(2.40 p.m.)

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

"Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education and Breaking the Admission Bottleneck at Secondary Level"
- policy document

The Minister of Education and Scientific Research (Mr S. Obeegadoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, further to the undertaking I gave to the House at our last sitting, I propose to make a statement as to the policy document entitled "Ending the Rat Race in Primary Education and Breaking the Admission Bottleneck at Secondary Level" released by the Ministry of Education on Thursday 11 May. As my colleagues will be aware, the document spells out in detail the measures Government intends to implement to ensure that ranking at CPE be abolished as from next year and that as from 2003 admissions at secondary level be effected, in general, on a regional basis. The strategy adopted is four pronged -

(i) ranking will be replaced by a fair and equitable grading syste
(ii) the number of educational establishments at secondary operated by the State will be increased from 41 to 90 by 2006 together with an ambitious programme of extension, conversion and general upgrading in the State secondary sector;
(iii) star secondary schools belonging to the State will be transf into Form VI colleges as a first step towards obtaining parity of public esteem for secondary schools; and
(iv) four administrative regions grouping both urban and rural will be established for admission purposes to Form I.

To that end, Government will assume the responsibility of effecting half of all admissions in the private schools thereby abandoning the mechanism of having computer listed schools which was premised on the ranking system. Further, in
doing, there will no longer be any distinction made between private confessional and private non confessional schools. Government has appealed to the private educational sector for all admissions in their schools to be as far as possible guided by the regionalisation formula.

As regards the transformation of private schools into either Form I to Form V schools or Form VI colleges, it is not deemed desirable and it is not Government policy to impose a single model, the so-called *Ecole Unique*, upon parents and the private sector has, therefore, been invited to decide for itself. Now, it stands to reason that we would naturally have wished the perceived star schools of the private sector to be transformed into Form VI colleges as that would have facilitated obtention of parity of esteem for all secondary schools offering Form I places and we made it known. But there is still time for the private sector to opt to do so. However to seek to force anything upon the private secondary sector, would only have lead to a dead lock and condemned the reform project to failure right from the start.

That is why we have chosen to describe the plan as the only workable formula "Réaliste et Réalisable" while stating that it does not purport to be the ideal solution to solve all problems in education and for all times. It is, however, the first step, and indeed the first major step, towards bringing about long overdue structural reforms in the educational sector.

It stands to reason that with the reform plan being put forward by Government, we are at a crucial juncture in the history of education in Mauritius and such a historical opportunity should not be wasted.