Mr A. Aliphon (Third Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière): Madame la présidente, si vous me permettez, j’aurais souhaité que Madame la ministre de l’Education éclaire la Chambre si elle en a la possibilité, bien sûr, sur le cas de viol d’une élève de dix ans à Petite Rivière dans la circonscription No. 20, avec toutes sortes de nouvelles : parents en colère, mouvements de révolte, cover-up, etc.

Depuis hier, la presse en parle. Nous savons que la fille de dix ans aurait été violée par le jardinier de l’école contre paiement. Merci, Madame la présidente.

The Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like to address the House and inform the House on the issues related to this particular case. Madam Speaker, with regard to this case of alleged sexual abuse on a Standard VI pupil aged 10, at Petite Rivière Government School by a person reported to be a close relative to the child. This person had been enlisted by the PTA of the school as gardener on a part-time basis during the third term in 2014.

My Ministry had taken cognizance of a school report on Monday, 30 March 2015 relating to this case of sexual abuse which was reported to have taken place on Tuesday 24 March outside the school premises. According to the same report, the accused person had, on 24 March, sought permission from the school to collect the child on the ground that there would be a religious ceremony at the pupil’s place.

The Headmaster allowed the child to leave the school after having registered the pupil’s name in the movement book as the person 2 had, according to the school, previously picked up the pupil from the school on behalf of her parents on 15 October 2013, on 02 June 2014 and on 20 August 2014.

With regard to the release of the pupil on 24 March 2015, the parents were not consulted as opposed to the previous three cases. On Thursday, 26 March 2015, the class teacher noticed the sum of Rs200 with the pupil and informed the parent and it was only then that the parents came to know that the relative who picked the child had given her the sum of money and the parents informed the school that, in fact, there was no religious ceremony held at their place on 24 March. On Friday 27 March, Police had called at the school to inquire into the matter. According to the Police report dated 01 April 2015, the accused had apparently picked up the child from school at about 11.15 on 24 March and allegedly abused her sexually in a nearby sugarcane field. The accused was arrested on 26 March.
and remanded to Police cell. The child was also examined by the Police Medical Unit on 27 March in presence of her mother and officer of the CDU and Police inquiry is still on.

Madam Speaker, on Monday 30 March, the Headmaster of the school informed the Zone Directorate of the incident. The incident had been reported to the CDU of Bambous as well. It has been reported that on the same day, a group of parents who expressed their strong concern about the incident, had gathered at the school for a meeting with the Headmaster. Hon. Guy Lepoigneur, MP, also called at the school to meet the Headmaster and addressed the group of parents. The Zonal Directorate had delegated officers of the school inspectorate: a School Inspector, a Senior Inspector and the Principal School Inspector on 30 March to inquire into the matter. The school has also sought the consent of the parents for the child to be seen by an Educational Psychologist of the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I am advised that the Headmaster of the school met the group of parents on 30 March and a special meeting of the PTA was convened by the Headmaster for Tuesday 31 March at 13.00 hours on that matter. In his report to the Zone dated 30 March 2015, the Headmaster had informed the Zonal Directorate of that Special PTA Meeting. However, it is viewed with concern that the Zone did not delegate any representative to the PTA Meeting and the Zone had issued instructions to the Headmaster to the effect that this case should not be raised at any PTA Meeting for the sake of confidentiality and welfare of the child. Madam Speaker, in view of the seriousness of the case, I have ordered that explanations be sought from the Zone Director and the Inspectorate as to why no representative of the zonal directorate was delegated to the special PTA meeting and secondly, why instructions were issued to the Head Master for the matter not to be raised although taking into consideration that confidentiality should have been taken into consideration. Explanations will also be sought from the school as to why no parental consent was sought prior to release of the child on that day unlike the previous occasions when the parents were contacted and why a substantial delay was noted in reporting the matter to the zone and to the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, as stated earlier, enquiry is on at the level of the Police and CDU.

Moreover, I have ordered a full-fledged enquiry on the matter and also on the circumstances that led to the release from school of the child on that day. The enquiry team will also be called upon to situate responsibilities and recommend disciplinary actions to be taken against officers in case they have failed in their duties.

In the meantime, instructions are being issued to schools for a more rigorous control on release of pupils and to ensure that parental consent is sought and obtained in each case prior to release. I wish to reassure the House that the matter is being followed up very closely at the level of my Ministry and actions will be taken very promptly.