Debate No. 37 of 23.11.04

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

CORRUPTION SUB-INDEX & CORRUPTION PERCEPTION INDEX OF TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL - RANK OF MAURITIUS

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam)(By Private Notice) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs whether, in regard to -

(a) the deterioration of the rank of Mauritius between 2002/2003 and 2004/2005 in the 'Corruption sub-index' of the World Economic Forum;
(b) the worsening in rank of Mauritius between 2002 and 2004 in the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International, and
(c) the decline in points scored by Mauritius between 2002 and 2004 in the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International,

he will state the reasons for such deterioration and decline.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition to Parliamentary Question B/809 of 09 November 2004 of the First Member for Piton and Rivière du Rempart, hon. Dr. R. Jeetah, which concerned exactly the same issue. I am therefore circulating the reply which I gave to that Parliamentary Question. (Appendix I)

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to add here a reference to wild allegations of corruption made recently by some Opposition Members in relation to -

(i) STAM and the operation of the landfill at Mare Chicose;
(ii) the purchase by the Cargo Handling Corporation of two ship to shore gantry cranes.

The House will remember that as a result thereof, two Commissions of Inquiry chaired by a former Chief Justice and a former Judge of our Supreme Court were appointed. They came to the conclusion that the allegations were totally unfounded and unwarranted.

I note that since then the Opposition has stopped making such wild and irresponsible allegations. However, in the course of the debate to amend the Sports Act on 09 November 2004, the hon. James Burty David made allegations of corruption against the Minister and the Ministry of Youth and Sports in regard to -
(i) alleged over invoicing in the purchase of medals by the Mauritius Badminton Federation;

(ii) alleged cover up of malpractices at the Mauritius Table Tennis Federation.

I wish to inform the House that I have raised the issue with the hon. Leader of the Opposition informing him that I will be writing to him to know if he stands by the above allegations before considering further action.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, for the question that was asked by the hon. Member for Constituency No. 7, the hon. Prime Minister has said many times that he does not agree with that supposedly perception. Is he still standing on this ground that there is no corruption in this country?

The Prime Minister: I did not say that, Mr Speaker, Sir. If the Leader of the Opposition will go back to what I said, I did say only – I shall quote what I said –

“I wish to add that only people of utter bad faith will not agree that since the last general election corruption has receded in this country in general and in particular, at the Customs Department, in the Police Force and at the Local Government level.”

I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be serious. I never said that there is no longer any corruption in Mauritius. I wish that it was so, but the fact is that there still is corruption and that we are fighting corruption by all means possible, including the Police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption; and I invite any Member of the Opposition who believes that there is a case of corruption anywhere to make the allegation and action will be taken forthwith.

Dr. Ramgoolam: The Prime Minister said he invites any Member of the Opposition, but we have seen what has happened so far. All allegations have fallen flatly on their face; nothing is happening in this country. That is why the perception of corruption is increasing. Does he not agree?

The Prime Minister: An allegation is an allegation. Then you have to prove your allegation. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition is not being fair when he says that all allegations are falling on deaf ears. This is not the case. The Independent Commission Against Corruption on the one hand and the Police on the other are doing their work. Cases have been sent to the DPP and to Court. And the hon. Leader of the Opposition knows that two of his former Ministers are before the Courts for corruption charges …

(Interruptions)
Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

The Prime Minister: …and a third being questioned right now by the Independent Commission Against Corruption for allegedly opening a fake bank account. So, every action that can be taken is being taken, but the hon. Leader of the Opposition should be serious. He knows what took place before the two Commissions of Inquiry that I mentioned…

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order please!

The Prime Minister: He came with hearsay and so on and was taken to task by the Commissions of Inquiry. I won’t mention Mr Valayden who disappeared completely from the circulation.

(Interruptions)

So, allegations are one thing; proving allegations is another. And this is why I have told the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the dignity of his office requires that he confirms whether he stands by the filthy allegations made in this House, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, order please!

The Prime Minister: And if the Leader of the Opposition stands by the allegations I shall act.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, order!

(Interruptions)

Hon. David, I have given the floor to the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Prime Minister for reminding people that even my own Ministers have been questioned. He forgets to mention that it was under my Government that the allegations were investigated by the Economic Crime Office;

(Interruptions)
And that there was no interference. But I want to ask him why did he dismantle the Economic Crime Office then?

The Prime Minister: He knows why! I made it a point and I would wish that he listens to what I say. ICAC is at present carrying out a full inquiry concerning a third Labour Party Minister for allegedly opening a fake bank account, Mr Speaker. This has nothing to do with the past or what have you. This is taking place now. Everybody knows the reasons why the politically motivated Economic Crime Office has been replaced by the Independent Commission Against Corruption and we all know what security of tenure, what additional powers have been given to the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: This is common knowledge.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is the joke! He asked for security of tenure for the lady in charge of Economic Crime Office. When the Economic Crime Office started investigating two of my Ministers, she was fine. But the minute she started investigating one of their own Ministers, then the Economic Crime Office was dismantled. That is the truth.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, it’s never too late. I invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition himself or any other Member who wishes to make allegations against any Minister today or yesterday to come forward.

(Interruptions)

I won’t use the word ‘challenge’ but I invite them. Instead of behaving like Valayden, come forward!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, this remark by hon. Dulloo should be interpreted as it is. We have set up Commissions of Inquiry chaired by people of integrity, former Chief Justice Glover, Former Judge Ahnee of the Supreme Court.

(Interruptions)
Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Prime Minister: Shame on this hon. Member! Shame on him!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: I feel ashamed for that kind of Leader of the Opposition, that kind of allegation that is being made in your back, hon. Leader of the Opposition. I again invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition or anybody in the Opposition, if you have any allegations, stand up now, make it and I will take action, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dulloo, please!

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, nothing will happen with the allegations because we know the Prime Minister interferes in everything. That is why the corruption index is increasing.

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, this is totally untrue, Mr Speaker, Sir and avec mépris that I take what has just been said, Mr Speaker. The insinuation of the hon. Leader of the Opposition is that I can interfere with people of integrity like the former Chief Justice Glover, former Judge Ahnee of the Supreme Court. Shame on the hon. Leader of the Opposition! We set up Commissions of Inquiry, they do their job in total independence, Mr Speaker, Sir, and when they found that the wild allegations made in the two cases I referred to were totally unwarranted, unjustified, they said so. Now, my ears are open. I again invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition and anybody on the other side, if it is true that the Economic Crime Office was done away with to hide allegations, come forward with those allegations!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Prime Minister: It is not too late. I challenge them to come forward with those allegations today in the House or anywhere! This is very unfair, unacceptable!
**Dr. Ramgoolam:** All the evidence has already been destroyed, we know that. Much evidence has been destroyed.

*( Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** What did the hon. Baloomoody say when he was there?

*( Interruptions)*

He said that if the Policeman would talk to his client he would punch him in the face. Did he not say that?

*( Interruptions)*

That kind of pressure! It was published in the papers. Go and see the papers! A barrister threatened a Policeman while he was investigating! Shame! What is the Prime Minister saying? That is a Government of *mafia* that is operating in this country! He has *le culot* to ask for allegations.

*( Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, order!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** This is the most corrupt Government!

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the truth, I repeat, is that when the lady we all know about, was in charge of the Economic Crime Office, it was totally *politiser*...

*( Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order, please, hon. Baloomoody!

**The Prime Minister:** But this having been said it is not too late. The Police is there; the Independent Commission Against Corruption is there; we are here. Instead of making shameful allegations, without bringing any evidence forward, I invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition once again. Come forward! Name the Ministers who are supposed to have been or are corrupt. Do that and I will take action immediately.
**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I do not believe that the Prime Minister will take any action. He has been covering up all this time. We will make the allegations when he is not Prime Minister anymore! I promise him that!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**The Prime Minister:** This is a complete admission of guilt, Mr Speaker, Sir. I repeat that when allegations were made in the case of STAM and Mare Chicose and, secondly, in the case of the Cargo Handling Corporation and the purchase of cranes, a former Chief Justice of Mauritius and a former Judge of the Supreme Court were appointed and they carried out a totally independent inquiry. This is what I will do every time that the need arises. Right now, the hon. Leader of the Opposition will have to react to the allegations made in his absence here in the National Assembly, then, we will see what next.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** I do not want to go into what happened in the Commission of Inquiry. Does the Prime Minister think it right that ex-Chief Justices or Judges are appointed and, at the same time, get juicy contracts from Government? Is that being independent?

**The Prime Minister:** This is just shameful, Mr. Speaker! Because the Opposition drowns in mud, they try and throw mud at anybody, including a former Chief Justice of Mauritius, Mr Glover, a former Judge of the Supreme Court, Mr Ahnee, who are respected by everybody in this country, except that mafia there.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order! Hon. Boolell, please!

**The Prime Minister:** I find it shameful that the hon. Leader of Opposition should associate himself with people who are throwing mud on a former Chief Justice and a former Judge. Shame on all of them!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** It is unacceptable that an ex-Chief Justice or a Judge accepts a contract from the Government and sits on and presides over the Commission of Inquiry. I find this wrong and if the Prime Minister does not find this to be wrong, then, there is no surprise that the Corruption Perception Index is increasing in this country.

**The Prime Minister:** What contract is the Leader of Opposition referring to?
Dr. Ramgoolam: Is not the former Chief Justice being asked to vet the Bills in this country? Has he not been nominated on a Board of a parastatal body?

The Prime Minister: This has nothing to do with a contract between the Government and the former Chief Justice. The Leader of the Opposition knows very well that when he was Prime Minister as well, Judges with their experience, with their capacity to draft legislation have always done that. A l'époque de Venchard, it was like that. It has always been like that. When Judges retire, their experience and knowledge are tapped. It has always been like that, if we go back à l'époque de Venchard and dozens of others, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is normal practice. I say 'Thank You' to Mr Glover and Mr Ahnee and others who are prepared to work, not for Government, but for the country, Mr Speaker, Sir. This has nothing to do with a contract between the Government and them; and I find it again shameful that today Mauritius has a Leader of the Opposition that associates himself with that kind of allegations. It is nothing, but shameful!

Dr. Ramgoolam: It is shameful as much as he wants himself! I stand by it. I think it is wrong for Judges to be given contracts while they are sitting on Commissions of Inquiry. It is not right and we have said it before. In fact, hon. Dulloo challenged this point. Can I ask the Prime Minister - he is talking about false allegations - what happened when he made allegations of corruption against Sir Anerood Jugnauth's government in 1984/85 and Justice Goburdhun then told everybody that he had been lying?

The Prime Minister: I cannot remember what words the then Justice Goburdhun used. We can go to the history books. But this has nothing to do with Mauritius of today.

Mr Dulloo: The question of accountability and transparency is important for the image of Mauritius. Why is it that Government is not giving the breakdown of all the money that has been paid from public funds to former Justice Ahnee and others for the various contracts that they have obtained, including contracts from the Ministry of Local Government that has been managing and running the whole STAM project?

Mr Speaker: I think that the question has nothing to do with the Private Notice Question that has been put by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. The hon. Member can come with a substantive question asking for all those information.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the only answer of the hon. Prime Minister concerned Mare Chicose and the harbour. He said that Transparency International and the World Economic Forum may be wrong because they have relied on the allegations of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir, I never said what the hon. Member is saying that I have said. It is not in order for him to put words in the mouth of the Prime Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir.
Mr Dulloo: The Prime Minister is lying.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. David, would you please be quiet? The hon. Member has to withdraw the word 'lying'.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, I withdraw the word 'lying'. I said that the Prime Minister is not telling the truth, because the answer that he has just given concerns Mare Chicose and the portiques; and the nomination of Mr Ahnee …

(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker: When the hon. Member is saying that the Prime Minister is lying and that he is not saying the truth, it is the same thing. To say that what he is saying is not the truth might be the correct way to put it. That is the difference.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, may I ask the Prime Minister whether he is aware that there has been conflict of interest in the case of a former Judge that had been presiding over Commissions of Inquiry? This was raised before the Judge himself and the list of the various conflicts of interest was given. In the past, the practice was to appoint independent former Judges or former Chief Justice who had had no contract whatsoever with the current Government.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am not going to reply to points raised by people like hon. Dulloo and Mr Valayden. Ils ne méritent que le mépris.

Mr Hurnam: Mr Speaker, Sir, the freedom of the press exists in this democracy. We have heard that the ex-Chief Justice presided over several Commissions of Inquiry. Would the Prime Minister now recall that ex-Chief Justice Glover appeared as Commissioner for the MURD and several persons were arrested, detained, bailed and there was a big scam about it? Today, the advice is that there is no case. Would the Prime Minister consider liaising with the Commissioner of Police to see to it that confidential information on matters which are sub judice should not be let out in the press on the issues of corruption as well?

The Prime Minister: It is a general statement with which I have no quarrel. But when matters are being considered and are sub judice, the press should be very careful. I agree fully with that.

Mr Dulloo: He has just referred to a case of a former Minister being inquired into by ICAC. Is this not corruption itself that the hon. Prime Minister should be aware, against all the laws of the country which forbid that, of a dossier being inquired into by the ICAC?

The Prime Minister: This has appeared in the press, Mr Speaker.
Mr Dulloo: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that the Director of ICAC, behind whom he is shielding right now, stated publicly that corruption has penetrated all the sectors of Mauritius and that there are certain dossiers, for example, Air Mauritius, Sugar Syndicate, the Offshore, the Vivendi case, the Multi-Consult case involving high profile people, have not been submitted to him? Because he said that these dossiers from the ECO transited to the Revenue Authority before coming to him. People should know what this meant. Is he aware of this public declaration of the Commissioner of ICAC?

The Prime Minister: I am not hiding behind anything.

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Prime Minister said he has forgotten what Judge Goburdhun said in his report. Does he still remember what Magistrate Namdarkhan said on allegations about Sheik Hossen?

Mr Speaker: This is not relevant.

Mr Dulloo: The hon. Prime Minister just now circulated the answer he gave last week to the PQ asked by hon. Jeetah. He quoted Mr Jacques De Navacelle who said -

"Maurice est dans la catégorie des pays pas très corrompus."

Does not this mean that Mauritius is one of those corrupt countries whose image is declining day by day, but not très corrompu as those in the lower rung of the ladder of the index published by Transparency International?

The Prime Minister: It is simple to understand what 'pas très corrompus' means. 'Pas très corrompu' means 'not très corrompu'. It is straightforward. There is no problem. As I said earlier on, there is corruption in Mauritius, Mr Speaker, Sir, but not in Government, unlike the previous Government.

(Interruptions)

They cannot point a finger at any Minister, any Member on this side! I invite them, again, to do that, Mr Speaker, Sir. This Government is proud that no one can point a finger at us. Therefore, when Mr Jacques De Navacelle made that statement, it is a good thing.

Dr. Ramgoolam: I again say to the Prime Minister that the allegation will be made in due time, not when he can interfere. He said that it would be only people of utter bad faith who do not agree that corruption receded. Is he aware that the JEC has stated that it disagrees with the Prime Minister as far as corruption is concerned and that it agrees with Transparency International and its findings about the rising level of corruption?

The Prime Minister: No, I have never stated that.
**Dr. Ramgoolam:** It is well-known that they are saying that. But does he agree that the level of corruption is rising in this country?

**The Prime Minister:** I reply that only people of utter bad faith will not recognise that since the last general elections corruption has decreased in this country. We have been and we shall be ruthless against fraud and corruption. Again, I invite Members of the Opposition who have an allegation …

*(Interruptions)*

The hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying "in time". He is running scared! He made two allegations.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** This is the cover up that has happened.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I thought you were going to stand up. Out of due respect I sat down but you refrained from standing up.

**Mr Speaker:** I was about to tell the hon Leader of the Opposition that the Prime Minister has the floor, he is replying to the question. Any question?

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** If the hon. Prime Minister says corruption has gone down, can he explain therefore why is it that all the figures that he has not actually quoted - but I can quote them if he wants - show that corruption is deteriorating and is getting worse in this country? Why is it that he should alone be right and all these professionals should be wrong?

**The Prime Minister:** Again, it is a question of Transparency talking about perception; and you know Transparency, the Davos crowd, the World Economic Forum, that is the same *milieu*.

*(Interruptions)*

You know I am not one of the Davos crowd, unlike the hon. Leader of the Opposition I do not go by the Davos crowd.

*(Interruptions)*

**Dr. Ramgoolam:** You will never be able to be part of the Davos crowd!
The Prime Minister: We do our work, Mr Speaker, Sir and it is acknowledged that today Mauritius is amongst the countries that has the best avant-gardiste, anti-corruption legislation and institutions, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Prime Minister: It is acknowledged by everybody and as a result of that, corruption is and has been decreasing in Mauritius.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Is the Prime Minister aware that the world State persons like former US President Jimmy Carter, like former President of Ireland, who is also Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission in Europe, Mrs Mary Robinson, these are people of probity, integrity and honesty? And they have put their signature on these reports of Transparency International and World Economic Forum. Are these people wrong as well?

The Prime Minister: Transparency International does its work the way it does. I am not dealing with all the names mentioned. I know Transparency International.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Why should we believe the Prime Minister who does not have any knowledge about this? He does not know anything about research methodologies, he does not know anything. Why should we believe him and reject the views of people of international repute, of international institutions who say that he is presiding over one of the most corrupt Government in this region?

(Interruptions)

The Prime Minister: It is not even what Transparency International says. Transparency International only says that the perception of corruption at a given point in time, through mainly private sector eyes, is at this or that level, not the reality of corruption. So, there is no one of international repute who has said that Mauritius is a corrupt country, that this is the worst corrupt Government. This is total rubbish! I repeat this Government has its record; we have been in Government for four years, we have voted legislation, we have set up institutions, including Commissions of Inquiry and no one can point a finger at us, this Government, as compared to the previous Labour stinking Government.

Dr. Ramgoolam: The proof of the pudding is in the eating! In my Government two Ministers were faced with allegations. Nothing like that happened with this Government. That is the proof of the pudding.

The Prime Minister: The truth is that there is no corruption in this Government. That is the truth!
(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Questions to the hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Armance.