

SECONDARY

DRUG PROBLEMS/ABSENTISM

8/05/01

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SCHOOLS - DRUG PROBLEM

(No. B/310) **Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Education & Scientific Research whether he will state what measures his Ministry is proposing to take to remedy the drug problem in our schools.

Mr Obeegadoo: Sir, I am very much concerned about the problem of drug abuse in our schools. Several press articles in the recent past have highlighted this problem, and I have recently had discussions with my colleague, hon. Lauthan, on the need to sensitise the general public and more specifically the student community and we have, for some time now, been closely coordinating the work of both our Ministries in this respect.

The Ministry of Social Security is in fact, I am informed, organising a sensitisation campaign in schools already on drug abuse. We are increasing efforts by getting on board the support of PTAs, students and teachers to combat this scourge. A brainstorming workshop with all stakeholders to finalise a detailed strategy pertaining to this problem will be organised in the coming weeks.

By next year, pedagogical modules relating to harmful and illegal drugs will be introduced within the primary curriculum either within the new subject of Citizenship Education or within Health and Physical Education. The initiative will then be extended to the secondary and preparatory work is ongoing in that respect.

As regards private secondary schools, I am further informed that the PSSA is presently carrying out a survey on the drug problem in private secondary schools. In the meantime, NATReSA's leaflets and stickers and posters are regularly distributed to those schools and they have been invited to participate in the NATReSA's sketch competition on substance abuse and prevention in schools.

Of course, any further suggestion from the hon. Member would be most welcome.

Mrs Labelle: Will the hon. Minister inform the House of the measures that are being taken to get parents involved?

Mr Obeegadoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think there can be no real solution to this problem unless and until parents are fully involved at the level of both

primary and secondary schools. That is why one of the first targets of the campaign is the parent teacher associations. We are trying to fully take on board the parent teacher associations in devising ways and means specific to the realities of each different school to tackle the problem. As I mentioned, we are planning to have a brainstorming session in the very near future which will bring on board the students, their parents, the teachers, managers of schools and responsible officers from the Ministries of Education and Social Security to look at the specific features of the problem in the different localities and see how to address them.

Mrs Labelle: One or two schools are coming forward with the idea of "*école des parents*". Will the Minister consider the possibility of having such training sessions for parents so that they can deal with the problem?

Mr Obeegadoo: This is an excellent suggestion. In fact, I understand that the Ministry of Social Security has already taken steps in that direction.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the Minister say that NATReSA is putting at the disposal of schools posters and pamphlets to be distributed. May I ask him whether he has looked well into this procedure because this could be most dangerous if not backed up with proper education and awareness campaigns? This may arouse curiosity in children who are not fully informed. I, therefore, believe that we better get better advice on that before proceeding with this method of just putting literature and other gadgets at the disposal of the students.

Mr Obeegadoo: I could not agree more, Mr Speaker. This has been the practice in the past - NATReSA regularly sending off materials to different schools. But what was possibly lacking was an integrated programme, which we are now urgently looking into.

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60

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - ABSENTEEISM

(No. B/547) Mrs F. Labelle (Second Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Riviere) asked the Minister of Education and Scientific Research whether he is contemplating any action to address the problem of absenteeism in our State secondary schools, particularly during the third term.

Mr Obegadoo: Sir, it is not clear whether the hon. Lady is referring to absenteeism of teachers, of pupils or both. Should the question refer to teachers, I am informed that there is no significant absenteeism or unauthorised leave during the third term. In fact my Ministry's policy is not to allow vacation leave as far as possible during the third term.

Should the hon. Member be referring to absenteeism amongst students, it is well known that many students of Form V and Upper VI choose not to attend classes during the third term. This practice apparently exists since long and the pretext frequently invoked is that the syllabus has already been covered and that a combination of home revision coupled with private tuition is more effective than attending school. Such a situation is unacceptable and makes a mockery of timetabling arrangements and school discipline but has since many years been tolerated so much so that it has become accepted by students, parents and, at times, teachers as perfectly normal.

I am informed that past attempts, if any, to tackle the problem have proved ineffective in as much as parents when queried request the school authorities to authorise such absences. That is why the provision within the State of Mauritius Scholarships Scheme that candidates may not have unauthorised absences for more than ten days in either of the two academic years preceding the HSC examinations has proved ineffective.

In line with the educational reforms under way, a new Directorate with specific responsibilities for School Management has just been set up at my Ministry and will in priority address the matter. It is presently considering various options. For instance, it has been suggested that shifting the internal exams for

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(P.Q. No. 1547 etd....)

Form IV and Upper VI from end of second term to beginning of third term may prove helpful. A further option under study would be to disqualify SC and HSC students exceeding a certain number of absences from taking the relevant examinations as school students, that is, registered under the name of a specific school. No decision has been finalised and we would welcome any constructive proposals.

YEAR 2006

GLUE SNIFFING – SURVEY (11/07/06)

(No. B/937) 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 prevention of drug addiction, he will state the measures he proposes to take to protect children who resort to glue sniffing.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/937, B/943 and B/946 together as they relate to the same issue.

The practice of glue sniffing by children and youngsters is a worldwide phenomenon. It is not just a problem that exists in Mauritius although it does exist in Mauritius and to a lesser extent. There has been no specific survey as such on glue sniffing in Mauritius. However, two surveys were published by the NATReSA, one in May 2004 and the other one in June-July 2004, entitled “*The Rapid Situation Assessment and Responses on Substance Abuse in Mauritius and Rodrigues*” and the other one “*Factors influencing Substance Abuse among Youth aged between 8 and 18 years in Housing Estates of Mauritius*”. They make reference to the practice of glue sniffing both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

According to the first survey, 6.2% of the secondary school students in Mauritius had used inhalants during the month preceding the survey. In Rodrigues, although 1.7% had used inhalants previously, none of them had used this substance during the month preceding the survey. The age of initiation to inhalants among secondary school students was 11 years for Mauritius and 9 years for Rodrigues.

The second survey which was carried out in 10 housing estates in rural areas and 10 in urban areas, 40 youth in each of the housing estates were interviewed. The results showed that 13% of the youth had used inhalant. Most of them, that is, 10% had used glue, followed by 6% who used thinner.

So far, only a handful of cases have reported for treatment in rehabilitation centres under the NATReSA. These cases have been successfully dealt with by appropriate counseling and family therapy. There was no need for medical intervention and no cases of sudden death that can

occur related to the abuse of inhalants have been recorded so far.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Government is conscious about the seriousness of substance abuse, including inhalant abuse among youth in this country and is sparing no efforts to deal with this situation. This requires a concerted approach involving the Government, social organisations and the civil society. Emphasis is being laid on the preventive aspects.

This multi-sectoral approach targets potential substances of abuse including solvent and among others, tobacco, alcohol and other illicit drugs. Information, Education and Communication Campaign is the motto of the preventive strategies targeting –

- (i) children in primary and secondary schools, pre-vocational schools, IVTB centres and other training institutions in collaboration with Ministry of Education and Human Resources;
- (ii) the community, including out-of-school youth, after office hours through special programmes by NATReSA and NGOs known as the Community Prevention Programme that has recently being launched;
- (iii) the workplaces, including high risk ones, where the personnel involved are at risk of developing addiction to certain specific substances, for example, inhalants in the woodwork workshops and alcohol in the hospitality industry;
- (iv) the family in collaboration with the Ministry of Women Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection where parents are sensitised to the ill-effects of substance use and abuse, including inhalants and ways of early detection of children using these substances, and
- (v) the youth by providing alternatives to substance use and abuse in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. I think they are working on that.

Mr Speaker Sir, I wish to reassure the House that all necessary measures are being taken to protect our children and youth from the illeffects of substance abuse, including glue sniffing.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister state whether there is any possibility of taking any specific remedial measures with respect to the sale of glue to children?

The Prime Minister: Sir, as far as I know, the sale of glue to children is not available. You must have some reasons to buy glue, but I can

look into the matter if need be and strengthen the law.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, in many industrialised countries, Governments have taken the necessary steps in collaboration with the manufacturers of those solvents containing glue to modify and replace them by chemicals which are less attractive and not addictive. Is Government contemplating taking such measures?

The Prime Minister: If that is the case, Mr Speaker, Sir, we'll certainly look at that possibility.

Mr Lesjongard: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Prime Minister for his reply. He mentioned that an inquiry is being carried out in 10 rural and 10 urban regions. Can we have the list of those regions if he has the information?

The Prime Minister: I said that the second survey had already been carried out in 10 housing estates in rural areas and 10 in urban areas where it was found that out of 40 youths - in each of the housing estates - who were interviewed, 13% of them had used inhalant and most of them, that is, 10% had used glue and roughly 6% had used thinner.

Mr Lauthan: Sir, this is a very complex and delicate issue. The question of trying to have another sort of glue has been studied, but it seems that it is a little bit more expensive and they are not interested. The figures given by the hon. Prime Minister have shown that those who are out of school, the street children are more at risk. The researches - I have gone through internet - have shown that there is one thing in common to all these children on any continent, this is what doctors call Children Boredom Syndrome (CBS). The street workers project was an ideal instrument....

(Interruptions)

So, in the light of these researches, can I appeal to the Prime Minister to reconsider the possibility of re-employing those street educators with the ideal instrument to go and reach all these children?

The Prime Minister: I want a clarification from the hon. Member. If he is talking of the street educators, I will look into the matter.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is known that there is a higher prevalence of glue sniffing among street kids following Government's decision to put an end to the contract of the street educators as these children

are being unattended. May I know from the hon. Prime Minister what mechanism has been set up since April or will be set up to take care of these children regarding this particular issue?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I mentioned a series of measures; I can go through them specifically for the children who, according to the hon. Member, are not touched by these measures. There is, for the community itself, including out-of-school youth, that is, those who are not touched - the previous children I mentioned in the different groups - after office hours, through special programmes by NATReSA, NGOs known as the Community Prevention Programme, this is a programme that has recently been launched....

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member is asking about children who are not in the street. This is also being done at family level with the collaboration of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection and we are also looking at the Ministry of Youth and Sports to see whether they can find other alternatives.

Mr Lesjongard: Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister how the monitoring of those children is being carried out these days? Because I have a case and that's why I have put my question. Last week a child of 11 years old vomited blood and was not directed to any place where he could get help.

The Prime Minister: As I said there are six categories of measures that we try to do as prevention. I must make an appeal also that if somebody is not well, he should be directed towards the hospital, whatever happens.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to see to it that if any campaign is being carried out with school children to ensure that this is done by well trained people because very often, at the primary level, these students may not be aware of these things. When such campaigns are carried out, they may get the idea of trying. So, it is very important to ensure that people going for the campaign are well trained to be able to explain children and know how to tackle the problem.

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Member that this must be ensured.

Mr Bérenger: If I heard the hon. Prime Minister correctly, he said

that surveys have shown that 6% of the youngsters in secondary schools and 13% of the youngsters on the housing estates surveyed have resorted to glue sniffing or some other kind of drug abuse. If that is correct, will the Prime Minister agree with me that these are very disturbing figures that will necessitate a fresh and urgent look at the whole situation?

The Prime Minister: I think the hon. Member is right to say that - that is what I said - 6.2% of the secondary school students in Mauritius and 1.7% in Rodrigues. As for the surveys in the urban areas and the rural areas there are 40 youths per housing estate. Whether that sample is big enough or not, that is something else that we must look at, but the result shows 13% of the youths and 10%, in fact, had used glue and only about 6% have used thinner. That is why we are taking this seriously.

Mrs Labelle: The hon. Prime Minister mentioned that there was no medical intervention. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister to confirm that no child has been sent to the psychiatric hospital for a particular treatment during, let's say, the past two or three years ?

The Prime Minister: I have no record of such cases, Mr Speaker, Sir.

CHILDREN – WOODWORK APPRENTICES – GLUE SNIFFING (11/07/06)

(No. B/943) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he is aware that young children working as apprentices in woodwork have access to glue and, if so, will he state the measures he proposes to take to prevent these children from using glue for sniffing.

(Vide reply to PQ No. B/937)

SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS – STUDENTS – SUICIDE CASES – JANUARY 2006 – NOVEMBER 2006 (07/11/06)

(No. B/1315) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (First Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he will state the number of students of the primary and secondary institutions who have committed suicide since January 2006 to

date, indicating their respective age and class.

Reply: I am informed that seven students who were attending secondary schools have committed suicide during the period 01 January 2006 to 31 October 2006. These students were in the age group of 12 to 17. One was in Form I, two in Form IV, three in Form V and one in Lower VI.

However, no suicide was committed within school premises. No such cases have been reported during the above period in respect of pupils attending primary schools.

YEAR 2007

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – BURGLARIES (24/04/07)

(No. B/236) 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 burglaries in State Secondary Schools since July 2006 to date, he will –

- (a) state the name and locations of the schools;
- (b) table a list of the items stolen, indicating their estimated value, and
- (c) where matters stand in relation to the inquiries.

Reply: The information is being placed in the Library.

SC AND HSC STUDENTS – ABSENTEEISM (08/05/07)

(No. B/308) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that there is a high rate of absenteeism amongst students of School and Higher School Certificates, prior to the examinations and if so, will he state the measures that have been or will be taken to prevent same.

(Withdrawn)

SECONDARY SCHOOLS – TRUANCY CASES (08/05/07)

(No. B/309) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware of cases of truancy at secondary schools level and if so, will he state the measures that are being or will be taken to prevent same.

(Withdrawn)

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS – BURGLARIES (15/05/07)

(No. B/358) 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 burglaries in State Secondary Schools since July 2006 to date, he will -

- (a) state the name and locations of the schools;
- (b) table a list of the items stolen, indicating their estimated value, and
- (c) where matters stand in relation to the inquiries.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I need to inform the House that in the context of reforms in the education sector, special emphasis is being placed on ICT in schools. This has necessitated the scaling up of equipment in schools but has, unfortunately, also led to an increase in burglaries.

I wish to inform the hon. Member that I have already placed, in the Library, the information in reply to PQ No. B/236 on Tuesday 24 April 2007, with respect to the period from 01 July 2006 to 20 April 2007. The information relating to period 21 April to 11 May 2007 is now being tabled.

As regards part (c) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that out of 49 cases of thefts reported during period July 2006 to 11 May 2007, one is awaiting Court's decision, 7 cases have been filed due to the accused being unknown and the remaining 41 are still under Police scrutiny.

In view of the fact that an analysis of recent cases of larceny has revealed that the pattern and mode of commission of these larcenies are more or less similar, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Commissioner of Police, is examining a number of remedial measures for reinforcing security at the level of the schools and to prevent further thefts. Frequent Police patrol is one of them.

Other measures relate to security being stepped up at the level of the schools, the State Law Office being consulted with a view to rendering the terms of contract more rigorous and placing greater responsibility on contractors, with a view to making good the lost equipment. The specifications for tender documents for awarding future security contract are also being revisited.

Meanwhile, except for the 3 recent cases of thefts, all the lost PCs have been replaced by my Ministry in order not to penalize the students.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I refer to the information that the hon. Minister laid down in the Library. Since there has been a lack of prompt response, because from the information we see, for example, that for the SSS, Palma, there have been three cases of thefts within six days. In Quartier Militaire, there were four burglaries in two months. In Belle Rose, there has been one case of burglary each month, that is, from July, August, September, October and November. The pattern repeats itself, so, obviously, there has not been any prompt response.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, we are aware of this problem, which is a recent one. The situation is being closely monitored. We have liaised with the Police authorities, the patrol is one of the measures which we have taken. The other measure we have taken is that we have established a handing over procedure between the school staff and the security staff. At the level of my Ministry, there is a unit which is regularly monitoring the situation. I cannot say all the other measures that we are taking, but there are a few ones which we are taking to ensure that this problem is minimised.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House whether there has been any internal investigation at the level of his Ministry as regards these burglaries?

Mr Gokhool: Certainly, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. If there is a case of burglary which happens in a school, the first report comes to the Ministry. At the level of the Ministry, there is an inquiry which is carried out to establish the nature of the burglary and the extent of equipment which is involved. The matter is immediately reported to the Police.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, for example, in the case of SS La Gaulette, 21 hard disks to the tune of Rs420,000 have been stolen. Does the hon. Minister have information about the time lag from the moment that those PCs have been stolen and the time they have been replaced? Because these children have been penalised.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said in my reply, we are concerned with the fact that the students should not be deprived with the PCs and, therefore, they have been replaced. In fact, in the contractual obligations of the company, it is laid out that they must make good for

whatever is lost. Otherwise, the money is retained. We expedite matters, so that the duration where the students do not have the PCs is the shortest. In any case, we need some time to get back the PCs into the schools.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister confirming that security services were available at these different schools? Were these companies requested to submit an interest cover – I think it is a public liabilities cover – before being allocated the contract?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, this is a requirement of any contractor. But, beyond that, we have a clause in the contract, where it says ‘any item lost during the time school institutions are guarded by the company, whether involving breakage or not, will be chargeable on the contractor’. So, we have got enough measures, but, in spite of that, the problem is there, and we are taking additional measures.

Mr Babajee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the schools are equipped with security officers. I would like to ask the hon. Minister what are the responsibilities of these security officers in these cases of burglaries?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, they have to be on duty and watch after the security of the schools. But, as I said, this is a recent phenomenon, and we are taking a number of steps, in order to ensure that even the contractual obligations are stricter.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can we know from the hon. Minister which company has been awarded the contract for security?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the company which has been awarded the contract is Keep Pace Security Guards Ltd.

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the Keep Pace Security Guards Ltd is in charge of the security for all the schools where the thefts have occurred? If this is the case, what action has been taken against the security company, and what measures are being taken for this company to reimburse all these items?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, a report is made of all the thefts, and this is put on file so that the next time this company applies for a contract, this is taken into consideration. We are seeking advice from the SLO, to ensure that proper action is taken when new contracts are floated.

As regards making good the computers, as I said, there are clauses and the money is retained to buy the computers and put them back in the schools.

SC AND HSC – STUDENTS – ABSENTEEISM (22/05/07)

(No. B/428) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware that there is a high rate of absenteeism amongst students of School and Higher School Certificates, prior to the examinations and if so, will he state the measures that have been or will be taken to prevent same.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the school year is normally divided in three terms of specific duration and, strictly speaking, teaching and learning has to take place in accordance with the approved school calendar, which is made known to one and all before the beginning of the school year.

I understand that the school calendar is generally adhered to except for Form V and Upper VI classes, that is, students who would normally take part in SC and HSC examinations at the end of the year. I am also aware that there is a high rate of absenteeism among the students taking part in SC and HSC examinations, but this is not something new. Because of the high emphasis placed on these examinations, students attached great importance for revision prior to examination. The situation is further compounded with the prevalence of the parallel system of private tuition, which inevitably draws the students away from the classroom and also the fact that some parents support and encourage children to absent themselves from school. It is to be noted that the SC and HSC examinations are, in fact, based on a two-year programme, starting in Form IV for SC and Lower VI for HSC, and, therefore, much of the syllabus is already covered by the end of the second term for Form V and Upper VI and the mock examinations are held at the end of term II.

This question of absenteeism has become a very thorny issue and it becomes difficult to strike a balance of convenience between the necessity of attending schools as per the school calendar and the need for revision prior to the examinations which seems to have entrenched itself in our culture and way of life.

My Ministry is, however, very conscious of the situation and believes in taking remedial actions. It has given clear instructions to Heads of school to ensure that –

(a) the school programme and the syllabus are not completed too early;

- (b) all teachers concerned be requested to devise their scheme of work in such a way that it makes allowance for an attractive and well planned school-based revision programme running up until the beginning of the exams, and
- (c) the mock exams are scheduled later at the beginning of the third term.

In addition, there are stringent rules regarding absenteeism, particularly, for students competing for the State of Mauritius Scholarships, but it seems that these rules require updating. It is also hoped that on the ongoing curriculum reforms will help, to a large extent to combat this particular problem of absenteeism.

I am, however, conscious that, in spite of these measures, the situation remains largely unsatisfactory because students know how to obviate the difficulties and how to bend the rules and regulations to suit their convenience. And as I said earlier, in many cases, students have the blessing of their parents for that.

In an attempt to address the issue, my Ministry is proposing to give consideration to the following –

- (i) reviewing the timetable for the third term in Forms V and VI focusing on revision and remedial teaching with adequate flexibility to address the specific needs of students;
- (ii) rescheduling at the beginning of the third term, the mock examinations, and
- (iii) prescribing the minimum number of days on which a student should be present at school in order to be able to take the examinations in the name of the school while concurrently ensuring that the number of days on which the student is absent is reflected in the School Leaving Certificate, something which is not done at present.

The situation is being monitored at the level of my Ministry, and further actions, as appropriate will be taken by a team of officials under the leadership of the CTO and the Director (School Management).

Dr. Ramloll: I thank the hon. Minister for the answer. I heard the hon. Minister talking about the State Scholarships. Are there any provisions or regulations in force on the number of days of absences to accede to State Scholarships?

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Member asking questions about the

regulations that have been published officially? If it is an official publication, the hon. Member cannot ask questions.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to clarify a point. If it is not so, may I ask the hon. Minister whether it is not high time to introduce a certain number of presences to accede to State Scholarships?

Mr Gokhool: As per regulations, they should not be absent for more than 10 days per academic year.

Dr. Ramloll: Sir, absenteeism is a problem, it has two effects. Firstly, on the quality of education and, secondly, it is at the detriment of those students who, prior to exams, would like to have revision classes, and, it is a practice that teachers say that there are not enough students, so there are no classes. Is it not unfair towards those students?

Mr Gokhool: As I said, we are looking into the issue of ensuring that during the third term, there is remedial and revision activities which are programmed, because most of the syllabus is already covered in the two terms of the second year.

Mr Varma: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has stated that there is a minimum required attendance to sit for SC and HSC examinations. Could he inform the House whether this criteria is adhered to?

Mr Gokhool: Sir, in principle, this is adhered to, but as I said, parents also approve the absences of the students, making the absences authorised absences.

Mr Varma: Is the criteria set up by Cambridge or it is a local criteria set up by the MES?

Mr Gokhool: I would not be able to say exactly, but it should be in relation to examinations and agreement between the Ministry and Cambridge.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS – TRUANCY CASES (22/05/07)

(No. B/429) Dr. P. Ramloll (Third Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Hum/an Resources whether he is aware of cases of truancy at secondary schools level and if so, will he

state the measures that are being or will be taken to prevent same.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there are from time to time reported cases of students playing truant, but the situation is generally not that alarming, although I will admit that one case is one too much.

A student is considered to be playing truant when he or she leaves home for school in the morning, but deliberately stays away from school.

Again, there are clear rules and regulations at the school whereby a student who absents himself from school is required to submit a letter of absence duly signed by the responsible party on the next day. But students of this day and age are so ingenious that they can easily overcome this complication if ever they have absented themselves from school without the consent of their parents. However, Heads of school do exercise diligence and suspected cases of forgery are dealt with by calling the parents.

When a case of truancy has been established, same is treated as a serious case of indiscipline which will trigger an enquiry to establish the causes thereof. In addition to the punishment to be inflicted upon a student having been caught playing truant and which includes rustication, he or she is also provided, after consultation with the parents, with counselling session either by the Educational Psychologist or the Pastoral Care Committee of the school. The student is then placed under close scrutiny and is the subject of a daily special report from the Form Master.

In addition to the above measures, PTAs and the Community are also sensitised by my Ministry on the need to collaborate in combating truancy.

In this connection, morning assemblies are also used. Requests have also been made to the Police Authorities for frequent and regular patrols with a view to discouraging truancy among students. My Ministry is also currently working on a manual of procedures regarding discipline and school management generally.

As in the case on the issue of absenteeism, there is a small team of officials working on the strategies on how best to combat the problem of truancy. If the hon. Member has views and suggestions, they would be most welcomed.

Dr. Ramloll: I thank the hon. Minister for the answer. In fact, it is a very alarming situation, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Ramloll: The tendency to play truant is to go to shopping malls, seaside and *pensionnats*. Mr Speaker, Sir, is it not high time to set up the 'once upon a time squad' to check on this?

Mr Gokhool: Well, there are controls which are exercised, for example, if the student is absent, then, he has to come with a letter of authorisation from the parents. And, as regards the squad, we have contacted the Police Authorities and they are doing patrols where these are required.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, should there not be harsher regulations to prevent minors from going to those places, bungalows, etc.?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not entirely the responsibility of school management of the Ministry. The PTA, the parents also should assume their responsibilities. It is basically a collective responsibility and my Ministry is doing all it can to ensure effective implementation of the provisions.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, should not the sale of alcohol be restricted until the age of 18 - in USA, it is 21 - because it is related to truancy? These boys and girls consume alcohol when playing truants.

(Interruptions)

Mr Gokhool: The control of sale of alcohol, drinks and all that do not fall entirely under the responsibility of my Ministry. This is a matter which may be looked at by other Ministries.

Mr Speaker: Next question!

(Interruptions)

Hon. Bhagwan, please! But, I cannot tolerate this; you are disturbing the proceedings of the House.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS – ASSAULT CASES (10/07/07)

(No. B/710) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) 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 reported cases of assault involving students at primary and secondary levels since July 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, 291 cases of assault involving 72 students at primary level, 205 students at secondary level and 14 students from technical and other institutions have been reported. Out of these, 26 cases have been prosecuted, 127 cases are still under enquiry, 66 cases have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice and 72 cases have been classified.

In the 26 cases which have been prosecuted, the accused have been fined.

In respect of the 72 cases which have been classified, both victims and the accused have agreed to settle the matter among themselves and have moved for no further action.

According to information from the Police, most of the reported cases relate to simple assaults between students which have occurred following disputes arising in school premises and outside the compound.

Mr Speaker, Sir, cases of assault in schools reflect an aggressive behaviour among school children. The different authorities concerned have devised preventive strategies to address this problem.

Within the educational set up, normally the Head Teacher or the Rector tries to sort out such problems by talking to the pupils concerned and parents are informed. A complete report is also sent to the directorate of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources. In extreme cases students who are felt to have a behavioural problem, are followed by social workers and/or psychologists of the same Ministry.

The Crime Prevention Unit, Family and Child Protection Unit and the *Brigade des Mineurs* and the Police in general are conducting regular programs to sensitise students on juvenile delinquency, violence and other anti-social behaviour and its consequences. The *Police du Transport*,

Brigade des Mineurs, Anti Drug and Smuggling Unit and the Emergency Response Service, among other specific Police Units, provide regular presence at all places which are often used or visited by school children.

Moreover, training has been provided to Police Officers to deal with child victims and child abuse.

Mrs Grenade: M. le président, vu que le nombre est alarmant concernant les *assaults* dans les écoles, est-ce que le gouvernement envisage d'avoir plus de psychologues attachés aux écoles ?

The Ag. Prime Minister: There are psychologists. I would take up the comments made. The number may be alarming, but a lot of them are minors, but degenerating sometimes. The Ministry of Education is looking after the psychological part of it.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, apart from the talks given by the specialists in various departments, has any survey been carried out to, at least, go to the root causes of the violence? It would be good if we could know what are the motives behind these students to resort to violence?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Member that such behaviours should be analysed carefully. I have talked to the Minister of Education previously and he is looking into it. As we can realise, this is a worldwide problem as well and it is going to be worse if we don't attend to it. I agree with the hon. Member.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Ag. Prime Minister has himself underlined the aggressive behaviour and we have only one dozen of psychologists for the whole island. We are aware that it is not enough to tackle this problem of aggressive behaviour. May I know from the Ag. Prime Minister whether there is a particular strategy that is being developed to tackle the problem of aggressive behaviour?

The Ag. Prime Minister: It is multi-faceted programmes from different quarters which are addressing it. I would also make an appeal that we, as a political class, should not exploit students to have aggressive behaviour.

Mr Speaker: May I inform the House that PQ Nos. B/730, B/731, B/732 and B/748 have been withdrawn. Questions addressed to hon. Ministers.

BAMBOUS STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL – DRUG USE CASES (17/07/07)

(No. B/798) Mrs D. Perrier (Fourth Member for Savanne & Black River) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether his Ministry has been apprised of cases of drug use and discipline related problems at the State Secondary School Bambous and, if so, will he state the remedial measures that will be taken.

The Minister of Local Government (Dr. J.B. David): Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to this question.

The Ministry of Education has been apprised of a suspected case of use of drugs at the State Secondary School, Bambous, on 18 June 2007. Six students were caught by two Education Officers, teaching Physical Education, in the act of smoking suspected drug in the school compound.

The Rector of the school reported the matter to the Police, on the same day, and the responsible parties of the students were also informed. The six students were arrested and brought to Court. They were subsequently released on parole and the case would be called on 20 September 2007. I understand that one of these students is currently on bail for another earlier incident pertaining to drug though not on the school compound.

Following a meeting the Rector had with the responsible parties of these students, they were allowed to return to school on 20 June 2007, except for one who resumed on 27 June 2007. The students and their parents are being provided with psychological assistance and counselling, but two parents did not turn up for these counseling sessions.

The social workers of the Ministry of Education will also be carrying out home visits during the school holidays to assess the social environment of these six students. The Rector is closely monitoring the situation and has sought assistance from NATReSA and ADSU to address and sensitise students on the ill effects of substance abuse, including smoking. The NATReSA and ADSU are being approached to carry out a massive sensitization campaign programme in all our secondary schools in this respect.

As regards the second part of the question relating to discipline, I am informed that there have been some acts of vandalism at the school. Items of furniture, sanitary equipment and window panes have been broken.

Meetings have been held with the parents of these students.

The CTO of the Ministry of Education has been requested to constitute a team to look into the matter and revisit the existing arrangements and also make necessary recommendations. In the meantime, each Head of School is monitoring the situation at his /her level.

Mrs Perrier: Mr Speaker, Sir, can the Minister inform the House whether he is aware that a gang is operating in the vicinity of the school causing a lot of problems to the younger children, racketing the younger ones and frightening all the people in the school.

Dr. David: I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, but if this is the case, it is very serious. I'll pass on the information to the Minister concerned.

STUDENTS – HIV AND AIDS CASES (24/07/07)

(No. B/880) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he is aware of cases of HIV and AIDS amongst students and, if so, will he state the measures that will be taken to monitor and prevent their propagation in the educational institutions.

(Withdrawn)

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS – DRUG ABUSE (24/07/07)

(No. B/827) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) 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 the number of educational institutions where cases of drug abuse have been reported since July 2005 to date, indicating the remedial measures taken.

Reply: I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, one case related to drug involving six students at an educational institution has been reported to Police.

The following remedial measures have been taken by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources to deal with the problem -

(i) providing psychological assistance and counselling to the students;

- (ii) setting up of Discipline Pastoral Care Committee to monitor closely the situation;
- (iii) organising home visits to assess the social environment of the students;
- (iv) training of teachers to increase alertness to drug abuse and identify such cases;
- (v) seeking co-operation of rectors, inspectors, parents and social workers;
- (vi) establishing an active line of communication between Heads of Schools and ADSU personnel on a regional basis; and
- (vii) seeking police assistance to patrol the vicinity of educational institutions on regular basis.

Young students need special coaching and guidance so as to prevent them to fall prey to social evils. In addition to the measures already mentioned, regular awareness campaigns are organised by the Police in educational institutions to emphasize the ill effects of alcohol and drugs. In the year 2006, sensitization campaigns were organised in 120 primary schools and 69 secondary schools involving a total number of 54,206 students. From January 2007 to date, of 45,424 students in 140 institutions have been sensitized.

Anti-drug sensitization campaigns and related activities such as brainstorming sessions and workshops for school administrators and teaching staff are also carried out by NATReSA.

I am also informed that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources proposes to carry out a survey on the extent of the problem in our schools. A Committee under the Chairmanship of the Director of Curriculum is working on the modalities thereof.

WORLD DRUG REPORT (2007) (24/07/07)

(No. B/817) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and 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 state if he has taken cognizance of the World Drug Report 2007, published by the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes and, if so, will he consider the advisability of setting up a select committee to address the issue.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the World Drug Report which is prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime presents

statistical view of the global illicit drug situation annually. In this year's edition of the Report, mention is made of Mauritius in two statistical tables on the annual prevalence of abuse of opiates and cannabis as percentage of the population aged between 15 and 64.

I should say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna has confirmed that the figures on the statistical sheets on the abuse of opiates and cannabis in respect of Mauritius are the same that appeared in the 2006 World Drug Report. In fact, we have been told that the figures for opiates and cannabis mentioned in the 2007 World Drug Report are those for the years 2003 and 2004 respectively. It is, therefore, clear that the figures contained in the 2007 World Drug Report in respect of Mauritius do not reflect the current drug situation necessarily in the country.

The fight against drug abuse and drug trafficking is a continuous process, Mr Speaker, Sir, that requires our determined efforts all along. My Government is fully committed to tackle the drug problem in the country and is sparing no efforts to that effect. We are reinforcing the capacity of the existing institutions and agencies involved in the fight against drug abuse and drug trafficking. Existing plans and operations are constantly reviewed and new strategies are put in place to take into account the changing circumstances.

I should like to point out that a major case of drug trafficking has been dismantled very recently. ADSU made a large seizure of Subutex at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport. A French national arriving from Paris was arrested with a total of 51,863 tablets of Subutex having a market value of Rs41 m. Since January this year, some 4 kg of heroin, 14 Kg of cannabis and 80,266 tablets of dangerous drugs, including Subutex, have been seized by the Police. The number of persons arrested in drug-related cases for the period 2005 to date is as follows –

Year No. of persons
2005 - 1973
2006 - 2038
2007 (to date) - 1340

This bears testimony to the positive results that the Police are getting,

Mr Speaker, Sir.

We are taking a multi-pronged approach to combat the drug problem, namely, on the supply and demand reduction, education, treatment and rehabilitation fronts. The following measures are being taken –

- The Dangerous Drugs Act is being amended to provide for tougher penalties in relation to trafficking and illegal possession of Subutex.
- Law enforcement agencies will continue to track down drug traffickers through the systematic surveillance system that we have and the optimal use of advanced technology.
- Training of Police personnel is being stepped up on new methods and techniques of investigation.
- Intensive collaboration is being maintained among agencies, such as the Customs Department, the Postal Services and other departments.
- The infrastructure at the Immigration and Customs Halls at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport will be improved to allow for a more effective profiling of drug traffickers.
- An Advance Passenger Information System will be implemented to allow Customs and other law enforcement agencies to receive details on all passengers prior to arrival in Mauritius and an automated means of processing this information against risks criteria in targeting drug smugglers.

17

- Sniffer dogs are being trained to enhance the capabilities in detecting drugs at the Port and the Airport.
- Four small X-Ray scanners capable of detecting drugs are being acquired and will soon be installed at the Airport arrivals, Post Office and Courier Services.
- The World Customs Organisation National Intelligence Database System is being implemented to facilitate collection and analysis of intelligence information on drugs.
- Regional cooperation and information sharing on drug trafficking is being enhanced to allow fast tracking and movement of traffickers.
- And on the preventive side, information, education, sensitization and awareness campaigns are being reinforced by NATReSA and its nine Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres as well as by the NGOs.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I believe that we are taking the necessary steps to fight the drug abuse and drug trafficking in the country. In order to effectively address the drug problem, we will continue to take additional measures as and when required. Therefore, I do not consider it appropriate to set up a Select Committee of the House.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Prime Minister for his answer. May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has confirmed that the figures that have been mentioned in the report, that is, 2% of the active population consume opiates is correct?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we have a letter from Dr. Thomas Pietschmann of the Research, Analysis & Statistics of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime who has confirmed that the figures of the statistical sheets on opiates and cannabis are the same that appeared in 2006 World Report and the figures are based on a survey undertaken in 2003 for opiates and those for cannabis are based on a survey undertaken in 2004.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has spoken of a multi-pronged approach and a result-oriented strategy. Does that form part of an Action Plan that he has put place since the last report or are they just different loose actions leading to the fight against drug trafficking?

The Prime Minister: It forms part of the whole Action Plan, Mr Speaker, Sir.

SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS - HIV AND AIDS CASES (31/07/07)

(No. B/941) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Health and Quality of Life whether he is aware of cases of HIV and AIDS amongst students and, if so, will he state the measures that will be taken to monitor and prevent their propagation in the educational institutions.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that from 1994 to date, tests carried out at the Virology Laboratory have identified 86 HIV positive cases (males and 48 females) between 15 to 19 years, the age group of secondary school students. However, an increase in the number of cases has been noted as from 2004 and 62 cases (30 males and 32 females) have been identified in this age group from 2004 to date.

I wish to point out that it is not possible to ascertain, according to data available at the Virology Laboratory and the AIDS Unit, how many students form part of this particular group. My Ministry does not verify the information submitted by the client in order to preserve confidentiality and to encourage people to come forward for testing. Furthermore, some people purposely do not give correct information regarding identification, such as age, profession and address. Following an interview given by the Director of PILS in the weekly

edition of 'L'Express Dimanche' of 15 July 2007 on the existence of cases of HIV/AIDS...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister cannot bring in his answer what the press has said. He can comment without mentioning the press.

Mr Faugoo: Following an article in the press, Mr Speaker, Sir, I had a meeting with PILS...

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Minister cannot bring in what the press has said.

(Interruptions)

Mr Faugoo: As regards the second part of the question, Government has adopted a multi-sectoral approach in the response to HIV and AIDS. My Ministry works in close collaboration with various Ministries, including the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions, Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection, NATReSA, NGOs such as Mauritius Family Planning Association, *Action Familiale* and other stakeholders with a view to sensitising the student population on Sexual Reproductive Health and HIV and AIDS.

A number of activities in the educational institutions has been carried out on a regular basis. These activities include, amongst other –

- (i) awareness sessions on HIV and AIDS and sexuality transmitted diseases for students of secondary schools;
- (ii) organisation of forum debates on HIV and AIDS in secondary schools;
- (iii) training workshops on HIV and AIDS organised for all secondary school teachers and administrative staff who, in turn, hold information sessions for the students;
- (iv) distribution of HIV and AIDS pamphlets to all students of secondary schools. So far, 115,000 copies have been distributed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, and
- (v) talks on family life education and HIV and AIDS in schools by the Family Planning Unit of my Ministry. Since 2005 to date, 9000 students have been sensitised.

Moreover, NATReSA in collaboration with United Office on Drugs and Crime and social workers have carried out a number of activities, including talks and presentations for the prevention of HIV and AIDS in schools. 150

sessions have been held in 30 colleges. It also, in collaboration with ‘*Ecole des Valeurs Humaines*’, undertook training workshops for 110 secondary school coordinators (i.e teachers) and students who are now acting as prevention vectors in their schools by delivering lectures on human values to prevent substance abuse and HIV and AIDS proliferation.

I am informed that NATReSA has sensitised some 5000 students, 1000 teachers and rectors as well as non-teaching staff during the financial year 2006-2007.

Furthermore, the Community Prevention Programme of NATReSA, which is being carried out during evenings, reach all target groups, including students who are being sensitised on substance abuse and HIV and AIDS.

I am also informed that during the period July 2006 to June 2007, the Ministry of Women’s Rights Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection has sensitised nearly 2000 adolescents on this issue.

These measures are being reinforced in the newly developed National Multi-sectoral HIV and AIDS Strategic Framework 2007-2011. One of the strategic objectives addresses specifically the youth. The National AIDS Secretariat, has been set up recently at the Prime Minister’s Office, to coordinate multi-sectoral response and to provide a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of the activities carried out by different partners in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Mr Speaker, Sir, one case of HIV and AIDS in our schools, if confirmed, is one too many. I thank the hon. Member for putting this question and I reassure the House that with the help of all stakeholders, we will maintain a focused approach targeting the student population.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether in the context of the AIDS awareness campaign minors, especially students from colleges, are required to come with their parents to undergo the test?

Mr Faugoo: It is open to anybody. In fact, minors under 16 have to be accompanied by their parents. Anybody above 16 can have the test done in any other hospital without their responsible party. In fact, it was limited to just one hospital. Today, this test can be done in all the hospitals and we have also allowed the private laboratories to carry out this test.

Mrs Labelle: The hon. Minister has given figures for young people aged 15 to 19. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has figures for children who were born with the

HIV virus, which means that by now there may be cases in our primary schools of children with the virus?

Mr Faugoo: I don't have the figures for those under 15, Mr Speaker, Sir.

There are few babies recently born with the virus, because of the mother carrying the virus.

Mrs Labelle: Some years back, there was a young girl who was deprived of her right to education because she was HIV positive. I think it occurred some three or four years back. There was some uprising regarding this case. Can I ask the hon. Minister to see to it that these cases do not happen?

Mr Faugoo: I did not get the question, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mrs Perrier: There is a regular exercise of blood donation in schools. Isn't it a way to find out new cases and is there any follow-up after positive cases are found after blood donation?

Mr Faugoo: All blood collection for transfusion purposes - I have said it in the House before - are automatically checked for this virus, Mr Speaker, Sir.

As far as I know, there is not a single case where that virus was found in the blood collected.

Mr Speaker: I am informed that PQ Nos. B/942 and B/944 have been withdrawn.

DRUG OFFENCES - MINORS

11017
18

(No. B/969) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne & 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 drug offences involving minors, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) the number of reported cases, since July 2005 to date, and
- (b) the remedial measures that have been or will be taken to address the issue.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the breakdown for cases relating to drug offences involving minors are as follows -

Period	<u>No. of Minors</u>
July to December 2005	9 cases involving 8
January 2006 to December 2006	25 cases involving 26
January 2007 to date	19 cases involving 25

As for part (b), I am informed that the Mauritius Police Force gives special attention to the policing of vulnerable groups such as minors under its anti-drug strategy focused on three pillars namely, supply and demand

reduction and education. In this context, the ADSU, the Crime Prevention Unit and the *Brigade pour La Protection des Mineurs* work in collaboration with the National Agency for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Substance Abuses (NATReSA), NGOs, *Forces Vives* and social workers on sensitization programmes for the benefit of youngsters and students.

The NATReSA has a specific programme targeting at minors in schools and in the community which includes sensitization campaigns through talks, film shows and debate competitions in secondary schools. Besides, following an agreement signed between Government and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, I am informed that 4,500 students aged between 14 and 16 from 30 secondary schools, followed a comprehensive programme against substance abuse in 2006.

The NATReSA, in collaboration with *L'Ecole des Valeurs Humaines*, also undertook a training workshop for 110 secondary school coordinators and students and the latter are now acting as prevention vectors in their respective schools through lectures on human values and prevention of substance abuse. Under this programme, some 5,000 students are targetted yearly.

I am further informed that the NATReSA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, has set up 10 Regional Youth Task Forces under a National Youth Task Force for the implementation of a peer to peer education project on substance abuse prevention in youth centres and the community. Under this project, training has been provided to 200 youth leaders in 2005/2006, and has reached 5,000 youths in the community.

Specific measures are also being taken by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources to address the issue of drug proliferation in schools, discipline and pastoral care committees in each educational zone are monitoring the situation.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I also wish to add that the issue of drug offences involving minors is a very serious one, which can only be addressed through concerted action. This is why joint programmes and activities are being carried out on a regular basis by all stakeholders including the Police, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the NATReSA as well as the *Forces Vives* and social workers.

MIE REPORT “YOUTH HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOUR IN MAURITIUS” (27/11 /07)

(No. B/1205) Mr M. Dowarkasing (Third Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether he will state if he has taken cognizance of the report submitted by the Mauritius Institute of Health, entitled “Youth health risk behaviour in Mauritius” and, if so, the measures he has taken so far in connection therewith.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry strongly believes and advocates that a healthy school population is essential for quality education.

I am aware of the report on “Youth Health Risk Behaviour in Mauritius: Prevalence and Determinants” prepared by the Mauritius Institute of Health following a study conducted by the Institute and targeting the youths of the country. While the report under reference constitutes a useful document both in terms of information and preventive actions, I wish to point out that my Ministry is already implementing a series of measures independently of the report.

A Health and Anti-Drug Unit has been set up at my Ministry for the coordination of health promotion and drug prevention activities in the education sector. A whole range of activities has been organised. Some of these are -

- (i) training sessions on HIV & AIDS targeting both teaching and non-teaching staff of private and State secondary schools with the help of the National Aids Secretariat of the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life;
- (ii) organisation of “Drama for Health” concerned with HIV & AIDS and Drugs at Regional and National levels for State and private secondary schools;
- (iii) school based activities related to -
 - World Health Day
 - World No-Tobacco Day
 - World Diabetes Day
 - International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking
 - Posters Competition on HIV & AIDS and other health issues have been held.

Road Safety Awareness Campaigns are undertaken in conjunction with the Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit of the Ministry of Public

Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping.

My colleagues are aware that we have already banned the sale of soft fizzy drinks in school canteens so that we may protect our youth against emerging diseases such as diabetes and obesity. Other measures are presently being examined to deal with healthy food habits like, for example, replacing oily foodstuff and snacks by more healthy alternatives.

Mr Speaker, Sir, health clubs already exist in almost all State and private secondary schools the main objective of which is to sensitise students on health related issues, including physical activities. An Action Plan has already been elaborated to revitalise health activities at the level of health clubs. My Ministry is also coming up with a proper structure for the operation of health clubs with a Regional Health and Education Council at its apex as announced in the Government Programme 2005-2010.

Furthermore, the document 'Empowering the Nation's Children-Towards a Quality Curriculum-Strategy for Reform' spells out the need to promote an all-round development of the individual – physical, intellectual, social and emotional leading to a balanced, active, healthy and productive lifestyle. In this document, the Ministry has revisited the health and physical education subject which will enable students to develop positive attitudes and values that will encourage them to adopt healthy habits. Physical Education activities have now been revived with schools being encouraged to engage in drills and sports activities. Similarly inter-college national games have also been revived.

In the same context, the modules for teacher training at the MIE cover several aspects of health issues such as sex education, nutrition, communicable and non-communicable diseases, drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

The hon. Member will agree that the recommendations of the report concern all stakeholders and will also require inter and intra ministerial initiatives, which can be envisaged in parallel. In this respect, my Ministry is already working with several organisations, among others, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, NATReSA, ADSU, ICAC, and Ombudsperson for Children, Mauritius Research Council, *Action Familiale* and Mauritius Family Planning Association.

All these measures have to be seen within a global and integrated approach to encourage and ensure that our youth develop and adopt healthy lifestyles and eating habits. As and when we go along, adjustments, as required, will be made.

Mr Dowarkasing: I will ask the hon. Minister the same question I asked before with respect to drugs. According to that report, one out of five children is, in fact, using drugs. In other words, there is a widespread of drugs in the school. On that particular issue of drugs, I would like to know what are the specific measures his Ministry is undertaking to get rid of this scourge.

Mr Gokhool: I have enumerated a whole series of measures. I think that the problem that is being referred to is an international one, and each Government is trying to do its best as referred to by my colleague. My Ministry is working with other Ministries as far as this is concerned. NATReSA is very active in providing training and other support services.

Mr Dowarkasing: May we know from the hon. Minister since when his Ministry has embarked on such a project and what has been the outcome so far? Is he satisfied that the targets have been met or not?

Mr Gokhool: In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have said at the beginning of my reply, in the context of the reforms, we have reviewed all the initiatives and measures with regard to promoting a healthy student population. In that respect, many problems, which affect the student population, are being addressed. NATReSA is particularly very active, in collaboration with my Ministry, in running a number of workshops, training programmes, poster campaigns to sensitise the youth towards the problem of drugs.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, in his answer, the hon. Minister has laid emphasis on the HIV/AIDS problem. We are all aware that one of the preventive measures is protected sex. May I know from the Minister why his Ministry has not given permission for the installation of condom distributors on the campus of the University?

Mr Gokhool: I need to put this issue in perspective, Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission. In fact, we have a National AIDS Coordination Committee where Government and NGOs work in terms of the implementation of Government strategy with regard to HIV/AIDS.

Secondly, there is a student organisation which organises an activity relating to HIV/AIDS on the campus. They do not announce to the University authorities that they are going to distribute condoms. Thirdly, if we want to have a programme, we have to plan it carefully and ensure that it is sustainable. There was no mention of installation of equipment and all that.

When this matter was brought to my attention, I checked and, in the light of the information I had, I said, at this point in time, that we could not go ahead. If the student organisation wishes to go ahead, it will have to sit down with the University authorities, relay with the National AIDS Coordination Committee and work out the proper strategy. May I add, Mr Speaker, Sir - and this is an important issue - that the expert, Dr. Ng Man Sun, has commented on the issue of distribution of condoms and other initiatives. What he said is that, very often, we take initiatives, but there is no forum. This is what he has said -

'Mais quand j'étais co-ordinateur au AIDS Unit, je dois le dire, il s'agissait davantage de piecemeal programmes ou de one-off programmes. On organisait quelque chose de grandiose à laquelle il n'y avait pas un bon suivi'

I don't want this to happen. I want things to happen properly and, therefore, there must be proper coordination. If things are done along that line with the possibility of sustaining the initiative, I don't think there will be any problem.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I'll come back to the issue concerning drugs within the colleges. The hon. Minister has mentioned that NATReSA is doing its work. Can I know how many colleges NATReSA has reached so far during this campaign? What is roughly the percentage?

Mr Gokhool: I have some figures which I can communicate to the House. The number of training sessions, between 2003 and 2006, with regard to HIV/AIDS is 168. The student population concerns 114,650 and it is estimated that 7,500 teaching and non-teaching staff has so far been trained in HIV/AIDS prevention. These are the figures I have.

Mrs Labelle: M. le président, le ministre vient de mentionner une organisation sur le campus et je crois qu'il parle de l'organisation *KISS*. Ce sont des jeunes qui, actuellement, essayent de conscientiser, qui font un travail formidable et ils avaient soumis leur programme d'activités et l'une d'entre elles était, justement, l'installation des distributeurs de préservatifs. M. le président, puis-je demander au ministre de revoir cette décision parce que nous avons des jeunes adultes sur le campus et ils n'attendent pas les préservatifs pour avoir une vie sexuelle active. La vie sexuelle active de nos jeunes ne commence pas sur le campus, M. le président, mais malheureusement à partir du primaire.

Mr Gokhool: The very basis of the question of the hon. Member does not hold because, as I have said, I have checked the information and I have the report from the University. This organisation did not even publish a brochure to indicate what will be the activity to be conducted on that day. There was no indication as to whether that activity was being organised and if there would be a follow up. I have to check all that. I cannot give authorisation off-hand. I am not saying that this should not be done, but I have to make sure that the conditions are there for the project to go ahead and to be sustained. This is what we did with regard to this project.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the same question asked by my colleague, hon. Mrs Labelle, may I ask the hon. Minister when exactly he learnt about the programme proposed by KISS? When was it submitted to him and whether or not that programme was interdicted on the same day that it was supposed to be held?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as I remember, it was on the eve that mention was made to me. Then I checked the whole information and, I said, on that occasion, that I don't think it is proper. But if they work out with the University authorities a carefully defined and proper plan as to how it is going to be implemented, I don't think there is any problem on that.

Dr. Ramloll: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have only one supplementary question. Concerning the intrusion of drugs in schools, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the Ministry contemplating, as a measure, the search of students which is prohibited today?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, there is a number of measures. This can be looked into by the officers.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think a very important study has been done and, of course, it has some main recommendations which, I believe, Government is addressing. Can I ask the hon. Minister when this programme will be evaluated because of the resources involved?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the report is there. I am sure, in view of the interest of the hon. Member, he should have read the report. I don't find anything new that has been mentioned except the statistics. The problems are known. As I said in my answer, we have already initiated actions in a proactive manner with regard to all those problems. If the hon. Member will look at my answer and the report, he will see that we have

already started taking actions well before the report was published. As far as the evaluation is concerned, I think it is a valid point. We will ensure that an evaluation is done so that we can assess the effectiveness of the initiatives we have taken.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS - STUDENTS SC/HSC – ATTENDANCE (27/11/07)

(No. B/1214) Dr. M. A. Husnoo (Second Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to the school attendance of students of Form V, Lower VI and Upper VI for the first, second and third terms respectively, regionwise, he will obtain information as to the average thereof.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I must say that the question of absenteeism at school during the third term particularly concerning students of Form V and HSC is not a new phenomenon and has always existed. As I indicated to reply to Parliamentary Question B/428 at our sitting of 22 May 2007, I have taken note of the extent of the problem and in the context of the quality education reforms, I am determined to address and solve the problem. Having said that, there are several factors, both internal and external to the school which adversely impact on the attendance of SC and HSC students at school, particularly, during the third term.

My Ministry is working on several fronts in order to address the problem. Firstly, Heads of schools and teachers have been requested to ensure that the syllabus is not completed too early and that an attractive and well planned school based revision programme is introduced, along with a compressed time table and the re-scheduling of the mock examinations at the beginning of the third term.

Secondly, a committee under the chairmanship of the Chief Technical Officer of my Ministry has been set up to look into the root causes of absenteeism and indiscipline and to make recommendations. In due course, the committee will come up with recommendations to be implemented in 2008.

Thirdly, my Ministry in consultation with the Attorney General's office is looking into the possibility of reinforcing existing legislation regarding attendance at school, including more stringent legal provisions for the award of scholarships. It is hoped that the updated legal provision will act as a deterrent against absenteeism.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is only over time that we will assess the degree of effectiveness of these measures but, above all, it will require the concerted efforts of one and all including parents to get students to attend school during third term in accordance with the school calendar.

My Ministry is also coming up with an innovative “100% attendance project” which will target the Form I students in 2008. The project will be run on a pilot basis with the objective of encouraging pupils to go to school for a 100% attendance. The project will be sustained in Form II to Form VI so as to bring about substantial improvement generally in school attendance.

In the light of the outcome of the pilot project, same will be generalised for implementation across the secondary schools.

I am tabling the information asked for by the hon. Member in regard to attendance in term I, II and III.

Mr Guinness: Can I know from the Minister whether the information that he is circulating is regionwise as the question has asked, that is, the towns and villages?

Mr Gokhool: The information is zonewise and the hon. Member will see that, in third term, the attendance is low.

YEAR 2008

SSS - ALLEGED AGGRESSIONS - JANUARY 2008 TO MARCH 2008 (25/03/08)

(No. B/60) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether, in regard to cases of alleged aggressions in the State Secondary Schools perpetrated on students and members of the staff since January 2008 to date, he will, state the number thereof in each school.

Reply: It is not clear as to which type of aggressions the hon. Member is referring to. In fact, cases of aggression can be categorized as follows –

- (i) those among students which can be of daily occurrence in all the schools but are mostly minor in nature;
- (ii) those between students on the one hand and teaching or non-teaching staff on the other which can occur from time to time but which remain isolated and rarely serious;
- (iii) aggressions involving PTA members, members of the staff and students which may or may not be serious; and finally,

(iv) aggressions on either students or members of the staff by members of the public.

I believe the hon. Member is more interested in the latter case. If that is so, I am informed that from January 2008 to date, there has been no reported case of aggression in that category of the State Secondary Schools. However, there is one in the Primary Sector namely, that of a parent of a pupil of Std III of Duperré Government School, Mahebourg who verbally and physically assaulted a teacher on the school premises on 20 March 2008. The matter was reported to the Police and according to latest indications, the parent is being prosecuted for “*assaulting a public officer*” and was remanded to Police cell for failure to furnish a security for bail purposes.

Be that as it may, my Ministry has already reinforced security measures at schools including tighter control on access to school premises, particularly, insofar as members of the public are concerned. However, it appears that in a few cases, members of the public are still enjoying unrestricted access to the schools on account of the laxity of some Heads of school. My Ministry is looking into the matter in order to ensure the safety and security of both staff and students. Disciplinary action will also be taken against members of the staff who fail to comply with instructions and who by so doing endanger the peace and security of the schools.

SSS – DRUG RELATED INCIDENTS – JANUARY 2008 TO MARCH 2008 (25/03/08)

(No. B/61) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to reported cases of drug related incidents in the State Secondary Schools since January 2008 to date, he will state the number thereof in each school.

Reply: I am informed that there has been only one reported case of drug related incident in the State Secondary Schools from January 2008 to date. A Form V student was involved in such a case in March 2008. This was reported to the Police and action has been initiated at that level. The student concerned has been placed under special report and his parents informed accordingly. Counselling will also be given to him.

SCHOOLS - CORPORAL PUNISHMENT (08/04/08)

(No. B/190) Mr Y. Varma (First Member for Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether in regard to corporal punishment administered on students in the schools, he will state the policy of his Ministry thereon.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker Sir, the policy of my Ministry on corporal punishment is premised on Section 13(4) of the Education Regulations which stipulates that “No corporal punishment shall be inflicted on any pupil in any school”. Further, corporal punishment is a criminal offence punishable under the penal code. My Ministry does not allow corporal punishment and any case of corporal punishment, as soon as reported, is fully investigated for appropriate action. As soon as it is established that there is sufficient ground for action to be taken, i.e. there is a *prima facie* case of corporal punishment, action proceeds accordingly. If found guilty for such an offence, the officer concerned may be interdicted from the exercise of the powers and functions of his office under Regulation 31 (1) of the Public Service Commission Regulations, 1967.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister kindly inform the House whether, since his assuming office as Minister, there have been any complaints registered as far as corporal punishment in schools is concerned?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there are occasional complaints which are registered. Some are referred to the Police and others are dealt with at the level of schools.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Minister inform the House whether any action has been taken against teachers in specific cases?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, matters are referred to the Police and thereafter to the DPP for action, but I have to check whether any officer has been imprisoned or fined for such offence.

Dr. Mungur: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if the matter is settled amicably between the parents and the teacher concerned, I would like to know what happens in this case?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in fact, this is what happens in most of the cases. The school management, the PTAs and the parents discuss about the matter and invariably these are settled at the school level.

The Deputy Speaker: Last question!

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le ministre ne pense-t-il pas que tous les élèves devraient lui donner un bon *corporal punishment* pour avoir failli dans sa tâche mercredi dernier ?

The Deputy Speaker: This is out of subject. Next Question!

(Interruptions)

Dr. David: They withdraw their questions or they choose to disappear.

The Deputy Speaker: Which question?

Dr. David: PQ No. B/191.

The Deputy Speaker: This is the privilege of...

Dr. David: Either they withdraw or they choose to disappear!

The Deputy Speaker: Listen to me! This is the privilege of any hon. Member.

(Interruptions)

Can the hon. Minister just listen to what I have to say? This is the privilege of any hon. Member to ask questions, but once the Member is not in the House, there is nothing I can do about it. Next question!

“ROOTS OF EMPATHY” PROGRAMME (29/04/08)

(No. B/317) Ms K.R. Deerpalsing (Third Member for Belle Rose & Quatre Bornes) asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the recent events that took place at the Régis Chaperon State Secondary School, Belle Rose, and with a view to tackling antisocial behaviour in schools, he will state if consideration will be given to implementing, on a pilot basis, the “Roots of Empathy” programme, as obtained in Canada.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the project “Roots of Empathy” was developed in Canada by Mary Gordon to enable children to develop emotional literacy, that is, understanding of the emotions and feelings of children aged four and 14 and interpreting them to develop appropriate responses. The process involves especially trained “Roots of Empathy” instructors as well as the involvement of parents.

This project was developed at a time when a young suicide rate in Canada was fairly high - 30%. The ultimate objective of the project is aimed at reducing aggressive behaviour among school children by raising social, emotional competence and empathy.

The project will be examined by my Ministry and attention will be given to the possibility of customising it, taking into consideration the specificities of Mauritian schools and their environment.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for bringing the project to the attention of my Ministry.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that this widely acclaimed programme has really gone global and that this programme not only reduces the aggressive behaviour, but increases cognitive skills for students? Is the Minister willing to introduce a pilot programme, at least, some time soon?

Mr Gokhool: Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, I have taken a look at the project. It is a viable one and, as I said, my Ministry will examine it and customise it in the Mauritian context.

Mr Varma: Could the hon. Minister inform the House what is being done by his Ministry to tackle antisocial behaviour in schools?

Mr Gokhool: This is a wider issue, but I will just inform the House and the hon. Member that there is a daily tracking of incidents in all our schools and we have a pool of psychologists and social workers who attend to problems, taking into account the more serious ones, and they provide counselling and advice to students, parents and teachers.

This is the arrangement which exists at present in terms of tackling the problems.

(Interruptions)

The hon. lady should listen when I am giving the answer!

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister since when this pool of psychologists has been operating and whether he has noted any reduction in the anti social behaviour resulting from the study?

Mr Gokhool: The scheme is already operational. We have a pool of psychologists and social workers on the field, and we can already see a certain positive impact of the work that they are doing. I would like to take the opportunity to inform the House that we are also extending the service to the private colleges where these problems also occur.

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether his Ministry has already contacted the 'Roots of Empathy' programme? I have some email contacts, is the Minister willing to take note?

Mr Gokhool: I think the issue of aggressive behaviour is on the card of my Ministry, and before the question set by the hon. Member, we already had a proposal with regard to exercise and behaviour management which we are considering. As I said, we

intend to look at the project more closely and in this context, we will recontact the authorities in Canada.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister talked about the job being done by the psychologists. I do have respect for them. But as this question of gang violence among students has been going for quite some time, has the hon. Minister himself dared to look into the root causes of this violence?

Mr Gokhool: It is not a question of daring to see, Mr Speaker, Sir, but this is an issue which is present in all school systems and I think any Minister of Education will have to address the issue and this is being addressed at the level of my Ministry.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister how many psychologists are actually being employed either on a full-time or a part-time basis by his Ministry?

Mr Gokhool: There is a pool of about ten psychologists and some twenty social workers.

Mrs Labelle: The hon. Minister has mentioned the advice given to students with behavioural problems. May I ask the hon. Minister - because I am sure he is aware that, in such cases, advice does not give the expected results - what are the activities, if any, that his Ministry has been organising in order to tackle the problem of behavioural problems?

Mr Gokhool: I think the work of the psychologists and social workers are multipronged.

It is not only with regard to the students, but with parents as well. In fact, parents are called to school and they are provided necessary advice and counselling. As regards the activities, in all schools we have a range of sports and physical activities as well as school curriculum and extra curriculum activities which they have to perform and which are being promoted in the schools.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has not been very precise in answering my question. I wanted to know since when the pool of psychologists has been operating and whether actually he has noted that there has been a decrease...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has answered.

Ms Deerpalsing: Hearing all these supplementary questions prompt me to ask this question. Is the hon. Minister aware that the 'Roots of Empathy' programme has nothing

to do with psychologists? It is a very innovative programme looking at basic human behaviour.

Mr Gokhool: I mean this is a larger project which has to do with other issues of aggressive behaviour.

**SCHOOLS (PRIMARY/SECONDARY) –
ALLEGED ASSAULT ON PUPILS (10/06/08)**

(No. B/616) 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 reported cases of alleged assaults on pupils of the primary and secondary levels, perpetrated by their teachers, since August 2005 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number thereof, indicating the measures he proposes to take, in addition to those already taken, to prevent such recurrence.

The Ag. Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that since August 2005 to date 72 cases of alleged assaults on pupils by teachers of primary and secondary schools have been reported to the Police.

Thirty-two cases have been classified and two cases are under prosecution. Police is still inquiring into 31 cases and the remaining seven cases have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice.

I am further informed by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources that section 13(4) of the Education Regulations stipulates that “no corporal punishment shall be inflicted on any pupil in any school”. Corporal punishment is also a criminal offence punishable under the penal code.

If a case of corporal punishment is reported, a full investigation is carried out by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources and the case is reported to Police when it is established that corporal punishment has taken place. Necessary action is taken against the officer in line with existing Public Service Commission Regulations.

All teachers are instructed by way of circulars that no corporal punishment is to be inflicted on a pupil.

Mr Speaker, Sir, violence on school-children is totally unacceptable. Physical punishment is an insult to the dignity of the child and it is vital that a more pedagogical approach be adopted to deal with this problem.

The Ministry of Education & Human Resources is already working on measures proposed by the Ombudsperson for Children with regard to corporal punishment. These measures include amendment to existing laws and regulations, sensitization of children, parents and teachers, and reviewing the mechanisms for a more effective inquiry into cases of violence on school-children. Moreover, a strategy would be evolved with a view to providing counselling, guidance and support to teachers in the context of the setting up of a National Psychological and Counselling Service for the education sector.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, we all agree that one case of aggression by a teacher on a student is one too many. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether, over the same period, there have been any cases of assault on teachers by pupils?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I replied to a question in that sense last year and there were not many cases. I gave all details in that answer to the question. But the answer is yes, there is!

Mr Guinness: Out of the 72 cases, can we know how many concern primary and secondary schools?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Ag. Prime Minister: I have the information; it is mostly secondary.

Mr Jugnauth: Mr Speaker, Sir, when an inquiry is being conducted on those teachers who have been involved in corporal punishment, what happen to them in the meantime? Are they transferred or do they remain in post?

The Ag. Prime Minister: I have no details, but I am sure the Minister of Education will reply to that.

Mr Guinness: True it is that we are dealing with cases where teachers inflict corporal punishment on students! Do we have cases where rectors inflict corporal punishment on teachers?

(Interruptions)

SODNAC – ALLEGED RAPE – INQUIRY (10/06/08)

(No. B/621) Mr G. Lesjongard (Second Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue) 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 case of alleged rape of a girl, on 23 May 2008, at Sodnac, Quatre Bornes, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto, indicating the outcome thereof, including if any arrest has been effected in relation thereto.

Reply: I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that following an in depth police enquiry, one J. S. L., aged 17, has been arrested at Pointe aux Sables on 04 June 2008 and he has confessed having committed the rape of the young girl on 23 May 2008 at Sodnac, Quatre Bornes.

On the same day, the victim has also positively identified the suspect. On 05 June 2008, a provisional charge of “Rape” has been lodged against J. S. L. before Black River Court. He has been remanded to Police cell up to 12 June 2008.

VIDEO CLIPS – COMPLAINTS (10/06/08)

(No. B/626) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth 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 he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if a young student has recently lodged a complaint in regard to the production of video clips of pornographic nature, and if so, if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

Reply: I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that on 11 May 2008, a young student lodged a complaint to Police regarding the circulation of a video clip of obscene nature on mobile phones.

Police instituted an enquiry and a minor was arrested the next day. A provisional charge of “dealing in obscene matters” was lodged against him. He was allowed bail after furnishing a recognizance of Rs50,000. Inquiry in the matter is still under way.

MINORS – CIGARETTES – SALE (08/07/08)

(No. B/797) Mr S. Soodhun (Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix) asked the Minister of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare & Consumer Protection whether, in regard to the sale of

cigarettes to minors, she will state the measures she proposes to take to sensitise the public of its ill effects and for a strict enforcement of the law.

Mrs Seebun: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the sale of cigarettes is regulated by the Public Health (Restrictions on Tobacco Products) Regulations 1999 made under section 193 of the Public Health Act, under which sale of cigarettes to minors is an offence. The Ministry of Health and Quality of Life is at present working on an amendment to these regulations with a view to strengthen the law in respect of sale of tobacco products to and by minors.

I am also informed that the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life has developed a National Action Plan on Tobacco Control for the period 2007 to 2011 and is conducting an intensive anti-tobacco campaign based on activities at the level of the community and with the media.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to stress upon the fact that in view of the amendments to be made to the Public Health (Restrictions on Tobacco Products) Regulations 1999, I suggested the following provision be made – “No person shall offer or supply any tobacco product, whether in return for any consideration or free of charge, to a minor or shall cause a minor to smoke, chew or sniff a tobacco product.”

Moreover, although enforcement of the law is actually being done at the level of the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and the Police Department, my Ministry has been carrying out crackdown operations islandwide in collaboration with the National Children Council operating under the aegis of my Ministry, the *Brigade des Mineurs* and NGOs during which actions have been taken against business operators for having sold cigarettes to minors.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform my colleagues that the *Brigade des Mineurs* maintains close watch and vigilance near points of sales of cigarettes. Wherever a complaint has been received regarding the sale of cigarettes to minors, the information is immediately verified through surprise checks. In fact, since 2004 as at date, the *Brigade des Mineurs* issued 28 contraventions to business operators for selling cigarettes to minors.

The National Children Council has carried out sensitisation campaigns through the Kids and Teens Club islandwide on a regular basis on the harmful effects of cigarettes. So far some 1,680 children have been reached. In addition, sensitisation campaigns have also been carried out by

Brigade des Mineurs and the Police Family Protection Unit in schools, colleges, youth clubs with a view to inform students as well as parents on the ill effects of smoking and the consequences of selling cigarettes to minors.

In addition to this, working sessions have been carried out with business operators to prevent them from selling cigarettes to minors. It is to be noted that from July 2005 to May 2008 some 43,500 persons (both minors and adults) have been reached.

Moreover, my Ministry has, in collaboration with the Mauritius College of the Air, prepared clips on the rights and responsibilities of the child which includes the ill effects of cigarettes. The MBC will be requested to broadcast same on a regular basis during peak time.

Mr Soodhun: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether she is aware that the big sellers are the *tabagies* situated near secondary schools of the island and if yes, what the *Brigade des Mineurs* is doing to stop this? Concerning the advertisement of ‘*Tote le Pep*’ on the radio, it is mentioned that *mineurs* are not being allowed, but till now we are not in the presence of any information as to whether radios or television will issue the same communiqué as far as the sale of cigarettes to minors is concerned

Mrs Seebun: I take note of your concern and I shall work it out with my colleague, the Minister of Health and Quality of Life, to ensure that cigarettes are not sold near schools and colleges.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I know from the hon. Minister whether she is aware that in a recent documentary broadcast on BBC2, Mr Duncan Bannatyne stated that out of two students between 11 and 14, one is a smoker? Is the hon. Minister agreeable to this statement?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member cannot ask the hon. Minister to agree with a statement which has been published in the press.

Mrs Labelle: Concerning this problem of sale of cigarettes to minors, in some shops we have the stickers “*Pas de cigarette aux mineurs*”. But, unfortunately, in these *tabagies* near schools, we don’t have it. Can we make it compulsory that every cigarette seller has the sticker “No cigarette to minors” and have it very well displayed?

Mrs Seebun: With the help of the Consumer Protection Unit, I shall personally ensure that this is done.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it has been reported that one out of two schoolchildren are actually smoking. Can the hon. Minister confirm whether this is correct?

Mrs Seebun: I wouldn't like such a feature be related to Mauritius. I shall ensure with the help of my colleague, the Minister of Health and Quality of Life, that this does not happen in Mauritius, that it does not become a feature in our country.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether time has not come for a survey to be made as to the impact of smoking amongst students?

Mrs Seebun: It is a very good suggestion and it is considered.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Varma: The hon. Minister has just stated that she will liaise with the hon. Minister of Health and Quality of Life to see to it that cigarettes are not sold near secondary schools. What will happen to the shops which have got the permits? Will their permits be revoked?

Mrs Seebun: We shall ensure that cigarettes are not sold to minors.

If a *tabagie* is very close to a school - why not - we shall ban the sale of cigarettes.

Mr Jhugroo: Comment les responsables des tabagies vont-ils distinguer si ces enfants sont des mineurs ou non s'ils sont des jeunes bien bâtis?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Next Question!

STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS - 'MANSON' CULTURE – (08/07/08)

(No. B/824) Mr S. Dayal (Second Member for Quartier Militaire and Moka) asked the Minister of Education and Human Resources whether he is aware of the spread of the 'manson' culture in the State secondary schools, and if so, will he state where matters stand as to –
(a) the tightening of disciplinary measures, and

(b) if additional psychologist and career guidance officers will be recruited, with a view to address the issue.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the hon. Member for this question and I refer him to the request made by the hon. Prime Minister to my Ministry to carry out a survey.

At this point, I am informed that there is no widespread observance and practice of the 'manson' culture in the State secondary schools, but I'll agree with the hon. Member that if we have only one case, it is one too much.

In fact, as from June 2004, a few isolated cases of students mildly observing and practicing the 'manson' culture were noted in some State secondary schools. Such observance was characterised by a liking for heavy metal rock, recourse to the colour black for dressing and make up, the wearing of an inverted cross as necklace, heavy consumption of alcoholic drinks and other drugs as well as a *penchant* for evil practices, violence and auto mutilation bordering on suicide.

As soon as these cases were observed, preventive action was taken at the level of my Ministry to curb the spreading of such culture in schools. Accordingly, all rectors of State secondary schools were convened to a meeting where they were apprised of the situation and were requested to be vigilant and to report such suspected cases.

As soon as these cases were observed, preventive action was taken at the level of my Ministry to curb the spreading of such culture in schools.

Having said this, there are a few cases of reported abnormal behaviour and auto mutilation, mainly through the use of cutters which happen from time to time in the private college and such a situation dates back to prior to 2004 when the 'manson' culture was first noted in Mauritius.

I am informed that such students who are few and far apart are normally those who have personal problems and who suffer from depression. However, there is no obvious link between these cases and the 'manson' culture, although some cannot be excluded altogether. In each reported case, a school psychologist normally follows the patient for diagnosis and remedial action. It is also important for parents to be on the alert and to rise up to their responsibilities, because if there are indeed cases or adherence to 'manson' culture, they cannot be exclusively at school.

However, the Heads of schools and teachers will require to exercise extra vigilance, enforce discipline and make better use of the pastoral care committee and morning assembly time to encourage students to make better use of the opportunities being provided to them and to stay clear of negative influences.

However, in order not to leave any stone unturned in our endeavour to eradicate this culture in our schools, and as already agreed by the Prime Minister in reply to PQ No. B/737 at our sitting of 01 July 2008, my Ministry will be carrying out a detailed survey to gauge the extent of the problem.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I can only hope that this survey won't take long. According to information reaching me, even the star State secondary schools have not been spared; this culture has even permeated there. Doesn't the hon. Minister consider it appropriate that all the stakeholders, that is, rectors, deputy rectors, teachers, parents, PTAs and officers of his Ministry be made conversant with the side effect of this 'manson' culture so as to be able to detect rapidly and fight efficiently against it?

Mr Gokhool: I think I need to mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that it is not a good thing to exaggerate a phenomenon which, I said, is isolated and there are a few cases far apart. But when the hon. Member is mentioning that it has permeated the star colleges, I don't think that I'll agree with him, because we have a daily reporting of incidents in all our schools, primary and secondary. And from the records which are being analysed by the psychologist of my Ministry, it is not evident that the culture is spreading as the hon. Member is trying to suggest. I don't know what is his source of information, but we are compiling statistics and the first report on incidents in schools has been prepared by the psychologist of my Ministry. It does say that there are a few cases, but not to the extent that the hon. Member is trying to suggest.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not at all exaggerating. I have been in the teaching field for a quarter of a century and I know what I am talking about. I should like to refer the hon. Minister to PQ No. B/104 which I put to this House on 04 April 2006. I am not going to revisit it. I put several questions to which I have not yet got the full answers. I am going to refer the hon. Minister to that PQ. But then, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he would consider the advisability of reinforcing sections 152, 153 and 154 of the 1945 Regulations in order to reinforce disciplines in Government secondary schools, because the hands of the

Rectors are tied and this delays the implementation and reinforcement of disciplines. By amending or making it go in the direction which I have requested the hon. Minister, will perhaps make the enforcement of disciplines more timely and effective.

Mr Gokhool: In fact, I thank the hon. Member for his suggestion.

We are already strengthening the disciplinary committees, and also there is a strategy. We are finalising a report in which we are suggesting the empowerment of rectors to deal with problems at source. But we are going even further. We are also ensuring that parents and PTAs play an active role and whenever there are incidents, we are making sure that parents are convened to the schools and the problems are exposed to them, so as they are partners in solving the problems to which the students are being exposed.

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Minister agree with me that since the promulgation of the present Regulation 1953, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Government Secondary Schools and that it is practically impossible for rectors of such institutions to enforce discipline in cases of serious misconduct because this requires ministerial power. Even to suspend a student, the approval of the Minister is sought.

Mr Gokhool: The Ministry exercises overall supervision because there are cases where the sanction is excessive, for example, there has been a case of a student being suspended or rusticated for three weeks by the disciplinary committee. I don't think this is on because we have other ways and means of tackling this situation. The overall supervision of the Ministry will be retained, but empowerment of rectors and heads of schools is being envisaged.

Mr Dayal: The core object of the school, side by side, is catering for the academic development and character development of a child, that is, a balance has to be created. What is his Ministry doing in this regard?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I agree entirely with the hon. Member that education should be balanced. That is why together with the formal curriculum, we have a strategy of co-curricular projects and activities which we are implementing. I'll just give you an example. Right now, in the PBB, all schools will be required - because there are some schools which do not engage in co-curricular projects and activities - to engage in, at least, four co-curricular and extra curricular activities which will provide opportunities for students to engage in activities which can help personality development and character building. Besides, we have reintroduced the

morning assemblies in all our schools. There are a number of steps which we are taking to bring about the balancing of the education that is provided to the children.

The Deputy Speaker: We have cautiously moved away from mention to morning assemblies. Now, hon. Members realise!

Mr Dayal: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, concerning the last part of the question with regard to additional psychologists and career guidance officers, according to my information, some eight to ten years ago, teachers were trained as career guidance officers. Can the hon. Minister say whether the number is sufficient and whether they are simply teaching or are they really guiding in career orientation? With regard to psychologists, is the number sufficient? Is his Ministry envisaging to have, in each secondary school, a psychologist or a career guidance officer?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have, at the level of the Ministry, taken steps to reinforce the psychology services and, right now, we have one Senior Educational Psychologist and ten Educational Psychologists together with the support...

(Interruptions)

Yes, for all the schools. And we have 19 Educational Social Workers working together. Besides, we also have the National Educational Counseling Service which has been provided and there are 23 Counseling Units which have been set up in the schools. We are coping with the situation. Of course, if we can recruit more psychologists, more social workers, that will be most welcome, that we will have to envisage, but, right now, we have a team of psychologists and social workers who are addressing the issues raised by the hon. Member.

The Deputy Speaker: The Table has been advised that Parliamentary Questions B/831, B/834 and B/835 have been withdrawn. Time is over!

BUS – STUDENTS – MISCONDUCT (22/07/08)

(No. B/891) Mrs S. Grenade (Second Member for GRNW and Port Louis West) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if cases of misbehaviour by students in buses have been reported, since 2006 to date,

and if so, the number thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that the number of cases of misconduct by students in buses reported to the Police is as follows –

- (i) four cases in 2006;
- (ii) twelve cases in 2007, and
- (iii) eleven cases as at 17 July 2008.

In order to address this problem, the Police has been –

- (i) providing daily policing on major bus terminals and bus stops;
- (ii) carrying out regular crack down operations at bus terminals and stations. Since January 2008, sixty-nine such operations have been carried out;
- (iii) sensitizing students, parents, school staff and bus operators on the need for good behaviour by students in buses; and
- (iv) sensitization campaigns are also being carried out for students in colleges/schools laying emphasis on discipline. Since 2005, 43584 students and adults have been sensitized by the Police.

I am also informed that the Ministry of Education and Human Resources that they had issued instructions to all Zone Directors and the Private Secondary Schools Authority on 04 July 2008, to request Heads of Schools to ensure that order and discipline are observed in buses. The issue of student behaviour in school buses is being taken up at morning assemblies and at meetings with Prefects, Student Councils and the Parents Teachers Associations.

Moreover, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping is having regular meetings with the National Transport Authority, the bus operators, the Parents Teachers Associations, representatives of schools and the Police to follow the situation.

Mrs Grenade: Est-ce que le Premier ministre est au courant qu'il y a des jeunes qui ne sont pas des étudiants, mais qui portent des uniformes, et agressent les élèves aux alentours de l'école ou sur les gares d'autobus?

The Prime Minister: The issue was raised to the Deputy Prime Minister last week. He is looking into it, I think.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether in any of these cases students have been prosecuted?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Out of the 27 cases which I mentioned

from 2006, three have been fined, one has been issued a warning, one case has been classified, 9 are in front of the Courts pending Court's decision and for 13, inquiry is still being carried out.

Mr Soodhun: Can the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether there is any monitoring committee set up at the Prime Minister's Office with consultation with the Minister of Public Infrastructure and Minister of Education to monitor the situation closely?

The Prime Minister: It is being done at the level of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure.

Mrs Labelle: I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether in cases of those students who have been prosecuted there has been any followup with the Ministry of Education or in their respective school?

The Prime Minister: Without talking to the Minister, my assumption is yes.

Mrs Martin: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister, with regard to the students who misbehave and who have been caught, whether some sort of counseling is being given so that they get rehabilitated and they don't do this again?

The Prime Minister: I explained some of the measures that are being taken including with them. Sometimes you say if there is no sanction, there is repetition. For example, I say that in some cases, bus operators have ceased to provide school service. They want their buses to be repaired first and in one case where the bus has been damaged by students of Islamic Cultural College, Cité La Cure, there has been a claim of Rs19,050. They have absolutely refused to provide the bus service until this is paid. This claim has been made by UBS and it is being now refunded by instalments by the Parents Teachers Association.

Mrs Grenade: M. le président, est-ce que je peux faire un appel urgent au Premier ministre pour qu'il approvisionne l'équipe des brigades des mineurs en terme de transport en bon état afin que le travail puisse se faire promptement et aussi renforcer les équipes aux alentours des écoles primaires, secondaires et surtout sur les gares d'autobus ?

The Prime Minister: In fact, we are reinforcing the system which is looking into that. I'll look into the transport situation, but we need also to look at the ways to inculcate discipline into our youth.

Mr Jhugroo: Le premier ministre est-il au courant qu'il y a des élèves qui consomment des cannettes de bière durant leur trajet vers l'école ?

The Prime Minister: None has been reported to me.

PUBLIC FAIRS - ALCOHOLIC DRINKS – SALE (29/07/08)

(No. B/1011) 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 alcoholic drinks, she will state if her Ministry will consider prohibiting the sale thereof in public fairs, with a view to combating alcoholism, especially among the younger section of the population.

Reply: The sale of alcoholic drinks to children is already prohibited under Section 16(1)(a) of Child Protection Act 1994 which stipulates – “No person shall sell any liquor, rum or compounded spirits to a child”.

As regards sale of alcoholic drinks in public fairs, I am informed that the Mauritius Revenue Authority grants occasional licences under the Excise Act for same on the basis of a report from Police on the application. The enquiry includes site visits, statements from applicants as well as from persons residing in the vicinity of the venue of the fair. Consideration is also given to the aspect of peace and order in the surroundings as well as proximity to places of worships and schools.

I am also informed that an occasional permit for “Public Entertainment Organiser” is granted for the organization of public fairs under the Local Government Act.

However, for the holding of public fairs where alcoholic drink will be offered for sale, the Local Authorities seek clearances from the Mauritius Revenue Authority, Police Department and the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life.

For such public fairs, Police is present to enforce the law, especially to ensure that no alcoholic drink is sold to a child.

With a view to further strengthening our law to combat alcoholism, the Ministry of Health & Quality of Life is presently finalizing Draft Regulations under the Public Health Act to regulate the –

(a) advertisement;

(b) sponsorships;

259

(c) sale, and

(d) consumption in public places of alcoholic drinks.

I have made a special appeal to provide for the following in the proposed Regulations -

“No person shall cause a minor to have access or to consume an alcoholic drink.”

In our endeavour to prevent substance abuse and to combat alcoholism among the younger section of the population, my Ministry has been carrying out sensitisation campaigns island-wide at the level of the community in collaboration with the National Children’s Council, the ‘*Brigade des Mineurs*’ and NGOs. So far, some 208 talks have been held and 3,554 adolescents have also been reached during the past three years by the National Children’s Council.

Furthermore, sensitization programmes on the effects of alcohol on the family have also been conducted in 19 localities through Zero Tolerance Clubs and in collaboration with NATReSA and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA).

Under its prevention strategy, NATReSA is running specific sensitization programmes among the youth, in schools, at the work place, among women and in the country.