

**GAYAN, MRS SOORYA, DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MGI -
DISMISSAL (18/10/05)**

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 his recent decision to dismiss Mrs Soorya Gayan as Director-General of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, he will –

- (a) say what led him to state in the House last Tuesday that Mrs Sibartie, former Registrar and acting Director of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, has had to resign on the occasion of the appointment of Mrs Gayan, and
- (b) agree that circumstances, fair play and justice dictate that Mrs Gayan be re-appointed Director-General of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a), although in reply to the PNQ last week, I did raise the question concerning Mrs Sibartie's retirement, I made it clear that this was behind us. However let me state the facts.

When Mr Utam Bissoondoyal, then Director, Mahatma Gandhi Institute was either on leave or on mission, it was Mrs A. Sibartie, then Registrar who replaced the Director on several occasions during the period 15 August 1995 to 07 August 2000. When Mr Bissoondoyal went on preretirement leave as from 01 February 2000 and eventually retired on 07 August 2000, Mrs Sibartie acted as Director of the Institute as from 01 February 2000 until 14 October 2001.

On one occasion, when Mrs Sibartie, Acting Director, went on leave from 24 June 2001 to 25 July 2001, Mrs Gayan, then Head, Centre for Mauritian Studies, acted as Director.

According to records a scheme of service for the post of Director of the Institute was specified with effect from July 2001. The qualification requirement for the post stated to be a degree and a post graduate qualifications from a recognised institution. Other requirements included sound knowledge of Indian culture traditions and cultural values.

As far as qualifications were concerned Mrs Sibartie had a degree and a Diploma in Educational Administration. The question may be asked whether the effect of the provisions of the scheme of service were not such as to render Mrs Sibartie ineligible for the post.

Mrs Gayan was appointed as Director, Mahatma Gandhi Institute, on 15 October 2001 and Mrs Sibartie resumed her post and proceeded on leave as from 08 February 2002 prior to retirement which was effective as from 31 July 2002.

Mr Deputy Speaker Sir, as regards part (b) of the question, I had indicated last Tuesday that I would be speaking to Mrs Gayan that afternoon. In fact, I did have a conversation with her and made some propositions to her. She wanted time to consider it and I talked to her again the next day and finally there was the proposition that she takes up the post of Director of Rabindranath Tagore Institute. She has written to me yesterday saying that she had given a thought and would rather proceed on retirement and that she would want all the benefits entitled to her to be paid. I personally have no objection to retirement benefits being paid to her in conformity with existing legislation. That is the situation.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, the fact is that last week the Prime Minister did say that Mrs Sibartie, former Registrar and former Acting Director of the MGI had had to resign. Now, he is better informed.

This is another case where clearly the Prime Minister was misinformed. Will the Prime Minister confirm that, in fact, Mrs Sibartie did not resign from the MGI and that when the time came, she retired from the MGI?

The Prime Minister: In fact, what I meant, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, is that she decided to retire - if we want to put it that way - because she felt that she was the Acting Director, she had been the Registrar and the scheme of service was changed and, therefore, she felt she did not want to continue. That is why I said she decided to go.

Mr Bérenger: This is not the information that I have. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister - now that we've corrected the fact that Mrs Sibartie did not resign from the MGI, but she retired from the MGI when the time came - whether he will confirm that, in fact, she chose not to apply for the post of Director when the decision was taken to open up to anybody the possibility of becoming Director of the MGI?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just to clarify the facts. She decided to go on pre-retirement leave because of the new scheme of service and she could not apply because she had only a degree and a diploma in Education and Administration. The new scheme of service required a degree and a post-graduate qualification which she did not have. She had

been acting as Director, she had been Registrar and, as I said in my answer, when Mr Bissoondoyal, for example, went abroad it was Mrs Sibartie and not Mrs Gayan who acted as Director-General. My understanding is that she felt the new scheme of service precluded her and she preferred to go on preretirement leave.

Mr Bérenger: I would not wish the hon. Prime Minister to get me wrong. Mrs Sibartie had a beautiful career at the MGI and she retired at the end of her career. There is absolute nothing against her, absolutely nothing. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he will agree with me that under his Government up to the year 2000, nothing would have prevented the then Government from appointing, after her actingship, Mrs Sibartie as Director? This was not done, we reached general election and she was acting. The previous Government did not confirm her, then the decision was taken to open up the possibility to anybody, including from overseas to become Director of the MGI. This having taken place and all the procedures having been followed, as I said, does not the Prime Minister agree with me that circumstances as we see them, fair play and justice indeed do dictate that Mrs Gayan be reappointed Director? The Prime Minister has said that he has just received the letter, but this is because she is not being reappointed. Will not the Prime Minister agree with me that circumstances, fair play and justice do dictate that she be reappointed?

The Prime Minister: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, just to clarify one thing before the first part of what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying. Mr Bissoondoyal went on pre-retirement leave on 01 February 2000 and only retired on the 07 of August 2000. There was then the electoral campaign as he knows. So, we wanted to wait for the election. That is the reason that this is so. The other thing is that I did talk to her. You know, I don't want to go through it because I don't want to sour the atmosphere, but there were some reasons why she was asked to go. There were some questions about some appointments that were done and all those things; and that is the reason why it was proceeded in that way. But as the hon. Leader of the Opposition says about the *côté humanisme*, I did ask her if she would reconsider certain options. She wanted to go back to the post of Director, but the one which was available was that of Rabindranath Tagore Institute.

Mr Bérenger: The Director-General is available.

The Prime Minister: Concerning the post of Director-General, there were some reasons as to why she was asked to go. In fact, she did consider it. I don't want to go into the private conversation I had with her, but she said she appreciated what we have done but, on the whole, she preferred, at

this point, to do other things and, therefore, she would want her full retirement.

Mr Bérenger: Surely the hon. Prime Minister agrees with me that *on ne peut absolument rien à reprocher à madame Gayan, absolument rien*. Therefore, can I ask the hon. Prime Minister – being given that he said in a press interview last week ‘*je suis un humaniste*’ - whether he will not agree with me that un vrai *humaniste* would admit to a mistake having been made and reappoint as a true *humaniste* Mrs Gayan as Director-General of the MGI, the post which is there?

The Prime Minister: That does not change the *humanisme*. In fact, it is through a humanistic approach that I rang her and talked to her. It was a very friendly conversation and I did tell her at the first place that there were some reasons, whether right or wrong, that we felt there was a need to change, with the reorganisation that is going on at the MGI at the moment. She did, in fact, consider it. She turned down the offer of Associate Professor, because she felt the least she should be the Director. Therefore, that is the situation.

Mr Bérenger: Let me put it differently. After I have read his statement to the effect that “*je suis un humaniste*”, I read what he said last Saturday. This time he came out with this forceful statement ‘only fools have no regrets’. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is not a candidate. Therefore, can I again insist that this is a case where we should be fair? I heard the Prime Minister say “whether right or wrong”, but it is important. We cannot say whether it is right or wrong, it is very unfair towards somebody who cannot be blamed for anything and who deserves to be reappointed. Therefore, can I insist that if he is *un vrai humaniste* and in the spirit of fair play, of justice that he gives further consideration to the reappointment of Mrs Gayan to the post of Director-General of the MGI, which is available?

The Prime Minister: Through the humanistic approach, I did speak to her, Mr Deputy Speaker and, in fact, we had two conversations. The first one was, as I said, the post of Associate Professor was turned down, but not that of Director. She had said - I don't want to go in the private conversation - that she wanted to be appointed either as Director-General or, but not Associate Professor. That offer was made and she did think about it positively, the way she was answering, but, at the end of the day, she felt that she would want to do other things and she would want her full retirement. It was through a humanistic approach that I talked to her

Mr Bérenger: The bottom line is the fact that somebody who fully deserves that post of Director-General, a lady at that, when we are all in favour of promoting ladies to the highest possible post, that she had been very hurt by being treated in that way and that, therefore, there is nothing that would be better than re-appointing her Director-General of the MGI. This is the question I put to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: When I said “either right or wrong”, I meant there were different opinions. The Opposition has a different opinion, and on this side there are different opinions about some of the appointments that were made just prior to elections. All this came into it, but, as I said, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, I did speak to her and that is the situation as it is.

Mr Varma: May I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is aware that Mrs Gayan has been involved in political activities during the 1983, 1995 and 2000 general elections?

The Prime Minister: As I said, I don't want to go into the details, but if the hon. Member is saying so.