Mr Speaker, Sir, I have two statements to make.

First of all, with your permission I would like to make a statement on the status of Asian Languages and Arabic within the school reform project.

Mr Speaker, Sir, at the very outset, I wish to assure the House that the proposed reforms will serve to promote our rich ancestral and cultural heritage by making Asian Languages and Arabic accessible to all.

Firstly, the Primary Curriculum Renewal. At present four core subjects, English, French, Mathematics and EVS and an Asian Language/Arabic are being taught in our primary schools and pupils are enrolled for an Asian language class on the basis of their ancestral language. However, in the case of Arabic which is offered during the same time slot as Urdu, parents exercise a choice between these two subjects.

After the publication of the "Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector" document, certain socio-cultural groups expressed some apprehensions because of the use of the term "optional" in respect of Asian Languages/Arabic. With a view to dispelling any confusion, I have met them and explained that the use of the word "optional" in the case of Asian Languages/Arabic referred, as at present, only to children whose ancestral language is not an Asian Language/Arabic and/or who take "Religious Education" as an alternative to Asian Languages/Arabic.

In fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, we are now going a step further with abolition of CPE ranking. At the CPE examinations, Asian Languages/Arabic are examinable, are used for certification purposes, but not for ranking. With the proposed reforms, for 2002 and 2003 CPE examinations, Asian Languages/Arabic will continue, as at present, to be examinable and gradable subjects and will count for certification. That is, up to academic year 2004 the seats reserved at Form I level for best performers in Asian Languages/Arabic will be maintained, but on a regional basis as from 2003.
Mr Speaker, Sir, with the abolition of ranking, as explained in the last released document, as from 2004, for Standard VI examinations, Asian Languages/Arabic will be conferred the same status as all other examinable subjects. Accordingly, as from 2005, the CPE aggregate of all pupils taking Asian Languages/Arabic will refer to the grades obtained in the eight best subjects out of 9 examinable.

New timetabling arrangements are being introduced to provide for non-corresponding and completely separate slots for Asian Languages/Arabic on the one hand and religious education on the other hand. As such, all children, irrespective of their ancestral background or religious denomination, will be afforded a very real opportunity and indeed encouraged to take an Asian Language/Arabic for Standard VI examinations. Pupils not having studied Asian Languages/Arabic before will be afforded the possibility of free coaching outside normal school hours as from this year so as to be in a position as from 2004 to offer an Asian Language/Arabic at the Standard VI examinations.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the above measures will allow for inclusion of Asian Languages/Arabic in the new Grade system and for the purpose of admission to secondary school without prejudicing the interests of any child as announced in the Presidential Address.

As regards the MGI, which has a very specific role to play in the promotion of Asian Languages, allow me to remind the House that it will in no way be hampered in so doing by the transformation of its secondary school into a Form VI college. In fact, additionally, the contract for the construction of the Rabindranath Tagore Institute has now been awarded which will provide for another powerful instrument for the promotion of Asian Languages and the RTI will house a Form I to V secondary school to be operational as from January 2003.
The Minister of Education & Scientific Research (Mr S. Obeegadoo):
I have two short statements, Mr Speaker, Sir.

With your permission, I would like to make a short statement on the curriculum renewal project in the primary sector.

As the House is aware, there has been no reform of the primary curriculum for almost two decades. Even then the only change that was initiated in the early 1980s was the replacement of Geography by Environmental Studies. We have seriously lagged behind in the sense that it is current practice for most countries worldwide to review periodically their school curriculum to ensure that it responds to the needs of a constantly changing socio-economic world order.

It is now recognised by all stakeholders that for too long, the educational experience of our children has been a very distorted one, limited to the academic subjects that determine their future access to the few 'Star' secondary schools – that to the detriment of their physical, aesthetic, moral and cultural development. The system has denied our children their fundamental rights to an education that would prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life.

The need for a curricular reform at primary level is accordingly based on the following considerations -
(i) the importance of providing a broad basic education to allow an early development of the child in line with international best practice and evolution within pedagogical thinking;
(ii) the importance of ensuring that education serves the development of the country by responding to human resource requirements and in parallel promoting employability and versatility of tomorrow's labour force;
(iii) the fact that no significant primary curricular reforms have undertaken since 1980.

A new curriculum taking into account these considerations as well as the needs of our multi-cultural society has, therefore, been devised and presented in the form of a document entitled 'Curriculum Renewal in the Primary Sector', copy of which has been laid in the Library of the Assembly.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am in the process of consulting all stakeholders of the primary education sector on the modalities of implementation of the project. I
have already met all unions of the primary sector as well as the Bureau d'Éducation Catholique. I am meeting Parents/Teachers Associations as well as Head Teachers in the days to come.

With your permission, Sir, I have also invited all Members of the National Assembly tomorrow, Wednesday 11 April at 3.00 p.m. in the Committee Room of the Assembly for a detailed presentation of the primary curriculum reforms, followed by discussions.

Copies of the project have already been circulated to Members of the Assembly and I earnestly hope that all interested Members, from both sides of the House, will attend.

Thank you, Sir.