Mr. Speaker Sir,

The Primary School Common Front comprising most of the Unions representing primary sector teachers have made representations to me regarding what they consider to be the excessive number of subjects to be examined at CPE level as from 2004 and I wish, with your kind permission, to make a statement on the issue.

2. It is the contention of the Primary School Common Front that the tendency of the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research is to "render the primary curriculum heavier day by day" and that the decision to examine pupils in a greater number of subjects at CPE level in 2004 goes against the objective of diminishing pressure on pupils and is therefore unreasonable and antipedagogical.

3. In response thereto, I wish to invite the attention of the House to the “Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector” document of March 2001 which had been approved by Government and was made public. The document under reference borrows from international best practices and explains in very clear terms, why the Primary Sector Curriculum which had
remained untouched for decades, had to be revisited. In a nutshell the declared objective of the Curriculum Renewal in the primary sector is to impart to pupils a broad-based education tailored to the future needs of the nation while at the same time exposing them to life skills to prepare them to face with greater confidence the responsibilities and experiences of life in society in years to come.

4. Experience has shown, during the past years, that when a subject taught is not evaluated, it is not given the required attention or consideration in the teaching/learning process although it may appear on the time table. It is therefore necessary to ensure that there is an evaluation and assessment so that these new subjects obtain their rightful place and consideration within the curriculum. As a matter of fact, assessment allows us to keep track of the performance of pupils and determine their level of competencies at the various stages. It is also a useful means of monitoring the effectiveness of teaching.

5. Prior to March 2001, there were four subjects which were examinable at Standard VI level, namely, English, French, Mathematics and Environmental Studies, referred to as EVS. Further, Asian Language/Arabic was also examinable as an optional subject. In addition, Creative Education and Movement or Physical Education were taught but were not examined at Standard VI level. The Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector accordingly maintained the core traditional subjects namely English, French and Mathematics and also provided for:-
(i) EVS which was considered to be a catch all concept in terms of pedagogical content and topics covered, to be split into three subjects namely, Science, History/Geography and Citizenship Education in order to allow pupils to benefit from a better understanding of the History and Geography of their country and an early exposure to the world of Science while acquiring citizenship values and skills;

(ii) Movement/Physical Education to be redefined as Health and Physical Education and Creative Education to be reconceptualised as The Arts;

(iii) the introduction of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) as a new subject; and

(iv) Asian Language/Arabic to remain as an optional subject.

6. It is a fact that some Teacher Unions had initially expressed reservations concerning the Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector when it was released in March 2001 and my Ministry could not, regrettably, move as fast as it wished on this project. In the light of some of the views expressed, a considerable amount of time was spent in explaining and convincing the Unions of the need to uphold the Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector in the best interests of the pupils. It was only in October 2002, following an agreement signed between my Ministry and the Unions of the Primary Sectors Employees that the latter adhered to the reforms and agreed to the implementation of the said reforms as announced as from
September 2000, inclusive of the curriculum renewal in the primary sector. The belated representations of the Unions therefore come as a surprise as they seem to question the Agreement of October 2002.

7. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is nothing pedagogically unsound with the objectives of the Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector. As a matter of fact as I indicated in reply to PQ 661 at our sitting on 21 October 2003, we have favoured an incremental approach. This implies that, while some of the new subjects will be assessed as from 2004, the mode of assessment will not necessarily be the same as for the traditional subjects but will depend on the nature and specifications of each of the new subjects introduced. The intention at all times is to proceed cautiously while remaining faithful to the set objectives. The Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES) has made some proposals regarding the various modes of assessment of these new subjects but these have yet to be finalized. In that respect, my Ministry is open to ideas and suggestions from all quarters including the Trade Unions representatives.

8. However, the introduction of the new subjects at primary level cannot be singled out and considered in isolation. It has to be considered within the wider perspective of the educational reforms and the abolition of ranking and efforts to transform the CPE into being a selection exercise into a tool for pedagogical evaluation. In that respect, when we consider the relaxed atmosphere in which the CPE Examinations have taken place only a few days ago and the much lesser pressure being brought to bear on pupils and parents alike, we are comforted in our belief that we are on the right track. In fact, as clearly stated in the “Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector document”, the introduction of the new subjects does not, in any way,
increase the pressure on the child nor does it increase the number of hours of teaching. In addition, as part of the endeavour to further improve the teaching/learning process, every effort is being made to off load the syllabi of the different subjects as taught and examined prior to 2001.

9. Mr. Speaker, Sir, by way of conclusion, I wish to inform the House that I met the Common Front of Primary School Trade Unions on Friday, 17 October 2003, in order to clear any confusion. It was inter alia agreed that:

(i) the trial assessment in Creative Education and Citizenship Education for Standard V in 2003 will be optional and as flexible as possible; and

(ii) a meeting with the Unions of the Front Commun will be convened in due course to share views of the Std VI syllabus and related issues.

10. It is noteworthy that there is a perception among General Purpose Teachers that the Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector tends to increase their work load as opposed to that of their Oriental Language counterparts. In the light of the recommendations contained in the 2003 PRB Report, my Ministry is currently reviewing the whole issue of teacher training and categorisation of teachers and will in the process consult all the Unions of the Primary Sector.

11. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.