

Debate No. 2

Parliamentary Questions - 25 March 2003

IRAQ INVASION - MAURITIUS POSITION

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. N. Ramgoolam) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Co-operation whether, having regard to the invasion of Iraq by the USA/UK coalition forces, he will state -

whether Government supports the view that the war is unjustified and illegal;

whether Government has not forcefully and unequivocally condemned this pre-emptive war which factually -

results in the killing and maiming of innocent people, and

constitutes a dangerous precedent for international relations;

whether Government has not protested against the use of Diego Garcia in this war, and

whether Government will oppose any proposal to set up a USA/UK protectorate.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir,....

(Interruptions)

the House is aware that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is on mission overseas. This is the most serious subject that we can be looking at, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Shame on the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

(Interruptions)

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let us take this very important issue seriously!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: Shame on the Opposition!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Hon. Leader of the Opposition! I am calling both sides of the House to order. This is, in fact, an important subject and I think it is in the interest of everybody that we listen to the questions being put and the answers being given.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, the position of Mauritius on the current Iraqi crisis was put in detail before the House by the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Co-operation in his reply to Parliamentary Question No. B/36 on Tuesday last.

This official position of Mauritius was confirmed by Cabinet last Friday. *En resumé*, Mauritius is of the opinion that the war in Iraq was avoidable at that point in time when it was started by the US and UK and that the UN disarmament inspectors should have been given more time to complete their work. Furthermore, Mauritius was and is of the view that the sanction of the United Nations Security Council was needed for any military action against Iraq.

With regard to part (b), I do not wish to add anything to what I have just said except to say that now that the war has started, it is our hope, like that of so many people around the world, that the conflict should end as soon as possible with minimum loss of life and property.

Only yesterday, during a joint meeting with the US Ambassador and UK High Commissioner, the position of Mauritius was again put across to them and this morning, I stated same to the French Ambassador. I also discussed this issue with the Indian High Commissioner several times over the past days.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard part (b) (ii), I have to bring to the attention of the House that unfortunately, the present war is not the first time that military action has been resorted to without the explicit mandate of the UN Security Council.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards to part (c), we all know that the vocation of Diego Garcia as a military base has changed over the years. In the cold war days, it was one of the very important military bases of the western bloc. Over the recent years, its role has changed to that of a base with a regional vocation, especially in the context of the Gulf War.

It will have been noted that recently neither Mauritius nor any country of the region has been taking a vocal stand against the military base in Diego Garcia. It will be also remembered that when Diego Garcia was used in the war against Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War and in the war in Afghanistan in 2001, no such protest came from Mauritius or any other country of the region.

For our part, we have been concentrating on the sovereignty issue in relation to the Chagos Archipelago and not on the military base issue and I can report to the House that some progress has been achieved on the Mauritius assertion of sovereignty....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister:over the chagos archipelago.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (d), there is no proposal to set up a US/UK protectorate in Iraq, and Mauritius would not support any such proposal. Within our means and through the UN, we stand committed to assist Iraq to reconstruct and prosper in the post-war era. To that effect, Government is setting up a *fonds de solidarité avec le peuple Irakien* to which Government is contributing Rs 1 m. The population is invited to contribute to the Fund.

I thank you, Mr Speaker.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, I note with satisfaction the U-turn of the Government on this issue.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Ramgoolam: The Deputy Prime Minister mentioned what the Minister of Foreign Affairs said last time, but in fact, he did not say much in his official reply. He tried to play both sides at the same time. He condemned this and he did not condemn that;

he went on like that. Sir, can I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether Government can say it clearly, yes or no, that it feels this war is unjustified and illegal?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Sir, there is absolutely no U-turn. It is quite the contrary. I made reference to what was stated here a week ago to show that there is precisely no U-turn, but consistency in our policy.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not have anything to add to what I have just said.

Dr. Ramgoolam: I have asked the hon. Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs as to his no U-turn. Can he say clearly 'yes' or 'no' as to whether he considers this war unjustified and illegal?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There is absolutely no U-turn, and I am not here to obey orders from the Leader of the Opposition, to answer 'yes' or 'no'. I have given in detail the official policy of the Government of Mauritius, Mr Speaker.

Dr. Ramgoolam: It is clear from the reply that the Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs is giving that he does not want to answer, because he has made a U-turn. He cannot come and say that it is unjustified and illegal, because he, himself, has said differently. Has he not said that the sole responsible in this war is Mr Saddam Hussein?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, Mr Speaker, I have never said such words. I repeat the stand of Mauritius: that the war was avoidable at the point in time when it was started, and that more time should have been given to the inspectors. We made it also clear that it was and is our view that the UN Security sanction was required before any military action would be taken against Iraq. There is no U-turn; this has been our considered position right from the start, and it is our position today, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Ramgoolam: It has been widely reported in the press that – and I can lay a copy on the Table of the Assembly - *alors que M. Bérenger intervenait au congrès de l'aile féminine du MMM, il a dit que s'il y a une guerre en Irak, ce sera la faute à Saddam Hussein*. Does he deny having said that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, the press reports as it thinks fit. But, the Leader of the Opposition will have noted that between what he said and what he has just read, there is a fundamental difference. I am supposed to have said that Saddam Hussein is the only one responsible. It is not even in the press article, which reproduces part of what I said. I repeat: that was invented by *un politicien malhonnête et repris par des petits mercenaires de bas étage*, Mr Speaker. What I said last Sunday and what was said here is the same. There is no U-turn, there is no change. There is consistency, and there is a principled stand, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. Boolell, do you have a question?

Dr. Boolell: Yes.

Mr Speaker: If I can ask for the indulgence of the hon. Leader of the Opposition to please allow hon. Dr. Boolell put his question.

Dr. Boolell: Would the Deputy Prime Minister confirm whether he was caught with his pants down on this very issue? He made a complete U-turn. Either he has been lying or he has been misleading the House.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It's shameful that on such a subject we should have that kind of politician, using those words, Mr Speaker! It's a shame on the Opposition.

Dr. Ramgoolam: I am sure the Deputy Prime Minister & Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs knows that both the African Union and the Non-Aligned Movement have very forcefully condemned this war. Can I ask why Mauritius has not done so up to now?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, we read very carefully all statements that are made by international organisations, regional organisations and friendly countries. Can I point out to the House that the stand that Mauritius has adopted over this Iraqi crisis is exactly the same stand as India. Exactly, Mr Speaker, Sir!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Opposition Members: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Deputy Prime Minister: To the extent that we have used exactly the same key word.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I have not called hon. Dr. David yet.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I said, Mr Speaker, to the extent that we have both used exactly the same key word 'avoidable'. It is no coincidence. It is easy to check. We have used exactly the same key word, and we have adopted the same attitude over this crisis, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Dr. Ramgoolam: It is his habit to hide behind other countries! But, can I remind the Deputy Prime Minister & Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs that India has said, in no uncertain terms, that the invasion of Iraq does not conform with international law, that it is illegal and unjustified, and they reject the view that Resolution 1441 has automaticity, and does not give them a mandate for invasion. Can the Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs, therefore, say that he agrees with those words that India has used?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, I think the Leader of Opposition should stop and re-read what was said here and what I have repeated today. We used the same key word as India 'avoidable', and we said that it was, and is, our view that any military action against Iraq needed the UN Security Council sanction. This is clear, and it is the same thing that India has said. In fact, Mr Speaker - maybe it's worth my quoting - last Tuesday, on behalf of Government, this is what the Minister said -

"At the same time, like India, South Africa and many other countries, Mauritius has been of the view that any military action against Iraq should be respectful of international law and requires the UN Security Council sanction".

Everybody knows that the military action started without the UN Security Council sanction having been obtained. This is so clear, Mr Speaker.

Dr. Ramgoolam: If it is so clear, I want to quote an interview from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in *l'Express* of 21 March. This is what he said -

"Mon point de vue est que, dans ce cas précis, l'utilisation de la force contre l'Irak est conforme au droit international".

This is what the Minister of Foreign Affairs said. That is why I was talking about U-turn. That is why I said we should give him an opportunity to say clearly whether he agrees

with I have said at the beginning, namely that this war is unjustified, illegal, and probably useless.

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that, in this House, last Tuesday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated what I have just repeated, Mr Speaker, Sir. I repeat again –

"At the same time, like India, South Africa and many other countries, Mauritius has been of the view that any military action against Iraq should be respectful of international law and requires the UN Security Council sanction".

This is what the Minister said here on behalf of Government in Parliament last Tuesday. As you know, Mr Speaker, Sir, he gave a press interview, and there has been a *mise au point*, where the journalist...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Dr. David, please.

The Deputy Prime Minister:...concerned has spoken of *une erreur malencontreuse*. Now, whether on this precise point, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was correctly reported, it's up to him to say. I repeat that, in this House, last Tuesday, on behalf of Government, the Minister was absolutely clear. Our point of view was, and is, that the UN Security Council sanction was required under the UN Charter, before any military action should start. This was our position and is our position.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, let me tell the Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs that the correction the Minister has asked does not concern this; it concerns the 45 countries. He said that Mauritius was not among the 45 countries that support this view, and apparently *l'Express* put something different. So, can I ask him again...

(Interruptions)

I don't have to take orders from the hon. Member. Either he stands up or shuts up.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Ramgoolam: Can I ask the Ag. Minister of Foreign Affairs not to hide and play with words? What the Minister of Foreign Affairs said last week - he repeated it, and I too repeated it – is that any military action should be respectful of international law and requires UN Security Council sanction. This is not what India has said. India has said, in no uncertain terms, that it condemns the invasion of Iraq, that it does not conform to international law and it rejects the view that Resolution 1441 contains automaticity and a mandate for invasion. That is what India has said.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have all the statements that have come out from India before me. I repeat that if we go to the statement by official spokes persons on the commencement of military action in Iraq, in New Delhi, on 20 March, concerning the official stand by the Government of India, we would see that the word is military action was 'avoidable'. So, the choice of words is clear, Mr Speaker, Sir. Some people have said that this Government is a *paillasson* of the United States. Mr Speaker, we have adopted exactly the same stand as India, to the extent that we have used the same key word 'avoidable'. I hope that no one is suggesting that India is a *paillasson* to the United States, Mr Speaker, Sir. So, our stand is a principle...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. David: He is calling India *paillasson*, Mr Speaker, Sir,

Mr Speaker: Order! Resume your seat, hon. Member! Order, please!

Opposition Members: Withdraw!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! I did not hear the hon. Deputy Prime Minister accusing India of *paillasson*, what he said is on record. He did not say that.

The Deputy Prime Minister: On the contrary, Mr Speaker, I repeat our stand has been exactly the same as that of India on this Iraq crisis and I take note that no one has suggested that India is a *paillasson*. Neither India nor Mauritius is a *paillasson* to any foreign country, even any friendly foreign country. It is *antipatriotique* and shameful for anybody to come and suggest...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. David! I am warning you, if you make any comment or speak from this position next time, you'll have to leave the chamber!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I repeat, Mr Speaker, that it is *antipatriotique* and shameful for anybody in Mauritius to suggest that Mauritius is a *paillasson* to any foreign country, be it a friendly foreign country.

Dr. Ramgoolam: The Deputy Prime Minister is talking of *paillasson*, let me come to a different point and jump to some of the points that I was going to raise. Can he say whether Government was consulted at all about the use of Diego Garcia?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, Sir.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Can I remind him that in an answer to a question on 13 November 2001 - he was acting Foreign Minister and answering to a Private Notice Question on Diego Garcia - he repeated what the Foreign Minister had said. He said that he had asked the UK Government to inform us regularly on the use of the base and that the Deputy Prime Minister then added we would wish to be fully informed. How can he explain that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Of course, we would have wished then and we would wish now not only to be informed, but to have the Chagos Archipelago back within our sovereignty. This is our wish and the fact is that neither the US nor the UK has kept us informed.

Dr. Ramgoolam: It is very easy to say I wish this, I wish that. My question was: whether the Mauritian Government was consulted.

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Ramgoolam: I note that you are not warning the Members who are creating trouble here

(Interruptions)

I note that you are biased. Look at the way they are interrupting me and you are not ...

Mr Speaker: Take your seat! I am calling hon. Paya, hon. Abdoola and hon. Baloomoody to order!

Dr. Ramgoolam: It is not a question of whether we wish, we all wish all those things, but we want to know, in spite of what has been said, whether the Deputy Prime Minister has been consulted? Yes or no? When he has not been consulted, is he not acting as a *paillasson*, just to keep quiet and keep his hands crossed?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There is a difference between what has happened in the past and what is happening now, Sir.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that in spite of all the money that the United States has offered to Turkey, it recalled its Parliament just to decide whether they would give right to the coalition forces to fly the plane over their air space? Here we are not even consulted and the Deputy Prime Minister is agreeable. He finds nothing wrong with it and he claims that he is not acting as a *paillason!*

The Deputy Prime Minister: He is putting words in my mouth, Mr Speaker, Sir. I never used words like agreeable and so on. The comparison does not arise at all. Turkey exercised its rights over its territory that it controls. Unfortunately, here in Mauritius, under a Labour Party Government, the Chagos Archipelago was illegally detached from Mauritius and we - not the Labour Party - have always tried to get back the whole of the Chagos Archipelago. So, the comparison with turkey does not arise at all. Unfortunately, we did not exercise our rights over the Chagos Archipelago. I hope that, in the near future, or in a more distant future, we will recuperate what a Labour Party Government allowed to take place.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, while the hon. Deputy Prime Minister was an agent for the PMSD, the Labour Party did not agree and we were not independent in 1965, if he does not know; this happened in 1965. He should not try to rewrite history! Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that when Mrs Madeleine Albright went back from Mauritius, she has said that she was surprised and astonished that Mauritius did not even raise the issue of Diego Garcia? They said that Diego Garcia could be used as they wanted. Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of this?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It was raised, and it is raised, on every occasion. Before I forget, Sir, it is true, that Sir Gaëtan Duval, some time before he died, saw in me son *héritier politique...*

(Interruptions)

I did not ask for that, Sir, but as a fact I have never been an agent of the PMSD.

Mr Speaker: Order, please!

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. gentleman sitting next to the Leader of the Opposition will have appreciated what that means, that slap on his face, and he keeps sitting there! Not the first time and it won't be the last time!

Mr Duval: Sir, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister - I quite clearly remember Sir Gaetan Duval who in 1991....

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order. Please! May I remind the hon. Members that this PNQ is not on what late Sir Gaëtan Duval said. Order!

Mr Duval: Mr Speaker, this was brought into the issue. I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he would recall that during the last Iraq war, Sir Gaëtan Duval went on television against Mr de l'Estrac and condemned the then Iraq war as illegal. I am asking the Deputy Prime Minister, irrespective of who he thinks he is, to condemn as illegal the murder of children, women and innocent people.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we should come back to the present situation and to the present crisis. As we know the

1991 war was as a result of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the military action taken then had the unanimous sanction of the UN Security Council. So, let us not create confusion as it was a different situation then, it is a different situation now. It is very irresponsible to create that kind of confusion. Let us stay with the facts as they are in the present case, with a very painful conflict going on.

Mr Speaker: May I remind the House that we are concerned with the present war in Iraq and not the former one.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Can I tell the Deputy Prime Minister while he was surreptitiously supporting the United States in this war at the beginning and then trying to say that he is going to set up an Iraqi Fund, he is going to fool no one and certainly not the people in this country? This is double standard hypocrisy! Can I ask him who will deal with that Iraqi Fund?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, we have no intention of fooling anybody. We have a consistent principle well-informed position right from the beginning and we are going to stick to that. The setting up of this *fonds de solidarité avec le peuple irakien* is in the same line as our policy has been right from the beginning. The question put by the hon. Leader of the Opposition is who should deal with it in our opinion, I take it. As he is probably aware that Russia proposed yesterday that the ongoing conflict should be brought before the UN Security Council and we'll see whether that is the case. There has also been the wish by Indonesia that the UN General Assembly should consider a Resolution. We are not in the UN Security Council, unfortunately, these days; we are in the UN General Assembly. If there is a Resolution, we shall examine, of course, the fine-print, the exact wording of the Resolution. Today there is no Resolution before the UN General Assembly and let us see what happens as far as the Security Council is concerned.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Mr Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to get a clarification because there was so much noise that I did not hear the Deputy Prime Minister. Can he deny that Mrs Madeleine Albright was given a *carte blanche* to use Diego Garcia as they thought fit?

Mr Speaker: Let me remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that Mrs Albright is no more a Minister of the US Government and I can infer from his question that he is referring to the past. Let's have questions on the present conflict.

Dr. Ramgoolam: I want to ask that question because this is another proof that we are being used as a *paillason*!

The Deputy Prime Minister: You have ruled, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Dulloo: Mr Speaker, Sir, it is universally agreed that, as a result of this unilateral declaration of war, the UN role and the international order, including all principles and ethics of international law, have suffered a serious setback. May I ask the hon. Minister what Government is doing in order to restore the proper UN authority and to bring the international order together, especially in view of post-war reconstruction and also to solve the humanitarian crisis that would crop up? What Government is actively doing right now in order to press that the UN should be fully involved as from now in whatever is happening on the humanitarian crisis to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and, at the same time, as far as reconstruction is concerned so that all the UN institutions should come back to normal?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I said it and I repeat, Mr Speaker, Sir, that we were, and we are, of the opinion that military action against Iraq should not have started without the sanction under the UN Charter of the UN Security Council. War has been started by the US, the UK and their allies without such a sanction. That is why the Rt. hon. Prime Minister, myself and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have, on several occasions, said that what has happened is *un mauvais coup porté à l'autorité des Nations Unies*. We have said that and it is our considered view that what has taken place is *un mauvais coup porté à l'autorité des Nations Unies*. What can we do to help in such a

situation? I can only repeat what I have just said. We are not in the Security Council these days. We are in the UN General Assembly. We

make our views known within our meagre means. We shall stand committed to help reconstruct post-war Iraq and we stand committed to that Mr Speaker, Sir, but apart from that there is not much that we can do, unfortunately.

Dr. Ramgoolam: What we think the Deputy Prime Minister should do is to say in clear unambiguous terms like France, Russia and Germany have said that they are against this war, that Saddam Hussein is not to be solely blamed, that we are against this war which is killing innocent people. That's what we want them to do.

The Deputy Prime Minister: There is a lot of passion around, Mr Speaker, Sir.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

The Deputy Prime Minister: May I remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that the Minister of Foreign Affairs did point out last Tuesday that only last Sunday - that is, Sunday week, not the day before yesterday - President Jacques Chirac of France suggested a deadline of one or two months for the UN inspectors to complete their work. Now, what is being put forward as the stand of France is wrong. This is what the Minister said and it is a fact -

"Like the United States, the United Kingdom, France and other UN member States, Mauritius is of the view that Iraq has not respected all its obligations under various resolutions."

This is the considered view of all these countries, but then we noted some progress under pressure and that is where disagreement came in. But there is unanimity that Iraq has not respected the different UN resolutions, including France which is of that opinion. Where disagreement crept in, is that progress under pressure was achieved. And like France, India and many others, we felt that war, at that point in time, with that progress that had been achieved under pressure, that some more time should have been given to the inspectors. And, as I said, President Chirac himself suggested one or two months, which is a short delay. We wish that a delay would have been found, because I remind you, Mr Speaker, Sir, that only a few days ago, France, Germany and Russia had said that a compromise on a time limit set for inspectors to disarm Iraq was *à la portée de la main*. History has recorded all that. We'll never know if that opportunity of giving another one, two or three months to the inspectors, we'll never know *sur quoi cela aurait débouché*. But it was our considered view, and it is our considered view, that this *chance historique* should have been grabbed and that a limited more time should have been given to the inspectors.

Dr. Ramgoolam: Maybe the Deputy Prime Minister is not aware, maybe he has been fed with the wrong information. I have the details of what President Chirac has said. It has been sent to me. I have also details in a foreign press that in the European Council Meeting a few days ago, France refused to condemn either Saddam Hussein or Iraq for what is happening. It refused and made it a point to take this out of the communiqué. Is he aware of that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, let us not confuse what is taking place. Now, with what the position of France was before, I repeat what the position is now, when military action has been started by the US and the UK without UN Security sanction, is different from what the stand of France, India and all the other countries was before military action was started. Before military action was started, there was unanimity that Iraq had not respected UN Resolutions. There was unanimity on that and our stand as well as France and the others was that some progress had been achieved under pressure and that we should give more time to the inspectors, but limited time. I repeat,

President Chirac himself, four days before military action started, suggested one or two months which is a tight schedule, but all this is unfortunately past history. We hope, as we said, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the conflict will end as soon as possible.

Dr. Ramgoolam: I disagree with what the hon. Minister is saying. I have it here that the French President said the contrary to what he is saying.