

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

MEDICINE - POST GRADUATE STUDIES - SCHOLARSHIPS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms, Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to scholarships for post graduate studies in medicine awarded to public officers, he will state –

- (a) the number offered by donor countries for the year 2007/2008;
- (b) for the years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 for studies at the Banaras Hindu University –
 - (i) the name of the candidates who were nominated under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation Programme, and
 - (ii) if his Office was involved in the selection exercise, and
- (c) if he has received representations in connection with the selection exercise for the year 2007/2008 and, if so, if an inquiry has been initiated in connection therewith.

The Minister of Health and Quality of Life (Mr S. Faugoo): Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to the PNQ as well as to PQ B/701 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister as both relate to the award of scholarships for post graduate studies in medicine to public officers.

As regards part (a) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources that 15 offers of open scholarships for post graduate studies in medicine have been received. There are 8 offers from China, 3 from Russia, 3 from New Zealand and one from SADC. These scholarships are meant for candidates in both public and private sectors. I am also advised that no scholarships have been awarded as yet for the year 2007/2008. Candidates have at this stage been recommended for nomination. The final selection of the nominated

candidates rests with the donor countries. In addition, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development has advised that they have received 3 offers from Banaras Hindu University, India for year 2007/2008.

As regards, part (b) (i) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, the names of the candidates who were nominated under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme are as follows -

For the year 2006/2007 -

- (i) Dr. (Mrs) Leckwantee Rittoo
- (ii) Dr. Rajiv Kumar Bachonee
- (iii) Dr. Ahmad Noorani Peerally
- (iv) Dr. (Ms) Laila Prasad
- (v) Dr. Bipin Sookmanee
- (vi) Dr. (Mrs) Dhurmah Devi Sookmanee

From the list submitted, the nominations of Dr. (Ms) Laila Prasad, Dr. Bipin Sookmanee and Dr. (Mrs) Dhurmah Devi Sookmanee were retained by the Government of India for post graduate medical studies.

As far as years 2007/2008 are concerned, the nominations were for -

- (i) Dr. Rajnishlal Chooromoney
- (ii) Dr. (Miss) Leckwantee Rittoo
- (iii) Dr. Ahmad Noorally Peerally
- (iv) Dr. (Mrs) Aroona Devi Mudoo
- (v) Dr. (Ms) Sheila Mudhoo

From the list submitted, the nomination of Dr. (Ms) Sheila Mudhoo was retained by the Government of India for post graduate medical studies.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to point out that the exercise carried out by my Ministry is only an administrative one. Once the exercise is completed, the recommended list of candidates is sent by my Ministry to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for onward transmission to the High Commission of India.

I also wish to inform the House, Mr Speaker, Sir, that although 3 seats are offered by the Banaras Hindu University each year for medical studies,

there have been instances where only 2 seats were finally allocated. For example, for the academic years 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 only 2 scholarships were awarded from a recommended list of 9 candidates in 2001/2002 and 9 candidates in 2002/2003.

Again Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the Banaras Hindu University also offers self financing seats. In this respect, in the year 1992/1993, Dr. (Mrs) Bindoomatee Koolwant who was not nominated by the Government of Mauritius benefited from a self financing seat by that University from the seats reserved for Mauritian candidates.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I need to point out that the final decision for the selection of candidates for the medical studies in India rests with the Government of India as also indicated in its letter of 19 January, 2007 addressed to my Ministry.

With regard to part (b) (ii) of the question, the Prime Minister's Office has not been involved in the selection exercise. In accordance with existing arrangements, nominations of officers for scholarships are approved by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development.

As regards part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, both the Prime Minister's Office and my Ministry have received representations in connection with the selection exercise for the year 2007/2008. I also understand that there have been representations made to the Ag. Prime Minister. As it is my Ministry that is involved in this exercise, as stated in my reply to PQ B/606 of 05 June, 2007, my Ministry has informed the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development of these representations made and has requested the latter to take up the matter with the High Commission of India. A reply is being awaited.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, my first question concerns the name of Dr. Sheila Mudhoo in the list of 5 which was submitted to the Indian High Commission. May I ask the hon. Minister whether Dr. Mudhoo was seconded for duty at the Police Department and is, in fact, now under a traineeship and is expected to have a scholarship to become a Police Medical Officer in the years to come?

Mr Faugoo: That is a fact, Mr Speaker, Sir, but this did not prevent her to apply because she was still on the establishment of the Ministry of

Health. She was entitled to apply and she did as she was qualified. This is why she was nominated.

Mr Bodha: Does the hon. Minister find it fit that somebody who is already undergoing training for forensic....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, does not the hon. Minister believe that somebody who is undergoing training to become a Police Medical Officer and who is expected to have scholarship to go to France to become a Police Medical Officer has taken the place of somebody else and then be awarded a scholarship in Pathology? May I ask the hon. Minister whether he feels that that person has not, in fact, availed herself of a scholarship which could have been better given to somebody else and that, in the first instance, Dr. Mudhoo should not have been in the recommended list of 5 sent to the Indian High Commission? That is my question.

Mr Faugoo: This, in my opinion, Mr Speaker, Sir, is a non issue because the scholarship was offered to all those people who were eligible.

Mr Speaker: Can I correct the hon. Minister? This is not a matter of opinion being given that the exercise was carried out by his Ministry.

Mr Faugoo: The offer was made, Mr Speaker, Sir, to all those who were qualified and that lady was qualified to all intents and purposes though she was seconded for duty. If she wanted to choose another field, why can't she? This is a free country; we can have two or three professions. Our Prime Minister is a doctor and a lawyer. Tomorrow I can choose to become a doctor, if I am interested. Where is the problem?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: My question is very simple: whether it is not a mismanagement of resources? We have somebody who is already under traineeship in a department in one specific field, which is forensic science, who is expecting to have a scholarship in a year's to come and that person

applies for another scholarship where everyone has not availed himself or herself of a scholarship. Isn't this a mismanagement of resources? Dr. Mudhoo should not have been on the list, to start with?

Mr Faugoo: This is not mismanagement at all. On the contrary, this is good management, offering the chance to everybody who is interested and eligible to apply.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! I said order!

Mr Faugoo: I will repeat. Mr Speaker, Sir, this is not mismanagement. On the contrary, offer was made to all officers who were eligible and she was an officer who was eligible to apply.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, let me now come to the two doctors who have been nominated and the complaints and representations that were sent to the Prime Minister and to the hon. Minister. May I ask him whether the Prime Minister, at one point in time, has to give his clearance for a public servant to go on a scholarship?

Mr Faugoo: As I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, there is a circular from the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of Civil Service, which dates back to 22 March 2002, and it has been clearly stipulated therein that nominations of officers are done, especially in this case, by the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development on behalf of the Prime Minister. So, the file does not need to go back to the PMO for approval. It is approved by the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware of a letter dated 24 May, addressed to his Ministry by Mr Jayprakash Kardam, the Second Secretary at the High Commission in Mauritius. I am going to table a copy of that letter, Mr Speaker, Sir. In that letter, it is stated that –

“The High Commission is pleased to inform the hon. Minister that Miss Sheila Mudhoo has been nominated for admission to a post graduate course at the Banaras Hindu University”.

The next paragraph says this –

“You are requested to inform the candidate accordingly, so that they report to the Institute of Medical Sciences in Banaras Hindu University without any delay to complete various formalities”.

My first question is: whether he is aware of this letter?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have a copy of the letter in hand. This was sent by the High Commission to my Ministry.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, my second question is whether the hon. Minister is aware – if he has got the letter – that the last paragraph says that ‘they may also be informed to report to the undersigned with release letter from your Government – that is, the Government of Mauritius – to complete formalities and obtain student visas’. When the Minister got a letter of that tenure, Mr Speaker, Sir, what has he done to find out any explanation as to the discrepancies in the letter?

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, first, I cannot comment on the letter which emanates from the Commission. It is not a letter which comes from my Ministry. Second, for the information of the House, this letter is dated 24 May, which informs the Ministry that the name of Sheila Mudhoo has been retained. Without any representations made from any quarters, on 25 May we wrote a letter to the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, requesting the latter to liaise with the High Commission of India on the two other nominations. That was done on the next day. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition does not have this letter, I can table it.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, that is the question! The hon. Minister was offered three scholarships under the Indian Technical and Economic Co-operation Programme, which is a State to State matter. He is given a letter where one person is nominated, and is being told that ‘they may also be informed’. What does he do? He writes to the Ministry of Finance on 25 May. What has happened since then?

Mr Faugoo: Is the hon. Leader of the Opposition proposing that I should have walked down to the Commission myself?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Faugoo: The first thing which the Ministry did, was to write to the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, asking them to take up the matter with the High Commission as to what happened. I will ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition: what happened in 2003? Can anybody on the other side of the House say what happened to the third seat? Two years, Mr Speaker, Sir! I am not justifying anything! As I said, these three seats are given to the Republic of Mauritius. Scholarships are given to public officers. There is a difference! What happened to Dr. Koolwant? She applied directly. I don't know what has happened. Officially, on record, I have one name. I have submitted five names, and one has been selected. What do I do? I am inquiring! I will come back to the House, if need be, in the light of the outcome.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is taking the matter lightly. *La méritocratie a été bafouée.* The Minister is condoning it in Parliament, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition cannot use the word 'condoning'.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether a release letter was granted to Miss Mudhoo for her to leave for Banaras?

Mr Faugoo: Indeed, Mr Speaker, Sir, after she was nominated, she applied for a release letter for leave without pay, which she was granted.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, is the hon. Minister aware that two officers who were unqualified, who were not eligible and who have not applied according to the correct criteria and procedure, have been given two scholarships at Banaras Hindu University? Is he aware of that?

Mr Faugoo: Officially, I am not aware, Mr Speaker, Sir. Unless the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants me to answer from what I have read in the press! I am replying from what I have in my file! Only one officer has been selected, and she has been given release. As far as the others are concerned – I don't know whether there are two, three or more – I don't know.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in the representation made by the trade union of medical officers, there is a fax, with reference AA1/327/26/212007, where a copy is sent to the Minister, stating –

“Please refer to the letter regarding nomination of foreign students. The competent authority in this Ministry – that is, the Ministry of External Affairs in India – has approved nomination of the following candidates, as per details given below -.”

There are two for Nepal and three for Mauritius. For Mauritius, there is first, Dr. Anju Ramdinny, second, Dr. Rishi Raj Purryag and third, Dr. Sheila Mudhoo. Furthermore, it is stated that –

“The candidates are being advised to approach IMS (BHU) immediately. Their applications in original are being sent through special messenger for further necessary action.”

Has the Minister got a copy of this letter?

Mr Faugoo: I don't have a copy of that letter, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a copy of a document which was sent by the trade union when they were protesting about the irregularities. Now that I have mentioned to the Minister – because there is an official document from the Government of India – that out of three scholarships that were awarded to the State of Mauritius, one has been allocated from the list, and that two had been allocated to two persons who are not eligible, not qualified and who did not even apply, what does he propose to do now? Because it is a matter of the quality and the excellent relationship we have between India and Mauritius.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we don't have any correspondence directly from India; either from the University or the Ministry of External Affairs. All we have is correspondence from the Commission, through the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development. As I said, we have written a letter and are waiting for a reply.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is saying that he has only the correspondence. But, I mentioned the correspondence which came to his Ministry, as regards Miss Mudhoo and the word 'they'. Therefore, the only thing he has done so far is forwarding the letter to the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development. Does he not think that this is flouting meritocracy?

Mr Faugoo: Not at all, Mr Speaker, Sir. This is the normal course to follow. As I said, when we received the letter, we have made representations to ask what has happened. Because we owe an explanation.

We don't know what has happened. This is why we wrote back to the Ministry of Finance for them to take up the matter with the High Commission.

Mr Bhagwan: I have three supplementary questions. Initially, I had asked one question.

Mr Speaker: I will give the hon. Member all the latitude.

Mr Bhagwan: Etant donné, M. le président, qu'il y a un climat de frustration au niveau du personnel médical, de la population, est-ce qu'il n'est pas dans l'intérêt du gouvernement d'avoir plus de transparence? Il y va même de la réputation du gouvernement. M. le président, est-ce que le ministre peut confirmer qu'il n'y a pas eu d'ingérence visible ou invisible au niveau du bureau du Premier ministre ou du Premier ministre? C'est la question que le public et le personnel médical se posent.

(Interruptions)

M. le président, le ministre n'a pas répondu. Est-ce qu'il peut donner la garantie à la Chambre qu'il n'y a pas eu d'ingérence au niveau du bureau du Premier ministre ?

Dr. David: The hon. Member is imputing motives when he says that there has been...

(Interruptions)

Let Mr Speaker arbitrate!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. David: Mr Speaker, Sir, I said the hon. Member is imputing motives when he stated that there could have been interference from the Prime Minister's Office or the Prime Minister himself.

Mr Speaker: Let me give my ruling! In view of the words used by the hon. Member - if I heard him rightly - being given that he is referring of the involvement of the Prime Minister at the same time then that can impute

motives against the Prime Minister. I am asking the hon. Member to rephrase his question.

Mr Bhagwan: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that it is being stated that the Prime Minister's Office had been involved in trying to influence the decision of awarding the two scholarships to these two persons? Can the hon. Minister, at least, reassure the House and the population that there has not been any intervention through senior officials to the Indian Embassy for the award of scholarships to these two persons?

Mr Faugoo: In reply to the PQ asked by the hon. Member last time, I stated in the House that there has been no intervention and no involvement of the Prime Minister's Office in the selection exercise. I can reassure the House again today that there has been intervention whatsoever. We are waiting for a reply from the Commission and we cannot pronounce until we get a reply from the other quarters.

Mr Bhagwan: Being given that there is a lot of frustration among the personnel in the way this scholarship had been handled, can the hon. Minister, at least, give guarantee to the House that, through the diplomatic channel, attempts will be made to ask these two persons to return to Mauritius and give these scholarships to those who are eligible?

(Interruptions)

Mr Faugoo: In fact, when we wrote to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, we also wrote to the Ministry of External Affairs and I understand that my colleague or the officer attached to the Ministry has taken up the matter with the High Commission. First, we have written directly, as I said, to the Ministry of Economic Development and second to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they are also taking up the matter with the Commission, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: If Government has nothing to hide, the hon. Minister has nothing to hide to the population and the personnel of the medical corps, is he agreeable to set up a Commission of Inquiry with a sitting Judge to look into the whole issue and enlighten the population?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: To set up a Commission of Inquiry, if he is not afraid!

Mr Faugoo: I had said last time, Mr Speaker, Sir, ...
(*Interruptions*)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(*Interruptions*)

Order! Hon. Ms Deerpalsing, you are unnecessarily provoking the hon. Member.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Member is unnecessarily asking for a Commission of Inquiry.

(*Interruptions*)

Mr Faugoo: At the level of my Ministry and that of Economic Development, everything has been done in transparency and there is nothing to inquire about; we have to wait for the answer from the Commission.

Mr Dowarkasing: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has made an inquiry as to whether any original application has been submitted to the Indian Authorities, and if so, can he table a copy of those original applications of all those three doctors involved?

Mr Faugoo: As I said last time, Mr Speaker, Sir, there were 33 applications and out of these only five candidates were qualified according to the set criteria and their names were submitted to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development for onward transmission to the High Commission together with all the application forms and documents required by the Authority over there. I have no problem to table a copy of it.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am referring to the fax dated 22 May which the hon. Minister has received in his office and where the names of the three doctors have been clearly earmarked. It stated that the applications in original will be submitted. I am referring to the three doctors, the fax dated 22 May, and to those applications that had to be submitted to the Indian Authorities in original. I am just asking the hon. Minister whether he has submitted the original applications of Dr. Rishi Raj Purryag and Dr. Anju Ramdinny to the Indian Authorities?

Mr Faugoo: I would request the hon. Member to table a copy of that letter and also state the source from where he got it, because I don't have any letter.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the hon. Minister answer the question.

Mr Faugoo: The correspondence that I have in my file is from the Indian High Commission. I have no letter from any quarters in India. If he has a copy, he must disclose his source and table a copy, and then I will look into the matter.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le ministre peut nous informer qui a donné le *release* aux docteurs Purryag et Anju Ramdinny pour qu'ils obtiennent leur *student visa*?

Mr Faugoo: The Ministry has not given any release to Dr. Purryag and Dr. Ramdinny. We have given release to Dr. Mudhoo who was given the seat officially, as I stated earlier. No release has been given to these two doctors.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: The hon. Minister has just stated in his reply that following the letter dated 24 May where discrepancies were noted, his Ministry wrote to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. Can the hon. Minister say what has been the outcome of that letter since it has been issued since 25 May?

Mr Faugoo: If the hon. Member is referring to the letter which emanates from the High Commission addressed to us...

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister just mentioned in his reply that having noted the discrepancies in the letter dated 24 May, his Ministry wrote to the Ministry of Finance on 25 May. Can we know what has been the outcome of that letter?

Mr Faugoo: We have written not only this letter, which I am tabling a copy, but on 24, we wrote a letter. Then, again when we received representations from the Union, we wrote again. As I said, in my answer, we are waiting for a reply.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: I am surprised, Mr Speaker, Sir, because two months have already elapsed and yet there is no reply from the Ministry of Finance. Definitely, there is something wrong!

Mr Faugoo: I am waiting for the answer, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether in view of the opacity of this whole procedure - since the Ministry of Finance has not yet replied to the Ministry - would he agree to set up a Fact Finding Committee to find out what exactly has happened?

Mr Faugoo: There is diplomatic implication in this matter, Mr Speaker, Sir. To set up a Commission of Inquiry to do what?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: A question has been put, let the hon. Minister answer!

Mr Faugoo: As I said, as far as my Ministry and the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development are concerned, we have to follow procedures. We have to wait for a reply from the other quarters. In the light of the reply, we will have to see what should be done.

Mr Bhagwan: *Is the hon. Minister aware that tout le corps médical, les syndicats, les médecins, les nurses et même la population, si le gouvernement n'a rien à cacher, pourquoi attendre? Est-ce qu'on va attendre une éternité? J'ai pose une question il y a deux mois de cela. Entretemps, il y a 'mardaye'.*

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member has put his question, let the Minister answer!

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have written and have asked, I am waiting for the question.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I have two questions?

Mr Speaker: Yes.

Mr Bodha: My first question is: whether the hon. Minister is aware that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure had a meeting with the representatives of a trade union of the medical officers and there was a proposal to leave the matter as they are and that Government would find two new scholarships to provide for the list of five?

Mr Faugoo: I am told there was a meeting with the Ag. Prime Minister and the unions, but I do not know the outcome of the meeting, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, as there was a meeting and a proposal made that two new scholarships be found for the list of five and in view of the fact that it is an issue of meritocracy, of democracy - we know how is the whole issue of scholarships and we have also the excellence of relationship between India and Mauritius - is it not the duty of the Minister and Government to make things clear to the medical profession and to the nation at large? That's why I am reiterating what my hon. friends have said, namely that we need, at least, a Fact-Finding Committee or at most a Commission of Inquiry?

Mr Faugoo: I have answered to this question, Mr Speaker, Sir. We are waiting for a reply and we cannot take a stand at this stage unless we get a reply.

(Interruptions)

Mr Gunness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I was just referring to the letter which the Minister himself has laid on the Table of the Assembly. I feel the content of the letter itself deserves a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry. I refer the Minister to paragraph 3 where he himself said that only one applicant has been nominated for admission. In paragraph 4, he himself

stated for academic session 2007, only one applicant has been selected and in paragraph 5, he said –

“Accordingly, I should be grateful if you could liaise with the High Commission of India to find out where matters stand concerning the two other nominations.”

Two months have elapsed and we do not know where matters stand as for the information asked to the Ministry of Finance. Therefore, I think that a full-fledged Commission of Inquiry can enlighten the House.

Mr Speaker: Although this question is being put for the third time, I could have disallowed it, but I will not do so and ask the hon. Minister to answer.

Mr Faugoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, we cannot impute motives. I, myself, said in my reply that in 2001 and 2002, only two applications were retained. We never knew, up to date, what happened to the third seat. Again in 2002 and 2003....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, now! A question has been put, let the answer come!

Mr Faugoo: Again in the years 2002 and 2003, out of three, only two were awarded when nine nominations were made. There was no fact-finding committee, no commission of inquiry.

Mr Speaker: Order, now. Order!

Mr Faugoo: At least, we have written the next day to find out....

(Interruptions)

We have not only written directly, Mr Speaker, Sir, but we have also taken into account the representations made by the Unions and we are waiting for a reply. We can't do otherwise, Mr Speaker, Sir...

((Interruptions))

Mr Speaker: Time is over! Order now! The Table has been advised that PQ No. B/700 addressed to the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn.