

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

ZIMBABWE – PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger) (*By Private Notice*) 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 Zimbabwe, he will state if –

- (a) Mauritius has made any statement or sent any message in relation thereto, indicating if Mauritius has joined with the other countries of the Southern African Development Community and international organisations and personalities, urging that today's Presidential run-off be postponed and a new date set after talks between the Government and the Opposition of Zimbabwe, and
- (b) he has information that President Robert Mugabe has been invited to attend the forthcoming African Union and Southern African Development Community summits, indicating who shall represent Mauritius thereat.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, Mauritius has closely followed the political developments in Zimbabwe and is still closely following them, in particular the announcement of the withdrawal of the Movement for Democratic Change MDC-T candidate, Mr Morgan Tsvangirai, Opposition Leader from the Presidential run-off scheduled for today, in fact.

Mauritius has not made any specific statement or sent any message directly to Zimbabwe because as member of SADC, Mauritius subscribes fully to the collective position taken by SADC on Zimbabwe. SADC, as the House is aware, Mr Speaker, Sir, has been involved right from the beginning of the electoral process in the country and had mandated President Mbeki of

South Africa to mediate with all the parties concerned with a view to finding a peaceful solution to the Zimbabwe crisis.

Mauritius has expressed its full confidence in the mediation efforts of President Mbeki and in this regard he has informed me that he had arranged for the ruling party ZANU-PF and the Opposition Party MDC-T to meet on two occasions in South Africa. A third meeting could not take place because of the arrest of the Secretary-General of the MDC-T, Mr Tendai Biti.

Currently the SADC Facilitator is still actively engaged in an effort to encourage the ruling party and the Opposition Party to resume negotiations as a matter of urgency.

We believe that the endeavours of President Mbeki are yielding some positive results and may help resolve this crisis in an all inclusive manner involving all the parties concerned.

In the circumstances, it is felt that statements by individual countries may weaken his mediation efforts, although, as I was saying, we are liaising constantly. In fact, I spoke to him about some two and half hours ago.

As I said, I am personally in touch with him and he is keeping me informed. When I spoke to him just now, he thanked me again for supporting his facilitation mission. He also told me that since there will be a hung parliament, both sides will, in any case, invariably have to work together and that is what he is trying to do.

As regards part (b) of the question, all Member States of the African Union and SADC are expected to attend the respective Summits. The international press has reported that President Mugabe has already announced that he will attend the African Union Summit in Egypt. As far as Mauritius is concerned, we will be represented at the AU Summit by -

- (i) H. E. Mr A. P Neewoor, Secretary for Foreign Affairs;
- (ii) H. E. Mr R. Soobadar Ambassador of Mauritius in Cairo,
and
- (iii) Mr N. Jagarnath, First Secretary of our Mission in Ethiopia.

I propose to attend the forthcoming SADC Summit which will be on 16-17 August in South Africa.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, granted we are a member of SADC and granted that SADC, especially through its present Chair, has condemned the increase in violence in Zimbabwe. I am sure the Prime Minister is aware that individual members of SADC have also spoken out, Zambia, Tanzania and other countries like Ghana, Senegal, Kenya and so on, apart from the United Nations and the African Union and apart from Nelson Mandela, as the political violence has increased, have denounced the political violence and asked for a postponement of the poll. Doesn't the Prime Minister feel that we, as a country - we have an image, a reputation as a democracy - should have made a statement condemning the increase in violence?

The Prime Minister: Of course, Mr Speaker, Sir, we also condemn all the violence that is taking place. I think everybody will agree with that. The only reason why we haven't done anything - I was saying that President Mbeki talked to me again this afternoon; the other day, in fact, he was looking for me while I was here for the Committee of Supply and when I got back to my office, it was twenty past midnight, we talked on the phone - is that he was saying to me that there are certain things happening that is not known to the media and to the people in general. After the President of Angola had made the statement that he made, he briefed him on what was happening because perhaps he didn't know, at that time, what was happening. He said to me that some two weeks prior to his conversation with me, that is, last Monday, Mr Tsvangirai had rung him to say that he wanted to negotiate with President Mugabe.

President Mbeki spoke to President Mugabe and President Mugabe agreed but he suggested that there should be designated officials in the first place to prepare the ground. This message was transmitted to Mr Tsvangirai who agreed to that proposal of President Mugabe.

Consequently, there were two meetings held in South Africa between the two parties, but that is not in the public knowledge. They then went further, they identified possible options. But after they identified the possible options, they wanted to get back to the principles to see from where to move from there. Unfortunately then the Secretary-General of the MDC, Mr Biti, who was in South Africa went back to Zimbabwe and he was

arrested. He was of the two persons representing MDC at the negotiation table.

Mr Tsvangirai then said that this cannot go on if his Secretary-General has been arrested, and he wanted President Mbeki to talk to President Mugabe. President Mbeki told me that he spoke to President Mugabe on 18 June. He told him that necessary legal steps should be taken to enable Mr Biti to participate in the negotiations. President Mubage's response was that he could not issue a decree because it's the law, but that he would see what could be done. Mr Tsvangirai then suggested that he be granted, at least, bail, so that he could continue with the negotiations. That has just happened; he has just got bail yesterday, if I am not mistaken. Mr Tsvangirai then announced to President Mbeki of his intention to withdraw from the race, but added that withdrawal does not close the door to negotiations and that he wants to continue the negotiations. President Mbeki says that the SADC position is that the only way forward must be if the political leadership agrees to negotiate. He sent a facilitation team from South Africa to Zimbabwe to restart the negotiations. As I said, he spoke to me this afternoon and said that if each Head of State is going to make a statement, this is going to create more confusion and might weaken his hand in the negotiations. He said to me that he is encouraged that that they are going to negotiate on the option that has been identified. In fact, he told me that President Mugabe said that he will meet Mr Tsvangirai, but after the election has taken place.

As far as the postponement of the election is concerned, I did not mention that to him because others have asked for it, including some ambassadors from friendly countries. He said that President Mugabe stated that this is the law in Zimbabwe and that he cannot postpone the election, but that he will certainly talk to Mr Tsvangirai after the election. That is the position. We will wait and see what happens. I have been told by our observers that the election so far is going on very quietly, although there seems to be a lower percentage of people who are actually voting.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I won't say anything that could damage President Mbeki's efforts. But I am sure the Prime Minister is perfectly aware that the MDC, some time back, asked that he be replaced as mediator and challenged his role as mediator. But, that's another question. I am surprised to have heard the hon. Prime Minister say that President Mbeki has referred to a hung Parliament in Zimbabwe. As far as I know, the two MDCs together have had a majority in Parliament since the election. Can

the hon. Prime Minister tell us in what sense President Mbeki referred to a hung Parliament?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, he referred to that in the sense that the two wings of the MDC are not necessarily on the same wavelength. Therefore, there might have to be a position where they all work together. That is my understanding.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, they are working together; they have been working together and, in Parliament, they are sitting together. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he made a speech or a statement at the Africa/Europe Summit in Lisbon in December 2007? If this is the case, did he make any reference, at that point in time, to events in Zimbabwe and, if yes, can we be informed of the content?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I did make a statement at that Summit. In fact, I said that we condemn what is happening; everybody knows what is happening - whatever the faults. I also suggested that we should not adopt double standards, that there are other countries where similar things are happening, which we should also condemn. I particularly spoke about what was happening in Burma at that time.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, yesterday President Mugabe said that he will be going to the African Union Summit that starts in two days' time. The officials have already met, and the Foreign Ministers are meeting as from today. Have we got information from the official representing us at that preparatory meeting on what is the mood at the level of the African Union? Is there consensus that, in spite of all that has happened, President Mugabe should attend the Summit?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have heard two things. First of all, the feeling is that when there is a Summit, the host country sends out invitations, but the member States are meant to attend these Summits. I also got the information that the Chairperson at the AU Commission, Mr Jean Ping, who has just been elected, said that the ministerial meeting will not comment on the political situation in Zimbabwe, but will refer the whole issue to the Summit which is scheduled to be on 30 June. It is going to be at the level of the Summit.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, precisely, it's clear - everything points in the direction - that Zimbabwe will be taken up at the Summit of the African Union. I am not in agreement that Mauritius should not have made a statement as Mauritius when the situation deteriorated and State violence kept on increasing. But, now, we are on the eve of the African Union Summit. What happens, what stand the African Union takes concerning Zimbabwe will be very important, not just for Zimbabwe or for SADC, but for the whole of Africa. Does not the hon. Prime Minister think that it is not proper that we be represented at ministerial level, Prime ministerial level or Head of State level by officials? If the Prime Minister cannot make it to the Summit, at least, the Deputy Prime Minister should be there. We should be represented at the highest political level to send a signal, because as I said, what is going happen at this African Union Summit is very important for the whole of Africa, for SADC and for Zimbabwe.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we can look at that. I will liaise with the Secretary for Foreign Affairs to see if it is essential. It is very difficult for me to go. I will be in touch with him and see whether he can go.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether we have observers in Zimbabwe right now, how many of them, since when they have they been there, and until when they will be staying there?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have in all 19 observers. Originally, we had prepared to send five observers. But, on the demand of different Embassies, namely USA, UK, France, the European Union and Australia as well, to send more observers as it would be better, we decided to upgrade and sent 19 observers. The Electoral Commissioner is also there, because they wanted us to have observers.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, does Mauritius has observers as a State member of SADC or some of our observers are within PAP or SADC observer missions?

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think that it is as SADC observer missions that we are there.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is aware that, although Mr Tsvangirai has pulled out the presidential run-off, the presidential second round is taking place today. At the same time, there are three legislative by-elections taking place today, with the MDC - the Opposition - presenting candidates and urging the electorate to vote in the constituencies concerned. Does the hon. Prime Minister know whether our observers will be present in those three constituencies also?

The Prime Minister: I am told that they are going to follow all the elections, including the by-elections, but I don't know whether it is all three. I suppose it would be all three.

Mr Bérenger: Does the hon. Prime Minister have any information at what is likely to take place at the level of the UN Security Council? Recently, for the first time, the UN Security Council took a tough stand on Zimbabwe with the deteriorating State violence and so on. It was expected that the Security Council would meet again after the pull out by Mr Tsvangirai and the vote today. Has our mission in New York sent any information or what is cooking and what we can expect at the level of the UN Security Council?

The Prime Minister: I have the statement that they made at the Security Council, condemning the violence. But, at the same time, the statement says - in fact, they have urged everybody - that international monitors and observers should remain in Zimbabwe while the crisis lasts. They are again saying that we should look for a peaceful way forward through dialogue between the parties, but that the Security Council says that they will continue to monitor the situation.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister - because I believe that it is better late than never; it is not too late for Mauritius, *digne de sa réputation de démocratie* - whether he should not consider a statement, better late than never, condemning the violence that took place before, up to the polling day, until today, condemning violence in general, but State violence in particular, and calling for a post-electoral set up where the MDC which has a majority - the two MDCs together - in Parliament to be allowed to play fully their role in Zimbabwe?

The Prime Minister: When I was talking to President Mbeki this morning, his preference is that individual members do not carry on making statements. He told me, after the President of Angola had made the statement, he briefed him, and he said this will weaken his hand. My suggestion to him was that: let's wait and see what happens today. The elections is going ahead anyway. There is no violence so far, as far as the reports I am getting today. But perhaps the best thing is to wait and see what happens afterwards, but we will have to encourage them to negotiate as soon as this is over.

Mr Bérenger: Does the hon. Prime Minister has information concerning the following? Mr Tsvangirai has given different reasons for pulling out of the race, increase in violence, violence against their last Sunday's rally where Government thugs broke into the rally, beat people and so on. This was on television; we saw it and it was terrible. There is increase in violence, people being killed, the wife of the Mayor of Harare who is from the Opposition MDC, being kidnapped and murdered. All this was building up and Mr Tsvangirai pulled out. Does the hon. Prime Minister have information to the effect that what added to the situation was the fact that last time, for the first time, the Opposition was allowed to have electoral observers in every polling station and they used portable phones and so on to take pictures of the list published in every polling station and there were thousands of Zimbabweans observers all over the country. This time they were not accredited and it was not possible for the MDC to have electoral observers, electoral representatives at each and every polling station, and that, therefore, they pulled out not only because of the violence, but also because it would be back to square one and there would be massive rigging.

The Prime Minister: I was told last time, Mr Speaker, Sir, that when the question of observers was raised, first, MDC said they did not want to observe inside, they would observe outside and then eventually they were complaining that they were not allowed inside. I don't know whether this has got to do with it, but this is the situation, this time there are no observers. My understanding is that it was because of the violence. I think it is regretful that Mr Tsvangirai pulled out. But we can understand why he pulled out; but, I think, this time, because of the violence, maybe they lost interest. I don't know whether it is because they were not given permission to observe or because of the violence mainly that they pulled out.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he addressed in his conversation with President Mbeki the issue that Mr Tsvangirai, the Leader of the Opposition, had, in fact, on Wednesday, that is two days from now, made a call to work together for a transitional authority with President Mugabe and whether he addressed also the issue that yesterday the President Mugabe said he was open to discussion, but after the result of the election?

The Prime Minister: This is why I said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that President Mbeki called me and said that they had identified various options of possibility to see how they get out of the *impasse*. I think I mentioned that President Mugabe has said that he is agreeable to meet, but after the election.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that we know what is going to be the results of the election, whatever be the turnout, and all the major international organisations have said that President Mugabe's election, if it happens, will have no legitimacy, may I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he addressed this issue with President Mbeki as far as the legitimacy of the election of Robert Mugabe is concerned from the standpoint of SADC? How will SADC consider the results of the election?

The Prime Minister: I didn't specifically talk of the results of the election because, as the hon. Member said, it is a foregone conclusion what will happen. But what President Mbeki was saying is that, now that the elections are taking place, let's wait for what happens afterwards and not prejudge the issue.

Mr Bérenger: As last question, Mr Speaker, Sir. We know the terrible things that have happened - I gave the example of the wife of the Mayor being kidnapped and murdered and she was not the only wife to be kidnapped and murdered - terrible State violence, terrible things which are very bad for Africa in general, for SADC and our region. The Prime Minister understands that I don't agree that we should not have, in spite of President Mbeki doing his job, made a statement, because Mauritius has an image, a reputation and terrible things have happened. How will the hon. Prime Minister react to my appeal to the effect that, once polling is over today, including in those three by-elections, Mauritius should come out with a statement? As soon as possible we should come out with a forceful statement, coming back on the State violence that built up on the terrible

things that happen until today and appealing that the MDC which has a majority in Parliament should be allowed to play fully its role in Zimbabwe.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have a slight disagreement on whether to make a statement or not. My feeling is that we should not prejudice whatever outcome there might be, knowing President Mugabe and his sensibilities and what President Mbeki has told me. But my feeling was that we work together with SADC and President Mbeki is going to make a statement after the election. This is my understanding. Perhaps, we should also join with that statement. But I agree, as far as working together after the election. We should, at some point, say that maybe it will be in the statement that will come out by SADC itself. I think personally that is what the solution would be.

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I beg to move that all the business on today's Order Paper be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.