark on the following programmes and activities -

- A youngster corner on its website to empower the youth with an online anticorruption tool and make ICAC's website a referral point on the internet.
- Story writing competition on the theme of "living values" for upper primary school children.
- Life-skills project for teenagers to empower them to resist peer pressure towards anti-social behaviour.
- Preparation of a working document for educators on moral development for pre-primary school children.

Dr. Boolell: Sir, will the Prime Minister state whether integrity culture will be inculcated at the higher level, higher *échelon* of ICAC?

The Prime Minister: The question is about anti-corruption efforts in the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of education.

Dr. Boolell: Sir, charity starts at home. Will the Prime Minister state whether the right message will be conveyed to ICAC?

The Prime Minister: Again the question relates to education.

Dr. David: Will the hon. Prime Minister tell us how ICAC will sensitise students to moral values and to positive attitudes when ICAC itself is operating in opacity?

The Prime Minister: I have given the answers in relation to education which ICAC has provided me with, Mr Deputy Speaker.

UNREVISED

DR/D06/P02/1
(No. B/216 Cont'd)

Mr Dulloo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, education of our kids is a very sensitive issue. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will ensure that high pedagogical expertise be obtained before those images and all those education materials that ICAC intends to invade our schools with be supervised and scrutinised before they are exposed to our children?

The Prime Minister: ICAC is an independent Commission. It will be allowed to do its work and we'll certainly monitor as we go along.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that ICAC has not got such expertise for it to go to our schools and to be exposed directly to our school children which may have the adverse effect instead of creating the proper culture and values by way of deterrence, by way of education to our children?

The Prime Minister: Unlike the hon. Member, I don't pretend to be an expert in everything. ICAC will do its work and we'll monitor.

Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will ensure that officers of ICAC themselves do not directly go and have contacts with our school children? Will he especially ensure that officers or people in ICAC who have been exposed to suspicion of pornography, sexual harassment or even paedophilia do not have direct contacts with our children?

The Prime Minister: This is all rubbish, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Dr. David: Will the hon. Prime Minister tell us what type of training the trainers from ICAC have got?

The Prime Minister: If a question is put, it will obtain an answer.

Dr. David: This is the question I am putting, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is asked to put a proper question and then he will get the answer.

CHILDREN (DISABLED) - ACCESS TO EDUCATION

(No. B/832) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he will state the measures taken by his Ministry for a better access to education for disabled children.

16/11/04

(2)

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the hon. Member for giving me the opportunity to explain the situation as regards disabled children.

As we are all aware, apart from three State Primary Schools which have special classes for children with special education needs, the Ministry of Education until recently did not attend to educational needs of disabled children or even children with special educational needs. Many of such children presumably receive no education at all

for lack of schools or lack of funds. Those that did, were and are mainly catered for by Non-Governmental Organisations which until recently received a certain amount of funding from the State through the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizen Welfare and Reform Institutions.

When the present Government came into office, we received representations from NGOs that disabled children deserved the same, if not more, attention than the able bodied children.

The Prime Minister involves himself personally in efforts to address the issue and the following were decided upon -

- (i) overall budgetary provisions for children with special educational needs have increased by 70% from Financial Year 2000/2001 to Financial Year 2004/2005.
- (ii) a new scheme for the financing of registered NGOs attending to the education of disabled children was devised as from July 2002. There has been an increase of the level of funding to NGOs, from Rs3.5 m. in 2002/2003 to Rs4 m. in 2004/2005 with a *per capita* grant of up to a maximum of Rs500 payable to children attending a Registered Special Needs School.
- (iii) As from July 2004, funding of NGOs for educational purposes in respect of disabled children is being attended to through the Ministry of Education. Accordingly, a Special Educational Needs Unit is being set up at the Pre-School Trust Fund to work in close collaboration with my Ministry and the required human resources are being recruited.
- (iv) As my colleagues just mentioned, UNICEF has carried out a Survey commissioned by the Ministry of Social Security to determine the number of disabled children, their whereabouts and their needs, and
- (v) On the basis of the survey results and other available information, a three year National Strategy is being worked out having regard to Special Educational Needs.

In the meantime, it is proper to recall that -

- a pilot In-service Training Programme on inclusive education involving 33 primary schools has been devised for implementation next year.
- 29 children with special needs have been successfully integrated in normal classes in State primary schools in partnership with NGOs;
- within the ZEP Project, special intervention programmes targeting the socially disadvantaged children are being organised for early screening and diagnosis for special educational needs, and finally
- new school buildings have all been rendered accessible through the construction of ramps and fitting of handrails to allow access to orthopedically disabled children.

YEAR 2005

BILLBOARD/MEDIA ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN – EXPENSES (06/09/05)

(No. I B/248) Miss K. R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the total expenses incurred by his Ministry with regard to the billboard and other media advertising campaign during the period March 2005 to July 2005.

Reply: I am informed that my Ministry has incurred the following expenses with regard to the Billboard and other advertising campaign during the period March 2005 to July 2005.

(a) Billboard campaign Rs 962,550

(b) Advertising campaign for Polytechnics project Rs 234,715

Total expenses Rs1,197,265

With regard to the billboard campaign, I am informed that a first tender exercise was conducted on 08 February 2005 based on specifications provided by Mr F. Abdool Rahman, Adviser who also held the position of Chairman, Pre-School Trust Fund. Quotations were invited from the following four bidders as recommended by Mr Abdool Rahman –

- (a) Public Ltée
- (b) Circus advertising
- (c) CREAD & Co. Ltd
- (d) Maurice Publicité Ltd

A pre-bid meeting was held on 14 February 2005 at the Ministry, chaired by Mr Abdool Rahman. Following discussions held with the two potential bidders who attended the pre-bid meeting, namely CREAD & Co. Ltd and Circus Advertising Ltd, decision was taken to extend the date limit for the submission of tenders from Tuesday 22 February 2005 to Monday 28 February 2005, and each bidder to be requested to make a presentation of their proposal on 01 March 2005. However, as at the closing date for the submission of tenders, no bids were received.

Upon recommendation of Mr Abdool Rahman, the Ministry then decided to go for a second tender exercise on 31 March 2005. Tenders were invited from the following seven bidders as proposed by Mr Abdool Rahman-

- (a) Publico Ltée
- (b) Circus Advertising
- (c) CREAD & Co. Ltd
- (d) Maurice Publicité Ltd
- (e) Ajanta Marketing and Advertising
- (f) Nad Design
- (g) Eye-Dentity Co. Ltd

As at closing date (7 April 2005), only one bid was received, namely from Eye-Dentity Co. Ltd. The only bid was evaluated by a technical committee of which Mr Rahman was a member that recommended that the award be made to Eye-Dentity Co. Ltd for the total amount of Rs862,500.

A sum of Rs700,000 as available in the budget of my Ministry in respect of financial year 2004/2005 for the item "Mass Communication Campaign". In view of the cost of the contract, I am informed that my Ministry had recourse to reallocation of funds to meet the excess amount of Rs162,500 plus the amount paid to the MBC and the Radio Plus in respect of the airtime (Rs100,050).

According to information available, Eye-Dentity Co. Ltd now operates under the name of Amadeus Advertising and Brand Communication.

I am also informed that the Polytechnics Campaign was launched in May 2005 to sensitise students possessing a Cambridge School Certificate, but not willing to pursue to the Higher School Certificate. According to the information available, the cost of the concept/studio processing for the informative advertisement was initially estimated at Rs19,000 (excluding VAT). No tender exercise was carried out. Upon suggestion of Mr Abdool Rahman, the contract was entrusted to Eye-Dentity Co. Ltd. Since the Technical Management Trust Fund (TSMTF) had been entrusted with the responsibility of offering the Polytechnic courses, it was decided that payment for the concept design, hiring of Graphic Artists with regard to the advertisement inviting applications would be made by it. Furthermore, it was also decided that media costs would be shared between the Ministry and TSMTF.

Eye-Dentity Co. Ltd has been paid a total amount of Rs54,050 (inclusive of VAT) which is nearly three times the original estimated cost. When I examine the *dossier*, I can see the shadow of Mr Rahman hovering over these two projects where expenses have far exceeded the amount budgeted. Besides, all procedures have not been followed.

Details	Cost(Rs)		Remarks
Informative Advertisement (local press): Concept/Studio Processing Graphic Artist + Pre-Press	(19,000) (excl. VAT) (6,000) (excl. VAT))	28,750 (incl.VAT)	Paid by M/Education and HR
Concept design, hiring of Graphic Artist with regard to the advertisement inviting applications from students: Concept/Studio Processing Graphic Artist/Pre-Press	16,000 (excl. VAT) 6,000 (excl. VAT)	25,300 (incl. VAT)	Paid by TSMTF

Media costs amounting to Rs180,665 were incurred as follows –

Le Mauricien (24/5 and 26/5/05)	Rs 73,600
L'Express (27/5/05)	Rs 39,100
News on Sunday (27/5/05)	Rs 13,800
Defi Plus (28/5/05)	Rs 19,665
Week End (29/5/05)	Rs 34,500
Total Cost	Rs180,665.

YEAR 2006

SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES – CHIKUNGUNYA DISEASE - SURVEY (04/04/06)

(No. B/93) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the chikungunya disease, he will state if any survey has been carried out to determine the number of students and teachers of schools and colleges who have been affected by the disease.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J. B. David): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall respond to all PQs addressed to the Minister of Education.

As the House may be aware, Government is committed with the elimination of the chikungunya and to the prevention of the spread of the disease across the island. In this context, the Ministry of Education & Human Resources is working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health on the following measures which are being implemented since mid

February at school levels –

- (i) fogging and spraying of insecticides after school hours;
- (ii) use of mosquitoes repellents in classrooms;
- (iii) sensitisation and prevention campaigns against chikungunya, especially during morning assemblies.
- (iv) cleaning of school premises and draining of water from roof tops, and
- (v) distribution of leaflets/brochures on ways and means to prevent the proliferation of mosquitoes.

All Heads of schools have been requested to submit to the Ministry –

- (i) weekly reports on the measures taken as per the guideline circulated to all schools for the prevention of the disease, and
- (ii) a daily report on any suspected cases of chikungunya among pupils and teachers in their respective schools and the action taken thereon.

Regular meetings are also held at zonal level with Heads of schools to ensure that the instructions given so far for the sensitisation and prevention campaigns against chikungunya are complied with.

Any survey to determine cases of chikungunya is carried out by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, but daily reports on suspected cases of chikungunya are submitted to the Ministry by Heads of schools.

The situation at the school levels is being closely monitored and is under control.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether we have any figures as to the number of pupils who have been affected by chikungunya and how this has evolved over the months?

Dr. David: Well, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, the survey is done by the Ministry of Health as there is no medical personnel at school level. All suspected cases are sent to hospitals.

GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS - LARVICIDE SPREADING (04/04/06)

(No. B/159) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state the dates on which larvicides were spread at the following Government schools - Réunion,

Hugh Otter Barry, Révérend Espitalier Noël, SSS Floreal, Henrietta, Aryan Vedic, indicating the lifespan of the larvicides treatment.

Reply: Larviciding operations have been carried out at the following schools as follows –

Schools Dates

Reunion Government School 23 February, 2006
7 March, 2006
29 March, 2006
Hugh Otter Barry Government School 26 February, 2006
25 March, 2006
Révérend Espitalier Noël Government School
26 February, 2006
25 March 2006
State Secondary School Floreal 11 March, 2006
28 March, 2006
Henrietta Government School 2 March, 2006
26 March, 2006
214
Aryan Vedic Hindu Aided School 5 March, 2006
30 March, 2006

The larvicide remains effective for ten to fourteen days under normal weather conditions. I am informed that it is a practice to carry out larviciding activities every ten days. However, in certain regions, it has not been possible to do so in view of persistent rainy weather since the beginning of the year. This has been the case of schools in the Central Plateau.

I wish to point out that larviciding operations only will not address the problem regarding mosquito nuisance. The most effective way to combat chikungunya is to eliminate potential mosquito breeding grounds. In this context, Heads of Schools have been requested to ensure that their school premises are free from potential mosquito breeding grounds.

SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS – 2001-2005 – CONSTRUCTION (09/05/06)

(No. B/450) Mrs 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, in regard to expenditure incurred with respect to the construction of Government buildings for new schools and hospitals during the periods 2001 to 2005, he

will state if –

- (a) there were significant cost variations and, if so, by how much in each case;
- (b) all the sites are in perfect running conditions, and
- (c) if it is proposed to undertake a complete financial as well as a full technical audit to ascertain that the “value for money” principle was respected.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, thirty-six new schools and four new hospitals have been constructed during the period 2001 to 2005. There have been increases on five school projects, including one in Rodrigues, ranging from a minimum of about nine hundred thousand rupees to a maximum of about seven million rupees on individual projects. The overall increase on the school projects amount to Rs27.5 m. Generally, the schools, I quote, “are in good running conditions except for leakages which are being attended to.”

The four major hospital projects are the New Souillac District Hospital, the Outpatient Department at Victoria Hospital at Candos, the new Psychiatric Hospital at Beau Bassin and the building to house the Magnetic Resonance Image and CT Scan at SSRN Hospital.

With regard to the construction of the New Souillac District Hospital, the original contract value of the project was Rs158.3 m. and the revised project value is Rs190.9 m., that is, an increase of Rs32.6 m. The project which was initially scheduled to be completed in January 2003 was delayed, amongst other causes given, because of modifications to the original design during the course of construction.

A further increase of Rs19.9 m. has been forecasted by the Construction Manager. Furthermore, the contractor has submitted a claim of about Rs100 m. representing costs incurred by him for staying longer on site. The contractor has moved for an arbitration on this matter. On the other hand, the Construction Manager has claimed Rs18 m. as additional fees and has also moved for arbitration. The building was handed over and became operational in April 2005. Snags have been noted during the maintenance period with the sewage disposal, internal water supply and airconditioning system with breakdowns. These, together with other snags, are being attended to by the main contractor and the final handing over of the building will be effected on satisfactory completion of the works which will be around mid-July 2006.

As regards the new Psychiatric Hospital at Beau Bassin, the original project value was Rs268.2 m. The final account is still under preparation. I am informed it will be consequently more.

(Interruptions)

I am informed there might be an increase of more than Rs20 m. The contractor has submitted claims of Rs112 m. which, according to him, represent costs incurred by him for staying longer on site.

The building is in use since June 2005. Minor defects appearing during the maintenance period of one year will be remedied by the main contractor except for damages caused by a fire in August 2005 to a female security ward for which a new contract will be awarded.

With regard to the New Outpatient Department, Victoria Hospital, the original project value was Rs161 m.

In July 2003, in the course of construction, the client Ministry, that is, the Ministry of Health, decided to carry out major variations of work.

(Interruptions)

This has disrupted the whole implementation of the project and has also resulted in -

- delay in the completion of the project;
- contractual claims to the tune of Rs68 m. which is under consideration, and
- additional consultancy claims of around Rs5 m. also under consideration.

Finally, with regard to the MRI and CT Scan at SSRN Hospital, the contract value was increased from Rs9.4 m. to Rs11.5 m. due to adjustments to provisional sums for four nominated sub-contractors.

As regards part (c), consideration is being given for the setting up of an Audit Team reinforced with appropriate technical staff for a full audit (technical and financial) on some projects, where it is considered necessary. Details of what I have given will be placed in the library.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his answer. May I urge the Deputy Prime Minister – we know, we have heard how much wastage of funds was going on with public funds

in the previous Government?

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I request the Deputy Prime Minister ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please! Order, Mrs Labelle!

Miss Deerpalsing: May I request the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that in future projects as well we conduct financial and technical audits so that public funds are not wasted and also, more importantly, that we get value for money for every rupee spent?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one of the priorities of this Government is that there should be no waste of public funds. Waste of public funds come from the client Ministries not deciding what they want from the beginning. I have issued instructions to client Ministries to decide before they start any project, what the project is going to be, how it is going to be implemented. There is no point going on site and deciding to change projects in the middle of construction. This is why we are paying Rs200 m. more than the initial project values.

(Interruptions)

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did not hear what the Deputy Prime Minister said. Can I know how many schools were constructed from the year 2001 to 2005?

Dr. Beebeejaun: As I have said, there are schools under construction. As the hon. Member knows, there are virtual schools which do not exist.

(Interruptions)

There are 36 schools.

ADOLESCENTS –OBESITY PREVALENCE (16/05/06)

(No. B/534) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if there is a prevalence of obesity among adolescents in Mauritius

and, if so, will he consider the advisability of banning high sugar soft drinks and junk foods in the school compounds.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand there is a study on obesity by the Ministry of Health where mention is made of the problems of obesity amongst adolescents. I cannot, at this stage, comment on the prevalence of obesity among adolescents in Mauritius. However, there is a worldwide trend towards obesity among youngsters and we have to be cautious in order to protect our students against this trend.

At present, the Ministry of Health already regulates the operation of school canteens by setting out sanitary norms and providing guidelines as to the foodstuffs and drinks which can or cannot be sold in canteens. I will be tabling a copy of the guidelines which are currently operational.

There is certainly need to improve the process and strengthen the measures taken so far. In this respect, I have already arranged for the setting up of a Health and P.E. Coordination Committee at my Ministry to strategically look at how we can encourage our students to develop a healthy life style. Further, I will seize this opportunity to request my colleague, the Minister of Health, to arrange for a specific survey to be undertaken regarding obesity among adolescents and to come up with recommendations as to the preventive measures to be taken. A national strategy to deal with the problem of obesity among the Mauritian population can also be envisaged.

Meanwhile I assure the hon. Member that my Ministry will give due attention to the proposal made.

PUBLIC OFFICERS – POSTING (30/05/06)

(No. B/630) 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, with a view to economizing on transport costs, he will consider the advisability of posting public officers closer to their place of residence.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that it has always been the practice to try to have public officers posted, as far as possible, as I said, near to their place of residence.

There is unfortunately a limit to the number of officers who may be posted in local offices out of the city centre, as most Government offices are concentrated in and around Port Louis.

However, as I stated in my reply to PQs B/85 and B/551, the Government is envisaging different options, including the eventual construction of a new administrative city, for the relocation of Government offices away from the Port Louis area. Then, it would be possible to look at the possibility of putting greater number of public officers closer to their place of residence.

PUBLIC PLACES – SMOKING – BAN (13/06/06)

(No. B/719) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he will state if it is proposed to amend the law with a view to banning smoking in all public places.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the issue of smoking in Mauritius is governed by the Public Health (Restrictions on Tobacco Products) Regulations of 1999. These regulations ban smoking in many public places in Mauritius. These include health institutions, drug stores, schools and other educational institutions, public libraries, public sports complex and museums, police stations, post offices and any part of any office premises or other place of work intended for use by the public.

In 2004, Mauritius ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. In this respect, a Steering Committee, comprising various Ministries and departments, para-statal organisations, representatives of the private sector, NGOs and other stakeholders, has been set up at the level of my Ministry to propose measures for the enforcement of the existing legislation as well as make the legislation compliant with the Convention.

The report of the Committee is expected within three months from now, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister confirm whether it is proposed to ban smoking in all public places? He has stated that it is already the practice in some public places, but will that be extended to all public places?

Mr Faugoo: Already, the law provides for a number of places, Mr Speaker, Sir. It covers a large number of places, especially public places. The issue is whether this would be extended to all public places. This can be taken on board by the Committee and studied.

Mr Varma: The hon. Minister made an announcement on the Anti-Tobacco Day with regard to smoking. Can we know what are the changes in the existing legislation that are being proposed?

Mr Faugoo: This is being studied by the Committee as I said, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has given us a list of public places where smoking is already banned and he has made reference to the World Health Organisation Convention that we have ratified. Can the Minister tell us whether in that Convention there are other public places – other than those where smoking is already banned - where, according to the Convention, smoking should be banned?

Mr Faugoo: I have been advised that there are other places according to the Convention, which are already provided for under the existing legislation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Miss Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, it's one thing to ban and it's another thing to enforce. Can the hon. Minister ensure that we all give the right example, lead by example, and really enforce non-smoking policy in all Government offices, including the Parliament?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Will the hon. Minister answer the question?

Mr Faugoo: This particular legislation exists since 1999, in fact, it was the Labour Government which brought the law. But I don't know for what reason this has not been enforced so far. This is why I have set up a Committee at the level of the Ministry to study how best to enforce the existing legislation and, at the same time, to study whether we need to extend the meaning of 'public places', Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has told us that according to his information in the Convention there are a number of public places that should be added to the existing public places, and he has made reference to a Committee that he has set up. In the meantime, not *cabri*

manze salade, but smokers are killing us.

(Interruptions)

Can I know from the Minister when was the Convention ratified and when is it expected that that Committee will complete its work?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, the legislation was passed in 1999, seven years ago. The Convention was ratified in 2003, but the law as it exists, the local legislation has never been enforced and I don't know for what reason. So, it's not now that *cabri manze salade* or whatever.

(Interruptions)

I have stated in the main answer which I gave to the House that the Committee is expected to come up with a report within three months from now.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, smoking is an independent risk factor for non-communicable disease and the National Risk Prevalence Survey has been done way back in 2004, and till now the final results have not been publicised. Can the hon. Minister say as when this piece of very good survey work will be made known to the public?

Mr Faugoo: I am aware of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have to look into it.

Mr Speaker: Last question!

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has made reference to a Committee that has been set up. Can we know who are the members of the Committee?

Mr Faugoo: I don't have the details in the file, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Varma!

DIRECTOR OF AUDIT REPORT – AUDIT COMMITTEES (20/06/06)

(No. B/799) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if a committee has been set up to implement the recommendations of the Report of the Director of Audit and, if so, will he give its composition and the number of times it has met.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, following recommendations in the reports of the National Audit Office for the years 2003 and 2005, an Audit Committee has been established on 02 June 2006 in 5 Ministries. I wish to point out that the role of a Committee is, not of an executive, but of an advisory nature. Its function is not to implement the recommendations of the Report of the Director of Audit. This is the responsibility of each Ministry and Department. The function of the Committee is rather to monitor implementation of the recommendations of the Director of Audit and also to advise on reducing wastage, and improving efficiency in the utilisation of public funds. The setting up of such Committees will be extended in the near future to all Ministries and Departments.

An Audit Committee consists of, at least, three Senior Officers appointed by the Ministry of Finance and with the following profiles –

- (a) having a sound understanding of the workings of the Ministry concerned;
- (b) having an understanding of Government environment and accountability structures as well as any relevant legislation, and
- (c) having General Management skills including Human Resources skills.

To ensure monitoring of the conclusions and recommendations of each Audit Committee, an Audit Monitoring Committee has also been set up in my Ministry. It is chaired by the Director of the Management Audit Bureau and comprises the following other members -
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance & Economic Development;
Accountant-General;
Head Finance Cadre;
Head Internal Control Cadre;
Head Purchasing & Supply Cadre, and
4 other members having legal, administrative, technical or corporate governance expertise

The Audit Monitoring Committee has met on ten occasions. A briefing session was held in my Ministry on 02 June with members of the Audit Monitoring Committee and the Audit Committee to explain to them their roles and responsibilities, their terms of reference and their *modus operandi*. The Audit Committees are expected to meet, at least, three to four times a year.

I am given to understand, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the Audit Committees, already set, will, in the coming weeks, seek appointment with the Responsible Officers of the five Ministries to prepare a work plan. As regards the composition of the Audit Committees, I am circulating a table giving the information requested. (**Appendix II**)

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister what are those five Ministries concerned?

Mr Sithanen: *Le bon exemple commence chez soi!*
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development;
Ministry of Education and Human Resources;
Ministry of Health and Quality of Life;
Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping,
and Ministry of Public Utilities.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister also whether this Audit Committee, that he has set up, is also taking into account the reports published by the Public Accounts Committee?

Mr Sithanen: I think a proposal was made to the effect by some Members of the Public Accounts Committee, because, very often, there is convergence in the criticisms that are made by the Director of Audit and the report of PAC.

CIVIL SERVICE – RED TAPISM & BOTTLENECKS - MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE (20/06/06)

(No. B/800) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications whether he will state if he was appointed Chairman of the Committee to address the problem of red-tapism and bottlenecks in the Civil Service and, if so, if any report has been

published, indicating if it will be tabled.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure and External Communications (Mr X. Duval): Mr Speaker Sir, as in stated in my reply to PQ No. B/183, a Ministerial Committee was set up by Government in August 2005 under my chairmanship to look into the problems of bottlenecks and red tape in the Civil Service. The Committee also comprises my colleague, Dr. the hon. Rajesh Jeetah, Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Cooperatives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, streamlining the bureaucratic processes and procedures in the service cannot be achieved overnight. It is a long term process. No report has been prepared as such although progress made by the Committee has been submitted to and approved by Government. The Committee has already made a series of recommendations, particularly, with regard to the grant of licences and permits by the Local Authorities which are being implemented since November last year. These include –

- (a) a system of clustering of trades for trade licensing purposes.

The clustering has been done in such a way that once a development permit is issued for a trade falling within the cluster, there is henceforth, no need for a fresh permit in the event there is a change of trade within that same cluster;

- (b) a single application form in respect of development and building permit for single residential units;

I am glad that both proposals have been taken one step further in the Budget Speech.

- (c) the grant of a Certificate of Morality within a period of 2 weeks, compared to a much longer period previously;
- (d) facilitation of the request for permission for filming in the nonsecurity zone at the airport;
- (e) deregulation of bakery licensing by the Ministry of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce & Cooperatives;
- (f) the revision of the list of items requiring an export permit. In this regard, a number of items would no longer require a permit to export;
- (g) the reduction of the processing time for the registration of MEs, from one month to 2 days;
- (h) the revamping of the procedures for the grant of a Tourism Enterprise licence by the Tourism Authority, and
- (i) the reduction of the processing time for the grant of work permit and residence permits. This has also been taken one step

further in the Budget Speech.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the list is not exhaustive. Already, these measures are yielding positive results. The Ministerial Committee has now targeted a number of other Ministries/Departments where the problems of bottlenecks and red tape are common and have to be addressed.

ALCOHOL PRODUCTS – BILLBOARDS ADVERTISEMENT– SCHOOLS VICINITY (04/07/06)

(No. B/874) 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 Government will consider the advisability of banning the advertising of alcoholic products on billboards in the vicinity of schools.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at present there is no legislation dealing specifically with the contents of advertisements in general, the more so of alcoholic products on billboards in the vicinity of schools.

On 26 June last, in my address in the context of the 19th International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking at NATReSA, I personally expressed my concern regarding the potential risk and damage that the promotion of alcohol and tobacco may have on our youth.

Instructions have already been given for all the 247 advertisements of all alcoholic drinks that are on billboards to be removed as from 07 July 2006.

PAEDOPHILIA VIA INTERNET` (04/07/06)

(No. B/876) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & 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 if there exists any system of protection for the purpose of ensuring that children using the internet do not become victims of paedophiles and, if not, the measures, if any, proposed to be taken to set up a system of protection.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, Government is concerned with the increasing threat of paedophilia via the internet. With the rapid development of technology, it has become very important to protect children from indecency, obscenity, pornography and paedophilia on the net.

Whilst the existing legislation do not cover specifically a situation whereby a child is lured on the Internet by paedophiles for immoral purposes, I wish to inform the House that our laws, namely -

(a) the Child Protection Act, makes it an offence for the making or distribution of indecent photographs of children, and

(b) the Information and Communications Technologies Act 2001, makes it an offence the transmission or reception of a message which is grossly offensive, or of an indecent or obscene character.

I wish to inform the House that, insofar as the investigation of computer related offences is concerned, including the investigation of child exploitation on the Internet, the existing Computer Misuse and Cybercrime Act 2003 gives the Police the power to apply to the Judge in Chambers for an order for the expeditious preservation of data that has been stored or processed by means of a computer system or any other information and communication technologies. Such data is subject to disclosure for the purposes of investigations and prosecution of offences.

However, the problem of paedophilia is a more complex one. One, online paedophiles use a variety of ways to reach children on the Internet and are constantly changing their approach. Moreover, children today have access to internet not only at home but also at other places such as schools, post offices and *cybercafés*. Online paedophiles usually make use of the internet chat rooms to “groom” children, that is, influencing them into accepting to meet them. A further difficulty is caused by the volatility of electronic data, which may be altered, moved or deleted very quickly, within a fraction of a second.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to develop a set of more powerful measures to provide an adequate protection to our children using the Internet. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive policy on child protection on the internet in Mauritius. First, the setting up of an appropriate legislative framework for child safety online is a priority. A new Child Online Protection Act which would address, *inter alia*, in a more vigorous way the problems posed by the internet to children is being finalised by the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare and

the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications.

Secondly, the issue of child protection online will also be addressed under the Information Security component of the National Information and Communications Technology Strategic Plan which is under preparation by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications.

Thirdly, awareness programmes will be conducted in schools to guide children who surf on the internet. Parents also will be asked to be more vigilant in their exercise to prevent children from having access to unwanted images and sites.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister kindly inform the House how many times the Police has applied to the Judge in Chambers to obtain the appropriate Order to be able to track paedophiles from the internet?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not aware of how many times they have applied, but I must say that there must have been complaints for them to apply.

MBC – PARENTHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMMES (25/07/06)

(No. B/1076) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will consider the advisability of impressing upon the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation the need to broadcast parenthood education programmes on television, as a measure to prevent violence against children and within the family.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, parenthood education programmes on television already figure on the agenda of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation. The objective of such programmes is, *inter alia*, to sensitise the public at large on subjects of interest and measures being taken by the authorities against social ills such as violence against children and within the family.

In the context of the International Day of the Child, a series of short messages on children's rights was broadcast on television from 02 to 17 June 2006. A special programme entitled "*Les Droits des Enfants*" was broadcast on 12 June 2006 with particular emphasis on violence against

children. In the “Constat” programme broadcasted on 03 July 2006, special emphasis was also laid on violence against children. On 19 July 2006, the “Dossier” programme on television was entirely devoted to the rights of children and the issue of violence against children.

I wish to inform the House that the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation is working in close collaboration with the Mauritius College of the Air for the broadcast of programmes relating to prevention of violence against children and within the family. Two of these programmes, namely, “Encounter” and “Media Mirror” will be broadcast shortly.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of informative programmes. Giving information to the parents is one thing, but, I am talking about parenthood education which differs from the informative programmes. This is one thing. The other thing is regarding programmes broadcast by MCA. May we see to it that these programmes are being broadcast at peak hours and not at times when no one is watching television?

The Prime Minister: As for the second part, I can ask the MBC to ensure that. But, I should also have added that the MBC is working closely with the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection with a view to sensitising parents about the need to provide better protection for children against violence and abuse. And that is what the MBC is also doing.

PSC/DFSC – REFORMS AND MODERNISATION (25/07/06)

(No. B/1080) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) 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 Public Service Commission and the Disciplined Forces Service Commission, he will state if Government proposes to set up a Select Committee to inquire and make recommendations with a view to reforming and modernizing these institutions.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the House would recall that during my previous mandate I appointed a Steering Committee on the Reforms of the Civil Service in order to raise the managerial efficiency and effectiveness of the service. Some of the recommendations of the Steering Committee concerning the reforms and modernisation of the Public Service Commission and the Disciplined Forces Service Commission were subsequently implemented by way of constitutional amendments.

During my visit to the United Kingdom last week, I had discussions with Baroness Usha Prashar regarding reforms of the Civil Service in Mauritius. Baroness Usha Prashar was the first Civil Service Commissioner between 2000 and 2005. She is now the Chairperson of the new Judicial Appointments Commission since October 2005. She has agreed to study the possibilities for technical assistance in this connection and to advise the Government. In fact, she will be here shortly.

For their part, the PSC and the DFSC have taken a series of initiatives, such as the implementation of ISO 9000 Principles, the Elaboration of Customer Charters, Online application system so as to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of their businesses. It is, however, not envisaged to set up a Select Committee to look into ways and means of reforming and modernising the PSC and the DFSC.

However, in the Government Programme, we are committed to provide a right of appeal against decisions of the PSC and the DFSC and the Local Government Service Commission. A Technical Committee under the chairmanship of the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service is already looking into the matter with a view to recommending the constitutional amendments to be made for this purpose.

POLICE & PUBLIC OFFICERS - RETIRING AGE (25/07/06)

(No. B/1084) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, following Government decision to raise the retirement age to 65 years, he will state if the number of years of service required by Police Officers and Public Officers to be eligible for full pension will be increased.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as announced in the Budget Speech 2006-2007, the normal pension age would be raised from 60 to 65 years. I should add, Mr Speaker, Sir - because I see that some people do not realise it - that this does not start immediately. The retiring age is a gradual process, which will start in August 2008 to achieve the target of 65 years in 2018. The computation of the amount of pension and the qualifying period to benefit for full pension would also need to be adjusted accordingly. The new scheme would apply to all employees with transitional measures to secure acquired rights.

The Pay Research Bureau would work out details of the modified Defined Benefit (DB) Scheme, as announced in the Budget Speech, for inclusion in its next Report which is due, as I said earlier, in 2008, after consultation with all parties.

Written answers debate no.
29 of 01/08/06
~~287~~ 15

mrl/d29 W01 - 03

PRISONERS - LITERARY AND NUMERACY EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

(No. B/1163) Miss K.R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms, Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Prisons, information as to if there are any plans to introduce a Comprehensive Literary and Numeracy Educational Programme for prisoners.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Prisons, that a comprehensive Literary and Numeracy Educational Programme for prisoners already exists.

Presently, classes are being held at five institutions namely Beau Bassin Prison, Petit Verger Prison, Richelieu Open Prison, Women Prison and the Correctional Youth Centre. An invitation to attend these classes is affixed in the association yards at the beginning of each year and admission is on a voluntary basis.

Five teachers are seconded for duty from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and they are under the Supervision of the Special Education Needs Unit of that Ministry.

Since January 2006, 12 detainees are attending classes at Beau Bassin Prison, 14 at Petit Verger Prison, 12 at Richelieu Open Prison, 11 at Women Prison and 5 at the Correctional Youth Centre. The following subjects are taught: English, French, Mathematics, Living Skills and Human Values.

The inmates at the Correctional Youth Centre have even the possibility to take part in the CPE examinations.

Detainees are provided with writing and reading materials, free of charge and they attend school from 09 00 hrs to 14 30 hrs. The curriculum is designed to suit the detainees' demands as most of them have a very basic level of education.

The newly appointed Commissioner of Prisons has been requested to actively consider ways and means of encouraging more prisoners to attend the educational programmes.

Oral Answers
Debate no. 29 of 21/08/06
16
#01

JG/D29/P16/8

UNREVISED

CHILD PROTECTION - SENSITISATION PROGRAMME

(No. B/1206) **Mrs F. Labelle, (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal)** asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether she will state if her Ministry has any programme to sensitise teachers, head teachers and Parent Teachers Associations on their roles in regard to child protection and, if so, since when, now is it conducted and by whom.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are fully conscious of the need for such programme.

To this end, a seminar was precisely held on 05 June and on 27 July again we had a two day workshop in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

Such exercises will be ongoing and sensitisation programmes where educators, parents and children are conducted regularly in schools, community centres and women centres by officers and psychologists of my Ministry, the National Children's Council and resource persons well versed in child matters.

Mrs Labelle: May I know from the hon. Minister whether she is having separate programmes for parents, teachers and head-teachers?

Mrs Seebun: Initially, we had a common programme but we are envisaging separate programmes.

17

Written Answers
debate no 24 of
231
25/11/06.

D34/W06/mt/2

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION BUILDINGS – EDITH CAVELL
STREET – PULLING DOWN**

(No. B/1481) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if Government is proposing to pull down the buildings which are presently housing offices of his Ministry at the Edith Cavell Street, Port Louis.

Reply: On 23 December 2005, Government approved the vesting of the land at Edith Cavell Street in the Judiciary. The premises at Edith Cavell Street are presently housing the Education Directorate Zone 1 of my Ministry. The land in question has been identified for the construction of the New Supreme Court Building.

As far as my Ministry is concerned procedures for alternative accommodation arrangements were thereafter initiated. Prime Minister's Office has, in September 2006, approved the relocation of the Directorate Zone 1 to the 8th Floor, Emmanuel Anquetil Building, formerly occupied by the Income Tax Department. My Ministry is awaiting for the renovation works to be completed there before the transfer of Directorate Zone 1 can be effected.

As regards the pulling down of the building at Edith Cavell Street, I am informed by the Attorney-General's Department that once the relocation of Zone 1 is finalised, they will initiate procedures for the pulling down of the existing building and proceed with the construction of the New Supreme Court Building. However, this decision will depend on availability of funds and will be in accordance with the requirements of the law relating to historic buildings and national monuments will be respected.

UNIVERSAL ICT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

5/12/06
12

(No. B/1603) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the Universal ICT Education Programme, he will state –

- (a) when it was launched;
- (b) its total cost;
- (c) the type and duration of the courses offered;
- (d) the name of the company or individual selected to offer these courses;
- (e) the criteria used for selection, and
- (f) the amount payable by Government or the students in terms of licence fees, course fees and examination fees, if any.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Tourism, Leisure & External Communications (Mr X. L. Duval): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission I am replying to this question.

Sir, I am tabling the information called for on Universal ICT Education Programme.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le Ministre pourrait-il au moins nous répondre *to part (d) of the question, that is, the name of the company or individual selected to offer these courses?*

Mr X. L. Duval: The National Computer Board is the legal entity offering these courses in Mauritius. This is what I have.

JG/D36/P15/4
(PQ No. B/1603 cont'd)

UNREVISED

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le Ministre peut-il dire si c'est un certain docteur Appu Kuttan de la Société Américaine National Education Foundation qui a eu le contrat? Est-ce qu'il peut confirmer cela?

Mr X. L. Duval: I am replacing the substantive Minister. I have asked the Ministry to prepare a comprehensive reply for the hon. Member so that I can table it in the House and on the next occasion the hon. Member can ask questions from the substantive Minister.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Le Ministre peut-il nous dire quels sont *the criteria used for selection*?

Mr X. L. Duval: As I have just said, I'll table the information and the hon. Member will get it in a few minutes.

Mr Ganoo: May I ask the hon. Ministre whether there has been any bidding process, tendering procedure for this election?

Mr X. L. Duval: I am not aware of how the procedure was made, Mr Speaker, Sir.

YEAR 2007

TETANUS TOXOID VACCINE – 10-YEAR OLD BOY – REACTION (10/04/07)

(No. B/110) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Health & Quality of Life whether, in regard to the recent vaccination of primary school children, he will state if complaints have been received in connection therewith and, if so, the nature thereof and the remedial measures taken, if any.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, vaccination programme in primary schools is a regular feature. It is carried out on school premises in accordance with an immunisation schedule, in line with WHO guidelines. Vaccination of “Booster Diphtheria and Tetanus, Polio and Mumps, Measles and Rubella (MMR)” is administered to primary school students on

entry. These protect our children against infectious diseases, such as Diphtheria, Polio, Tetanus, Measles, Mumps and Rubella. Furthermore, vaccination of “Tetanus Toxoid”, which protects against tetanus, is administered to all primary school leavers, that is, children of ages between 10 and 11.

It is an established practice to carry out a screening exercise at the school to rule out contra-indications prior to vaccination. During the vaccination exercise, it is also common that a few children feel some discomfort. This may happen after any injection and is not alarming. During the vaccination programme of 2007, a few cases of discomfort were reported from four schools.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that on 06 March 2007, 101 CPE pupils of Petit Verger Government School were vaccinated with Tetanus Toxoid. Out of them, a ten-year old boy developed fever on the night following the injection and had weakness in his left arm. On 08 March, the child attended the Accident & Emergency Department of Dr. Jeetoo Hospital, where he was given treatment. On 09 March, the child attended hospital again and was admitted. He was discharged on 10 March, as his condition had improved and he was given an appointment for 14 March, on which date the child was reviewed in the Orthopaedic Outpatient Department.

The child again was called on 21 March for further investigations. On admission, blood investigations, CT Scan and Magnetic Resonance Imagery (MRI) of the brain and cervical spine were carried out. No abnormality was revealed. During this period, daily physiotherapy was provided to the child.

He was discharged from hospital on 30 March 2007, as his condition had improved further, with the recommendation to continue physiotherapy as an outpatient.

However, before his next appointment on 07 April, the child was readmitted at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital on 04 April, with weakness of all four limbs. Immediate supportive treatment was started, and the next day the child was assessed by a panel of five specialist doctors, among whom a neurosurgeon. CT and MRI scans were repeated, which did not show any abnormality again.

I visited the child on Thursday 05 April, accompanied by officials of my Ministry. We met the panel of doctors who confirmed that the child was recovering. We also explained the situation to the child’s mother who was

present there.

I am further informed that, according to the international medical literature available, this is a very rare case of neurological complication known as 'Guillain-Barré syndrome', which may occur in one out in a million cases, resulting from an immunological reaction of the patient to the vaccination.

I understand that this is the first such case reported in Mauritius. Some 60,000 persons have been vaccinated from the same batch and no such complications have been reported.

However, as a precautionary measure, the remaining doses (22,360) in this batch were immediately withdrawn. A sample of the vaccine has been sent abroad on 27 March for testing. Concurrently, the supplier, which is WHO listed, has been apprised of the issue.

Dr. Jeannet, a neuropaediatrician and '*Maître d'Enseignement et de Recherche*' of *Centre Hospitalier Universitaire* of Lausanne, Switzerland, examined the child yesterday at Dr. Jeetoo Hospital. He agrees with the diagnosis made on the case, and finds the treatment given to him so far to be appropriate.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the latest health report I received this morning, the child's condition has further improved and he is able to walk independently without any support, and has regained strength in all his limbs.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the Minister say that the supplier of the vaccine has been informed of what has happened, and that an analysis is being done. Can we know from the hon. Minister what is the result of the test being done on that vaccine?

Mr Faugoo: We are waiting for the results, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Naidu: Mr Speaker, Sir, my information is that the case the Minister is referring to is not the only one. There is another case where the parent of the child went to the Ministry, but, unfortunately, he was not given due consideration. Officers refused to meet and talk to him. Can the Minister confirm that this is the case?

Mr Faugoo: There is no other such case, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member is mistaken. As I stated, there were several cases from several

schools. But these were cases of discomfort only. That is something usual which happens in the normal course of things.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, just for the sake of information, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether vaccination in schools is done on a voluntary or compulsory basis.

Mr Faugoo: It is voluntary, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, as it is done on a voluntary basis, were the parents given notice that their children were going to be vaccinated in school?

Mr Faugoo: I suppose this is the case, but I need to check, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES –
ADVISERS (17/04/07)**

(No. B/160) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to advisers attached to his Ministry, he will state –
(a) their names, and
(b) the date of their appointment.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are at present eight advisers attached to my Ministry and I am tabling the information relating to the second part of the question.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House on which basis were they appointed?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are a set criteria in terms of requirements of the Ministry and also in terms of the competencies of the advisers and the procedure is for the Ministry to submit the names with recommendation to the Prime Minister's Office which eventually gives the approval for the appointment of advisers.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just stated that there are a set criteria. Could he inform the House what are these criteria?

Mr Gokhool: It is a combination of academic and professional qualifications as well as experience in the field that are taken into account

and also the needs of the Ministry.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has talked about the needs of the Ministry. Could he inform the House in what way his Ministry needed advisers?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform the House that my Ministry takes care of two sectors: Education and Human Resources. Previously, it was only a single ministry, that is, the Ministry of Education, and 17 advisers were posted to one Ministry. Now, I have the responsibility for two huge sectors. I think I am coping with half the number of advisers.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the question is not how many advisers the previous Government had and how many we have, because the people voted for a change. Could the hon. Minister inform the House to which specific departments are the advisers attached to?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the advisers are posted to various departments, for example, infrastructural management, human resource management and development, E-government, examinations, educational reforms, international relations, school management and also information matters.

Mr Varma: Prior to the appointment of these advisers, Mr Speaker, Sir, were there not civil servants dealing with these specific departments?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, this is an old established practice that Ministers are supported by advisers. I have not invented this system, but wherever there is a need for complementary advice...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker, Sir, the advisers are there to provide specific advice with regard to certain sectors where the resources are not available in the Ministry.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister inform the House where the specific advice was not available so that he had to have recourse to advisers outside the Ministry?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are projects and issues which crop up. Together with the advice or the services of the officers, we also need other specific advice with regard to projects and issues and it is a

matter which crops up as we are working in the Ministries.

Mr Varma: I have another supplementary question, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister has said that there are issues that crop up where advice is needed. Will he consider to have advisers on an ad-hoc basis and not on a full-time basis?

Mr Gokhool: I think the overall policy is to have advisers on a contract basis, but this is not ruled out because there are advisers who can also be appointed on a project basis.

Debate No. 07 of 17 April,
2007

138

21

DR/D07/W04/01

**CONNECT YOUTH ENGLAND PROJECTS – COMPUTERS AND
PRINTERS – DONATION**

(No. A/5) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Youth and Sports whether in regard to the donation of some 93 old computers and 40 old printers under the Connect Youth England Projects, he will state –

- (a) the terms of the agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the Ministry and the donor agency;
- (b) the reasons for which the equipment have not been put to use;
- (c) the amount of money that –
 - (i) both parties have agreed to put in the project;
 - (ii) have already been spent on taxes, and
- (d) if any evaluation on the implementation of the project has been made and, if so, if a copy thereof will be tabled.

Reply: As regards part (a) of the question, no Memorandum of Understanding or agreement has been signed between the Ministry of Youth & Sports and the donor agency. The modalities of the agreement are still being discussed with Connect Youth, UK and the British Council.

As regards part (b), the personal computers and printers which form part of a British Council, Connect Youth and Microsoft project were donated in August 2006 for use in youth centres for the training of unemployed, underemployed youth to arise IT awareness among them. The batch of a hundred computers and 40 printers which were received last year were found not to be to the required standard and in many cases there was no windows operating system. These discrepancies have been brought to the attention of British Council which has agreed to provide appropriate logistics and the necessary licences.

DR/D07/W04/02
(No. A/5 Cont'd)

As regards part (c), this project is being funded by British Council. All payments have been incurred by the British Council and the amount of Rs77,296.89 paid by this Ministry for VAT and storage/demurrage fees have also been refunded by the British Council.

As regards part (d), an evaluation of this project will be made once it has been implemented. Officers in charge of the youth centres and the National Youth Council are monitoring with the British Council so that this project is implemented as early as possible.

15/5/07

33

22

CA/D10/P06/5

**S. O., Mr – 19 YEAR OLD STUDENT – ALLEDGED ASSAULT BY
POLICE**

(No. B/344) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe & Midlands) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & 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 if, on or about 23 January 2007, one Mr S.O., a 17 year old student, made a declaration against two Police Officers for alleged brutality and, if so, the reasons therefor.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that an incident took place on 23 January 2007 at Jan Palach Bus Stand, Curepipe, when one Mr S. O., a 19 year old student, was allegedly slapped on the face several times by a Police Officer dressed in civilian clothes.

The student also declared that he was brought to Curepipe CID Office, where he was assaulted by another man in civilian clothes, as a result of which he fell unconscious.

The student was allowed to leave after he signed an entry in the Diary Book. Later, the student, accompanied by his mother, called at the Curepipe CID Office, where he fell unconscious again. He was admitted to Victoria Hospital for treatment and was discharged on 25 January 2007.

Mr S. O. made a declaration on 29 January 2007 at the Complaints Investigation Bureau regarding the incident.

I am further informed that Mr S.O. lodged a complaint at the National Human Rights Commission on 08 February 2007 against two officers of the CID of Curepipe, with respect to the incident.

The National Human Rights Commission is investigating into the case, and appropriate action will be determined on the basis of its findings.

/...

CA/D10/P06/6
(No. B/344) (Contd)

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether he is in presence of the reasons of the arrest of this young man?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are reasons given that he was using filthy language against people in the vicinity.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether, despite the fact that he fell unconscious twice, he was never given any attention and brought to the hospital? He fell unconscious twice in the Police Station, and remained there.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is not what I have here. The inquiry should clarify matters, but here I am informed that he was admitted to Victoria Hospital.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that there are several cases of brutality with respect to the Police Force, is the hon. Prime Minister envisaging to set up the Independent Police Complaints Commission soon?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is already the National Human Rights Commission, which looks into complaints. This is why we did not go forward with this. But, we can still have a look at that.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that the student said that he could identify those two Police Officers, and whether there is any procedure that he can, therefore, resort to?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that the Police Officers are already known. They have been identified.

23

15/5/07

PUBLIC SECTOR – OFFICERS – POSTING

(No. B/347) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) 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 allowing officers in the public sector to work close to their place of residence; he will consider the advisability of setting up a committee to look into its implications.

(Withdrawn)

D11P20CO4

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER
BATTERED CHILDREN – PROTECTION**

The Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection (Mrs I. Seebun): Mr Speaker, Sir, in the reply I made on 08 May 2007 to Parliamentary Question No. B/301 on the case of a suspected battered child, I informed the House of my intention to establish a protocol to ensure better protection to such children who are returned back home after a Court order.

I wish to inform the House now, that I co-chaired a meeting with my colleague, the Attorney-General, on Monday 14 May 2007 and the following issues were raised –

- (a) the difficulties encountered by officers of my Ministry and other departments in intervening in cases of ill-treated children;
- (b) the Committee also looked into aspects concerning –
 - (i) legal framework
 - (ii) bureaucratic impediments
 - (iii) monitoring and accountability
 - (iv) regular evaluation
 - (v) sensitisation and awareness campaigns

Were present at the meeting major Government stakeholders dealing with abused/ill-treated children, namely -

- Ministry of Health & Quality of Life
- Probation & After Care Service
- Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions
- The Police Family Protection Unit
- The Police "*Brigade des Mineurs*"

D11P20CO4

Statement (contd)

The main observation made was that there is presently no mandatory obligation on the part of Magistrates to request –

- (i) the parents of a battered child,
- (ii) the Police, and
- (iii) other institutions, such as the school or nursery to regularly report to the authorities concerned on the child once the latter is returned to the parents.

There is also a need to bridge all loopholes in existing legislation, including the need for mandatory obligation so as to ensure proper intervention in and follow-up of such cases. My Ministry and the Attorney-General's Office are working on the necessary amendments that need to be brought.

In the meantime, a Protocol of Assistance to battered/ill-treated children will be signed between major stakeholders. Two working sessions have already been held on the drafting of the protocol.

It is also proposed to have a meeting with the Association of Magistrates before the end of this month to discuss the specificity of children's cases, the attention and consultations required and the reporting system that needs to be put in place.

My colleague, the Attorney-General, will look into the possibility of case – conferencing that facilitates the sharing of information which leads to judicious decision-making.

We will also hold a series of meetings with –

- heads of religious bodies
- non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and
- youth leaders

to sensitize them on the problem of battered/ill-treated children and to call upon their participation and commitment to help the Government to combat this societal problem.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**PUBLIC SERVICE – RETIRING OFFICERS –
“EXIT INTERVIEW” (29/05/07)**

(No. B/491) Dr. R. Mungur (Second Member for Flacq and Bon Accueil) 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 officers retiring from the public service, he will consider introducing the practice called “Exit Interview”.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that an “Exit Interview” is considered as a Human Resource Management tool used to look at the effectiveness of employment practices in scarcity areas. This practice is meant to help the employer to find out the reasons why people leave the organisation. However, it does not apply in cases of normal retirement on grounds of age.

The Pay Research Bureau has in its 2003 Report recommended that this practice be initiated by way of an “Exit Interview” or “Exit Questionnaire” in the public service to monitor staff turn over and to help to formulate corrective actions. This recommendation was specifically made to cater for scarcity areas where there were recruitment and retention problems.

I am further advised that the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms will consider introducing this practice for scarcity areas in line with administrative reforms underway, especially, with regard to the introduction of HR practices in the public service.

CHILDREN - SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

5/6/07
20

(No. B/562) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley & 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 sexual assaults of children of tender age by adolescents, since January 2006 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, the number of reported cases, including cases involving pupils at schools.

The Ag. Prime Minister : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that during period January 2006 to end of May 2007, 44 cases of sexual assault on children by adolescents have been reported to the Police and 53 persons have been arrested in connection with these cases.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am also informed that in 2006, none of the reported cases occurred on school premises. However, in the year 2007, one such case has been reported.

UNEMPLOYED – INTERVIEWS AT PSC – TRANSPORT REFUND (19/06/07)

(No. B/637) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North & 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 unemployed who have to attend to interviews at the Public Service Commission and other Commissions, he will state if consideration will be given for the refund of their cost of transport.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am afraid this cannot be entertained. So, the answer is no.

OFFICIAL CARS – USE (19/06/07)

(No. B/664) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if Government proposes to review its policy in regard to car allocation for private use to Government officials, Chairpersons, Chief Executives, General Managers and Managing Directors in parastatal organisations.

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, the matter will be considered by the Pay Research Bureau which is undertaking a Review of the Pay and Grading

Structures and Conditions of Service in the entire public sector.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House whether he is aware that there is abuse in many cases as far as the usage of official cars for private purpose is concerned?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are instances of abuse. This is the case also for telephone. Human nature being what it is, the propensity to misuse what does not belong to them is quite high. We are looking into ways and means of ensuring that public funds are used judiciously. In some cases - I am sure the hon. Member will know - the cars should be used only for official purposes. We'll set up a cell to make sure that whatever is provided for in the law as far as the entitlement is concerned is adhered to strictly.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House what is the rationale behind the practice of usage of official car for private purpose?

Mr Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a long story. Where the official function of one of these chairmen ends and where the private use starts, I think is a grey line. I am aware of what the hon. Member is saying. It is a tricky one, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I can give you an example. It is a very grey area, but I agree with the hon. Member that we have to put some order because there are abuses and there are other abuses also which, I am sure, many of us in this House are aware. I have stated in the Budget, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we owe it to the nation to make sure that every rupee of taxation that we take from our compatriots is judiciously used.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance inform the House what is the cost implication and the number of vehicles that are being used for that purpose?

Mr Sithanen: I don't have the information, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I'll try to compile it.

Mr Bhagwan: The hon. Minister has just acknowledged that there are cases of abuses. Can I bring to his attention the case of a Senior Adviser in a very important Ministry, who is also the chairperson of a well-established company, who uses the private company's car for his private and personal purpose and, at the same time, has an official car at the Ministry where he is attached. I'll give the name to the Minister afterwards.

Mr Sithanen: I don't know the name of the individual that the hon. Member is mentioning, but let me reassure my good friend, hon. Bhagwan, I don't want to make politics out of this. This has existed for a very long time, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I can give examples of many abuses. I don't think this is a subject, Mr Speaker, Sir, where we should try to score political goals. There have been abuses in the past, there are probably abuses today and there will continue to be abuses in the future. I think our objective is to try to mitigate the abuses that exist in the use of fund, but if the hon. Member would give me the name, I'll try to look into it, if possible.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not making politics. I have good eyes. *Pour moi, l'exemple doit venir d'en haut.*

CIVIL SERVICE –LICENSE AND SERVICES AGREEMENT (19/06/07)

(No. B/675) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the project for the computerization in the civil service under the Term License Agreement, he will state –

(a) when the first and second agreements were signed, indicating in each case –

(i) the contract value, and

(ii) the name of the company to whom the contract was awarded, and

(b) the objectives of the technical support, indicating the expenditure incurred in relation thereto.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am assuming that the hon. Member is making reference to the Agreement with Oracle African Operations relating to the use and technical support of user licences of Oracle products.

In respect of part (a) of the question, I wish to inform the House that a first Agreement was entered into with Oracle Corporation in August 1999 for the period ending August 2004. This first Agreement for a period of five years for a total amount of US\$2,437,000 was made up of US\$770,425 for licence fees and US\$1,666,575 for support services payable in five equal annual instalments of US\$487,400 each.

However, Mr Speaker, Sir, at the expiry of the License and Services Agreement in August 2004, the then MSM/MMM Government unlawfully failed to renew same thereby putting the country in the scandalous position

of using unlicensed software in Government Ministries and departments unlawfully.

I am advised that in May 2006, after discussions and clearance from the Central Tender Board, a new Agreement was signed with Oracle African Operations for a total amount of US\$1,991,924.

As regards part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the main objectives of the technical support are –

- (i) the installation right for new acquisition of Oracle products
- (ii) the right to critical patch updates and security alerts
- (iii) Oracle troubleshooting at various Governments sites
- (iv) Obtaining upgraded version of Oracle, and
- (v) Platform upgrade (same make of equipment or different make and platform).

I am finally informed, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the expenditure incurred in respect of technical support is as follows –

(i) in the 1st Agreement, the support fee was US\$1,666,575 which formed part of the total amount of US\$2,437,000 paid, that is, an annual fee of US\$333,315.

(ii) With the 2nd Agreement, the support fee for a year was US\$359,199.46 included in the whole amount of US\$1,991,924.26 stated earlier.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that the former Government took much time in negotiating the contract on expiration in August 2004. May I know why, since the second Agreement was signed in May 2006, one year after he has been nominated as Minister, why he took so much time, on his turn, to negotiate this new Agreement?

Mr Sinatambou: First of all, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to correct, unfortunately, what the hon. Member has said. The previous Government did not “take much time in negotiating.” Firstly, it simply did not negotiate and put the country in an unlawful position. Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir,..

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Sinatambou: Secondly, Mr Speaker, Sir, it took quite some protracted discussions and negotiations for the ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jeetah, order! Do you want to reply in the hon. Minister's place? Order!

Mr Sinatambou: The second point, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that it took protracted negotiations and discussions to remedy the situation to the extent that the country has been using unlicensed software and Oracle was not at all agreeable to negotiating without Government paying a hefty penalty for all those months during which the unlawful situation had prevailed. What also happened is that the first five-year agreement, as the word says, was a renewable license agreement. What we have negotiated is for Government now to own the licences. It is no more a renewable license Agreement. Government now owns all the licences and we only pay for support thereafter. So, what the gentleman said is totally inaccurate.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether, in the technical support services, the upgrading of the existing systems were included in the second Agreement that was made with Oracle?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dowarkasing, you have put the question, let the hon. Minister answer!

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, before I reply to this question, I would like to refer this House to the total amount which would have been payable for new licences and first year support. It amounted to US\$2,845m.

Then, we would have had to pay the total amount of usage and support charges for the period during which the country had been in breach of contract, which amounted to more than US\$1,970m., making a total amount of US\$4,816m. However, after the negotiations, Government obtained a discount of US\$ 2,824,614, which means that we paid only \$1,991,924. With regard to the upgrading of equipment, I am afraid that I cannot answer at this stage, but if the hon. Member comes with a substantive question, I would be more than happy to provide the reply.

Mr Speaker: Question Time is over! I have to announce that PQ Nos. B/680, B/681 and B/682 have been withdrawn.

CIVIL SERVANTS – OVERTIME DUTIES – TRANSPORT

FACILITIES (10/07/07)

(No. B/704) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) 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 all the grades of civil servants who perform overtime duties at night, he will state if they are provided with transport facilities to return home.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that it is the practice to provide transport facilities to civil servants who perform overtime duties at night when public transport is not available.

As a general rule, transport facilities are not provided to those who are entitled to duty remitted cars and to those who are in receipt of a travel grant. These officers are paid a monthly travelling allowance of Rs7,375 or a travel grant of Rs4,875, as applicable, both for attending duty and for performing official travelling.

Mr Gunness: I would like to ask the Ag. Prime Minister to look into the matter because there are cases – I don't know whether it is political victimisation – where lower grade officers, drivers in certain Ministries are not provided with transport when performing overtime. They have to sleep on the bench and the next day, they return home. The Ag. Prime Minister knows the case and I'll communicate the name to him.

The Ag. Prime Minister: I am surprised that this is happening in 2007.

CIVIL SERVICE - PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM - INTRODUCTION (17/07/07)

(No. B/750) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state when the Performance Appraisal System will be introduced in the Civil Service.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Performance Management System (PMS), of which the Performance Appraisal System (PAS) is a major component, is being implemented in the service since last year in several departments. The first Department to implement the system on a pilot basis was the Central Statistical Office followed by the Meteorological Office and Services and the Valuation

Department. As from this year, 12 additional Ministries/Departments are implementing the system.

The implementation of the PMS is in line with the PRB Report 2003 which has recommended that each public service organisation should adopt a performance management system. The PMS is a major reform initiative meant to transform the Civil Service by improving performance at organisational, division, and individual levels within an agreed framework of goals, objectives and standards.

The PRB Report 2003 was approved by the then Government and accepted by all Public Officers who signed the option form which is binding.

A Task Force was set up in 2004 at the Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms to help implement the PMS/PAS, such as devising of appropriate Performance Appraisal Forms and Guidelines. Subsequently, the Unions were consulted.

In a context of the implementation of the PMS, wide consultations with all stakeholders, including unions of Public Officers, were held in May 2005 onwards. Circular Letters and appropriate guidelines were also issued to Ministries/ Departments to sensitize all officers on the PMS/PAS and to seek their collaboration.

Intensive training has also been provided to some 400 officers from mid to top management levels to make them knowledgeable and conversant with the technicalities involved in the process. In addition, sensitization and training are being systematically carried out for all officers in organisations where the PMS is being implemented.

I wish to add that the Programme Based Budgeting, which has been introduced as from this financial year in the context of the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), complements the implementation of the PMS. Both these reform strategies are meant to render the public service more responsive, accountable and efficient.

Hon. Members may recall that in a statement which the hon. Prime Minister made in this House in January last in the context of the closing down of the DWC, he said -

“Our vision of modern Public Sector Management is geared towards performance and results. As part of the public sector reforms programme underway, the PMS which is a central component of this strategy, has been introduced in the public sector since last year and

will be fully operational by the end of 2008”.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: With regard to those at the highest level of the hierarchy, can the Ag. Prime Minister state what would be the criteria for the performance appraisal and whether it is linked to productivity and how is this going to be determined?

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, this question, I think, implies a very narrow view of the PMS. It must be viewed as a whole project. It does not account only for productivity. It is to my mind to help the civil service to move forward, to improve this service as a whole. It is not an appraisal system only, though the appraisal system is a major component. It is a management system as a whole to communicate to all those working in any department the vision of Government, the objective of the particular department and how to achieve this vision.

I am given to understand that each Ministry which has introduced the system has had wide consultations. I, myself, in my Ministry, had addressed the department that was taking part and, at the end of it, they were all happy.

We have replaced the whole system of confidential report into a more proactive continuing process where the officer reported upon, is encouraged to come forward to give his vision, of how he contributes to where he is this working and help him to achieve it. This is the main criterion: to help him to achieve it. Productivity comes in as a sideline; it is not the main issue.

Mr Ganoo: Did the Ag. Prime Minister say that the whole system will start to be implemented gradually in certain specific departments of the Ministries?

The Ag. Prime Minister: It has started as a pilot project and it is interesting that the Central Statistical Office volunteered because they said they were ready for it; they started it and they have been followed by others.

Mr Guinness: Is there any time-frame for all Ministries to be under this appraisal system?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I have already mentioned in my answer that it would be in 2008.

**TRAINEE TEACHERS AND DEPUTY RECTORS
– RECRUITMENT (24/07/07)**

(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 –

- (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.

NATIONAL ICT STRATEGIC PLAN - TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (24/07/07)

(No. B/849) Mr R. Bhagwan /**(First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Information Technology and Telecommunications whether, in regard to the implementation of the Information Technology Action Plan, he will state if any committee has been set up for its monitoring and, if so, will he state –

- (a) its composition;
- (b) the number of times it has met as at to date, and
- (c) if its report will be made public.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am assuming that the hon. Member is making reference to the National ICT Strategic Plan (NICTSP), which is currently being formulated and I thank the hon. Member for giving me an opportunity to clear any misunderstanding regarding the matter.

The decision to elaborate a 5-year National ICT Strategic Plan was approved by Cabinet on 10 February 2006. This project is being funded jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Mauritius. In this context, a project document between the two parties was signed on 20 April 2006 and the contract for provision of consultancy services for the elaboration of the National ICT Strategic Plan was awarded to Price Waterhouse Coopers of India on 05

October 2006 following an open tender exercise.

I am advised, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the monitoring is being done by a Technical Advisory Committee chaired by Mr Newraj Burton, Chairman of the National Computer Board and comprising of 17 representatives from both public and private sectors as follows –

- Mr Ramsamy, Chairman of the ICT Advisory Council
- Mr Ramalingum, the then President of the ACT (Association regrouping BPO and Call Centre Operators)
- Mr Lollbharry, Acting Director of the Central Informatics Bureau, who has been replaced in February 2007 by Mr Sukhoo, Ag. Deputy Director of that Bureau
- Dr. Mohadeb, Ag. Executive Director, Tertiary Education Commission
- Mr Mohee, Executive Director, National Computer Board
- Mr Boodhun, Manager, Central Information System Division
- Mr Pierre Yves Harel, Director, FRCI
- Mr Mauree, Manager, Planning, Research and Development, National Computer Board
- Mr Thomas Buffard, Director, Pro-Contact Ltd.
- Ms M. Wan, Representative of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
- Ms Su Lin Ong, Member, MITIA
- Mr Ramgoolam, Project Manager, Central Informatics Bureau
- Mrs Awotar, Project Manager, IT Security Unit, Ministry of IT and Telecommunications
- Dr. Oollun, Executive Director of the ICT Authority.
- Mr Dabeesing, IT Manager, ICT Authority.
- Mr Oozeer, Senior State Council, State Law Office.

As regards part (b) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may be pleased to know that a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) has met on no less than 16 occasions.

In addition to the Technical Advisory Committee, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that a Review Team has been set up since March 2007 to monitor the quality of the deliverables submitted by the consultants and ensure that additional information required by the consultants are made available in a timely manner. The Review Team has met 22 times to date.

With regard to part (c), the National ICT Strategic Cum-Action Plan will be made public after its presentation and approval by the Cabinet.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, how does the hon. Minister reconcile what he has just said and the public statement made by no less than the Adviser of the hon. Prime Minister? I won't mention the name, but everybody knows who he is.

At least, we, Members of the House, would like to know which is which? The Adviser of the hon. Prime Minister has made public comments on this issue, that nothing is being done and things are done *à pas de tortue*. Can the hon. Minister, at least, inform the House and the public at large, how he reconciles that statement with what he just said?

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I suppose the answer speaks for itself. The decision was taken by Cabinet in February, the project document was signed in April 2006 and the consultant was awarded the consultancy in October 2006. I think we are well in time and I presume it might be opportune here, Mr Speaker, Sir, to compare, because I do recall having read in the debates on the Second Reading of the Appropriation (2001-2002) Bill of 15 June 2001 where the then Minister was stating ...

(Interruptions)

Maybe, the hon. Member has not heard, that is why I am stating it.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister should address the Chair. He must not answer to the comments which are being made. If they obstruct him, then I will take care of them.

Mr Sinatambou: Thank you, Sir. In the course of those debates, the then Minister was stating that the then Government was going to come with an IT Strategic Plan which we have never seen in the four and a half years of their mandate. They should not be worried now.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the population wants to know whether, following that statement of the Adviser of the Prime Minister, he has discussed the issue with the Prime Minister.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I suggest that the hon. Member writes a letter asking the advice and the assent.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Adviser of the Prime Minister has made a public statement which is known by everybody. We are elected

Members...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! The hon. Member should look at me.

(Interruptions)

Order! I have told the hon. Member not to answer to comments. Let me make a statement to the House. There are many hon. Members who are withdrawing their questions. I suspect that their questions will not be answered as Question Time will be over. Members are taking so much time to put questions. It is not fair to other hon. Members of this House.

Mr Bhagwan: I am not at fault, I am being harassed, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are elected Members...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let me listen to the question and then I will rule on it.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, we are elected Members, we are paid from public funds and public funds are at stake. What I am asking the hon. Minister....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should put his question.

(Interruptions)

Hon. Bhagwan, if you continue, I will ask you to sit down.

(Interruptions)

Put your question!

Mr Bhagwan: Can the Minister inform the House whether it is not

his duty to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister? He is paid from public funds...

Mr Speaker: There is no need for these remarks.

Mr Sinatambou: Mr Speaker, Sir, I presume the hon. Member is not aware of the vibrant democracy which prevails on this side of the House.

(Interruptions)

CHILDREN - COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (24/07/07)

(No. B/855) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether she will state if cases of alleged commercial sexual exploitation of children have been reported to her Ministry over the past two years and, if so, will she state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the actions taken, if any, to address the issue, and
- (c) if it is proposed to carry out a survey on the extent and the causes of such exploitation.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, for the past two years, from July 2005 to date, 5 cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) have been reported at the level of my Ministry.

As regards part (b) of the question, my Ministry has taken a number of actions to address the issue, namely –

(i) Information, Education and Communication Campaigns in public and private secondary schools, children's clubs and associations are carried on an ongoing basis to sensitise children, parents and teachers on the risks and implications of CSEC. For the period July 2005 to date, approximately 9500 children, 1200 parents and 300 teachers have been sensitised on this specific subject.

(ii) I had several meetings with the Commissioner of Police and his Deputy to ensure that the "*Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs*" intensifies its actions by introducing more vehicles and trained officers for constant patrol in public places where children are at risk such as *discothèques* and others. The last meeting dates 09 July, when I was informed that 6 new vehicles have been acquired for more effective operations by trained Police Officers.

(iii) A National Parental Empowerment Programme, which was launched on 30 May this year, will ensure that parents are empowered to deal, *inter alia*, with the sexuality of their children and the societal ills children are exposed to. Several workshops with parents and other stakeholders are being carried out by my Ministry and a training manual is being finalised.

(iv) My Ministry intends to launch in August, a Community Child Protection Programme under which the participation of people at the community level will be sought to ensure early detection of children at risk and quick referral actions. 22 Community Leaders and Social Workers have been trained from April 2005 to March 2006 so as to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to better identify children at risks and handle cases of CSEC properly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, these measures aim at enhancing the prevention of CSEC. Moreover, actions have to be taken to address the difficulties and trauma of victims.

At the level of the Family Support Bureaux of my Ministry, immediate psycho-social support is given to victims by officers and psychologists of my Ministry prior to referring such cases to the Police Department and to Regional Hospitals for medical treatment.

Moreover, specialised services are provided to victims who call on their own at the Drop-in-Centre at Bell Village, for their rehabilitation and reinsertion in the mainstream of society. For period June 2005 to date 37 cases of CSEC have been dealt with at the Drop-in-Centre.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (c) of the question, as the House is already aware, two studies were carried out in 1997 and 2001 which led to a National Plan of Action for period 2003–2004 to combat and eliminate CSEC. The Ministry, in collaboration with all stakeholders, has so far implemented the existing Action Plan. An evaluation report is being prepared and in the light of this report, a new Plan of Action will be prepared for the period 2007-2009.

Mr Soodhun: Mr Speaker, Sir, especially concerning the school girls, can I ask the hon. Minister whether she is aware of the Report of US Department of State, Country Report on Human Rights Practices? With your permission, Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to quote one paragraph so that the hon. Minister can inform the House what action will be taken, especially for the school girls. I quote –

“Mauritius is a source country for female children, traffic within the country for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. This commercial sexual exploitation of children largely consists of school girls engaged in the practice, often with the encouragement and support of their family members. Taxi drivers are known to provide transportation and introduction to those girls and their parents.”

I would like to know from the hon. Minister what is being done, at least, to remedy the situation? I hope that the hon. Minister is not going to say *nou pa besoin apprenne avec l'Amérique*.

Mrs Seebun: We are aware of this problem, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the reason why in December 2005, we came with stiffened law regarding child trafficking. We are also aware of all the ways and means that unscrupulous people use to drag young girls into undesirable activity. This is the reason why we reinforce the number of vehicles so that patrol can be done in a more aggressive manner. We cannot only depend on the Police Department or institutions. We are handling this problem at home level.

This is why we are coming up with our parental programme. The responsible behaviour of an adolescent is not only a matter for the different institutions to deal with, but also ‘home’. We are trying to address this issue from different angles so that our adolescents behave in a more responsible manner.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Minister whether any programme carried out at the level of schools includes information and awareness, i.e. of making students aware of dangers that might come across their way?

Mrs Seebun: Our National Children Council is especially responsible for carrying talks in school and we certainly make girls aware of how they can become very easy prey to such unscrupulous people.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned stiffer laws, but we are all aware that laws are not enough. She has mentioned sensitisation campaigns. May I ask the hon. Minister whether it is an ongoing process and, if so, at what path are we having these campaigns both at primary and secondary schools?

Mrs Seebun: It’s an ongoing programme and we are doing it at different schools. Maybe at a later stage, I can table the information

regarding in which schools currently it is being done.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Speaker, Sir, maybe the hon. Minister is aware that most of the nightclubs and restaurants are allowing minors in their vicinity to consume alcohol. The law is there, but it is not enforced. Can we ask the hon. Minister to press on the authority concerned - maybe the Prime Minister and the Police - to really use all ways and means to enforce the law and penalise these tenants, because it's unacceptable that minors can attend these places?

Mrs Seebun: I wish to ensure the hon. Member that the needful will be done. We need to do some reinforcement.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the awareness and sensitisation campaign being carried out in schools are being done by professionals and, if so, which types of people are dealing with the children at school? Who are those people who are informing these students of the dangers?

Mrs Seebun: They are officers from the National Children Council and we have got Child Welfare Officers, psychologists and all trained officers.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Minister has spoken about campaigns being carried out around the island. May I ask the Minister whether a study will be carried out to assess the efficiency of these campaigns?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, this can be envisaged.

SC/D27/P09/04

**DROP-IN CENTRE FOR CHILDREN – NUMBER , FOLLOW-UP
ETC.**

(No. B/901) **Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River)** asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the drop-in centre for children, she will state –

- (a) if an evaluation of its work, as at to date, has been carried out;
- (b) the number of victims;
 - (i) having been subject to psychological follow-up, and
 - (ii) who have responded positively to the therapy.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the drop-in centre at Bell Village was set up by my Ministry in December 2003. This centre was in line with the recommendation of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Action Plan published in June 2003.

The management of the drop-in centre has been entrusted to the Mauritius Family Planning Welfare Association.

As regards evaluation of the work at the drop-in centre –

- (i) a joint meeting is held with the personnel working at the drop-in centre on a 3-months basis to review and discuss management of cases as well as running of the centre.
- (ii) submission of monthly report including statistics by the Mauritius Family Planning Welfare Association is made to my Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, on the basis of all these information, a full-fledged report is underway.

With regards to part (b) of the question, a total of 355 cases of sexual abuse on children where it was felt that victims may become prey to CSEC have been handled by the drop-in centre for period July 2005 to date. All the cases are given psychological counseling and are followed up as long as appropriate.

SC/D27/P09/05

(PQ No. B/901 contd.)

Between July 2005 to date, 309 individual therapy sessions and 22 group therapy sessions have been held.

Moreover 466 parents of victims have been counseled.

Mr Speaker, Sir, most of the counseling do have a positive impact which is illustrated by the following –

- (i) 45% cases, the children have already been successfully reintegrated in their families;
- (ii) in 20% cases, the children are back to school. Arrangements for school are made by the drop-in centre itself;
- (iii) as for those who are above 16, arrangements are made for them to follow courses at the women centres level.
- (iv) 12 children victims are waiting for registration at the level of IVTB.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, does the hon. Minister feel that now it is time to revamp the objectives of the centre so as to meet it in the present context?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I agree with the hon. Member and we are doing the needful.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister inform the House what is the duration of the therapy that these victims have to undergo?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the duration of the therapy will depend on the gravity of each case and it cannot be identical.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, after a child has attended the drop-in centre for a psychological follow-up, can the hon. Minister say for how long the follow-up stays there and for how long the child is being followed?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the therapy is done at a drop-in centre, but even later, where the follow-up is highly essential, it is done at home level as well.

YEAR

2008

EDUCATION/HEALTH SECTORS – GOVT. POLICY (25/03/08)

(No. B/44) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether, in regard to the introduction of targeting in the education and health sectors, he will state if Government has already taken any commitment with either the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development (Mr R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is committed to a new socio-economic model driven by global competitiveness and the creation of opportunities for all of us. Our reforms have already unlocked robust and sustained economic growth and we are now able to focus on securing inclusive growth. One of the most important achievements of our founding fathers was to widen access to opportunities, including in health and education as well as employment. Our challenge is to continue on the same path.

Fairness, enhanced access, and equity should be the main pillars of our policies on health and education. Effectiveness in terms of the policy impact on human development, quality of life and benefits to overall socioeconomic development is also at the centre of our policies in these two social sectors.

Mr Speaker, Sir, under the present education system, 15% of 3-year old and 13% of 4-year old, our youngest kids, are not enrolled in preprimary schools and this has been happening for a very long time. There can be little doubt that these children come from the poorest and most disadvantaged families. There are also bottlenecks at primary and secondary levels, with a high failure rate at primary level, which reduces the cohort finishing with a school certificate. Further, there is a reduction from SC students going to HSC, with the result that presently, Mr Speaker, Sir, only 5,500 students undertake tertiary education out of a cohort of around 19,600.

This represents, Mr Speaker, Sir, 28% of the cohort which is far lower than in countries like Singapore, Canada and South Korea. Moreover, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a Gross Enrolment Ratio of around 34%, true higher than Africa, but compared to 91% in Korea, and above 80% in the US and New Zealand. Mr Speaker, Sir, these comparative data give us a measure of the challenge we have to face and also a measure of how serious is the issue of access to education, especially at the two ends of the spectra. With such a poor performance, it is clear that those who are left out are primarily in the lower middle income and the lower income groups. Moreover, such an

enrolment rate at tertiary level does not do justice to the vision of our forefathers who wanted to give access at all levels to education to all.

We are addressing the issues by formulating a national education strategy to increase pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary output and raise quality, through -

- (i) increasing enrolment at tertiary level;
- (ii) reducing the failure and bare pass rate of the CPE, in particular in *Zones d'Education Prioritaire*;
- (iii) offering a vocational stream to those who fail or barely pass the CPE;
- (iv) upgrading teacher training;
- (v) implementing a new curriculum with a greater emphasis on languages, science, maths and ICT.

To carry through this endeavour, Government has sought the assistance and support of our development partners namely the World Bank, the European Commission (EC), the African Development Bank (ADB) and *the agence Française de Développement* (AFD). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are closely associated with the implementation of the Programme.

All these institutions have raised the issues of sustainability and fairness of the system. They are in particular concerned with enrolment at tertiary level and the failure rates.

However, we do not have any commitment with the IMF on Education and Health with regards to the introduction of targeting. We have agreed on general guiding principles and taken specific global commitments with the development partners, including World Bank, EU, AFD and ADB.

These specific commitments are as follows -

- (i) to produce an education strategy to address issues relating to enrolment at tertiary level, failure and bare pass rate at CPE and secondary level and improving the vocational stream;
- (ii) to hold discussions with stakeholders by December 2008 on the education strategy, which is being prepared by a working group at the Ministry of Education, and
- (iii) to start implementation of the strategy by early 2009.

We have also made a commitment to the EU in the context of the financing agreement under the sugar accompanying measures, to take necessary measures to improve pass rates and reduce absenteeism in ZEP

schools.

As regards the health sector, we have not made any commitments regarding targeting with any development partner or any other institutions.

CYCLONES GULA & EX-LOLA TORRENTIAL RAIN – WARNINGS (01/04/08)

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the abrupt lifting of cyclone warnings concerning cyclone Gula and to last Wednesday's tragic events, he will state –

(a) the contacts there were between his Office and the Meteorological Services, and

(b) if his Office had been informed of the 5.00 a.m. *Communiqué* issued by the Meteorological Services pointing to dangers for students, and obtain information as to if they had communicated same to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and, if so, why schools were not closed on Wednesday last, in spite of heavy rainfalls the day and night before.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me reiterate my condolences to the families of the victims and I am sure the House joins me in sending them our condolences.

I also wish to point out to the House that we are dealing with unusual natural catastrophes and phenomena here. Similar unusual phenomena and natural catastrophes have taken place in other countries – with significant damage and loss of life.

Mr Speaker, Sir, for any system of warning to work there are well established protocols based on criteria, not individual judgment. The system of warnings in Mauritius exists since the early 80s, that is, more than two decades ago. Successive authorities have never questioned or critically appraised these criteria – be it for cyclones or floodings.

With regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director of the Meteorological Services that as far as “Gula” is concerned, a Class III warning was put into force at 04.00 o'clock in the morning on 31 January 2008 because it was found to be moving towards Mauritius. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, I should say that in the late evening of 30 January 2008, my Office was informed of the likelihood of a Class III warning and even a Class IV warning during the next day. According to the Meteorological Services the Class III warning was felt necessary because winds of 140 kms/hour had been experienced at St. Brandon when Gula was at its nearest from the Island. Let me recall,

Mr Speaker, Sir, that the criteria for cyclone warnings is a threshold of 120 kms/hour while here we had already reached 140 kms/hour.

At around 07.30 hours on 31 January 2008, as further information from our stations in Rodrigues and St. Brandon and satellite pictures were received, it became evident to the Meteorological Services that Gula had, in only a matter of few hours, lost its strength and was disintegrating rapidly. Because it was an unusual phenomenon the Meteorological Services did further verifications. Thus, the Meteorological Services thereafter decided to lift all warnings at 08.45 hours in the morning of 31 January 2008 because by then the cyclone had completely disintegrated.

Regarding depression ex-Lola, weather bulletin issued by the Meteorological Services at 05.45 hours on Wednesday 26 March 2008 indicated that the tropical depression was about 440 kms to the north of Mauritius and was moving towards the south-south east at about 10 kms/hour. The bulletin had forecast that for the next 24 hours weather would be cloudy and overcast with showers, moderate to heavy and at times accompanied by thunders. The bulletin also mentions that with the current rainy weather conditions, students attending schools must take all necessary precautions and that there will be accumulation of water in flood-prone areas and that the public was advised not to venture on river banks. I should add, Mr Speaker, Sir, that officials of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources had been in contact with the Meteorological Services as from 04.16 hours that very morning.

Rainfall data collected at 04.00 hours on 26 March 2008 did not reach the criteria for the issue of a torrential rain warning. The situation was being monitored continuously and at around 11.30 hours, the Meteorological Services noted that heavy rainfall was occurring and that conditions for the issuance of a torrential rain warning was now necessary.

My Office was apprised of the torrential rain warning at around 12.15 hours. Regarding part (b) of the question, details of weather bulletin are not routinely communicated to my office. Such communications are made only when cyclone warnings or torrential rain conditions are imminent or prevailing. The contents of the weather bulletin issued at 05.45 hours on 26 March 2008 were brought to the attention of senior officials of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources a few minutes before the issue of the bulletin. However, torrential rains situation had not been attained.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources did not take the decision to close schools.

However, when the torrential rain situation was registered later in the day, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources requested Heads of schools to proceed as per established procedures.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House is no doubt aware that I have decided to set up a Fact Finding Committee with wide Terms of Reference and presided over by a Sitting Judge of the Supreme Court. However, I have also solicited the services of the World Meteorological Organisation to study our weather forecast processes and advise us on our human and logistical resources needs in the field of Meteorology.

Mr Speaker, Sir, recent scientific evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has confirmed that the impact of climate change will not be gradual but devastating and indiscriminating. In fact, the world has lately witnessed a series of extreme weather events in different parts of the world. Severe monsoon floods we have seen in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the wettest May to July period leading to massive flooding in England and Wales last year, abnormally heavy rainfall in China and Sudan, large swell waves in Maldives, heat waves in South Eastern Europe and rare snowfalls in South America and South Africa and even heavy snowfalls in China. We have also seen devastating hurricanes like Katrina, tornadoes and flood throughout the USA. In spite of their level of development and infrastructure, even the well-developed countries suffered heavy human and material lost.

Mauritius had not been spared. After a severe drought, we have been hit by an unprecedented downpour rain causing severe flood within hours. This is clearly a case of extreme weather event linked to climate change. Unfortunately, this kind of sad event will recur as global warming conditions continue and climate change is not addressed globally.

In the aftermath of the torrential rains on 26 March 2008 the hon. Minister of Environment and National Development Unit established a list of critical areas warranting immediate action. Around 100 urgent projects have been prioritized to be implemented under the Emergency Drain Clearance Programme. The Programme is expected to cost around Rs250m. Works have already been started in some regions and at other sites work will be started in the coming days.

Various social security measures have been taken following the flooding. These include payment of an allowance of Rs109 per member of household and special allowance of Rs5,000 to each family who has incurred losses of basic necessities such as foodstuff, clothing, mattresses, kitchen utensils and school materials and so on.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, for us to leave cyclone Gula behind us, does the hon. Prime Minister find it normal that the Meteorological Station should have decided to lift all classes - III, II, I - without even getting in touch with the Prime Minister's Office, because everybody knew that problems were going to arise and did arise?

The Prime Minister: In fact, it did arise. I can tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that, I, myself, took the precaution, because I met His Excellency the

President on Thursday morning. I took the precaution of telling the President that it is unlikely that we have our meeting on Thursday morning because there might be a class III and, probably, a class IV warning. In fact, I should tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that even at 5 o'clock in the morning - I had asked the Meteorological Services to send me the bulletin at home because there was a warning and they did so - the bulletin did say that the class III warning was maintained and that the class IV warning was likely to be imminent. I took it that there was going to be a class IV warning. In fact, when all the warnings were removed later on, it was to my surprise and to that of His Excellency the President; we could not have our meeting because it was too late to go and have the meeting. This is what the Meteorological Services said: once the unusual phenomenon of the cyclone having disintegrated completely - they found it unusual - they wanted to verify with all the stations, not just Rodrigues and St. Brandon, but other meteorological stations and, when it was found to be such, they decided to remove all the cyclone warnings.

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is now aware that closing of schools is not tied directly to the torrential warning. If he has cared to check, in the past schools have been closed because even if it is not torrential, but very heavy rainfall. Can I ask the Prime Minister being given that the whole day on Tuesday, it had been pouring, when we left here, it was pouring outside, in the early morning it was worse - a few minutes ago he told us that he was in touch in the case of Gula at 5.00 a.m. - why he did he not get in touch with the Minister of Education to know what was being envisaged? In fact, on Tuesday evening, schools should have been closed for the next day. Did he take the trouble to get in touch with the Minister of Education & Human Resources?

The Prime Minister: I explained to the hon. Leader of the Opposition that there are strict criteria for deciding whether there is a torrential rain warning or not. There is a criteria of 100 millimetres of rain for 12 hours - I am just saying it offhand, Mr Speaker, Sir - consequently for 12 hours with likelihood of continuing heavy rainfall. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, if you look at the warnings that were given, let us look at Tuesday at 1600 hours -

« Les prévisions pour les prochaines 24 heures. Le temps sera couvert avec des averses modérées à forte et avec des orages. Il y aura également des poches de brouillard,, il y aura des accumulations d'eau aux endroits inondables. Il est conseillé au public de ne pas s'aventurer au bord des rivières »

That was at 1600 hours on Tuesday 25; it does not say that there was going to be torrential rain, it does not even mention anything here. I gave the details for Wednesday at 5.45...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, I said!

The Prime Minister: It did say –

“Cloudy to overcast with showers moderate to heavy and, at times, thunders. There will be fog patches”.

I go on, Mr Speaker, Sir. At 11.30 hours, on Wednesday itself, this is what they had to say –

“Le temps restera couvert sur l’ensemble de l’île et avec des averses éparses. Les averses seront fortes avec orages isolés. Les poches de brouillard persisteront principalement sur les hauteurs. La visibilité sera réduite sur la route et il y aura des accumulations d’eau à travers l’île et les rivières. Le public est fortement conseillé de ne pas s’aventurer au bord des rivières. »

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Nowhere at that time was there any torrential rain warning.

In fact, they said moderate...

(Interruptions)

If you look at the world...

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: It is not a personal decision, there are criteria which you have to abide to.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has checked that in the past schools have been closed without a torrential rain warning? Common sense should have made both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education move. Has the hon. Prime Minister checked that this is the case? Nowhere is it said that the Minister of Education or the Prime Minister must wait for the torrential rain warning to close schools! It is too late then!

The Prime Minister: Can I then ask the Leader of the Opposition on what criteria do we close schools then? You open the window and you say it is raining, then you close the schools....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: Common sense! When we left here immediately after adjournment, it was pouring and any parent knew that it would be very dangerous. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has cared to check how many Heads of schools throughout the island took it upon themselves – they did not wait for torrential rainfall warning – to close the schools? Can he say how many such schools were closed by the Heads without waiting for the Ministry of Education to wake up?

The Prime Minister: That is the question that should be put to the Minister of Education. How do I know how many schools were closed?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Bhagwan! I am calling you to order, please!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, has the Prime Minister had time to check whether something went wrong at Nicolière? Because this is not normal, two persons alight from the bus and are taken away by the waters in a surge. There was some information as if something went wrong and wrong orders were given. Has this been checked?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I also heard that people were saying that at Nicolière something had gone wrong. We had it checked and the information appears to be false. I leave it to the Fact-Finding Committee to check again, but this is the information that we have. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is right when he says that it is abnormal. That's what I was saying.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Prime Minister has said that now a new programme will be set up to prevent such happenings in the future. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister why was the National Land Drainage Programme slowed down since the last elections?

The Prime Minister: I don't know why the hon. Leader of the Opposition thinks that way. It has never been slowed down. In fact, if you want to go by any criteria - I have the details here - the Land Drainage Programme has never been slowed down and I don't know why he said that in his press conference.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: It is in the Budget!

The Prime Minister: The hon. Leader of the Opposition should look at the Budget at his own time. In 2003-2004 the amount voted was Rs200 m. How much was

actually spent, Mr Speaker, Sir? A sum of Rs42,202,000.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Second year, 2004-2005: Rs200 m. again was voted. The sum of Rs100,400,000 was spent and the whole amount was not spent. It is the same thing that is happening here.

Mr Bérenger: The Budget Estimates themselves show that, for example, in 2006-2007, the figures were brought down to less than Rs100 m. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, when the hon. Minister of Education did not assume his responsibilities on Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning, adding insult to injury, he made reference to one student having lost her life out of 350,000...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has asked the Minister of Education to resign?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did ask the Minister of Education whether he actually...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I said order! Can I tell the House that this is a very important issue for the public in general and I would expect hon. Members to behave and have the debate in a dignified manner.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister has to answer. I said order! It is the last time that I am calling Members to order!

The Prime Minister: I did ask the Minister of Education what actually he had said and whether he had said this. He apprised not just me, but also the Cabinet afterwards that if we listened to what he had said, he had not actually said this. In fact, he tells me that he had asked the particular radio station to replay it so that people can listen

to it.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker ...

Mr Bérenger: I will not give way.

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Minister of Education so wishes, he can come with it as a matter of personal explanation later on.

(Interruptions)

Order now!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister has made reference to a Fact-Finding Committee to be chaired by a Judge of the Supreme Court. As the hon. Prime Minister knows, a Fact-Finding Committee has no powers to call for witnesses, to call for papers or to do anything. Given the gravity of the situation, will the hon. Prime Minister agree to upgrade the Fact-Finding Committee to a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry with the same Judge chairing, to do a complete job with the correct terms of reference?

The Prime Minister: I think the terms of reference are quite wide here, Mr Speaker, Sir. On purpose I have made it very wide. It is felt, Mr Speaker, Sir, that if we want to have good results - if somebody does not want to come and depone, we will know about this, and then, if need be, we will look at it, but, at the moment, I feel a Fact-Finding Committee will be the quicker solution.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he can give us some more indication about the criteria that are going to be used to pay those Rs5,000 to households who have been hurt by the events of last week?

The Prime Minister: I think the Ministry of Social Security has defined the criteria, Mr Speaker, Sir. I know it is about people who have lost not only foodstuffs, materials in the houses like clothing, mattresses, kitchen utensils, but also those who, for their living, have to use certain materials that have been destroyed. I think it is quite open. In fact, from what I understand I don't have the exact figures - the number has increased dramatically and it costs much more than what we thought, but it does not matter, because these are the criteria that we have used.

Mr Bérenger: Can I have a guess estimate of how many families will be able to benefit from those facilities? How the enquiries are going to be carried out and by whom and when payment can be expected to start?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the Ministry of Social Security, in fact, is

still enquiring and they don't have an idea as to the number of people, but we understand that the number is increasing.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me, after what has happened both in the case of cyclone Gula, but, more seriously, in the tragic events of last week, that there is urgent need for much closer cooperation, consultations between the Meteorological Station, the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister's Office in such circumstances and we should not just sit and wait for the miraculous torrential rain warning to start saving lives?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, Mr Speaker, Sir, even these criteria have been there for more than two decades and nobody has questioned it in the past. That is why I have said in my declaration that not only we will look at it, but I have also asked for an expert from the World Meteorological Service to come and have a look and see what are the lacuna that we have in our system so that we may correct them.

Mr Lesjongard: May I ask the Prime Minister why, until now, the Minister of Education has not gone to see the family who has lost their child and why, up till now, he has not even talked to that bereaved family?

The Prime Minister: I understand that he has made arrangements.

Mr Jugnauth : Mr Speaker, Sir, we have heard the hon. Prime Minister say that there are established criteria in deciding when to give torrential warnings etc. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether these criteria are in absolute terms? Because we had information on Wednesday morning from the Meteorological Service that 94 millimetres of rain had already fallen and it was continuing to rain. May I ask whether we had to wait for the other five or ten minutes, half an hour, for it to reach 100 millimetres, then they would have taken the decision of closing the school?

The Prime Minister: In fact, to be precise, it is correct to say that in one place only, they had around 94 to 96 millimetres of rain; in other areas, they had as low as 20 or 30 millimetres. The criteria says here that it has to be 100 millimetres of widespread rain in less than twelve hours and that this heavy rain is likely to continue for several hours, then only will they issue the warning.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, the climate prediction net project uses about 95,000 computers in 150 countries. They work together to investigate the climate change. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will agree with me how complicated is predicting climate change and shifting patterns of rainfall?

The Prime Minister: Well, I am not making it a political issue.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order please!

The Prime Minister: But it is a fact that in many countries they have been taken by surprise because it was an unusual phenomenon.

Mr Bodha: M. le président, étant donné que beaucoup de zones sinistrées se trouvaient dans la région de l'est, puis-je demander au Premier ministre pourquoi les deux ministres, qui étaient réclamés par la population dans cette circonscription - ils sont des députés de surcroît – au lieu de rendre visite aux habitants de la circonscription, c'est le docteur Mungur qui y est allé pour affronter la colère de la population?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker : Order!

(Interruptions)

Time is running out, we are losing time!

Mr Ganoo : Can the hon. Minister tell the House, on that fatal day, at what time did he first talk to the Minister of Education?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say also – and I think that people who have been in Government ought to know - that the issue of warning and removal of warning does not fall under the PMO. As I explained, at 4.16 in the morning the Ministry of Education was in touch with the Meteorological Services. But when the warning was issued, it was then that I talked to the Minister of Education.

Mr Bundhoo : Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the enquiry to identify where there is need for draining system, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister when was this enquiry carried out, when were all these spots identified and what was done in order to remedy this situation by the previous Government?

The Prime Minister: The answer is obvious and I must say that I am not putting blame as such, because it is difficult. Mr Speaker, Sir, that is why sometimes I say that very often we shoot ourselves in our feet. Again here, we have criteria. The Minister, for example, cannot decide that he will give this contract to this or that person. There is a whole procedure. I suppose that is one of the reasons why a lesser amount was spent. In the Budget, a sum of Rs200 m. is supposed to be spent, but only much less is spent. It is because of the procedures. In fact, I told the Minister that he has to accelerate the procedures and if we have to go through the same system...

(Interruptions)

When the hon. Member himself was chairing those committees, he did not manage to spend the money. What is he saying?

Mrs Perrier : Dans le cas d'un cyclone, c'est en alerte II que les écoles sont fermées, c'est-à-dire avant que le cyclone n'arrive et ne soit un réel danger pour les habitants. Dans ce cas présent, peut-on savoir pourquoi avoir pris la décision de fermer les écoles au moment même où c'était le moment le plus dangereux, c'est-à-dire au moment où les pluies torrentielles avaient été identifiées et le *warning* avait été donné par la météo? C'est à ce moment-là qu'il y avait les pluies torrentielles et qui représentaient un réel danger pour les élèves.....

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member should not repeat herself.

Mrs Perrier : C'est à ce moment-là que les enfants ont eu l'autorisation de partir et les écoles ont été fermées. Est-ce que ce n'était pas irresponsable...

Mr Speaker: This is a statement? The question has been put, the hon. Member should let the Prime Minister answer. Time is running out!

The Prime Minister: In fact, it is more complicated than we think. When the warning was given, in fact, the Ministry of Education did not allow the children to go out. They were held...

(Interruptions)

In many cases they were held in their schools because they had to organise transport. We should not forget that the parents are not at home at the time, transport had to be organised and then, only then, were the children allowed to go.

Mrs Martin : Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that there have been some cases where Police is actually refusing to take the statements of flood victims and can I ask him whether he can remedy to the situation?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that there have been cases where Police refused it, but if the hon. Member can let me know, I will look into the matter.

Mr Bhagwan: Has the hon. Prime Minister's attention been drawn by the Police authorities or by the officers of the National Educational Unit to the fact that no transport facilities were arranged for the children just at the time when they were asked to go home? We have witnessed it. My office is near the JSS Mohamed and all the children

were there in the rain.

Mr Speaker: No transport was arranged!

Mr Bhagwan: This is the cause...

Mr Speaker: I have understood the question.

Mr Bhagwan : Don't shout at me!

Mr Speaker: I am not shouting at you. I have said that I have understood the question. I am not shouting at you and if you continue like this, I will take action against you.

The Prime Minister: In fact, as I explained, there is a whole procedure. That is why, I understand, the hon. Minister of Education did not immediately allow the children to go because they were supposed to organise the transport. In fact, the Fact Finding Committee will find out.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, it has been rightly pointed out that schools are closed when a cyclone warning class II is in force and not class III or class IV. And I remind the hon. Prime Minister that in the past it has happened that schools are closed without the torrential rains warning being issued. The way the hon. Prime Minister is answering, is he telling the country that we are going to keep on doing just that, that is, to keep schools open until that miraculous torrential rains warning or are we going to review and allow those kids to go before the warning is issued?

The Prime Minister: But, Mr Speaker, Sir, this is precisely what I said earlier. We are going to review and see what are the lacuna and the criteria. That is why I have asked an expert from the World Met Office to come and I have set up the Fact Finding Committee. I am looking at other possibilities and asking other people also to help us establish the criteria.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! May I inform the House that Parliamentary Question B/86 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will be answered by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Tourism. Parliamentary Questions B/106 and B/128 will be answered by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development. Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister!

**CYCLONE AND OTHER NATURAL DISASTERS COMMITTEE –
FUNCTIONS (08/04/08)**

(No. B/161) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Blanche) 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 Cyclone and other Natural Disasters Committee, he will state –

- (a) its terms and reference;
- (b) its composition, indicating the names of those who were present at the meeting of Wednesday 26 March 2008, and
- (c) who is entitled to convene a meeting thereof.

The Prime Minister; Mr Speaker, Sir, every year before the start of the cyclonic season, the Cyclone and Other Natural Disasters Committee meets and reviews the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders to cope with natural disasters such as cyclone, torrential rain and landslide. The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are thereafter laid down in a manual which is widely distributed.

The Cyclone and other Natural Disasters Committee reconvenes in the aftermath of a disaster.

With regard to part (a) of the question, the functions of the Committee are as follows -

- (a) to collect and present to Cabinet information on -
 - (i) the general situation throughout the island;
 - (ii) the condition of the Government Departments;
 - (iii) damage of non-governmental property, and
 - (iv) general situation at the airport and updates on arrivals and departures;
- (b) to make recommendations on any relief measures immediately required;
- (c) to ensure that immediate executive action is taken on the decisions of Cabinet; and
- (d) to provide an accessible central reporting point for Heads of Ministries/Departments/Organizations primarily concerned in the work of relief and reconstruction.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I would also like to inform the House that with regard to tsunami, the Committee has already worked out an Emergency Scheme after discussions with all stakeholders. The Scheme is in the process of being finalized.

Regarding part (b) of the question, the Committee is chaired by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service and comprises representatives of all Ministries/Departments which are involved in Disaster Management. In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, the cyclone emergency organization provides for a high degree of decentralization. I am tabling the requested information regarding the composition of the

Committee. I am also tabling a list of officers who were present at the meeting held on Wednesday 26 March 2008.

With regard to part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the Committee is convened by the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service on the basis of preliminary information obtained from the Meteorological Services and the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous informer pourquoi le comité n'a pas été convoqué tôt le matin en raison des conditions climatiques?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a Fact-Finding Committee which has been named to look into all these matters and I'll let the Fact-Finding Committee deal with that. I will not decide for them.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister said that usually the Cyclone and other Natural Disasters Committee meets in the aftermath of a disaster. Can I ask him as to why that Committee met at 1300 hours on the day the floods occurred?

The Prime Minister: Because the Meteorological Services decided to issue a warning of torrential rains and they decided to meet.

Mr Jhugroo : M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous informer si ce comité était au courant de l'état des rues à travers l'île avant de prendre la décision de fermer les écoles à deux heures de l'après-midi ?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just said that there is a Fact-Finding Committee which is going to look into all these matters. I can't answer for the Fact-Finding Committee.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: After what the Prime Minister has just said, can we know whether he proposes to review the terms of reference of that Committee in the light of what has happened?

The Prime Minister: The Fact-Finding Committee has been given very wide ranging terms.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I am sorry, Mr Speaker, Sir, I was not referring to the Fact-Finding Committee; I was referring to the Cyclone and Other Natural Disasters Committee.

The Prime Minister: Every year in October, they relook at the procedures and the terms. I think it will be good to wait until we see what is said by them and also by the World Meteorological Services experts and then we will see. I am sure there will be recommendations made.

Mr Jhugroo : M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous dire pourquoi il n'y avait pas de classes le jeudi 27 mars quand le temps était beau?

The Prime Minister: What the hon. Member wants!

(Interruptions)

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS – 26.03.08 – DEATH (08/04/08)

(No. B/162) 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 severe climatic conditions which prevailed on Wednesday 26 March 2008, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of students who died and/or got injured, indicating –
 - (i) their respective names and addresses;
 - (ii) the school attended, and
 - (iii) the causes of death and/or injuries, and
- (b) the number of vehicles which have been recovered from the rivers/floods.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that unfortunately one student namely, Marie Desirela Paul, passed away during the severe climatic conditions which prevailed on Wednesday 26 March, 2008. The student resided in the region of Mont Plaisir and was studying at Merton College in Pamplemousses. Following an autopsy, the Chief Police Medical Officer certified that the death was due to “Asphyxia due to drowning”. There was no reported case of students injured on that day.

As regards part (b) of the question, I am informed that 22 vehicles were recovered from the floods with the assistance of the Police.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, alors qu'il y avait une pluie torrentielle le mercredi 26 sur l'île et beaucoup d'élèves étaient complètement trempés et les parents inquiets, pourquoi est-ce que le ministre était dans une fonction au MES ?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! How can the Prime Minister answer where the Minister of Education and Human Resources was?

Mr Jhugroo: Je voudrais demander au Premier ministre s'il avait appelé le ministre de l'éducation le matin?

The Prime Minister: I explained last week that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources was, in fact, in contact with the Meteorological Services at 4.16 in the morning on that day.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre serait d'accord avec moi que s'il n'y avait pas des interventions *live* sur Radio Plus ou Radio One, ce jour-là il y aurait plus de victimes ?

The Prime Minister: What does the hon. Member want me to do? To abolish the Meteorological Services and let the radios do the role then!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Next question, hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee!

Mr Jhugroo: I have got one more supplementary question, Sir.

Mr Speaker: I think the issue has been more than fully canvassed during the PNQ last week, the more so that there is a Fact-Finding Committee now sitting. I am now calling the question of hon. Mrs Hanoomanjee.

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION – BAD WEATHER/CYCLONIC CONDITIONS –
MANAGEMENT TEAM (08/04/08)**

(No. B/185) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if there is any team of officers at his Ministry who are on a 24 hour standby in cases of bad weather/cyclonic conditions and, if so, will he state –

- (a) its terms and reference;
- (b) its composition, and
- (c) if it recommended the closing of schools on Wednesday 26 March 2008 and, if not, why not.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, in case of bad weather and cyclonic conditions, my senior management team and myself are available on a 24-hour basis.

Contacts are established by telephones and if the need arises we meet. Standing arrangements exist at the level of my Ministry as regards bad weather and cyclonic conditions and instructions have been issued to all Heads of schools as regards actions to be taken during cyclones and bad weather conditions including torrential rain.

There is no formal team of officers with prescribed terms of reference. Even in the past, no such arrangements existed.

In case of cyclone, as soon as a Class II warning is issued, during school hours, by the meteorological services, classes are dismissed without delay. Should a Class II warning be in force at the beginning of a school day, students as well as teaching staff are requested not to report to school. The Heads of schools and support staff, however, have to call at their respective school to ensure that all necessary precautions and security measures for the safety of the school premises are taken.

In cases of torrential rains, schools are closed only after the issue of a torrential rain warning by the meteorological services. Parents are then informed accordingly by way of a radio broadcast. On Wednesday 26 March 2008, there were bad weather conditions but without torrential rain condition, i.e. an average of 100 mm of rain over 12 hours over the island, it was agreed that an extra precaution be taken by the meteorological services to inform the public that students attending schools must take all necessary precautions and this was included in the communiqué of the meteorological services. Further, the Ministry was following up the situation in schools for the past days prior to Wednesday 26 March 2008. As at Tuesday 25 March 2008, no reports regarding schools affected by rainfall had been received and all schools were in a position to have normal classes on Wednesday morning.

As regards part II of the question, Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, my adviser on information matters was in constant liaison with the meteorological services and myself.

At no point in time, prior to the issue of a torrential rain warning at 13.00 hours, did the meteorological services give any indication of torrential rain conditions. In the absence of that material information and also taking into account the fact that there was no report of any school not being in good running condition on Tuesday 25 March 2008, my Ministry could not close school on Wednesday 26 March 2008, as already pointed out in the reply made to the PNQ by the hon. Prime Minister at our last sitting.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que je pourrais demander au ministre si pendant sa présence dans la fonction du MES, il avait eu des appels téléphoniques et est-ce qu'il a répondu à ces appels ?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, after the schools were opened, my Ministry continued to monitor the situation and we have a standing agreement between

the Supervising Officer, the Chief Technical Officer and the Zone Directors that the situation is monitored and I am kept informed regularly. We have a communication arrangement. Whether I was in my office or not, the communication arrangement was there and I was kept informed of the evolution of the situation throughout the day.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I listened carefully to the hon. Minister. He said two things that seem to be contradictory. At one point, he said - cyclone is another thing, warnings and so on - that schools are closed depending on the weather conditions, including torrential rains. At one point he said that. And then later on, he gave the impression that the schools could not and should not be closed until the torrential rains communiqué was out. Can I know which is which?

Mr Gokhool: I think I am clear in my mind. The hon. Leader of the Opposition did refer during the PNQ to the Prime Minister that schools have been closed in the past.

Yes, schools have been closed, when we make an assessment and the conditions of the schools, whether there has been any damage, any waterlogging; we have closed schools because we make a prior assessment. These relate to weather conditions and we make the assessment. Coming to the specific event of Wednesday 26, I have given the reply, that is, we took into account the meteorological services information passed on to us and also the fact that on Tuesday 25, when we closed office, the schools were in a good running condition and were to welcome the students the next day. We have taken into account both sets of information to decide not to close the schools.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister when was he made aware that at five o'clock in the morning on Wednesday 26, the meteorological station issued a special communiqué in which it was spelt out that students and parents should take precautions because of dangers to the students?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, my adviser on information matters was in contact with the meteorological office as from 4.16 a.m. Thereafter, he was in contact with the supervising officer. Because there was no indication of torrential rains ...

(Interruptions)

There was not!

Mr Bérenger: The 5 a.m. communiqué!

Mr Gokhool: Yes, I am coming to that! I don't think that even in the 5 a.m. communication, there was any clear indication of torrential rains.

(Interruptions)

There was none! Because if there were ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Let the hon. Minister answer! If there are questions then, hon. Members will have the opportunity to rebut the Minister's argument.

Mr Gokhool: This is the information that has already been given to the House that there was no communication stating clearly that there will be torrential rains in the 5 o'clock communiqué. That was the information that was available and that is where it was said that rains will continue. There was an agreement between my Ministry and the Meteorological Office, and it is the first time a paragraph was included, that 'children should take all necessary precautions while going to school.'

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister at what point in time did he address the issue with the Prime Minister?

Mr Gokhool: I have said that at the Ministry we have standing arrangements. I met the hon. Prime Minister the next day.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Minister at what time he became aware of that 5 a.m. communiqué?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when the 5 a.m. communiqué was issued, my adviser on information matters and also my supervising officer were informed. The fact that there was no indication that there will be torrential rains ...

(Interruptions)

I became aware of it after the communiqué was issued.

(Interruptions)

I said after the communiqué was issued! I cannot become aware of it before the communiqué was issued.

Mr Bérenger: There was the 5 a.m. communiqué and the 11 a.m. communiqué for torrential rain. My question is: when did he become aware of the 5 a.m. communiqué?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have to correct the Leader of the Opposition. I have a copy of that communiqué.

(Interruptions)

Has the hon. Leader of the Opposition read the communiqué?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, I said! Order!

Hon. Minister, when I am on my feet, you have to take your seat. Hon. Bodha!

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the Minister agree that he has failed miserably because he addressed such national issue to the Prime Minister too late - the next day - and this led to the death of a child and other people?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have been vested by Government with the responsibility by Government to manage the Ministry of Education and Human Resources. We have specific arrangements with regard to cyclonic and weather conditions and when the communiqué was issued there was no clear cut indication that torrential rains will continue or will take place. It was only during the day..

(Interruptions)

I am giving my statement. I am giving my explanation.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order, I have said!

(Interruptions)

I am going to suspend now! Hon Members, you better behave! I am telling you now! This is Parliament and not anything else!

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the Minister has stated earlier that he has been vested powers as a Minister under the Education Act, why did he not act as per section 36 of the Education Act which states clearly that under extreme circumstances he has the full power to take decision and he could have released school and there would have not been anybody who would have lost life in this country?

Mr Gokhool: Let me remind the hon. Member that in the floods there were four victims and among them there was one student. We should not forget that when we are talking about the floods. Secondly ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: It is most unfair of hon. Members. If the Minister has something to say, let him say it. If they do not agree with it, they can rebut the argument of the Minister, but they should make it in a parliamentary manner.

Mr Gokhool: Events of Wednesday 26 relate to four victims and there was one student among the four victims. Coming to powers vested with the Minister of Education to close schools, I am aware of it, but the relevant section states – “The Minister may order any school to be closed for an indefinite period in case of infectious diseases occurring in epidemic forms, or to enable necessary repairs to be made to school buildings, or in other exceptional circumstances.”

(Interruptions)

There are two assessments we can make of the situation that prevails on Wednesday 26.

One is before the events, when you have a certain amount and set of information on which the Ministry makes a decision and then after the events, when you have another set of information and, of course, the state of mind is different. There are two sets of events, one before, and one after, and in these circumstances we do not think that these are exceptional circumstances. Maybe when you look back at the events that took place during the day, then you might say that these are exceptional circumstances, but not before the event. This is the position taken by my Ministry.

Mr Guinness: Can I ask the Minister whether on Wednesday 26 an inspector from SSS Bel Air phoned the Ministry to say that there was an urgent need to release the school immediately because the school was flooding?

Mr Gokhool: I will go back to what I said. On Tuesday evening, we carried out a survey and, the report says that Bel Air SSS is in good running condition, we can open the school the next day. But the rains continue, and the hon. Member knows that Bel Air SSS, when we have continuous rain, gets flooded. But on Tuesday in the evening, we did not have any report of the school having been flooded and what happened was during the day. When the report came to the Ministry that the students should be released, they were allowed to let the children go with the precautionary measures that were taken.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question, hon. Jhugroo.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que je pourrais demander au ministre combien d'écoles il a visité le mercredi 26 mars ?

Mr Gokhool : Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have stated that we were in contact with all our zone directors who were giving us information about the schools. But let me conclude by saying something, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The way people on the other side of the House are tackling this issue today should have gone beyond. Matters have been dealt with in the PNQ of the Leader of the Opposition answered by the Prime Minister. We have got very urgent environmental conditions which are going to affect the country and the Opposition has failed

(Interruptions)

They have failed in these circumstances; they have tried to put the blame on my shoulder, but they should have played their role not as demagogy and looked at the problem facing the country.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! Order, I said.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is threatening me and others, pointing a finger which is totally out of order

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Hon Minister, order! Order, I have said!

(Interruptions)

Hon David! Hon Jhugroo!

(Interruptions)

I have said order!

TORRENTIAL RAINFALLS – 26 MARCH 2008 – REGIONS (08/04/08)

(No. B/203) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Environment and National Development Unit whether, in regard to the torrential rainfalls, which prevailed on Wednesday 26 March 2008, he will state the regions, which have been mostly affected, indicating if any major causes have been identified.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, following the torrential rainfall, the

National Development Unit has received lately from Local Authorities, Road Development Authority, Parliamentary Private Secretaries and other Members of the National Assembly lists of 158 regions across the island where flooding has occurred and 17 rivers where cleaning and dredging need to be undertaken. The regions mostly affected are the Eastern, Northern, Southern and Port Louis, especially localities in the regions of Mon Gout, Vallée des Prêtres, Poste de Flacq and Bel Air.

The main causes of flooding are the following –

- blocking of watercourse with garbage, waste, debris, cut branches, plastic bags, construction materials, TV and improper maintenance of drain systems;
- not properly designed drains, especially sizing of drains, inadequacy of drains and complete absence of any drainage facility in certain areas;
- installation of pipes in the waterway of storm water drains and culverts;
- obstruction of natural drains;
- construction of houses in low lying areas or below the flood line of rivers and canals and close to banks of rivers and canals;
- construction in marshy/wetland areas, and
- no proper and adequate outlet identified for drainage systems, and
- construction of houses and drains in water course;

Whatever drain network which had been constructed in the past was designed for a period of ten years. However, the intensity of the recent rainfall was unprecedented and, to use the technical term, one in a hundred years. The rain water run-off was such that it could not be contained within the existing network with the result of cases of flooding and overflowing occurred in different regions.

In view of obstruction of water courses, the excessive volume of water, coupled with strong water current, led to the overflow of bridges in certain regions. The major causes of flooding will be brought to light following the survey under way in the context for the comprehensive emergency programme covering the regions severely affected by the problem of flooding.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he could confirm whether the regions around Cité Argy, Rivière Ecoignard and Rivière du Rempart have not been affected by the recent floods?

Mr Bachoo: The contrary is the truth. Cité Argy and all the regions which the hon. Member has mentioned have been badly affected by the flood and I have mentioned the eastern region also.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just wanted the Minister

to confirm it because in PQ No. B/745 on dredging of rivers, the Minister was asked as to whether the proper surveys were carried out and permits were received from Water Resources before the dredging of these rivers. The Minister had answered in the affirmative, saying that he has got a whole team of engineers to help him out in this work.

May I ask the Minister whether one of the reasons for the flooding in these regions has not been the increased capacity of the rivers due to the dredging works carried out?

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the dredging of the rivers was carried out, but this has nothing to do with the flooding. I have just mentioned that it is because people have had the bad habit of throwing debris, plastic bags, etc. In addition to this, there have been the growth of water lilies, which we cannot prevent, that keeps on occurring time and again. It is hardly eight months that the dredging of rivers has taken place, but it had in no way affected neither the flow nor the flooding of the river. This has already been confirmed by the engineers.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: How can the Minister confirm the same since the river downstream has not been dredged and there has been an increased capacity in the dredged area? It is likely that there will be an excess capacity that had to run downstream. How can he confirm that this has not been case?

Mr Bachoo: What is the meaning of dredging? Dredging, in fact, means clearing the river of all those debris. This is exactly what we do.

(Interruptions)

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I maintain we do not go very deep; we do not dig. We simply remove the rubbish which gets accumulated. Actually, the dredging work is being carried out in the 17 rivers. And if we do not do that work, what will happen if there is a heavy rainfall? All the water passages will get blocked and all the areas will be flooded.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I want to make something clear. The hon. Minister says that the overflow in the water courses or drains was due to the fact that people had thrown debris and all types of things, water lilies have blocked the water courses. I thought that this was the purpose of having a Ministry of Environment to ensure that these areas are cleaned. This is an indictment on his own of the Ministry when he said that.

Mr Bachoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one thing I would like to inform the House is that dredging work was never done ...

(Interruptions)

Allow me to express myself! When the question was asked, I listened to the question and now I am answering.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, I said.

Mr Bachoo: Dredging work has started recently and a sum of about Rs10.5 m. has been spent. Cleaning work keeps on going but, unfortunately, people keep on with that bad habit of throwing debris, even dead animals in the rivers. Time and again, it is the duty of my Ministry or part of my responsibility. We keep on cleaning the rivers.

When the question was asked, I had to answer, giving the causes which for the flooding of rivers. That hardly means that I am shirking from my responsibility. Once this matter has come to light, then, definitely, I sent workers to clean the rivers.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I just want to know from the hon. Minister whether the National Land Drainage Committee which was set up by the previous Government is still working.

Mr Bachoo: The National Land Drainage Committee is still working and I have chaired a few meetings and we have already set up a list of about 110 sites where works need to be done and, in fact, the work has already started.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister said that they have identified sites. Can we know what is the amount that has been spent on the Land Drainage Programme in the present Budget and what has been spent in the last year's Budget?

Mr Bachoo: I can give the figures. In 2003 – 2004, a sum of Rs200m was earmarked and a sum of Rs42.202,868 m. has been spent.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member asked a question and he gets the answer; that is the rule of the game.

Mr Bachoo: In 2004-2005 a sum of Rs200m. was earmarked and an amount of Rs1,475,980 was spent. 2005 – 2006, Rs200 m. was earmarked and a sum of Rs115,500,477 was used.

(Interruptions)

2006 - 2007, a sum of Rs150 m. was earmarked and an amount of Rs120,072,286 was used and for this year, 2007 - 2008, a sum of Rs150m was earmarked, but the

amount has not yet been spent. We are spending another Rs100 m. which we received last week and, in fact, I have received green light to go ahead.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, in the good old days, we had the malaria team which looked into after the rivers. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he will look into the possibility of having those malarias team that used to come at one time

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. The question pertains to what has happened on Wednesday 26 March and about the regions which were affected by the torrential rains. What you are saying is maybe the theme of another question on another occasion. The Table has been advised that Questions Nos. B/204, B/205, B/206 and B/207 have been withdrawn.

SCHOOLS - TORRENTIAL RAINS- 26.04.08 (15/04/08)

(No. B/260) Mrs F. Labelle (Third Member for Vacoas and Floreal) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state if his Ministry has sent a letter to the heads of the primary and secondary schools who had released their respective pupils on Wednesday 26 March 2008, before the issue of the torrential rains warning, asking them to state the reasons why they had taken that decision.

(Withdrawn)

NEWSPAPERS – GOVERNMENT PUPLICITY

6/5/08
(42)

(No. B/380) **Mr R. Bhagwan** (First 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 Government publicity in newspapers since December 2005 to date, he will state the amount paid to each daily and weekly newspaper?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the information called for in the Parliamentary Question is being compiled.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, order, please!

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I know from the Prime Minister whether 'l'Express', 'Le Militant', 'Week End' are still debarred from obtaining Government publicity? Is it still the Prime Minister's policy?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said last time, we are going to review the policy with regard to Government publicity in newspapers. I think I mentioned it last time and I have mentioned also that we are having consultation with a well-known expert in media law, who is also a well-known civil liberty lawyer, and he is expected to be in Mauritius very soon. We will relook at the criteria. I must say in all frankness - I will give an information to the House and to the members of the press as well - are thinking, for example, to relaunch new advance party political papers, but I think it is wrong that a party political paper should get ...

(interruptions)

Personally, I think it is wrong! If you want to run a party political paper, I think you should not expect to get Government publicity.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let me inform the House that supplementary questions have the discretion of the Speaker. I am not stopping you, hon. Bhagwan. I will see that when the subject matter has been fully canvassed, I'll stop supplementary questions.

Mr Bhagwan: Whatever arguments the Prime Minister has made about political parties, there are newspapers which are party politics partisans, like the 'Socialist' and so on.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, now!

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he still stands by his statement: "So long as I am the Prime Minister, 'Le Militant', 'L'Express', 'Week End' will not obtain any publicity".

The Prime Minister: No, I did not say that. I said: "So long as I am Prime Minister, le Militant...! 'Week End' is no different from 'Le Militant'; we know this!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, now!

PUBLICATIONS – PRESS PASSES

(No. B/381) **Mr R. Issack (Second Member for Port Louis South and Port Louis Central)** 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 media, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain information as to –

(a) the names of the

(i) dailies, weeklies, monthlies and other periodicals published in Mauritius, indicating the names and addresses of their publishers

(ii) holders of press passes of each of these publications and
(b) if it is proposed for the Ministry of Information to issue passes to members of the press according to the status of each member.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am tabling a statement giving the information requested by the hon. Member in part (a) of the question, because he asked for names of dailies, etc.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards the second part of the Question, I am informed by the Acting Director, Government Information Service, that currently passes to members of the press are issued in respect of the following categories –

- Director
- Managing Editor
- Reporter
- Editor
- Photographer
- Reporter/Photographer

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government, as I said, will shortly avail itself of the services of a Media Law Consultant to advise us on legal provisions relating to the media in general. The issue of press passes will be rationalized in the light of the recommendations of the lawyer and in keeping with international practices.

Mr Issack: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the Prime Minister, in a nutshell, how many members of the press are registered at the Ministry of Information?

The Prime Minister: There are so many newspapers which come and go, Mr Speaker, Sir. I have to count one by one to tell the hon. Member, but we know we have quite a plurality.

Mr Issack: One last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. Is the Prime Minister aware that there are, up to now, even Chief Editors, Editors in Chief, who are still classified as “Reporters” by the Ministry of Information?

The Prime Minister: This matter should be remedied, Mr Speaker, Sir. It is the classification that they have been using. You know how it is in Mauritius; you use classification that was used a long time back.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Questions addressed to the hon. Minister! The Table has been informed that Parliamentary Question No. B/392 has been withdrawn.

PQ/REPLY

22

20/05/08

(43)

SC/D08/P04/07

CIVIL SERVICE – PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

(No. B/484) Mrs S. Hanoomanjee (Second Member for Savanne and Black River) 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 Performance Management System recently introduced in the Civil Service, he will state the criteria laid down to assess the performance of the public officers.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, The criteria for assessing the performance of Public Officers have been clearly defined in the Guidelines for the Performance Management System (PMS) and the Performance Appraisal Forms. They form the basis of an agreement between an officer and his immediate superior and they relate to Key Results Areas, Key Tasks, Performance Standards and competencies that the officer is expected to demonstrate in the performance of his duties. The criteria are clearly explained to all officers concerned in the course of an intensive training programme carried out prior to the implementation of the PMS.

These criteria for the assessment of Public Officers have been developed based on models from several countries such as the UK, Malaysia and Singapore and after consultations with stakeholders.

As stated in the reply to PQ B/750 last year, the implementation of PMS is in line with our vision to create a modern Public Service for achieving excellence in the delivery of services and ensuring good governance, and in accordance with the recommendations of the Pay Research Bureau in its 2003 Report.

It should be pointed out, however, that PMS goes beyond individual performance and focuses also on group and organizational performance. In this regard, it is fully consistent with and even complements other reform initiatives being undertaken, namely the Programme Based Budgeting under the Medium Term Expenditure Framework which is being led by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

SC/D08/P04/08
(PQ No. B/484 contd.)

I am informed that as at date, thirty-four Ministries/Departments have embarked on this important reform initiative, covering some 15,000 public officers. It is expected that by the end of this year, some fifty organizations representing 40% of the Civil Service will have implemented the PMS.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the Prime Minister confirm that the performance of civil servants will be evaluated on an individual basis, taking into consideration their personal contribution to the goals of the Ministries?

The Prime Minister: I think that should be the case, Mr Speaker, Sir. That is the whole idea. It is not just the whole organisation, but also individuals.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister say whether in the case of non-performance disciplinary action will be contemplated?

The Prime Minister: I think what needs to be done is to try to help them to perform better, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, what about the case of those who perform very well? Will there be a system of reward for them?

The Prime Minister: I am all for that.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Prime Minister consider then putting up a system where there will be reward for those who perform and, at least, disciplinary actions against those who do not perform?

The Prime Minister: As I said, it has to be performance related. Those who are unable to perform should be helped to see whether they can be made to perform better.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

SC/D08/P04/09

The Prime Minister: There are some people who never want to learn anything and never want to improve. They will have to be subject to disciplinary actions.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister say whether any mechanism has been put in place so that those who do not perform are, indeed, helped?

The Prime Minister: That is what I said in my answer. They have an intensive course at the very beginning.

LATE

AIME CESAIRE – SCHOOL NAMING (27/05/08)

(No. B/553) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in memory of late Aimé Césaire, he will state if Government will consider naming a public place or any other important State building after him?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, consideration is being given to naming a school after late Aimé Césaire.

222

27/05/08
45

DR/D09/W05/01

**WOMEN AND CHILDREN – ALLEGED VIOLENCE – JANUARY
2006-MARCH 2008**

(No. B/606) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether in regard to complaints of alleged violence on women and children reported to her Ministry, since January 2006 to March 2008, she will state –

- (a) the number thereof, and
- (b) the follow up actions taken in connection therewith by her Ministry.

Reply: From January 2006 to March 2008, 4280 cases of violence against women and 3465 cases of child abuse have been reported at the six Family Support Bureaux of my Ministry.

With regard to part (b) of the question, follow up actions taken by my Ministry include first hand counseling, psychological counseling, legal advice and immediate intervention where required.

I wish to inform the House that in adult cases of domestic violence, women are assisted by Family Welfare and Protection Officers of my Ministry for applications for Protection Orders at the District Courts.

Moreover, those who are at risk, are provided temporary accommodation in places of safety and in some cases referrals are made to other agencies for further assistance.

With regard to children, urgent site visits are effected by Family Welfare and Protection Officers of my Ministry and where children are found to be in danger, they are removed immediately and placed at the shelter of the Ministry. This is usually done with the assistance of the Police.

Within the least possible delay, applications for Emergency Protection Orders are made at the District Courts. Upon further enquiries, applications are made for Committal Orders to keep the children at a place of safety (Shelter & Residential Care Institution) for longer period.

In both cases of women and children, follow up visits are effected even after the grant of Court Orders for protection. These include home visits and psychological sessions so as to ensure rehabilitation and to foster reintegration in the family.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN – SHELTERS - FACILITIES

27/5/08
40

(No. B/607) Mr M. Allet (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether in regard to the shelters for women and children, she will state –

- (a) the number thereof;
- (b) the number of women and children who can be accommodated therein;
- (c) the facilities provided thereat, and
- (d) if any psychologist is attached to each shelter.

Reply: With regard to part (a) of the question, the Ministry has two shelters under its aegis; one at Albion which is run by the National Children's Council and the other one at Forest Side is run by an NGO namely "Shelter for Women and Children Trust Fund".

With regard to part (b) of the question, presently, the shelter at Albion is providing care and accommodation to some 84 children victims of abuse/neglect and 4 adults who are victims of domestic violence. The shelter at Forest Side is presently accommodating 28 inmates and it has an accommodation capacity of 35 inmates; whereas the shelter at Albion has an accommodation capacity of 65.

I wish to remind the House that the shelter at Albion is meant to provide temporary accommodation to children victims of abuse or neglect until they are transferred to other residential care institutions or placed in foster families. It is the only place of safety where the Ministry can place a child at any hour of the day or night.

With regard to part (c) of the question, children of both shelters are provided residential facilities with all amenities. Those above the age of 3 attend school (pre-primary, primary, secondary) or vocational training/educational institutions. Those who have never attended any school before being admitted at the shelters and who cannot be integrated in mainstream educational settings are provided with a Special Needs Teacher at the level of the shelters.

At the shelter at Forest Side, inmates of above 16 years of age who cannot pursue normal schooling are provided training in vocational skills. They are also given the opportunity to develop their IT, sports, musical and dancing skills and moral values are inculcated to them.

Arrangements are also made at both shelters to offer the children creativity and leisure activities.

With regard to part (d) of the question, psychologists employed by the Ministry conduct individual and group counseling with the inmates of the two shelters on a regular basis.

I wish to inform the House that the shelter of Albion is shortly being transferred to a more spacious building at Pointe aux Sables.

PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT SECRETARY – SCHEME OF SERVICE (10/06/08)

(No. B/617) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire & Moka) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the post of Principal Assistant Secretary, he will state if the scheme of service thereof is being amended and, if so, the changes that are being brought thereto, indicating the reasons therefor.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, action has indeed been initiated for the scheme of service for the post of Principal Assistant Secretary (PAS) to be amended. The scheme of service is being reviewed to change the mode of appointment to the post of PAS.

23

According to the existing scheme, appointment to the post of PAS is made by

selection from among officers in the grade of Senior Assistant Secretary (SAS), a grade which was recommended by the PRB in its 2003 Report. However, this post of SAS has proved to be superfluous as explained by the Prime Minister in his reply to PQ No. B/1095. Moreover, the Association of Public Administrators has also been asking for the abolition of the post for the same reason. The grade of SAS has therefore been made evanescent. In fact, in its 2008 Report, the PRB has, in line with its policy for flatter structures, equally recommended that the grade of SAS be made evanescent. Consequently, the scheme of service for the post of PAS is being amended so that in future, appointment thereto would be made by selection from among officers in the grade of Assistant Secretary reckoning at least eight years service in the grade. Initially, it was proposed that the length of service required from an Assistant Secretary to be eligible for consideration for appointment to the grade of PAS should be five years. However, the Public Service Commission has now proposed that this should be increased to eight years in order to ensure that experienced officers are selected for this high level post. This proposal of the Public Service Commission has been approved. The Union is being consulted on the new revised scheme, in accordance with existing rules.

VIDEO CLIPS – MOBILE PHONES (10/06/08)

(No. B/628) Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun (Third Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) 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 illegal transmission of video clips through mobile phones, he will state if he will consider toughening the law in relation thereto.

Reply: The transmission or reception through mobile phones of video clips which are “grossly offensive, or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character”, is sanctioned under our criminal laws by virtue of section 46(h)(i) of the Information and Communications Technologies Act 2001.

Any person who provides an information and communication service, which includes the sending out of information in the form of sounds and images, must, pursuant to section 24 of the Information and Communications Technologies Act 2001, hold a licence issued by the Information and Communications Technologies Authority.

Section 47(1) of the Information and Communications Technologies Act provides that any person who commits an offence under the Act, if convicted, is liable to a fine not exceeding 1,000,000 rupees and to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years.

Moreover, where a person is convicted for an offence under the Information and Communications Technologies Act 2001, the Court before which a person is

convicted may, under Section 47 of the Act, in addition to any penalty imposed, order the cancellation of the licence held by the person convicted and the forfeiture of any installation or apparatus used in connection with the offence.

The provisions in our current legislation constitute an adequate deterrent to the illegal transmission of video clips through mobile phones or any other electronic means and there is no need for toughening the law at this stage.

However, I wish to inform the House that the issue is being addressed from a holistic perspective rather than simply legal compliance. Under the National Information and Communications Technology Strategic Plan, consideration is being given by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications to a multi-prong approach to address the problem of illegal video transmission.

POCKETS OF POVERTY – SURVEY (17/06/08)

(No. B/718) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if any survey has been carried out to identify pockets of poverty with 7157 families and, if so, indicate –
(a) the findings thereof, and
(b) if copy thereof will be tabled.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since 2003, while working at grassroots level together with NGOs, the Trust Fund for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups investigated into the specific poverty characteristics of various localities with a view to having a more effective approach for dealing with poverty.

The survey was carried out by the Fund over a period of more than two years and was completed in the last quarter of 2006. It revealed, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, 229 pockets of poverty, comprising 7,157 households that needed a specific intervention. The 229 pockets of poverty have been identified using indicators like monthly income of less than Rs4,000; the structure of the housing unit; family size and number of persons residing in the single housing unit; connected or not to electricity and water supply; employment opportunities in the locality; age and level of education, and health status of the households. Based on these criteria, these households are considered to be in the group of absolute poor.

In addition to the Trust Fund, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) has also carried out surveys in 1996/97 and 2001/02 and recently that allow us to understand the challenge posed by poverty in Mauritius.

The CSO has established the following poverty lines –

- (i) \$2 per person a day (put forward by the World Bank) which is relevant for middle income countries like Mauritius. On this measure of \$2 per person per day, there are about 5,000 families in Mauritius affected by poverty;
- (ii) half the median of household income adjusted for differences in the needs of adults and children and for economies of scale. This relative poverty line is more relevant to high income OECD countries like Canada, France and USA. According to this measure, over 26,000 families are in relative poverty in Mauritius, receiving less than Rs3,821 per adult equivalent per month which is equivalent to Rs10,000 per month per family.
- (iii) The Trust Fund Survey is somewhere between these two poverty lines.

With respect to part (a) of the question, one of the main findings of the Trust Fund survey was that there is an urgent need for 4,350 housing units. It has also been noted that most of the families do not possess land title deeds as the land belongs to their ancestors with numerous heirs.

As far as part (b) of the question is concerned, a listing of the pockets of poverty is being tabled.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, clearly the problem is not information but willingness to act. In this regard, I wish to inform the House that the Trust Fund, other public institutions, the civil society as well as the private sector have been intervening in these pockets independent of each other and there has so far been no shared programme to tackle absolute poverty collectively.

This is why, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have, in the next financial year, provided a sum of Rs395 m. to finance projects focusing on these pockets of poverty under the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme.

This programme will be steered by a Committee comprising the Trust Fund, the National Empowerment Foundation, civil society and the corporate sector. This Committee will be adopting an integrated approach to address and eradicate absolute poverty in Mauritius, including Rodrigues.

I wish to reiterate that part of the sum of Rs395 m. will ensure that –

- (i) all poor children of pre primary school-going age attend school;
- (ii) these children are provided with a decent lunch;
- (iii) parents are trained to get a decent job with sustainable income;

- (iv) social problems are dealt with;
- (v) there is training in life skills management for parents and children, and
- (vi) adequate infrastructure to those needing it.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Eliminating Absolute Poverty Programme will be implemented in partnership with the private sector that has agreed to cover 30 percent of the cost as part of their CSR programme.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I heard the hon. Minister saying that there are some 4,300 housing units and households which need some assistance. Can I know from him what has been done and what is actually being done in these cases?

Dr. Sithanen: I explained it in the Budget, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I think there is a question on that subsequently. The Trust Fund has already helped approximately 1,500 of these poor people this year to have housing facilities. I have just *débloqué des fonds* so that they can invest in 1,000 additional housing units until the end of the year. I have also mentioned about the Corporate Social Programme of the private sector and their partnership with NGOs and Government. In addition to providing education and empowerment for people in terms of skill upgrading, we will also invest in low-cost housing so that these people will have *un toit* over their head.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has said that he would table the list of the 229 pockets of poverty. I heard the Minister saying that it would be done in collaboration with the NGOs, the private sector, which is very good. Can I know whether in the regions that have been identified as having pockets of poverty, the *forces vives*, the village councillors, the members of community centres will be taken on board to move the process ahead?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are some NGOs that have done and are doing a good job, and there are some corporate entities that have good programmes. I don't want to mention them. The Trust Fund has also been doing a lot. The Empowerment Programme also. The idea that I had some time back is a bit like the Declaration of Paris on aid effectives. It happens in development assistance programme.

Many are trying to help, but they get into the path of each other. What I have tried to do is to call them so that we have a shared vision and to have more effectiveness in the fight against poverty. We will work together with the NGOs, the corporate sector on a geographical basis; and in fact we have already identified – I am having a meeting with most of them this week – these pockets of poverty and the NGOs *ont le relais* in terms of networking, and we will work with the NGOs, with the Trust Fund, with the Empowerment Programme and with the corporate sector to effectively fight poverty in these pockets of poverty.

Mrs Perrier: In his answer, the Minister has talked about the 20,000 families that were in a relative poverty identified by the CSO. Can we know what is the mechanism which has been put in place to avoid these families falling into absolute poverty?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister there are three definitions of poverty: a dollar a day – we don't have any in Mauritius; 2-dollar a day, which is about 1.5% of 335,000 households. If we use the definition of France or the UK, which we call relative poverty and which is 50% of the medium income, there will always be people who will be relatively poor, just like there are people who are relatively rich. This is where we have 8%. We will have a multi-pronged programme. One is education. I will say it as often as I am given the opportunity to say it. The best passport and the best antidote against poverty is to give education to people. We are giving education at both ends. We are trying to make sure that these 5,000 kids who are three or four years old get access to pre-primary education. Today, they are victims of poverty, and tomorrow they are going to be the cause of poverty. We will help them. We also have to give their parents life skills; we are re-skilling them. There are many people who are poor because they are unemployed. What we have done is to provide gainful employment opportunities to them while, at the same time, give them training. We are introducing *l'école de la seconde chance*. We are targeting people who did not have a chance in their life. They will get a second chance, and will be able to reintegrate the mainstream economy.

Mr Spéville: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that the survey has been done, including Rodrigues. Can I ask him, out of the 229 pockets of poverty and the 7,157 families, how many are from Rodrigues?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I will circulate the information with regard to Rodrigues. It's a good work that has been done in terms of information collection. In fact, when my friend, hon. Guinness, will look at the figure, it does make sense. We know where the pockets of poverty are. What we have done is to develop what is called an Index of Human Development (IDH). We know where some of the poorest regions are. Some are in Constituency No. 4. The richest region is in Quatre Bornes central. It makes sense. It does tally with where we think the pockets of poverty are. Admittedly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in many of the rich places in our country, there are also small pockets of poverty, just like in many of these very poor regions there are also some few pockets of people who are rich. We have tried everything, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since 25 or 30 years, and it has not worked.

This is the best solution; it has worked in other countries. Let's give it our best try, and we'll see in two years', three years' time what progress is made.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Deputy Prime Minister how are the pockets of poverty distributed?

The Deputy Speaker: In fact, he has already answered that question.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister mentioned the question of title deed, saying that these poor families do not have title deed and live on land belonging to their parents. Is there any provision, in the sum allocated to alleviate poverty, to help these people regulate the title deed? We all know that it is very expensive. Sometimes, they cannot have the title deed because of lack of funds. Is there something provided for this particular issue?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will help them, just like we have shown our compassion towards the 20,000 people living in CHA houses. We have done our best to make sure that they get their title deed and become owner of their houses.

That's why we need flexibility in the system. I shall appoint members of the committee; it will be a joint committee – Government, corporate sector, NGOs – and if there are cases that deserve our compassion, our assistance, we will give it to them, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, corporate social responsibility was highlighted in the last Budget. Can we have an idea of what was their contribution for last year?

Second, I would like to know whether we can put the parliamentarians on board of such an important committee.

The Deputy Speaker: I think this has nothing to do with the question.

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the answer to the first question is that we had not woven the strategic partnership last year. This is a new programme. It's akin to the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness. They were doing their bit. Let me be very fair to some of them. Some have done an excellent job in terms of education, empowerment and training. What we are trying to do this year is to see whether we can define a common programme and whether we can have a shared objective. Then, we will decide whether A will invest in B and C will invest in X. At Government, we are very good at investing in infrastructure. But, I am not sure whether we are very good in *accompagnement social*. Let us use the private sector and the NGOs for *accompagnement social*, for *le suivi*, for reporting, monitoring and evaluation. In terms of infrastructure, Government has a very long and good history of how to invest in infrastructure. This is the shared vision, and this is the common objective that we are trying to have.

With respect to the second point, my humble submission would be no. We can take on board the views and opinions of parliamentarians. If we were to include them on the committee itself, there is the risk that it will be unduly politicised. Poor people are already suffering. Let's not make political football out of people who are poor. My own

feeling is that we need to fight poverty wherever they are, whoever they are. Let's give a chance to this committee, and then we will review it in two years' or three years' time to evaluate progress.

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS
CHILDREN – SEXUAL EXPLOITATION (01/07/08)**

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) 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 trafficking of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation, he will state if –

(a) he is aware of last month's US State Department Report, reporting that there are some 2,600 child prostitutes in Mauritius and that the Police and the authorities are not doing enough to eliminate child prostitution rings, in particular, in the tourism industry and, if so, will he state the actions taken, if any, and

(b) Mauritius complies with the minimum standards for the elimination thereof, indicating if the –

(i) Police is provided with the necessary resources, and

(ii) existing legislating caters thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, each year, the US Department of State issues a report to monitor the progress of several countries to eliminate trafficking in persons which is defined as - "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by mean of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs".

Each country under scrutiny by the United States is classified in four TIER Placements, namely - TIER 1, which includes countries whose governments fully comply with the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act's minimum standards.

TIER 2 groups countries whose governments do not fully comply with

the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

TIER 2 WATCH LIST, which includes countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards but are making significant effort to bring themselves into compliance with those standards and -

(a) the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing;

(b) there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year, or

(c) the determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.

TIER 3 groups countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.

As the House may be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the US Department of State Trafficking in Person Report of 2005, and which refers to conditions prevailing in the previous year, Mauritius was placed in the TIER 2 WATCH LIST category, which is, as I said, a TIER lower than the TIER 2 category assigned to Mauritius in 2004.

The fact that Mauritius has now progressed in the TIER placement in 2006, I think, is a testimony of the various actions taken by the Government to combat trafficking in persons and child prostitution. As a matter of fact, the trafficking of persons mentions "the Mauritian Government demonstrated increased anti-trafficking laws enforcement efforts, vigorously investigating cases of human trafficking throughout the year".

For the information of the House, I should like to enumerate those actions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir - The Ministry of Tourism has set up a multi stakeholders committee to address the issue of child prostitution and is finalising a brochure to sensitise all tourist agents.

The "*Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs*" (BPM) is now working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection on the protection of the child from all forms of abuse including commercial sexual exploitation of children.

To create public awareness, sensitisation and awareness campaigns targeted towards children are carried out on a regular

basis through media by way of radio and television programmes. Talks are delivered to school children at primary and secondary levels, to parents, in regions at risks and to the community at large with a view to sensitise on the protective needs of children against all forms of harm and abuse.

□□ Construction of a residential Drop-in Centre at GRNW is being envisaged with a view to removing victims of commercial sexual exploitation from their living environment, where they are exposed to the risk of being engaged in prostitution by family members and peers. The removal of victims from their environment will ensure their successful rehabilitation.

□□ Information, education and communication campaigns, which are ongoing, is being enhanced in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions with a view to educating children about the problems associated with commercial sexual exploitation.

□□ Professionals, such as Family Welfare & Protection Officers, Child Welfare Officers, Police Officers, Probation Officers, Medical Social Workers and NGOs working with children have been trained by a local consultant with a view to providing better services to victims of CSEC. The training programmes are ongoing.

□□ The National Parental Empowerment Programme, which was launched on 30 May 2007, provides guidance to parents regarding the sexual education of their children.

□□ Since January 2008, crackdown operations are organised at regular intervals by officers of this Ministry, of the Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection, National Children's Council, *Brigade des Mineurs*, in collaboration with NGOs to ensure that young persons and students are attending schools during normal school hours. Such operations are seen to contribute in an efficient way to prevent young persons from playing truancy and loitering thereby getting involved in illicit activities. These operations are carried out all around the island.

□□ A Community Child Protection Programme has been launched in August 2007 to ensure that local communities are also closely

involved in the protection of children. Communities are sensitised on the phenomenon of child abuse and are thus capable of initiating actions at their end when children are at risk, thus contributing to prevent child abuse, including commercial sexual exploitation of children. A surveillance mechanism in high risk areas has also been set up. A capacity building programme has been launched in May this year.

□□ The Child Protection Act 1994 was further amended in December 2005, to make provision for all cases of child trafficking, abandonment and abduction to be dealt with by officers of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection who are responsible for child welfare and development. Tougher penalties have also been provided for, in case of contravention of the provisions of the law. Penalties under the present Child Protection Act for sexual offences and indecent photographs of children have been revised from a fine of Rs50,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 5 years to Rs75,000 and 8 years respectively. As for cases of mentally handicapped victims, offenders will be liable to a fine of Rs100,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 15 years instead of Rs75,000 and 8 years respectively.

As regards part (b) of the question, although Mauritius is not fully compliant with the minimum standards set out in the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act we have taken a series of measures as I have indicated earlier to address the situation.

□□ So far, a total of 831 officers of different ranks both male and female have been trained in courses ranging from trafficking in persons to sensitization against sexual exploitation and abuse of minors.

□□ On a regular basis, Police officers visit schools and deliver talks and lectures on child abuse and services available for the protection of children.

□□ On a regular basis, in collaboration with the social workers of the Ministry of Education and also with the Child Development Unit reconnect children who are cut off from schools to the education system.

Regularly, Police officers refer children who have been abused, to the Child Development Unit for psychotherapy and placement to shelters, if required.

In addition, the Police provide the following services –

24-hour hotline service.

At divisional level, an Operations Room is open on a 24-hour basis.

Likewise, at Line Barracks the Operations and Information Room is open on 24-hour basis.

A protocol of assistance to child victims ranging from protection to counseling exists, whereby all Police officers serving in any part of the country know how to deal with reported cases of child abuse.

With the amendment of the Child Protection Act in 2005, and incorporation of a comprehensive anti-child trafficking provision, the penalty of imprisonment has been made stricter – by providing for imprisonment not exceeding fifteen years.

With regard to part (b) (ii) of the question, the Child Protection Act 1994 was amended in December 2005 to provide for child trafficking, child abduction, abandonment of child as offence and punishable by law.

However, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with a view to providing better protection to children as well as adults, a holistic approach is being considered and all provisions relating to human trafficking are being clustered under one legislation. We need to criminalise trafficking in person, prevent potential victims falling prey to traffickers, detect and prosecute and punish all those involved in that activity, raise awareness even more, promote collaboration among law enforcement agencies and foster partnership with civil society and all stakeholders.

In that respect, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the State Law Office had already prepared a draft Bill in February 2008. The draft has now been finalized and it is called “Combating of Trafficking in Persons” Bill. These followed preliminary comments on the draft Bill by the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a request for assistance was conveyed to the UNODC through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Cooperation in February 2008.

In April 2008, UNODC responded positively to our request for assistance in the drafting of the Bill. In this context, a Senior Legal Adviser visited Mauritius in June 2008. Working sessions were held with stakeholders and the views of UNODC on the Bill, following the visit of the Senior Legal Adviser, are awaited, but otherwise the Bill is actually being finalized and should be ready very soon

Mr Bérenger: I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will agree with me that that figure put forward by the United States of some 2,600 child prostitutes in Mauritius is very disturbing. He has refrained from making reference to that figure. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he agrees with that figure and whether the Police and other authorities in Mauritius have carried out a thorough inquiry to try and arrive at a given figure?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did not refer to that figure, because in the 2008 report, no mention is made of that figure of 2,600. In fact, in 2001 the Ministry of Women's Right, Child Development and Family Welfare commissioned a study which was done by the University of Mauritius. In that study, which the report was published in 2002, the figure of 2,600 is mentioned. But, I should say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the figure is mentioned, but if I read it from the report 2002, it says that according to the estimates made by the study, there may be as many as 2,600 children victims in Mauritius. But, the new report does not refer to that figure, that is why I did not refer to that figure. There is no new survey that is being carried out just now, whether we should or not, perhaps we should look at that.

Mr Bérenger: I think the hon. Prime Minister is aware that it is not only in the reports of the United States Department that that figure is quoted, but in several reports. For example, the US Department of Labour Report on labour in different countries also makes reference to the figure. I quote – “Mauritius has an estimated 2,600 child prostitutes” This is being quoted as a kind of accepted figure. Being given the impression that has been given by the latest report, very harsh words that the authorities are not doing enough to eliminate prostitution rings involving children, very tough comments, does not the hon. Prime Minister think that we should react? For example, in not a distant past, New Zealand was referred to in the US Department Report and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade came out with a press communiqué, a reaction, and also a reaction on Internet, because these figures are not only in the press, but on the Internet also.

The Prime Minister: As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that figure of 2,600 came out from the report that was commissioned by the Government at the time in 2001, which was published in 2002, and I cited from the report which says -

“There may be as many as(...)”

But that figure has now been taken by everybody else, as if we have shot ourselves in the foot. But I must say with caution that we should make sure that the figure is actually nil, but in no country it is actually nil, not even in the United States. But, as I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have reacted.

I don't know whether we are reading the same report, but the report recognizes that the Government is making significant efforts. Let me just read part of it, it says –

“The Mauritian Government demonstrated increased anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, vigorously investigating cases of human trafficking throughout the year.”

It goes on to say -

In July 2007, the number of Police Officers working in the Minors' Brigade increased from six to 35 and the number of vehicles from one to five, allowing adequate coverage of all regions of the island.”

Also it says –

“Police discovered eight cases of children engaged in prostitution and arrested 22 adults caught exploiting such children.”

It goes on to say –

“The Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment conducted inspections to enforce child labour laws.”

I am not reading the whole report, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but it says –

“The Government provided funding to NGOs offering protection and services to victims of trafficking, and referred victims to these organisations for shelter and other assistance. The Government run drop-in centre for children engaged in prostitution actively advertised its counselling services through bumper stickers, the toll-free number, a community outreach.”

And it continues –

“The Government encourages victims' assistance in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking crimes. The Government ensures that victims are not inappropriately incarcerated, fined or otherwise

penalised solely for unlawful acts as a direct result of being trafficked.

The Government made notable efforts to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children and reduce demand for commercial sex acts during the year.”

It goes on to say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that, in fact, the Government is doing quite a bit of effort and that is why I suppose it has explained that we have moved up a tier instead of being on the watch list, we are now in tier 2 list.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Prime Minister agree with me that one case of child prostitution is one case too many? I am not going to *polémiquer*, because it is question of *un verre à moitié rempli ou à moitié vide*. The hon. Prime Minister is quoting all the positive parts. But the report also says that the authorities are not doing enough to eliminate prostitution rings involving children and even when they are positive they say the following –
“The Government of Mauritius does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however it is making significant efforts to do so.”

That is, of fully complying and, even today, the hon. Prime Minister admitted that we still are not fully compliant. And the hon. Prime Minister quoted the number of Police officers and vehicles in the *Brigade des Mineurs*. I think that this Mauritian full inquiry by the Police should be carried out so that we have material to challenge this figure of 2,600 that is now accepted all over the place. Will the Prime Minister, therefore, agree that there is need for such a thorough survey and does he think that, although we have progressed, there is not need for, especially with tourism in mind, increasing the number of policemen and of vehicles available *à la Brigade des Mineurs*?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I want to say two things before I answer the last question. The report that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is referring to is from the South African press agency which says differently what the report actually says.

(Interruptions)

Nowhere it accuses the Mauritian Government for not doing enough to eliminate child prostitution. It actually says that Government is making significant efforts to do so, but never is never enough. As I said, and the

hon. Leader of the Opposition agrees, even if there is one case, it is one case too many. We have moved up from the watch list to the TIER 2 which includes, surprisingly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, countries like Singapore and many countries from the European Union including also Israel, Japan which are well-known for what they do. That is why I do not agree but, unfortunately, that figure of 2,600 came out in that report and it has stuck. Maybe we should do something to change that perception. Although it says “it may be as many as”. The figure has been taken. as if that is the figure.

Mr Bérenger: There should be a thorough survey so that we have material to challenge that, if it needs be. I tried to grasp exactly what further amendments are being brought to the law to better combat trafficking in child prostitution. For example, is the Prime Minister prepared to make it an offence to be a clear client of the child prostitute? Not just those pushing children into prostitution, but if a person is a client, he is committing a crime. Should not the law be made tougher as far as this part is concerned?

The Prime Minister: I would have thought that that this is also covered by the law, but that is actually being toughened in the new draft Bill about combating trafficking of persons, which is coming to the House, as soon as it is ready. As I said, Sir, it is the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime which has been looking at the draft Bill. We have made a request for assistance from a Senior Legal Adviser who has come to Mauritius last month and they had working sessions with all the stakeholders, including the State Law Office as well and that is why the Bill is being finalised. I forgot to mention whether we should increase the number of policemen. In fact, it has been increased from 3 to 35 and the vehicles will be increased, if need be, furthermore. Unfortunately, the report of 2002 gives an indication which everybody takes as a fact. Perhaps we should do a new survey and see to it, after a while, what is the new figure.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the report also recommends that the Government of Mauritius should complete the prosecution of suspected traffickers apprehended in 2006 and 2007. Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister where matters stand for 2006, 2007 and 2008 and whether there have been cases found guilty in Court and what stage the prosecution has reached? Because there were some very disturbing cases, especially in the north of the island, in those years?

The Prime Minister: I have the figure with me, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, but I know that the number of people who are actually being arrested and prosecuted is increasing. It has increased over the years. The latest number for this year, up to June, is 4; last year 24 people were arrested; the

years before, it was 10 and then 1, 8, 7. As I said, last year, the number has increased and we are vigorously prosecuting them and, as at June this year, there are 4 persons.

Mr Bérenger: The number of 24 for last year is very disturbing also.

I listened also to the very good efforts that are being made to better coordinate and combat child prostitution in the tourism sector but, in the same report, the US authorities “wish to see the Government of Mauritius take greater steps to discourage child sex tourism in Mauritius” which means that it is a serious problem. But they recommended the issuing of warnings to foreign tourists on arrival at the airport. Of course, we must not overreact completely in the other direction but, as we know, in certain countries, for example, drug trafficking is advertised at the point of entry and here it is recommended that warnings to incoming tourists should be properly made.

The Prime Minister: We are considering what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is precisely saying here, but we should not be seen as overreacting and doing as if we are a country where there is a lot of child prostitution in the tourism industry. As I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if you look in the TIER 2 of the list – I do not want to read the whole list - many countries in the European Union fall in the same list. We will have to look at it and see whether we should actually do that.

Mr Bodha: May I come back to the report, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The fact that the report explains who are the children who are vulnerable to the problem, what are the possibilities, for example, it refers to the children from the underprivileged areas, role of taxi drivers in the network, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether we should not do an in-depth inquiry because we know what are the vulnerable areas and who are the vulnerable children to this scourge?

The Prime Minister: It is the same in all countries, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Very often, it is when you are more vulnerable that you are prone to these and the networking includes taxi drivers. It is the same for all countries. As I have said, we have graduated from two TIER 2 WATCH LIST to a better level and we should not attract attention just as this report mentions figures and we are now stuck to this figure. Of course, as I have said, one is too many and we need to target properly.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the report also says that a lot of efforts has been made to cater for children who were in prostitution, but one issue which was addressed was that the children could not have immediate

shelter and went back to the network. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether something can be done so that once we have the children, we can provide them with the *encadrement nécessaire* so that they do not fall back again in the network?

The Prime Minister: In fact, I did mention that there is a new shelter that is being constructed, but we do what we can also. We cannot pretend to be the United States of America and we have solutions to everything.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Sir, the hon. Prime Minister talked about legislation being prepared for better protection of our children. We all know that, although legislation is important, it is not sufficient. What is more important is the enforcement, the training of officers and so on and so forth. The Prime Minister knows certainly that we signed the other optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 2001. Will he envisage the ratification of such Protocol?

The Prime Minister: I should say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that, in fact, we have progressed. It is not as if we are going down, we are going up the list and we are progressing. We have strengthened the legislation and we have increased the officers who are being put in action regarding this problem. It is not just the law as the hon. Member said, but also the enforcement. That is why I have mentioned all these and I do not want to repeat what we are doing. And for the ratification, of course.

Mrs Jeewa-Dawreeawoo: As we all know, child prostitution is very often linked with poverty. The Prime Minister has just enumerated a list of measures. May I know from him what additional measures Government envisages to help the families of those child prostitutes?

The Prime Minister: In the Budget, I think, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance mentioned the poverty areas and these are the areas which we are targeting. These are the measures that I have just mentioned are being looked at.

Mr Bérenger: It is acknowledged that we are not yet fully compliant with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Can I, therefore, have it from the Prime Minister - I am sure he will agree - that we rely on additional efforts to become as rapidly as possible fully compliant with the minimum standard for the eliminating of trafficking? Also, can I have confirmation that there will be a thorough survey done by the Police and others to try and arrive at a credible figure, but also to better target those guilty of trafficking in child prostitution, as hon. Bodha has just said? The

whole survey will allow us to better target those guilty of such trafficking and of improving on our performance.

The Prime Minister: In fact, I should say again, Mr Speaker, Sir, we have actually progressed from TIER 2 Watch List to TIER 2. It is already a progress. We are progressing; that means efforts are being done and we are getting results. I don't know whether the Police should make the survey or whether we should have other people as well, but we should have a survey to correct this image that was created in 2002.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over!

CANDY SWEETS – HEALTH HAZARDS (15/07/08)

(No. B/867) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether in regard to the sweets, in which strange objects have been found and after the consumption of which children have developed allergies, she will state the actions that have been taken by her Ministry.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to PQs B/867 and B/882 together as they both relate to sweets representing health hazards.

I have taken stock of the three cases of candy sweets representing health hazards namely 'Ever Successful' brand (Guava flavour) from China, 'Gula Gula Funny Tongue Monsters' and 'Love Ring' brands from Malaysia.

I am informed further that a charge of adulteration of foodstuffs for the case of 'Ever Successful' brand (Guava flavour) has been retained under the Food Act, 1998, and the case has been submitted to the Attorney General's Office for the determination of the offender, as the incriminated foodstuff has been manufactured outside Mauritius.

As regards 'Gula Gula', results from the Government Analyst Division of the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life indicate that the candy is highly acidic. I am informed that 'Love Ring' contravenes the Food Regulations as it is in direct contact with a ring-shaped plastic material.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as an immediate measure, officers of the Consumer Protection Unit of my Ministry and those of the Ministry of Health reacted

promptly in all the three cases to have all the incriminated sweets removed from the market and inspections were carried out in all retail outlets and school premises. Further, as precautionary measure the Consumer Protection Unit of my Ministry sought the collaboration of media to sensitise the public of the risks associated with the consumption of these sweets.

Furthermore, I have set up an *ad hoc* Committee comprising representatives from the Ministry of Health, Mauritius Revenue Authority (Customs Department), Ministry of Industry, Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Cooperatives (Commerce Division), and officers of my Ministry to address this matter.

The Committee has recommended the following –

- (a) The incriminated brands of sweet be banned from import.
- (b) All import of sweets only be authorised, subject to clearance from the Ministry of Health. Samples will be analysed by the Government Analyst Division of the Ministry of Health and only on satisfying the Food Regulations, a pre-market approval permit will be issued from the customs clearance department for consignments.

Mr Speaker, Sir, section 23 and the third schedule of the Food (Amendment) Act 2004 already stipulates that for the importation of confectionery, a pre-market approval permit from the Ministry of Health is required. I will liaise with my colleague, the Minister of Health to ensure that this section of the Act be fully implemented.

In that breath, Mr Speaker, Sir, I firmly believe that these measures will minimise health hazards and risks associated with consumption of sweets in particular for the best interests of the child and the public at large.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the committee that has been set up will look into the components of the products which are actually on the market, or is it on the products which will be imported in the future?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is already in operation. Right now, all samples are being sent to the Analyst Division. After positive results are obtained, they are released on the market.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Minister eventually consider liaising with other Ministries in view of issuing guidelines, which would indicate to schools, especially school canteens, the type of goods that

can be sold within the school canteens so that children are protected?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and my Ministry are working together, so as to give the best guidelines, especially to canteens and other shops around schools.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, did I hear the Minister say that all the school canteens and shops have been visited?

Mrs Seebun: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, inspections have started since a long time, and they are on. We have collected 68,285 love rings – that's the brand name - 1,830 'Gula Gula' and 3,600 'Ever Successful'. Inspections as well as the collection are on.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard the hon. Minister mentioning sensitisation, which I think is very important. May I ask the hon. Minister whether she is considering having sensitisation programmes on TV, to reach a maximum number of parents as well as kids?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we did it during the weekend for a few minutes. We shall do it for a longer period. We have decided to have, at least, a half an hour programme based on foodstuffs to be consumed by children.

Mrs Navarre-Marie: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the same breath, would the hon. Minister see to it that the advertisements of such products be reviewed on MBC TV or whatever media?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned earlier, all samples of all incoming sweets will be analysed. It is understood that brands which are not recommended will not be advertised on TV or any other media.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think I heard the hon. Minister say that these sweets were imported in contravention of existing legislation, which says that prior approval from the Ministry of Health must be obtained before they are imported. Then, I will put a double-barrelled question.

Have those importers that have contravened the law been taken to task, and second, have the Minister and her colleague, the Minister of Health, looked at it? How is it that, apparently, sweets were imported in contravention of the law?

Mrs Seebun: Mr Speaker, Sir, we shall ensure that this piece of

legislation is rigorously applied. As I said earlier, we have already sent the case to the Attorney-General's Office, for action to be taken against those importers of sweets which have proved to be a risk hazard to children.

CANDY SWEETS – HEALTH HAZARDS – MEASURES (15/07/08)

(No. B/882) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the sweets which have recently been found to represent health hazards to the children, she will state the measures she proposes to take to have same banned.

(Vide reply to P.Q. No. B/867)

PUBLIC OFFICERS – PRESS – STATEMENTS (29/07/08)

(No. B/955) 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 he will state if public officers are allowed to make public statements to the press and if not, why not.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no prohibition as such for public officers to make statements to the press, provided that the making of such statements does not constitute a breach of the Official Secrets Act and that the rules laid down in the Personnel Management Manual are complied with. These rules require a public officer to seek prior authorisation of his Supervising Officer before making any statement to the press.

Insofar as supervising officers themselves are concerned, they may make public statements to the press in order to explain Government policies, in line with the principles governing disclosure of information by public officers as laid down in the Personnel Management Manual and the Code of Ethics of public officers.

However, public officers are not allowed to write letters to the press, publish articles or circulate leaflets and pamphlets on political matters.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House as to how many public officers have been sanctioned for making

public statements to the press since July 2005?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, none in that case because none have gone beyond what they are allowed to do according to the Personal Management Manual and also to the Official Secrets Act.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has been made aware and whether he has read carefully two public statements through press interviews on 12 July by the new Secretary for Home Affairs and on 13 July by the new Commissioner of Police? I won't say anything further, but I would like to know whether the Prime Minister has been made aware and whether he has read carefully and discussed it with the two top officials concerned.

The Prime Minister: In fact, I must say I haven't read the interviews myself, Mr Speaker, Sir, but I have not been aware. I have seen that there were interviews in the press, but I haven't actually read them myself.

Mr Jhugroo: Can the hon. Prime Minister confirm whether the ex-CMO, Dr. Sungkur, had been sanctioned for making public statements to the press?

The Prime Minister: In that case, he went beyond his call of duty and he made statements that were not, in fact, correct.

BEL OMBRE - ERADICATION OF ABSOLUTE POVERTY PROGRAMME (05/08/08)

(No. B/1088) Mr A. Ganoo (First Member for Savanne and Black River) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development whether he will state if consideration will be given for the inclusion of the village of Bel Ombre in the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development (Dr. R. Sithanen): Mr Speaker, Sir, in my Budget Speech 2008/09, I announced that the focus of the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Programme would initially be on the 229 pockets of absolute poverty already identified by the Trust Fund. The objective of the programme is to tackle the problems of absolute poverty in an integrated manner with the collaboration of the NGOs and the private sector.

The village of Bel Ombre is not among the pockets of poverty already

identified by the Trust Fund, but I am informed that any other cluster of severe poverty that is identified will be considered for inclusion in the EAP Programme.

Mr Speaker, Sir, we do realise that there are households outside the pockets of poverty which are facing poverty. The Trust Fund, in collaboration with NGOs continues to cater for the immediate needs of these households in accordance to its existing schemes which *inter alia* includes community projects, loans to needy students for tertiary education, micro credits and income generating activities.

In the case of Bel Ombre, in addition to the above, the National Empowerment Foundation in collaboration with the Trust Fund is also looking into the possibility of providing training to the unemployed of the region with a view to enhancing their employability under the scheme of 'placement and training'. Furthermore, the NEF proposes to include the inhabitants of Bel Ombre in its NGOs training programme in Life Skill in order to facilitate "*accompagnement*" to the needy.

Mr Ganoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have no quarrel with the reply of the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and I refer to the last reply he gave to the PQ on the same matter and pockets of poverty. But, can I ask him whether it is possible to review the findings of the Trust Fund?

Dr. Sithanen: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, as they do the work in the field and if there is need to broaden the scope to include more villages, we will do it. As the hon. Member would know, there are areas where it's a question of percentage of poor. It is true that in the areas that have not been initially identified, there are people who are poor. That's why I have suggested these three pathways in order to address that problem.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I draw the attention of the hon. Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Finance to the case of two extremely poor ladies, without revenue, who have spent a whole week at the rear of the *Marie Reine de la Paix* monument? They are being taken care of by...

Mr Speaker: Hon. Lauthan, I fully agree. You are very compassionate about these two persons. But this is a question related to Bel Ombre. I fully agree with you, but if you have a specific problem, you can see the Minister in person and talk to him.

INTERCULTURAL HARMONY (19/08/08)

(No. B/1142) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg & Plaine Magnien) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will state if Government proposes to set up a Race Relations Commission, having as object, the promotion of inter-communal harmony.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, Mauritius already has an outstanding record of inter-communal harmony compared to countries in other parts of the world. Our cultural pluralism has always been a source of great pride, and my Government is fully committed to reinforce our multiculturalism, celebrate our cultural and linguistic diversity as well as our multiple identities. We have also made it very clear that we do not believe in compartmentalisation and fragmenting our social fabric, and we will implement policies aimed at promoting national unity.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House will agree that inter-communal harmony depends largely and also on social justice and education. This is the reason why, in the Government Programme 2005-2010, we have pledged to gear our country towards a future that is prosperous for all – a future where economic success will be characterised by equity and social justice.

In order to fulfil this pledge, we have, over the last three years, implemented profound measures, which aim precisely at building a new economic model through the democratisation of the economy and reconciling economic efficiency and social justice. In fact, no other Government before has done more than the present Government insofar as fighting poverty and social exclusion is concerned.

Mr Speaker, Sir, when we speak of inter-communal harmony, we already have NGO's like the Organisation for National Unity and the Council of Religion, which are working for the promotion of peace and harmony in the country. We also have a number of Government organisations which are endeavouring for the enhancement of social peace and community cohesion. These organisations include -

- (i) the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Social Security and the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, which organise various activities, including Inter-Faith Meet, all round the islands to foster a community spirit;
- (ii) the Ministry of Education, which has introduced the teaching of a series of "life skills" to primary and secondary students, so as to make of them responsible citizens;

(iii) the Ministry of Arts and Culture, which organises numerous activities to promote patriotism and national unity, and
(iv) the National Economic and Social Council, which also contributes towards the strengthening of social peace and harmony.

I should add that there is another groundbreaking measure in the pipeline, the Equal Opportunities Bill, which will provide for equal opportunities in employment and access to resources.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government took the historic step to promote social justice and national unity through the introduction, last week, of the landmark Bill for the setting up of the Truth and Justice Commission.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said earlier, inter-communal harmony has always been a way of life for all generations of Mauritians. And that harmony has blossomed into the grand concept of Unity in Diversity, of which we are so proud and which is part of our day-to-day culture. It is, therefore, felt that there is no need to consider the setting up of such a Race Relations Commission, in case it diminishes what we are doing.