

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

CEB – GENERAL MANAGER - APPOINTMENT

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities whether in regard to the General Manager of the Central Electricity Board, he will –

- (a) for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Board –
 - (i) information as to his qualifications and the names of his seniors at management and engineering levels, indicating their qualifications and date of appointment;
 - (ii) and table copy of the minutes of the Board Meeting when his appointment was approved;
- (b) state if –
 - (i) Government gave instructions to any Board Member to approve his appointment, and
 - (ii) he will request the Board to freeze his appointment pending the coming into force of the Equal Opportunities Bill.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Renewable Energy and Public Utilities (Dr. R. Beebejaun): Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for giving me this opportunity of giving facts as to an appointment which has created a lot of comments outside, and also inaccurate representations, according to me. I think it is very unfair what has been said in public, in the newspapers and I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition to give me the opportunity to give the facts as they are.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the Central Electricity Board, set up by the Central Electricity Board Act, is a body corporate and Section 6 thereof provides that “*the Board shall appoint and employ a General Manager and such technical and administrative staff as it thinks fit*”. The same Section also provides that the salaries and terms of appointment shall be determined by the Board.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that in 2001, following the departure of Mr Eddy Astruc, the then CEB Board issued an international advertisement to fill in the post of General Manager and Corporate Planning Research Manager. The Board did not deem it appropriate to consider any existing and experienced staff of the CEB for the post including Mr Narain who was then the senior most employee and who was fully qualified to assume the post of General Manager. Mr Paul Van Nikerk and Miss Donna LeClair, were appointed respectively, that is, General Manager and Corporate Planning Research Manager. The salary drawn by Mr Nikerk was Rs250,000 monthly...

(Interruptions)

Monthly, not yearly!

...compared to monthly salary of Rs47,150 of the previous General Manager, Mr Eddy Astruc.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that again on 23 January 2004, the then Government took note, before the meeting of the Board of CEB that the CEB Board proposed to appoint Miss Donna LeClair from Corporate Planning and Research Manager to General Manager without advertisement with a package of about Rs300,000 monthly...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Beebeejaun: ... including Rs25,000 for accommodation and other benefits with the blessing of the then Minister of Finance and Economic Development who gave his 'no objection' to the proposed salary package.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I said order!

Dr. Beebeejaun: Once again the Board chose to disregard the candidature of the existing and experienced staff of the CEB.

Thus in January 2004, the CEB Board appointed without advertisement Miss Donna LeClair as General Manager.

Mr Speaker, Sir, according to our records, on 28 January 2004, the then Government invited the then Minister of Public Utilities to consult Mr R. Dajee as to whether he would accept appointment as Deputy General Manager for a period of one year on the understanding that he would be offered the post of General Manager at the expiry of Miss LeClair's contract.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that Mr Jean Mée Desveaux, Special Adviser to the then Prime Minister was a member of the Board of CEB on 28 January 2004.

I am informed that from March to November 2004, Mr R. Dajee was appointed as General Manager designate without the job being advertised. As General Manager designate, he was offered a full package as a substantive Manager with a salary of Rs125,000 monthly and a new 2200 cc car by the CEB Board. Mr Dajee was appointed substantively in December 2004. So, he was appointed designate in anticipation of an appointment later on.

Thus, Mr Speaker, Sir, between March and November 2004, the CEB had a General Manager together with a General Manager designate, both receiving full benefits though the CEB Act provides for only one General Manager.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the House may wish to note that, at that time, there were several qualified staff at the CEB to fill the post. Yet the Government invited the then Minister to consult a person from outside the organisation for the post, and ignored the existing qualified and experienced staff.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that, on 15 November 2006, the Board appointed Mr K. Guptar, formerly Financial Secretary, as General Manager, without the job being advertised, as was in the case of Mr Dajee and Miss LeClair.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am advised that, on 20 November 2008, Mr Guptar's contract came to expiry and, on the same day, the Board decided to appoint Mr Chavansingh Dabeedin as General Manager. I am tabling a copy of the minutes of the Board Meeting of 20 November.

Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Chavansingh Dabeedin has impressive academic and professional records; he is a holder of a B-Tech (Hons) in Mechanical Engineering, Master of Business Administration, and an MSc in Electrical Power System Engineering with Distinction from the University of Bath, UK. Mr Dabeedin is the only one who holds an MSc in Electrical Power System Engineering. The MSc in Electrical Power System is a Master Degree which is tailored for electricity utility professionals. Mr Dabeedin obtained the Confederation of British Industries Scholarship in 1994 for working experience in electricity utilities in the UK, and the British Chevening Scholarship in open competition in 2001 to study the MSc in Electrical Power Systems at the University of Bath, UK.

In 1994, he obtained leave without pay with the CEB to study in the UK and, in 2001, he was considered meritorious enough to obtain a leave with pay, on account of the uniqueness of the master degree which is meant for electricity utility professionals and, therefore, directly related with the CEB core business.

As regards to part (a) (i) of the question, the names of the Seniors at Management and Engineering levels, their qualification and date of appointment are as follows -

Name	Post	Qualification	Date of Appointment
Mr G. Hebrard	Deputy General Manager	<i>Diplôme Ingénierie Electricien et Mécanicien</i>	01 January 2006 up to 31 December 2009 (on contract)
Mr H. Fakim	Production	B. Mechanical	01 January 2006 up

	Manager	Engineering	to 31 December 2009 (on contract)
Mr P. Sembhoo	Transmission and Distribution Manager	B. Electrical Engineering	01 October 2004 to date (on contract)
Mr D. Veragoo	Chief Finance Officer	FCCA	March 2008 to date up to 28 February 2010 (on contract)
Mr Charitar	Chief Internal Auditor	FCCA, MBA	27 April 1984
Mr Shiam Thannoo	Secretary/Non- Utility Generation Manager	B. Tech Mechanical Engineering, MBA	31 August 2007
Mr C. Dabeedin	General Manager	B. Tech Mechanical Engineering, MBA, MSc in Electrical Power System with Distinction	21 November 2008 (2-year contract)

Mr Speaker Sir, with regard to part (b) (i) of the PNQ, no instructions were given to any Board Member regarding the appointment of the General Manager, contrary to past practices in regard to the appointment of Miss LeClair and Mr Dajee.

Mr Speaker Sir, the House may wish to know that I am precluded by Section 21 of the CEB Act to give instructions to the Board, except for instructions of a general nature. I was, however, kept informed that the Board was going to consider appointment of a new General Manager on 20 November 2008, given that the contract of Mr Gupta had reached expiry.

I am informed by the Board that it followed same procedures in making the appointment as in the case of appointment of Miss Donna LeClair and Mr Dajee, and the Board was satisfied that the candidate was the most appropriate. Furthermore, since the appointment has been made by

the Board under Section 6 of the CEB Act, it is open to an aggrieved person to seek a judicial review of the appointment before the Supreme Court if he considers that there is valid ground for doing so. It is common place for a party aggrieved by an appointment made under a law to challenge such appointment before the Court.

Regarding part (b) (ii) of the question, it would not be in the normal interest of the public organisation, in particular vital organisations like the CEB, to be prevented from having adequate human resources to enable it to fulfil its functions, simply on the ground that the Equal Opportunities Bill has not been passed.

Furthermore, the Bill, even if it is voted in the National Assembly today, will not come into force until it is proclaimed, and I understand that this process is not going to be completed for some time.

I also understand that the Equal Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination on the ground of “Status”, and “Status” means “age, caste, colour, creed, ethic origin, impairment, marital status...”

Mr Speaker: Perhaps, I’ll have to intervene at this stage. This is against the rule of anticipation, because we are going to discuss the Bill later on.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the point I am trying to make is that it is in the Bill.

Mr Speaker: There is no need to make the point. The Bill will come for discussion later on.

Dr. Beebeejaun: The point I am trying to make is that if the Leader of the Opposition is contending that more experienced candidates have not been offered the job, I wish to state that the offer of a job to a less experienced candidate would not necessarily be tantamount to discrimination.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, that should be precisely left to the bodies that we are going to create in the law later on. My question relates to the recruitment of the new General Manager. But, since the Deputy Prime Minister has made reference to the past, can I just put a few questions on that, and then I’ll move onto the real subject of my question. Will he confirm that, when international offers for employment were made in ‘The Economist’ throughout the world - one gentleman was recruited as General Manager and a lady as lower staff, and the two of them were recruited after international calls for offer - they were open to CEB staff?

Dr Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, at the time, it was considered there were suitably qualified candidates at the CEB. But, from what I gather, the criteria were such that no CEB candidate cared to apply, because they knew they were not going to have it.

(Interruptions)

Twenty years experience! They should read what they put as requirements for General Manager! Read what's in there!

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister has confirmed that, when we looked for the best people, it was open to all existing staff of CEB also, and it is a committee that decided finally.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, the criteria laid down was not suitable for internal CEB candidates. It was more or less tailored for outsiders.

Mr Bérenger: And will he confirm that this was not challenged at all by anybody, including the then Opposition?

(Interruptions)

It was not challenged by anybody?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Of course, it was and we had questions in the House and outside this House on Miss Donna LeClair and Mr Paul Van Nikerk, endless questions!

Mr Bérenger: All of them were recruited through international calls for employment and in the case of Mr Dajee, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister confirm that he was not promoted from inside - he was not an employee - he was recruited on the basis of his management qualifications.

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, more than that, he was pre-selected and there were discussions as to his terms of employment; outside the Board his terms of contract were discussed. The former Prime Minister should know what happened with the appointment of Mr Dajee. He was induced to come, conditions were negotiated, he was to be Deputy General Manager, it failed, then he was designated as designate General Manager.

(Interruptions)

He was appointed as designate General Manager for nine months! Does the hon. Leader of the Opposition think that this is normal? Designate General Manager!

Mr Bérenger: We were purely on the basis of qualifications, internationally and locally, there was no other political, communal or any consideration.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry! No comment can be made on that.

Mr Bérenger: And we know where Mr Dajee is today!

Mr Speaker: There should be no comment.

Mr Bérenger: Can I therefore move on to the point which I was making? The hon. Deputy Prime Minister has confirmed that six employees of the CEB are the seniors of the gentleman that has been appointed; he has 16 years of experience, and the present Deputy General Manager has 42 years and he has been working as a junior to all these persons.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Bérenger: Will not the Deputy Prime Minister agree with me that since the decision has been taken to recruit internally through existing staff that the question of seniority should have been prevalent?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I find it difficult to follow the reasoning of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. If someone has been there....

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, on both sides of the House!

Dr. Beebeejaun: I said to the hon. Prime Minister this morning...

Mr Speaker: The Deputy Prime Minister should answer the question.

Dr. Beebeejaun: I feel embarrassed to reply to this question, because there are people who have contributed to CEB, but it was considered that they were not the most suitable. It was not a question of how long anybody served. You have seen the qualifications of Mr Hébrard, it does not match up in any way with the one who has been appointed. Let us be fair about it. The former Prime Minister should know that length of service is not the only criteria by far for appointment.

Mr Bérenger: It is not the only criteria. Never! My point is that this time it has been agreed to recruit internally. Before there were international calls - written to people outside - but this time the decision was taken to recruit internally and we agree that the Deputy General Manager has 42 years of seniority. I listened carefully and I want to be fair to the gentleman who has been recruited, I heard his CV, his qualifications. Is the hon. Deputy Prime Minister telling me that he is more qualified than all the other six more senior staff members?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, again when Mr Nikerk was appointed...

(Interruptions)

I go back to that. There were qualified people here, but they ignored the qualified people. In 2004 when Miss Donna LeClair was appointed, there were suitable candidates, but they were ignored.

(Interruptions)

When Mr Dajee was appointed, Mr Hébrard was there, he was suitable. Why did not they find him suitable? Mr Speaker, Sir, you see part of my embarrassment. He talks about people who have certain qualities, but are not necessarily suitable for the job. Mr Dajee had suitable qualities, but it does not mean that he had to be the General Manager of CEB.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order, I said! I am on my feet! Order! Order!

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, when it comes to selection, Mr Hébrard is an excellent technician – and I repeat, an excellent technician - as Deputy General Manager in charge of transmission, distribution and production. He does a good job, but that does not necessarily qualify him to be General Manager. I wish Members of the House will understand this.

Mr Bérenger: My question was simple - the way the hon. Deputy Prime Minister is confirming that that gentleman has been appointed, although there are six seniors on top of him, I wanted to know genuinely whether – we won't stop there, we will compare all the qualifications once we are in presence of the Board Paper and of the qualifications. My question was simple: he is not qualified, because we are recruiting internally, on the basis of seniority. I never said that it is the only basis. The second criteria should be qualifications. My question was clear: is he better qualified than the six more senior officers? And I take it that the reply of the Deputy Prime Minister means 'no'.

Dr. Beebeejaun: I can only conclude that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has not listened to my reply.

Mr Bérenger: And it is exactly what his answer means! So, that gentleman, apparently, from what I hear...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister has answered the question. He has said what he had to say. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has to put the questions.....

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: He has confirmed that the gentleman has been appointed ...

Mr Speaker: Whether the Deputy Prime Minister has confirmed or not, there is no need for the hon. Leader of the Opposition to come and say that he has confirmed. It is on the record.

Mr Bérenger: We have heard that this gentleman is not qualified either in terms of seniority or of being more qualified than the others. That is the bottom line, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: What is the answer?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, I still maintain that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has not listened to my reply. Mr Speaker, Sir, I repeat it. Mr Dabeedin has an impressive, academic and professional record. He is a holder of a B-Tech (Hons)...

Mr Bérenger: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, Sir, if this was read, this was listened to.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Let me listen to the question!

Mr Bérenger: My question is: we have been provided with that and it is impressive, but we have not been provided with all the qualifications of the six senior ones. My question was: is that gentleman more qualified, yes or no, than the six more senior?

Dr. Beebeejaun: The answer is yes; he is more qualified than anyone of the staff of the CEB.

Mr Bérenger: This being the clear answer, we will go through the files and if he does deserve on qualifications, that's another matter, because I always said, you have seniority and you have qualifications. I heard the hon. Deputy Prime Minister say that - and, of course, we will have to study the Minutes of the Board Meeting which has just been laid, I have not studied it - Government did not give instructions to any Board member to approve his appointment. Can I ask the hon. Deputy Prime Minister whether the appointment of that gentleman was discussed by the Chairperson of the CEB Board, with himself or with anybody else in Government?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I was informed that there was a Board meeting on 20 November and that a General Manger would be appointed and that Mr Dabeedin has submitted his candidature, an expression of interest, as was the case for previous ones.

Ms Deerpalsing: In respect to this, I have a particular question, when the hon. Deputy Prime Minister answered he mentioned the name of a certain Mr Jean Mée Desveaux ...

(Interruptions)

That person was supposedly sitting on the Board of the CEB. May I ask...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, I said!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Guinness, I ask you to withdraw what you have said.

(Interruptions)

You know what you have said! I am not going to repeat it. I am asking you to withdraw what you have said. You stand up and you withdraw!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Guinness: I maintain.

Mr Speaker: So, I order you out of the House and suspend you for the rest of the sitting of the House!

At this stage, Mr Guinness left the Chamber.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Ms Deerpalsing: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question to the Deputy Prime Minister is: when he answered he mentioned the name of the person that was sitting on the Board of the CEB, may I ask in what capacity that gentleman was sitting on the Board of the CEB and whether he was a mouthpiece of anybody there?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mr Jean Mée Desveaux was Special Adviser. What that means, Mr Speaker, Sir, I don't know, but he was also representing the Minister of Finance on the Board. What he did there, I can't tell.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: Since the Deputy Prime Minister has mentioned the outstanding track record ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Lesjongard: ... of that gentleman with regard to his qualifications and experience, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he has been, in the past, since he has been recruited by the CEB, in charge of any major or minor project of the CEB?

Dr. Beebeejaun: I cannot answer this question offhand, but if a substantive question is put, I'll answer.

Mr Bérenger: Because I have not read the minutes of proceedings yet, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister, who must have read the minutes of proceedings, who proposed the appointment of that gentleman at the Board level and were there discussions at the Board level?

Dr. Beebeejaun: The Chairman proposed and the discussions were as to the details of his track record and qualifications.

Mr Bérenger: Was it the Chairperson who proposed the appointment after having discussed it with the Deputy Prime Minister?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry. Did he discuss that with the Deputy Prime Minister?

Dr. Beebeejaun: The answer is no, but more importantly, it has always been the Chairman who proposed, unless it was Mr Jean-Mée Desveaux in the past.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: The Deputy Prime Minister just said that he had been informed. By whom, if not by the Chairperson!

Dr. Beebeejaun: The Chairperson informed me that there would be a meeting of the Board on 20 November.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not want to be too tough on the gentleman pending the fine-tuning of his qualifications. Pending that, we know that this afternoon we are supposed to discuss the Equal Opportunities Bill where meritocracy prevails and no consideration is given to political opinion, communal, race and so on. Do the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister think that this is the way to start our work on this piece of legislation?

Dr. Beebeejaun: Mr Speaker, Sir. I will not comment on that. I'll wait for the debate and see what comes out.

Mr Speaker: Time is over! The Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/1349 and B/1350 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister have been withdrawn. PQ No. B/1346 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will now be answered by Dr. the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs keeping in mind that time is available. Questions addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister.

