

PNQ

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Debate No. 01 of 24.01.2007

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

- (I) CPE CANDIDATES (2007) – NATIONAL COLLEGES – SEAT ALLOCATION
- (II) SC AND HSC EXAMINATIONS FEES SCHEME - IMPLEMENTATION

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) *(By Private Notice)* asked the Minister of Education & Human Resources whether, in regard to the declared policy of Government to provide access to, and achieve, a world-class education, he will state –

- (a) if Government will, for the sake of transparency, undertake to publish the names and the detailed results of all the CPE candidates who have been allocated a seat in a national college for the January 2007 intake, and
- (b) how the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate Examinations Fees Scheme will be implemented this year, as compared to last year.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer the hon. Leader of the Opposition to the replies I gave to PNQs at our sittings of 21 March 2006 and 28 November 2006, as well as the replies to PQs B/19, B/152, B/1299 and B/1308 at our sittings of 21 March 2006, 04 April 2006 and 07 November 2006 respectively, where the subject of admission on a national basis to State colleges have been dealt with.

In line with the philosophy of the present Government concerning educational reforms as laid down in our Government Programme 2005-2010, we are pursuing a new vision of a World Class Quality Education accessible to all. Consequently, the reforms we are implementing are comprehensive, holistic and inclusive.

As a first step towards our goal, we reinstated the Form I to VI Colleges, first of all by converting seven Sixth Form Colleges into Form I to VI Colleges as from January 2006 and the remaining 9 as from January 2007. Secondly, we provided for a refined grading system, which is fairer and more equitable as it is based on merit. On the basis of this refined grading system admission to schools admitting students on a national basis is made on the basis of grade aggregate, relative performance and parental choice. Whereas admission on a regional basis is made on the basis of residence, grade aggregate and in case of tie, on the basis of proximity of residence as has been the case since 2003.

I have to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the whole CPE Examinations 2006 and the admission exercise in Form I have been carried out smoothly and without any major problems.

As regards the question of publishing the detailed results of all CPE candidates who have been admitted to schools on a national basis, I wish again to repeat what I have said in the past in the replies to numerous PQs and PNQs on the issue.

Mr Speaker, Sir, since the existence of the CPE, even at the time of ranking, it has never been the policy nor the practice to disclose detailed individual results of CPE candidates. I am also informed that according to best practices worldwide, it is neither desirable nor proper to disclose individual results of students both at primary and secondary levels. It is precisely for this reason and also to respect the privacy of candidates that the MES Rules and Regulations governing CPE examinations clearly stipulates that marks shall not be disclosed.

Consequently, my Ministry and the MES are satisfied that transparency has all throughout prevailed and that the lists of candidates admitted to schools on a national basis are available at the school level.

The new system was widely publicized and the schools admitting students on a national basis were gazetted. In term of procedures, parents are advised to fill in an application form prior to the CPE exams to indicate their preference in regard to the schools in which they wish their child to be admitted. Consequently, parental choice is as important as the other criteria of grade aggregate and relative performance for schools admitting students on a national basis. Similarly, for admission on a regional basis, parental

choice is again as important as the other criteria of residence and grade aggregate.

It is to be noted that as regards schools with admission on a national basis, all the criteria of admission have been respected, namely performance, grade aggregate and parental choice. On the basis of the exercise carried out, any student who has obtained a maximum grade aggregate of 24 and 23 for girls and a maximum grade aggregate of 24, 23 and 22 for boys with best performance, have been admitted to a school with admission on a national basis, where the parents have so opted. There are still a few vacancies in the three schools admitting students on a National basis, namely John Kennedy College, Sookdeo Bissoondoyal College and Mahatma Gandhi Institute and my Ministry has invited applications for the filling of these vacancies, which will be filled essentially on the criteria of performance.

Further, for the sake of transparency, all parents who felt aggrieved by the results for the admission of their wards have, on request, been provided with the plausible explanation as to why his or her ward has not obtained an expected school. Indicatively, if a student with a maximum grade aggregate of 24 has not obtained admission in a school on a national basis, it will be simply because the parents did not opt for a college on a national basis.

Consequently, Mr Speaker, Sir, it has never been in the policy of Government to publish the detailed results of students, nor will it be the practice in future.

As regards part (b) of the PNQ, again the matter has been amply dealt with in my reply to the PNQ of the Leader of the Opposition, at our sitting of 20 June 2006. I need to remind the House that the overall philosophy of the Labour Government has always been supportive of vulnerable sections of the population. In line with this philosophy, Government has set the Welfare State which is still striving today.

In the present Budget, Government has further consolidated the concept of the Welfare State, with the clear objective of providing better support to the most needy of the community.

Every rupee of the taxpayer's money should be judiciously spent and should be directed towards the most vulnerable group and the most needy of our citizens.

It may be recalled that the previous Government had, in its Budget Speech of 2004/05, introduced a system of targeting whereby the subsidy on SC and HSC examinations fees would be limited to those children whose family benefited from social aid.

Mr Speaker, Sir, as the House is aware from the Budget Speech 2006/07, Government has modernized the approach to social protection to ensure fairness and make sure that we can increase support to those who need it most. The House will recollect that before reform two thirds of the wealthiest Mauritians received three quarters of the subsidy on SC and HSC examinations fees.

The new policy ensures that Government assistance will be focused on those who need Government support the most. That is why the Ministry of Social Security will pay the full fee for the SC and HSC exams for students from families whose income is below Rs7,500 per month. Because children from such families may sometimes require a second chance, Government will also pay in full the exam fees for first time repeaters whose parents' income does not exceed Rs7,500 per month.

Qualifying households will be invited through communiqué in the press and radio to call at the Social Security Office of their locality with relevant documents, to submit an application for payment of exams fees. It is expected that payment will be effected within a period of two weeks from the date of application.

In line with this Government's philosophy to target aid to the needy, the Ministry of Social Security is also working on a scheme to provide assistance to other genuine cases needing assistance and the policy will be in place before the exam fees are due in March 2007.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, in view of the fact that 16,000 students applied for a seat in the national colleges - and there were very limited seats - may I ask the hon. Minister how many students did get a 4 A⁺?

Mr Gokhool: Well, I don't have the details of how many obtained the 4 A⁺, but, Mr Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is all students who got the 4 A⁺ have been provided with a seat in the colleges.

Mr Bodha: My second question to the Minister, Mr Speaker, Sir, is: how many students who have got a 4 A⁺ did get a seat in a national college and how many did not get a seat?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I said, all students who got 4 A⁺ were provided with a seat. Whether they availed of the seat or not is a different matter. But they were provided with a seat. The number which was provided with a seat was 1,050 and those who availed of the seats which were provided was 999. 1,050 who got A⁺ were provided with a seat and 999 took advantage of the seats which were provided.

Mr Bodha: Let me take these figures, Mr Speaker, Sir. The hon. Minister is saying that 999 students did take the seat, so, we are left with 51 seats. Today, in the press, we have an official document saying that there are only 27 seats. May I ask the hon. Minister where the other 24 seats have gone?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, we provided for 1,260 seats initially and we also explained that because of ties that occur, we increased the number of seats from 1,260 to 1,337 which means that officially there were 1,260 seats, but because of the ties we had to accommodate the students. Now, in certain colleges, for example, Sookdeo Bissoondoyal, the last admitted student with a grade aggregate...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order! Order!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, we provided for 1,260 seats, but because of ties, 1,337 seats were provided to students. Now, we have made a check of how many vacancies are available and these vacancies have been advertised. The official number of seats was 1,260 and the number we have offered was 1,337. We have adjusted because we don't really have to offer all the seats being given that the official number of seats available was 1,260.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, according to the figures presented to the House by the hon. Minister, we have 287 additional seats because the final number is 1,337. Can he confirm that among those 287 seats, there are students with 3 A⁺ plus one A and 3 A⁺ and a B who have been allocated a seat? My question is now: how many students did get a 3 A⁺ and an A and how many of them did get a national college and how were they chosen?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the scheme, as it is implemented, is on grade aggregate so that a student who gets 4 A⁺ will get the maximum grade aggregate of 24. Now, if a student gets a 3 A⁺ plus one A, the grade aggregate will be 23. If a student gets 2 A⁺ plus 2 A, the grade aggregate will come to 22. The basis of the admission is on the grade aggregate. Therefore, if we have the number of students with 4 A⁺, that is, a grade aggregate of 24, the seats are offered to them, if they apply for a seat. But if the number of those who are admitted is less, then we go to the next aggregate, that is, 23 and this is how we admit 3 A⁺ plus one A or even 2 A⁺ plus 2 A which will be 22 marks. And this system has been used by the MES to offer admission.

Mr Bodha: The whole issue of transparency is very important, Mr Speaker, Sir, because the CPE students are spending 50 hours every week to run this unacceptable race for a seat in a national college. The QEC is offering only 140 seats. My question is: some students with 3 A⁺ and an A, that is, an aggregate of 23, have obtained a national college, I want to know how many were there and how those who got a seat at the national college were chosen. That is the question.

Mr Gokhool: I can provide the breakdown of candidates with 4 A⁺, 3 A⁺ plus one A, 2 A⁺ plus 2 A. These statistics can be made available. This is not a difficulty. We can make the statistics available. But the question of the hon. Leader of the Opposition is: why is it that somebody with a 4 A⁺ may

not have got a seat, but somebody with a 3 A⁺ plus one A has got a seat. As I said, it is a parental choice. If the parents, for example, do not opt for admission to a national college, such candidates will not be considered for a national college.

(Interruptions)

Let me explain! If a parent whose child has got a grade aggregate of 24 – and we have the option of a national college - and he does not want his child to go to a national college, that student will not get a seat. And that will explain why somebody with a 3 A⁺ plus an A, a grade aggregate of 23 might get a seat in a national college, whereas somebody with a 4 A⁺ may not get a seat because of the choice. It is parental choice.

Mr Bodha: It is an issue of transparency, Mr Speaker, Sir, because people are making representations and they are complaining. My other question is: are there students with 3 A⁺ and a B who have obtained a seat in a national college while a student with 5 A⁺ has not had a seat?

Mr Gokhool: I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition should follow. If a student ...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Gokhool: I repeat my answer. If a student has got 4 A⁺ which is 24, but the parent did not opt for a college on a national basis, that student will not get a seat on the national basis, but will get a seat in the regional college because the parent did not opt for it. And that will explain how when the exercise is carried out, the possibility is there that somebody with a 3 A⁺ with one A or 2 A⁺ with 2 A will get a seat. The MES has looked at those cases where a student may have got 4 A⁺ and has not got a seat. Representations have been made and explanations have been given and parents are satisfied that because they didn't opt for a college on a national basis, they didn't get the seat.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, parents are not satisfied. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he agrees that an aggregate of three A⁺ and one B is

the same as two A+ and two A. How is the choice made then? That is why we are asking for the detailed results.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am asking him whether, for those cases, the border line cases...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: When there was the system of ranking, a girl...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha:... did not get a seat at the QEC because of a difference of $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mark. This is a very delicate and sensitive issue. My question is: whether the Minister is aware that when we go on the aggregate, somebody having three A and one B has the same aggregate as somebody having two A+ and two A. How do you choose? That's why I am asking why he does not...

Mr Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition has put the question. Let the Minister answer.

Mr Bodha: The question is: why he does not publish the list of all students, in each school, with the detailed results, so that there is transparency? There should be faith in a system! We need to have faith in a system!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition has canvassed this point in the past. We are in the logic of grading and not ranking. If we go with the logic of ranking, then you have to compute the marks. We are in the logic of grading. So, the starting point is grade obtained by the candidate. The candidate who has obtained grade A or four A+ would obtain 400 marks. If the lower range is 90, this means it is 360. I have presented the scheme of the range of marks that will allow the MES to carry out the selection exercise. The range of marks is important and not the absolute marks. We are not using the absolute marks.

Mr Bodha: May I ask the hon. Minister whether the refined grading was used in all cases or whether, in certain cases, the raw scores were used?

Mr Gokhool: I stand by what I said. The refined grading system, as it has been devised, was used.

Mr Bodha: Can the Minister confirm that the raw marks were never used?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am saying that the range of marks was used for the admission of candidates.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, remaining in the logic of grading, as the hon. Minister stated, may I ask him whether he is in a position to inform the House how many pupils got a grade aggregate of 23 and how many were admitted in national schools, and how this choice has been made?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have the figures. For Maurice Curé, 152 candidates were offered a seat and they all had grade aggregate 24; Droopnath Ramphul, 116 with grade aggregate 24, and 24 with grade aggregate 23; Gaëtan Raynal, 67 with grade aggregate 24 and 91 with grade aggregate 23; MGI, 72 with grade aggregate 24...

(Interruptions)

The hon. Member should, at least, listen. Out of courtesy, she should listen! She will have her turn to put questions.

(Interruptions)

I am replying! This is the hon. Member's interpretation! QEC...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: There is a point of order. Let me listen to it.

Mrs Labelle: Mr Speaker, Sir, I think the hon. Minister is giving information that I did not ask for. He is not replying to my question.

Mr Speaker: This is not a point of order. I have no control on the answer of the Minister. However, I would request the Minister to be relevant.

Mr Gokhool: QEC, 163 with grade aggregate 24; MGI, 72 and the overall grade aggregate admitted was 24; John Kennedy, 41 with grade aggregate 24 and 100 with grade aggregate 23; Mahatma Gandhi, 70 with grade aggregate 24; Royal College Curepipe, 147 with grade aggregate 24; Royal College Port Louis...

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Minister is going to be long, I will request him to circulate the figures.

Mr Guinness: Mr Speaker, Sir, I heard the Minister say that, for parents who have opted for national colleges, a seat must have been given. I am in presence of a case where a student with five A+ from Montagne Blanche opted for the national colleges and even opted for MGI, where today we see that vacancies exist. I am laying the document on the Table of the Assembly. How does the Minister explain the fact that this student has not been given a seat in a national college?

Mr Gokhool: The parents must have made a proper representation to the MES. Otherwise, as I explained, we have admitted a certain number of students on the grade aggregate 24. But the number of applications and those who obtained 24 was much larger. That's where the range of marks was used by the MES to give to those who are the best. This is simple!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, it is clear that they advocate a fairer and more equitable system, but that they are not for transparency.

Let me come to the second part of the PNQ. May I ask the hon. Minister how many students are sitting for the SC and the HSC exams this year, and how many are going to benefit from a subsidy from Government this year as compared to last year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have the figures for last year. The number of students who sat for SC exams was 20,229 and 9,929 for HSC exams. The students have yet to fill forms for sitting for the exams for this year.

Mr Bodha: Could the hon. Minister please give the figures of those who benefited from full subsidy from the MSM/MMM Government and the number of students who benefited from a 50% rebate on the full fees, which meant that they paid around Rs3,000 for SC and around Rs9,000 for HSC?

Mr Gokhool: The figure is 1,600, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, does that mean that 1,600 students for SC and HSC included, are going to benefit from a subsidy from Government this year?

Mr Gokhool: The figures are for last year. The exercise is being done. A communiqué will be published, and those who need help will have to go to the Ministry of Social Security, where their cases will be studied and processed.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I remind the hon. Minister that the last Budget provided for Rs72 m. in terms of subsidy? May I ask the hon. Minister what is the figure for this year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, as I have indicated, the cases that will be eligible will be attended to by Government.

Mr Bodha: It is clear that Government is not aware of the number of cases who are going to benefit from social aid. May I ask the hon. Minister whether he is aware that, this year, SC exam fees are going to be increased by at least 25%, first because of an annual increase and second because of the devaluation of the rupee, and that the fees of the HSC will be about Rs10,000? Can he imagine the burden on a certain number of parents? May I ask him what the Government intends to do?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, as I have indicated, the Ministry of Social Security will implement the policy of paying the full fee for those who will qualify. On top of that, we will also provide assistance to those cases which are genuine ones and which may not be covered by the existing scheme. This will be looked into by the Ministry of Social Security.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, my question is: how genuine is genuine? How will we know that there is a genuine and rewarding case?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, the parents will have to make a case and provide all the information that will be required to study the case on a case to case basis. The other question we are examining is how to alleviate the difficulties of some parents. I have asked the MES to look into the possibility of paying the fees by instalments. This is being looked into.

Mr Nancy: Mr Speaker, Sir, concerning the local examination fees, may I ask the hon. Minister whether the same policy will apply for Rodrigues or whether additional special consideration will be given to Rodrigues, as in the recent case of free books in all schools in Rodrigues?

Mr Gokhool: As it is applied in Mauritius we also apply it for Rodrigues.

Mr Dayal: Can the hon. Minister confirm to the House that despite several claims and requests from all stakeholders and Union people no detailed results of the students, their place of residence and the schools they were allotted were published during the last five years? Why? What about transparency then?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order!

(Interruptions)

Order I said! Hon. Dowarkasing, order! Hon. Guinness, order!

(Interruptions)

Order!

Mr Gokhool: The exam fees...

Mr Speaker: If the hon. Minister does not want to answer, I can't force him to answer, but if he is answering let me listen to the answer.

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, hon. Dayal has put a question and I would like to answer the question.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Minister has already answered the question in his main reply.

(Interruptions)

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the examination fees have many components. There is an entry fee, there is a subject fee and there is a local fee. May I ask the hon. Minister whether Government can consider that the local fee be subsidised or abolished so that the fees paid by the parents are less than the 25% that they are going to pay because of the devaluation of the rupee?

Mr Gokhool: I have already stated the policy of Government with regard to the payment of fees.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask this Government, through the hon. Minister and through the hon. Prime Minister, to come back to the former policy of providing 50% grant...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: ... to all those who are going to sit for the SC and HSC examinations this year?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will answer that question. The population has given us a mandate to carry out our Governmental Programme. They will have to wait for their turn.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Last question, hon Bundhoo!

(Interruptions)

Mr Bundhoo: Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to the refined grading system, can the hon. Minister of Education state the number of complaints received this year as compared to last year and would he make a statement on the refined grading system itself?

Mr Gokhool: Mr Speaker, Sir, there have been very few cases. In fact, I, myself was pleasantly surprised - because of the outcry that was raised in certain quarters - that there have not been many cases.

Mr Speaker: Time is over!

(Interruptions)

Order! Order!

MOTION**SUSPENSION OF S.O. 10(2)**

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I 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 & Shipping (Dr. R. Beebeejaun) rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

PNQ

(11)

My Ref. NA/28

24 January 2007

To: The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Human Resources

Private Notice Question

I have to inform you that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Mr Nandcoomar Bodha, MP, has given notice of the following Private Notice Question which he proposes to put to the Honourable Minister of Education & Human Resources at the sitting to be held today, **Wednesday 24 January 2007 at 11.30 a.m.**

To ask the Honourable Minister of Education & Human Resources:-

Whether, in regard to the declared policy of Government to provide access to, and achieve, a world class education, he will state –

- (a) **if Government will, for the sake of transparency, undertake to publish the names and the detailed results of all the CPE candidates who have been allocated a seat in a national college for the January 2007 intake; and**
- (b) **how the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate Examinations Fees Scheme will be implemented this year, as compared to last year?**

R. R. Dowlutta
Clerk of the National Assembly