

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

RICE (RATION) – LOCAL PURCHASE/IMPORTATION, ETC.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Industry, Small & Medium Enterprises, Commerce and Co-operatives whether, in regard to ration rice, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the amount thereof –
 - (i) purchased locally or imported since December last, and
 - (ii) to be purchased locally or imported, for the remainder of 2008,indicating in each case, the price paid or to be paid and if tenders were, or have been called for;
- (b) if the performance bond furnished by Toepfer International Asia Private Ltd. has now been forfeited, and
- (c) if he will now table copy of the minutes of proceedings of its eight Board meetings during which the issue of rice was discussed.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed as follows.

First, the answers to parts (a) (i) and (ii) of the PNQ. With regard to local purchase, I am informed that the answer is nil.

As regards imported purchase since December last, I am informed that STC has purchased 500 MT of ration rice at USD 395 per MT (C & F basis) from Pakistan and 950 MT at 414.50 USD per MT (C & F basis) from STC (India).

Chaiyaporn Rice Co. Ltd. Thailand and STC (Mauritius) has signed an agreement on 21 December 2007 for the purchase of 12,000 MT at USD 410 per MT (C & F basis) for period 01 December 2007 to 31 May 2008.

The purchases from Pakistan and Thailand were made following quotations received from 13 potential suppliers.

Purchase from India was made through MoU signed between STC Mauritius and STC India.

The House may wish to note that a tender was launched for the purchase of 20,000 MT of ration rice on 30 April 2008 by STC. The closing date for the submission of bids is 29 May 2008.

The tendency on the world market indicates that the price per MT of ration rice may turn out to be around 1,100 USD per MT.

As regards part (b) of the PNQ, the answer is yes.

Regarding part (c) of the PNQ, yes, Sir.

The relevant extracts of the minutes will be tabled.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, when a tender was carried out by the STC last year, the price quoted by the firm that got the tender was USD 315 for 15% broken rice and USD 318 for 25 % broken rice. The figures which have been quoted by the Minister are way above that: USD 395, 440 – if I heard correctly – and 410. Can the Minister tell us why this big difference between the tenderer who was supposed to provide us with the rice and the rice we finally purchased?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, on the PNQ asked by the hon. Leader of the Opposition on 14 December 2007, I amply gave all the reasons. But, I am willing to share with him. Obviously, he doesn't seem to be aware that there is a big difficulty in the world with regard to food security. This is the reason why the price has been up.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether in all the cases which he has mentioned, where rice has been purchased at USD 395, USD 410, went through the Central Tender Board, now Public Procurement Board?

(Interruptions)

Dr. Jeetah: No, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: I can't hear, if the hon. Minister can be a bit more energetic.

Dr. Jeetah: I said, no.

Mr Bérenger: The Minister does it on purpose, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I repeat my question: were tenders called for? Were those tenders allocated by the Central Tender Board in every case?

Dr. Jeetah: No, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: In which cases did we not go through tender procedures, through the Central Tender Board?

Dr. Jeetah: The cases which the hon. Leader of the Opposition has just mentioned.

Mr Bérenger: Is the hon. Minister saying that in all of these cases the Central Tender Board was kept out completely?

Dr. Jeetah: I have replied, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! How can I hear the Minister if hon. Members carry on like this!

Mr Bérenger: I think I heard the hon. Minister say that no rice was purchased locally. In reply to the PNQ it was different. He said that rice was purchased through the local representative of Toepfer International. Which is which?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is obviously confused. His question relates to December. In the PNQ of 14 December 2007, I have given all the answers. He can go and consult the answer. But, with regard to December onwards, the answer is still nil.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister has told us that a month ago a fresh tender was called for. Last year, we landed in trouble because we issued a tenderer for one tender only, leaving aside security of supply. Can I know from the hon. Minister whether that tender is for one tenderer only?

Dr. Jeetah: I didn't quite understand the meaning of the question. Could the hon. Leader of the Opposition repeat his question?

Mr Bérenger: Last year, we run into trouble because the tender was for one tenderer only. He went away; we were in trouble. We have had to purchase rice at a much higher price without tender procedures. This year, we have been informed that the STC has issued a tender a month ago. My question is: has a tender been issued for one supplier only again?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have not even opened the tender box as yet. How am I supposed to pre-empt the issues?

Mr Bérenger: I am not asking how many tenderers are coming forward. I am saying whether the tender is for one supplier only to supply the 20,000 tonnes. This is clear.

Dr. Jeetah: Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have to have all the submissions in front of the Evaluation Committee and they will have to take the decision.

Mr Bérenger: I repeat: last year, we committed the mistake of putting security of supply in danger...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bérenger: ...in asking one supplier only to supply the whole 20,000 tonnes and we still have not learnt the lesson apparently. Doesn't the Minister agree that this is very dangerous, especially in the present situation, to go for one supplier only?

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking for the opinion of the Minister and I think this is not in order.

(Interruptions)

The hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking the Minister whether it is dangerous or not. He is asking for the opinion of the Minister.

Mr Bérenger: But, the Minister is paid to have an opinion.

The Deputy Speaker: No, no, no!

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Minister not agree with me that, like it was last year, we can very much end up in real trouble, if we go for one supplier and the supplier, does not show up?

Dr. Jeetah: Obviously, the hon. Leader of the Opposition doesn't have the information. He is totally confused. In the provisions of the tender, we can accept up to 30% of the quantity that has been sought.

The Deputy Speaker: I would just like to enlighten the House that, according to Standing 22(1)(g) –

“a question shall not ask for an expression of opinion, or for the solution of an abstract legal question or of a hypothetical proposition”.

Mr Bérenger: It is certainly not abstract. If rice is abstract these days, then I don't know!

The Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition missed the first part which talked about opinion.

Mr Bérenger: On abstract...

The Deputy Speaker: This is my ruling.

Mr Bérenger: Yes, it is your ruling. I can understand that.

The Deputy Speaker: I am just sticking to the Standing Order.

Mr Bérenger: No, I don't think so at all! Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the tender which has been issued by the STC a month ago is for 25% ration rice or both 25% and 15% broken rice like it was last year?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we have recently opened up the business of ration rice and on this tender it is for 25% broken. That's a fair question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. Government has decided to open up the business of importation of rice, because of the current situation. People who wish to bring in rice, which is above 25% broken, can do so. This is a measure that we have had to take because of the exceptional circumstances prevailing in the world market.

Mr Bérenger: I'll come to that later on, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission. The tender was issued a month ago and it closes at the end of this month. Can I know whether there have been any offers to date?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did talk to the officer who is in charge of rice. There are two who have shown their interest to provide quotations for the commodity, at least, through email.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister, or rather, through him, I will ask the hon. Prime Minister - as we know India and Pakistan have stopped exporting rice, in the case of India, they have made exceptions, according to information, for Senegal, Madagascar and, last week, Sierra Leone - being given the very difficult situation we are in, in terms of import of ration rice, and rice in general, whether there has been an approach, because in all those cases, it was the Head of State or Government of the country concerned who went straight to the hon. Prime Minister of India, the Prime Minister of Mauritius has gone straight to the Prime Minister of India, being given the privileged relationship between India and Mauritius?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, if you will allow me...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order! You have to stop here! Hon. Ms Deerpalsing, it would help if you could stop making nonsensical and provocative remarks from a seating position.

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, yes, the hon. Prime Minister has given me directives to make sure that there is no shortage of rice in Mauritius and it is not from now. If you will allow me, I would like to give some details, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir

The annual consumption of local rice is about 16,000 MT of what we call ration rice and about 59,000 tonnes of what we call '*de Luxe*' rice, that is, Basmati. On 06 and 07 November when I attended the India/Africa Hydro Carbon Conference, on the personal invitation of Mr Murli Deora, Minister for Petroleum, I met Mr Kamal Nath, Minister of Commerce and Mr Pandalai, Chairman of State Trading Corporation India and raised the issue of supply of ration rice to Mauritius. On my personal intervention and in spite of a ban on non-basmati rice export from India, the Government of India, in view of our privileged relationship, has allowed to export 10,000 MT of ration rice to Mauritius under the special derogation clause. I am tabling the documents on the Table of the Assembly. 1,000 MT have already been received and an extra 9,000 MT will be imported in due course.

Mr Bérenger: Over the recent weeks there have been different cases of *pénurie* in different part of the island, although we are told that the State Trading Corporation has enough stock of ration rice until August. Can the hon. Minister tell us why this *pénurie*, here and there, which is causing a lot of trouble? Is it because of the way the rice is being sent to *grossistes* or is there some other explanation?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, first, I would like to remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that I am only the Minister of Commerce, the Consumer Protection Unit falls under another Ministry. I take the point...

(Interruptions)

She is not here! I do take the point that there might be hoarding. But I think the question is to be addressed to the hon. Minister in charge of Consumer Protection, she would be in a better position to give details of the market.

Mr Bérenger: Have there been changes in the way the State Trading Corporation stores the ration rice imported? There has been information that some operators were asked to stock rice in places unfit, because too humid. Has there been a change in the policy of STC.

Dr. Jeetah: Not that I am not aware of, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: The hon. Minister said that the performance bond 5% of the total purchase by Teopfer International Asia Private Ltd. - I think I heard him say yes - has been seized. Can I know on what date?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it was 25 April 2008.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as far as the tabling of the Minutes of Proceedings are concerned, can I remind the hon. Minister that on 14 December last, he was categorical on two occasions that he would lay copy of those Minutes? In one case, he said 'I can'; the second time he confirmed: "I can lay on the Table of the Assembly all the eight Board Meetings/sessions, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir." But he also said: "I don't have any problem to lay on the Table of the Assembly the two copies of the Agreements between STC and Toepfer and Al Rabi." Can I know why all this time neither the agreements nor the Minutes of proceedings have been laid as promised?

Dr. Jeetah: I must say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I went through some questions that the hon. Leader of the Opposition answered; ten times he did not answer, and that really put me...

(Interruptions)

I am tabling the document requested today

(Interruptions)

I must say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did get some bad habits because of his behaviour, but I am trying to change.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has just confirmed that Cabinet last Friday decided to *libéraliser l'importation du riz ration*. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether it will be – I think he replied to that – different types of ration rice from 25% to basmati rice?

Dr. Jeetah: Basmati is not under the control of the Ministry. We had two provisions - 25% broken for what we call ration rice and 10% for basmati rice. Now we've removed all these hurdles, in a manner of speaking, in this current situation.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Minister confirm that, although Government has decided *de libéraliser* the importation of ration rice of different types, STC will keep on importing and cross-subsidizing ration rice?

Dr. Jeetah: Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in the current situation!

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Minister give a guarantee that the *libéralisation* of importation of the business in ration rice is not a way of doing away with cross-subsidization and that the price of ration rice will not increase?

Dr. Jeetah: Again, I must say the hon. Leader of the Opposition is getting mixed up. We are talking about two issues here, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. I did mention, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the whole world is facing food crisis and we have to make sure that rice is available to the population in Mauritius. We are doing whatever we have to do, we are taking whatever decision we have to take to make sure that rice is available to the population of Mauritius.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister, now that we are going to have rice which is going to be imported by the STC and by private suppliers, how will the price of rice on the market be affected and will there still be price control of the ration rice on the market?

Dr. Jeetah: The price that is currently being used by STC will continue to be, we will have to wait for the tender, then we will know.

Mr Bodha: That means, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we are going to have ration price at two prices, that is, ration rice imported by the STC, which price is fixed by the STC and ration rice on the market.

The Deputy Speaker: But how could the hon. Minister possibly know because the tenders have just been floated...

Mr Bodha: I am asking whether there are two prices.

The Deputy Speaker: How could he know?

(Interruptions)

As regards the other case, we don't know what the price is going to be.

Mrs Hanoomanjee: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, to follow on what hon. Bodha has just asked concerning the policy of liberalization of the import of rice. Can the hon. Minister say what mechanism has been put in place to allocate the subsidies to the different stakeholders?

Dr. Jeetah: I think here again there is some confusion. The STC is bringing a certain quantity of rice; it has launched a tender for 20,000 tonnes. But, as I said, the difficulty today is that we have to make sure that we have rice on people's plates. So, STC will bring in the rice that is normally sold and we will open up the market. If somebody has some better contacts or they can actually procure from other places, in small quantities, why should Government stop people from getting into this business, being given that we are facing a food crisis in the world.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I refer to PQ No. B/358. The hon. Minister states that the General Manager of the STC attended the second rice congress of America in Brazil which grouped the world main rice suppliers and buyers and has established contacts with potential suppliers and will follow up the matter. Can the hon. Minister enlighten the House on these contacts and what about reliability of supply with these suppliers?

Dr. Jeetah: In fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, today you might have some cash in your pocket, but you might not find rice. What actually happened through this Conference is that the General Manager made contacts with all the world suppliers and, in fact, the STC has already written to 24 suppliers and they have got, if I am not mistaken, about 1,000 tonnes at a price of about 1,000 dollars (C & F). So, it has started bearing its fruits.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I will like to come back to this issue of the purchase of rice by STC and by private traders. The hon. Minister has said that the State Trading Corporation will continue to subsidize. Therefore, I assume that the price is going to be lower than the market price, if it is going to be subsidized. Is the hon. Minister saying that, in fact, there are going to be two prices, one at the market price and one at the subsidized price on the Mauritian market?

Dr. Jeetah: Once again, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I, for one, cannot tell because the Evaluation Committee has to look at the tendered price and then we would have to take a decision when we get all the prices.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that he said that the first three consignments did not go through a tender exercise, may I ask him what were the procedures which were adopted for the purchase of the three first consignments?

Dr. Jeetah: I have given ample explanations in my last PNQ. I did explain and, even today, I said that there were 13 suppliers and there was an Evaluation Committee to look at all the different prices that were produced. It is on this basis that a decision was taken. Yes, a quotation from 13 suppliers was obtained.

Mr Jhugroo: Avec la libéralisation de l'importation du riz, le ministre peut-il garantir la qualité du riz ration car il y a des normes établis par la STC concernant l'importation des différents riz ?

Dr. Jeetah: Est-ce que la STC peut garantir la qualité du riz ?

(Interruptions)

I have to say to my hon. friend on the other side that the situation in the world is not as it used to be three or four months ago. We have to make sure that we provide this commodity but, of course, there are Members who would come and say that there is *lanatte dans du sucre, cochon dans la farine*. These are awful things which we should avoid to say.

Mr Bérenger: Will the hon. Minister liaise with the lady responsible for Consumer Affairs to see to it that no trader sells ration rice obtained through the STC, when there are other types of ration rice at a higher price?

Dr. Jeetah: Yes, Sir.

Mr Bérenger: Can I know how the shipments are going to take place, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir? Because we are told that there is stock until August, but now we are told that a tender for 20,000 tons is out, closing at the end of the month and, on the other hand, India has agreed to supply us with 10,000 tons. Can I know how are the shipments going to take place?

Dr. Jeetah: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the STC provides us with about 1 million tons of petroleum products, cement, all the ration rice that are used in Mauritius. Of course, there is a procedure. We have to look at the planning and the scheduling and, at the moment, we get about 1,500 tons monthly to supply the market.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that we are going to have, most probably, two prices of ration rice and income support is calculated on the fixed price of the rice by the STC and thousands of people rely on this income support, may I ask the hon. Minister how this quantum of income support is going to be dealt with in the future?

Dr. Jeetah: I am only the Minister of Commerce, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. The hon. Member will have to put a substantive question and we shall reply.

Mr Bérenger: A last question, Sir. Can I know from the hon. Minister the sum that was paid by the STC for cross-subsidisation of ration rice during calendar year 2007 and request the guarantee that it will not be less in calendar year 2008 and, if required, that the cross-subsidisation will be increased so that the price of ration rice imported by the STC is not increased?

Dr. Jeetah: Apart from the Rs2 billion subsidy that Government is putting on LPG and flour, the price of rice that is being offered on the market is Rs5.40 per ½ kg whereas the real price ought to have been Rs6.90. An estimation of the shortfall would be about Rs24 m up to 30 June 2008. I think the latter part of the question is hypothetical and once we get the tender, we'll have to evaluate the situation, then we will take the decision that needs to be taken.

The Deputy Speaker: Time is over! Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ Nos. B/420 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn. PQ No. B/428 in regard to Sale by Levy Solidarity Fund addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will now be replied by the hon. Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development. In keeping with practice, PQ No. B/428 will be replied at the end of Question Time, that is, after PQ No. B/474.

MINISTRIES - ADVISERS & PRESS ATTACHÉS – RECRUITMENT– APRIL 2006-MAY 2008

(No. B/419) Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the advisers and press attachés, recruited by Government since April 2006 to date, either on a full time or part time basis he will now state their respective –

- (a) names;
- (b) qualifications;
- (c) salaries, allowances and other benefits drawn, and
- (d) conditions of service.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since April 2006, 81 Advisers and Press Attachés have been recruited by Government.

I am tabling a statement giving all the information requested by the hon. Member at parts (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the question.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister to lay the information, because the question was first asked on 10 July 2007 and again on 04 December 2007. I checked only this morning and it was not placed in the Library.

The Prime Minister: Now I understand why the hon. Member said: “he will now state”. I was wondering why he was saying that but, in fact, what happens, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that we were trying to compare what happened before.

(Interruptions)

The first time, the hon. Member asked for July 2005. I was comparing between 2000 and 2005 and I can tell the House that there were many more. I will lay all the information.

The Deputy Speaker: This will be done.

Mr Lauthan: The question asked for was for the period 2006.

The Prime Minister: I know the hon. Member asked for that period, but I want people to know, compare from period to period.

Mr Lauthan: Does the hon. Prime Minister have information about the number of those advisers who are presently facing court cases following criminal offences?

The Deputy Speaker: This is not related to the question. Next question, hon. Lauthan!

**PUBLIC SERVICE – EMPLOYEES
– MONTHLY SALARY RS100,000 TO RS150,000**

(No. B/420) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to persons presently employed in the public service and earning between Rs100,000 and Rs150,000 monthly, he will give a list thereof, together with a breakdown of the fringe benefits to which they are entitled, indicating if their salaries or allowances are paid in foreign currencies.

(Withdrawn)

NATIONAL CRIME INTELLIGENCE SERVICE –OPERATION

(No. B/421) **Mr S. Lauthan (Third Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the National Crime Intelligence Service of the Police Force, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to –

- (a) when it was set up, and
- (b) its functions and objectives.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, at paragraph 22 of the Government Programme 2005-2010, it was announced that a National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) would be set up to deal exclusively with intelligence relating to criminal activity and would play a key role in combating crime and maintaining law and order in the country.

Accordingly, a National Crime Intelligence Service has been set up within the Police Force since January 2006. The main objective of the National Crime Intelligence Service is to help the Police Force to process, analyse, and disseminate information relating to major criminal activity. It has the following functions -

- (a) to collect, monitor, analyse and manage crime information in the Police Force;
- (b) to study the crime pattern and trends in the island and to propose appropriate strategies for crime prevention and detention;
- (c) to centralize all crime intelligence in order to facilitate coordinated approach to combat crime by all operational Divisions/Units of the Force; and
- (d) to assist Management in collecting information and improving the information flow which is vital for the entire Force to proactively deal with crime and take informed strategic and tactical decisions.

I am also informed that as from October 2007, seven Crime Intelligence Cells at Divisional level have also been set up for gathering criminal intelligence in their respective areas.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the National Crime Intelligence Service along with the Crime Intelligence Cells regularly monitors the evolution of crime in the country. The information processed by these units is a vital tool in the hands of the Police in tackling in a more effective and efficient manner the problem of crime.

I should add, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, since the setting up of the National Crime Intelligence Service, its Field Intelligence Officers have contributed in the detection of 293 cases, the recovery of articles in 92 cases, the tracing of 63 missing persons, the tracing of 67 wanted persons, and the arrest of 121 persons.

Mr Lauthan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that it is a very important unit for State security, law and order in general. It has been reported that the transfer of several officers...

The Deputy Speaker: Can the hon. Member put it in a formal question?

Mr Lauthan: Is the hon. Prime Minister aware that there have been vehicles which have been withdrawn from the officers and even those who used to have mobile phone facilities have had these removed from them?

The Prime Minister: For the Police, all the operations are under the Commissioner of Police or the Acting Commissioner of Police at the moment. But I understand that there is a reorganisation. He wants it to be centrally controlled so there is no abuse. Basically that is what was said.

Mr Lauthan: The hon. Prime Minister has stated the functions and the objectives. It is important that as far as possible those people be unknown to the general public so that they get the information they need. It seems that during the recent 40th Independence Anniversary, they were asked...

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member should not go along with a statement, he should come with the question, please!

Mr Lauthan: My question, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is: does the hon. Prime Minister think that it is good for those people, who usually must be working incognito, to have participated in the parade of the 40th Independence Anniversary. This has been very embarrassing for them. Everybody will know who they are.

The Prime Minister: I don't know whether that is the case because they are separate from what the NSS does. The NSS is supposed to be very secretive, but not necessarily them.

(Interruptions)

Were they forced to?

Mr Lauthan: There were instructions.

The Prime Minister: But I think there is a difference between them and the NSS.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I take it that the Police officers working on the National Crime Intelligence Service are there permanently. Can I know how many officers are there permanently and who is at the head and the grade of the Head of that service?

The Prime Minister: At one time, when it was started, the Head of the service was ACP Dip and then this was changed to ASP Rusihawon who was then Chief Inspector. I don't know whether it is still him or not, but there were 53 officers there. As I have said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the existing set up of this unit is being reviewed. I know this is in the process of being done at the moment.

Mr Ganoo: Could the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether this service is a stand alone service or does it fall under the aegis of the Central CID or the National Security Service? Does it have an office of its own?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it stands alone. These were also recommendations and this is why we have come forward with it. It is a stand alone service and, of course, at the head it is the Commissioner of Police.

Mr Gunness: Can I know from the Prime Minister whether the South African Police produced a blueprint in that field for Mauritius and whether he is prepared to table a copy of it?

The Prime Minister: I will not certainly produce a copy of that blueprint, but I think they did help. I remember there was a South African unit which was doing some training for some of the people.

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister kindly inform the House by which department of the Police Force was the work currently done by the National Crime Division Service done previously?

The Prime Minister: They were not under any department, they were made under a separate unit. But, as I said, we have seen some of the difficulties that we have, that is why it is being reorganised.

MBC – EQUIPMENT – PURCHASE

(No. B/422) Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member of Port Louis North & Montagne Longue) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the items of equipment purchased by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, since April 2006 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) a list thereof, indicating, in each case
 - (i) the date of purchase;
 - (ii) the amount spent thereon and
- (b) the procedures followed in each case.

The Prime Minister: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am tabling a statement giving the information requested by the hon. Member.

The Deputy Speaker: The information is being tabled.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a supplementary question.

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary question on what?

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I have a supplementary question.

The Deputy Speaker: The information is being tabled. How can supplementary questions be put in the absence of a reply?

Mr Jhugroo: Is there any need for us to put questions in Parliament?

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member should come with a particular question. The hon. Member has a supplementary on what?

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait confirmer s'il y a des équipements qui coûtent très chers, achetés par la MBC TV pendant l'année financière 2007-2008, ne sont pas encore installés et si oui, pourquoi?

The Prime Minister: I can understand why you say, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, what supplementary question. Obviously, the hon. Member has all the information. I can say, from what I remember, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that we have been changing from the process analogue to digital. The equipment is quite expensive and there is need for engineering know-how to be able to install these. They are recruiting people actually and this probably the reason.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous dire qui est responsable du département technique de la MBC/TV?

The Prime Minister: I understand it is the engineering department.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que la personne concernée est un *chartered engineer*?

The Prime Minister: I don't know whether there is need of a chartered engineer, but I know there is an engineering department.

The Deputy Speaker: I think that engineers should be registered and not chartered. Hon. Varma!

Mr Varma: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, could the hon. Prime Minister inform the House whether he is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the MBC?

The Prime Minister: I was trying to be helpful.

MBC – BOARD MEETING – 25.04.2008

(No. B/423) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member of Port Louis North & Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the board meeting of 25 April 2008 of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to –

- (a) the names of the members present, and
- (b) if a decision was taken to carry out a promotion exercise, indicating in respect of the promoted employees
 - (i) their names;
 - (ii) their previous and new grades;
 - (iii) their length of service, and
 - (iv) the criteria adopted.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the MBC Board meeting held on 25 April 2008 was chaired by Mr Fareed Jangeerkhan and was attended by the following members –

- (i) Mr R. Mudhoo, Senior Chief Executive, Prime Minister's Office;
- (ii) Mr J. Hurry, Acting Director, Government Information Service;
- (iii) Ms A. Freyneau, PDSM;
- (iv) Ms M. Goodur, MSK; and
- (v) Mr K.A. Pather.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, Section 15 of the MBC Act empowers the Board to appoint, on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit, such employees as it considers necessary for the discharge of the functions of the Corporation.

I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the Board at its meeting on 25 April 2008, has decided to proceed with a consolidation and restructure exercise to meet the human resource needs of the Corporation.

In that respect, the management of the Corporation is currently working on recommendations for appointment and promotion that would be subsequently submitted to the Board for approval. Therefore, it is both premature and inappropriate at this stage to provide details because they have not taken the decision yet in respect of the employees concerned with this exercise.

Mr Jhugroo: Est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait confirmer que, quand il y aura des promotions à la MBC, ce sera fait dans la transparence?

The Prime Minister: I hope; it has always been *dans la transparence*.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether - normally there is a lot of frustration around all these promotions – his attention has been drawn, or he has received representations, to the fact that, in the process of promotion exercise, many of the jobs have been tailor-made for certain outsiders who have been recruited on contract and whether he has raised this question with the Chairperson of the MBC/TV?

The Prime Minister: I don't think that it is the case, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether in this promotion exercise - apart from the workers who have been recruited under contract by the MBC - opportunities will be given to young persons who have received audio visual training and who have gone to universities outside or even in Mauritius?

The Prime Minister: I think there is another question turning on the MBC and I totally agree that it should be the case.

MBC – INDIAN FILMS - PURCHASE

(No. B/424) **Mr P. Jhugroo (Third Member for Port Louis North and Montagne Longue)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the purchase of Indian films and serials by the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, since August 2007 to date, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Corporation, information as to -

- (a) a breakdown thereof, and
- (b) the cost of each film and serial.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the information is being compiled and will be tabled.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait nous dire pourquoi la MBC/TV n'achète pas des films, comme dans le passé, du *National Film Development of India*?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member should come with a substantive question. As I was reminded twice, I don't run the MBC, as we know.

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, est-ce que le Premier ministre pourrait demander au *Board* de la MBC de faire une enquête pour voir comment on fait l'achat des films et des *serials*?

The Prime Minister: I can ask them to look into it. I am sure there are lots of criteria and one of them must be the price.

POLITICAL PARTIES – PUBLIC FUNDING - LEGISLATION

(No. B/425) **Mr E. Guimbeau (First Member for Curepipe and Midlands)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the proposed introduction of legislation providing for the public funding of political parties, he will state where matters stand.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware, the Sachs Commission has examined the whole issue of funding of political parties and made detailed recommendations thereon. In fact, it also prepared a draft Bill for public funding of political parties.

However, the Commission has underlined the fact that the draft Bill is not a '*definitive text*' but only a '*coherent and motivated*' scheme that can '*serve as the basis for further elaboration*'. The Commission has also recommended that the draft Bill be supplemented by further legislation to cater for private donations and contributions to political parties.

As I said in my reply to the Private Notice Question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition on 25 March of this year, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Government will soon start a process of consultation on the reform of our electoral system.

The issue of funding of political parties is a separate issue, as I think, was pointed out, from the pure electoral reform, but I think we should address it or along in parallel while we are discussing the other recommendations of the Sachs Commission.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, will the hon. Prime Minister propose that the accounts of political parties be audited on a yearly basis?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure whether actually we don't have to report anything. But it is in the draft Bill.

Mr Guimbeau: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, let us be transparent. I would like to know from the hon. Prime Minister how much did *l'Alliance Sociale* ...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: This question does not arise. This was not part of the question!

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I agree, but much less than he got.

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: We are talking about proposed legislation. The hon. Member has to wait and then we will see.

Mr Bodha: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can the hon. Prime Minister be more precise as to the date as regards to the discussions on the electoral reform?

The Prime Minister: As was said, we should have started shortly after 01 May but, as the hon. Member knows, we have very important Bills coming next week. I need to talk, in fact, to the Opposition about the constitutional amendments that are coming, and I hope after that.

MBC – NEWS BULLETIN - BROADCAST

(No. B/426) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the performance of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, especially in regard to the news bulletin on television, he will state if he proposes to appoint an independent consultant to –

- (a) assess the present situation, and
- (b) make recommendations.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Director-General of the MBC that the Corporation is doing its level best to ensure that the news bulletins broadcast are accurate and presented in an impartial manner in compliance with the provisions of the MBC Act.

Any person or institution who for whatsoever reason believes that the news coverage is not done in compliance with the provisions of the MBC Act can seek redress through the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

As a matter of fact, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the IBA Act is being reviewed to give enhanced powers to the Authority to determine complaints of unjust or unfair treatment in broadcast programmes.

However, the MBC needs to have more training - the issue that we were mentioning just now - for newsreaders and cameramen. I understand that the MBC has initiated action to appoint an expert to assist in the formulation and implementation of a training programme for the news section of the Corporation as well as for the cameramen. Under the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, the *Canal France Internationale*, *RFI* and *RFO* of France Television have also agreed to provide training for MBC staff in all aspects of production and news. And, therefore, there is no need for a consultant as proposed, because this is being done.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister, since he has said that the IBA Act is being amended, whether he is aware - I am sure he is aware - that the existing IBA has blamed severely the MBC on more than one occasion to no effect at all - business as usual - the MBC has not changed at all as a result of that blame?

The Prime Minister: It is no different. When I was in the Opposition the same thing happened.

(Interruptions)

I did not know. The same thing happened before. But I think they should complain more often.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister - I know that he does not look in the day-to-day administration of the MBC - at least to give instructions to the MBC/TV, even through officers from his office which are using scissors behind his back to play with the films, or even through the Senior Adviser of his Ministry whom everybody knows is interfering not behind his back, on the issue of the news bulletin? The population knows what has the MBC become!

(Interruptions)

Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister - since people are paying Rs100 - to ask the MBC to be fair at least for 5%?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, the hon. Member might remember when I was in the Opposition - I even mentioned the names in public meetings...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, hon. Bhagwan!

The Prime Minister: People at the MBC cutting the films, changing this and that when I was in the Opposition. There was even a live debate on the television which was cut off. The hon. Member knows what I am talking about. And also as far as the media is concerned, we want fair comments as well, not just at the MBC, but also in the press.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, it is not what the hon. Prime Minister is planning that is being seen, it is not what is happening everyday. What is happening everyday is that there is direct interference as far as the news is concerned. Even people from his office have publicly stated that they are not happy...

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr Bhagwan: If the hon. Member is not happy, he can leave the House. I am paid to do my job! I don't take instructions from him!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I said order! Order!

Mr Bhagwan: I don't take instructions from him!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Speaker: I said order!

Mr Bhagwan: What I am asking the hon. Prime Minister, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is to ask the MBC to be fair to the people who are paying Rs100.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, again, what happened when I was in the Opposition and they were in Government? Three people were sitting there and were saying exactly what the hon. Member is saying.

RODRIGUES – ICAC - CASES

(No.B/427) Mr J. R. Spéville (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to Rodrigues, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Independent Commission Against Corruption, information as to the number of cases reported to the Commission and referred to court, before and after the opening of its office thereat.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I shall reply to Parliamentary Questions B/427 and B/432 together.

As the House is aware, the ICAC, which has been established under the Prevention of Corruption Act 2002, is meant to operate as an independent body. Its operation is monitored only by the Parliamentary Committee.

Furthermore, according to section 81 of the Act, all Board members and officers of the ICAC are required to take an oath of secrecy and they have a duty to maintain the confidentiality of, and not divulge, any official information that becomes known to them, except as provided under the Act.

The information requested falls within the purview of the Parliamentary Committee.

It would therefore be improper for me to seek and to give such information.

Mr Spéville: Can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the the office at Rodrigues is adequately staffed?

The Prime Minister: I have to pass on this information to ICAC.

PQ No. B/428 - See 'Written Answers to Questions'

PUBLIC SERVICE – EMPLOYEES OVER 60 YEARS OF AGE

(No. B/429) Mr S. Naidu (Third Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to persons who are over 60 years of age and who are in employment in the public service, he will state the number thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the number of persons who are in employment in the public service and who are above 60 years of age is 238. However, I should like to point out that this figure includes –

- (i) 61 Medical and Para Medical Officers employed by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life;
- (ii) 46 Medical and Para Medical Officers employed on a sessional basis by the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions; and
- (iii) 75 Supply Teachers employed by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources.

Mr Naidu: Will the hon. Prime Minister table a list of all these people?

The Prime Minister: I will look into it, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir. If there is no objection, I will do so.

Mr Naidu: Can the hon. Prime Minister tell us how many of those people benefit from the old age pension as well?

The Prime Minister: I will expect all of them.

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND LANDS – MR A. H. R. - ADVISER ARREST

(No. B/430) **Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin and Petite Rivière)** asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to one Mr A. H. R, adviser to the Ministry of Housing and Lands, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if he has recently been arrested for an alleged act of conspiracy and, if so, if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that in a statement made to the Police on 14 July 2006, one Mr E. stated that Mr A.H.R. had requested him to obtain a medical certificate for his brother to be presented in Court to justify the non-attendance of the latter. It appears that Mr E. impersonated the brother of Mr A.H.R. during a medical consultation.

The Police carried out an inquiry and upon completion thereof the case was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions on 22 January 2008. The latter advised prosecution against Mr A.H.R. for ‘conspiracy to do a wrongful act’. Mr A.H.R. was subsequently arrested on 05 May 2008 and he was bailed out on the same day upon furnishing a surety of Rs1,500.

I am also informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that in a letter dated 28 April 2008, Mr E. changed his statement stating that Mr A.H.R had, in fact, never been involved in the case of impersonation in order to obtain the medical certificate. In light of the recent development, further advice is being sought from the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Bhagwan: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, there was a reply made to the House on 18 July 2006 and in a supplementary question we were told that Mr A. H. R. was asked to step down. So, can we know whether he was removed from office as from 18 July 2006?

The Prime Minister: I do not think he has stepped down, otherwise, he would not have been there. In fact, this is being looked into, I can say.

Mr Bhagwan: Can we know from how long he was suspended and when did he resume office?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not the one who answered that question, but I have to look into the matter. All I know is that the inquiry was sent to the DPP on 22 January 2008.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE – MR S. -
TRANSFER TO SSU**

(No. B/431) **Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE)** asked Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr S. he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to if he has been transferred from the Central Investigation Division to the Special Supporting Unit and, if so, the reasons therefore?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Acting Commissioner of Police that Deputy Commissioner of Police Mr S, who had been in charge of the Central Criminal Investigation Division since October 2002, is now in charge of the Special Support Unit with effect from 30 April 2008. In addition, as Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr. S, has also been assigned with additional administrative duties, and as such is presently acting as Chairperson of the Police Tender Committee.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, all postings and transfers in the Police Department are the prerogatives of the Commissioner of Police who, in the exercise of his duty, is dictated by the interest and exigencies of the service. I am informed that no posting in the force is permanent. However, the Commissioner of Police ensures that all changes are based on the need to achieve operational objectives of the Force and organisational effectiveness and efficiency of all Police Units.

I am further informed that the posting of Mr S. to the Special Support Unit is felt beneficial to the Unit, as well as its staff, in view of his knowledge, skills and experience.

Mr Jhugroo: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, can I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether this is a punitive transfer?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Member heard me right, he is also the Chairperson of the Police Tender Committee which is important.

Mr Cuttaree: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, being given that the issue of crime is of such importance in this country and to take an officer like Mr S who has vast experience in the field of criminal investigation and put him at the SSU to chair a committee for tenders, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether this is in the interest of the nation in its fight against crime?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as I said, as far as the operational day-to-day of the Police Force is concerned, it rests with the Acting Commissioner of Police. But I can tell the hon. Member that there has been a recommendation from the French division which said that we have to do a few changes at the SSU and maybe that is what he had in mind. I can't say it.