

**(a) SIR SEEWOSAGUR RAMGOOLAM FOUNDATION – BOARD  
COMPOSITION**

**(b) SIR RABINDRAH GHURBURREN FOUNDATION – ESTABLISHMENT (20/05/08)**

**The Leader of the Opposition (Mr P. Bérenger)** (*By Private Notice*) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues and Outer Islands whether, in regard to Foundations set up by Acts of Parliament in respect of personalities having well served the country, for the purposes of paying tribute to them, he will state if –

(a) the objects set out in the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation Act are being fulfilled, indicating the composition of the Board thereof and when it last met, and

(b) he will agree to the introduction in Parliament of a Bill providing for the establishment of a Sir Rabindrah Ghurburren Foundation.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, on a point of order. The law voted by this Parliament provides that it is the Prime Minister who appoints on the Board of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation and, obviously, a decision to set up a Sir Rabindrah Ghurburren Foundation lies with the Prime Minister. This is why I have put the question to the Prime Minister. I think it is totally out of order for the Minister of Education to reply.

**The Prime Minister:** Mr Speaker, Sir, if I may answer the Leader of the Opposition. That may be so. Then, all that I can do is answer the question, because the whole subject matter is dealt with under the Ministry of Education. I can answer the question, but then there will be no supplementary questions.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** A point of order has been raised and the basis of the point of order is that some members of the Board of the Foundation of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam are appointed by the Prime Minister. I don't have the text in front of me, but there are certain institutions where the Boards or their Chairpersons are appointed by the Prime Minister, but the jurisdiction falls under the respective Ministers. For example, the Mauritius Institute of Education, I think, the Chairman, is appointed by the Prime Minister, but the Institute falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education & Human Resources (Mr D. Gokhool):** Mr Speaker, Sir, with your permission and, as you have mentioned, the operation of this Foundation falls under the purview of my Ministry. I will reply to this Private Notice Question as the objectives of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation relates mainly to the intellectual, physical, social, cultural and artistic development of the Mauritian citizens.

I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for this PNQ

With regard to part (a) I wish to inform the House that the objects of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation are as follows –

(a) work for and further the progress of young Mauritians by affording them opportunities for their intellectual, physical, social, cultural and artistic development and by offering them scope for their creative talents in the arts and sciences;

(b) grant scholarships in appropriate fields of study to deserving students of

high promise and potential, and encourage and assist financially or otherwise institutions devoted to the achievement of goals similar to those of the Foundation.

As regards the composition, this is contained in section 5 of the SSR Foundation Act. I am laying a copy thereof.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Although the Board *per se* has not been meeting, the objects of the Foundation have nevertheless been fulfilled through a Loan Committee, the composition of which is similar to the composition of the Board as per section 5 of the Act. The Loan Committee last met in March 2007. It was the Board decision to meet when 5 or more requests for loans are received. Since March 2007, only two requests for loan have been received.

The objects of the Foundations have been implemented to needy students mainly through helping students with loans and for this reason the University of Mauritius has been entrusted with the responsibility of the fund.

I wish to remind that the Board is autonomous and independent and comprises only two representatives of Government. It has been vested with considerable authority and freedom to further the objects of the Foundation.

It needs to be pointed out that the members sit on the Board on a voluntary basis.

I need to point out, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Act was passed in 1981. So, it has been in operation with successive Governments. The hon. Leader of the Opposition will appreciate that there are practical difficulties with the functioning of such foundations with heavy reliance on voluntary members.

The Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam Foundation has two loan schemes –

(a) the first scheme provides interest-free loans to full-time students of the University of Mauritius who need financial assistance to pursue their studies, and

(b) the second scheme is meant for part-time students facing severe hardship; those who fall into difficulties during a course due to unforeseen or uncontrollable changes in circumstances and cannot pay their tuition fees.

The loan carries an interest of 8%.

A sum of Rs2 m. was advanced to the fund by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in 1994. Additional funds were also received subsequently totalling Rs5.3 m. The SSR Foundation Loan has a bank balance of Rs2,2 m. as at December 2007. According to record, for the period 1997 to March 2007, 381 needy students have been granted loans amounting to sum Rs4.6 m.

Mr Speaker Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, the proposal of the Leader of the Opposition to set up a similar Foundation in honour of Sir Rabindrah Ghurburrun is worth considering in view of his achievements.

However, I wish to point out that the SSR Foundation dates back to 1981 and since then, a number of organizations, including socio-cultural organizations and NGOs have come into existence. Moreover, there has been a substantial increase in the number of newspapers, television and radio channels. These bodies and entities constitute now a very effective and diverse means of honouring the name and memory of the great patriots and citizens who have left their marks on the socio-economic, cultural and political life of

this country. Occasionally, private members' Bills have been introduced for such purposes.

To date, Parliament has, on the initiative of Government, introduced legislations setting up Foundations only in the name of eminent personalities from the non-political sphere, except in the case of SSR and Sir Dayendranath Burrenchobay, former Governor General. These organisations and the public at large should continue to be encouraged in honouring the memory of distinguished political and non-political figures. Wherever appropriate, the existing Foundations may be empowered, by necessary legislative amendments, to also extend their activities to those aimed at honouring the other personalities.

However, if the wish is expressed by parties interested in putting up the necessary financial and other resources required to ensure a proper functioning of a statutory Foundation, Government will consider the advisability of setting up such a Foundation.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I understand that the Minister is circulating a copy of section 5 of the Act, that is, the Board. What I requested was the names of the members of the Board. Can I ask, therefore, the hon. Minister to give us the names of the Chairperson, the secretary and the member of the Ramgoolam family appointed supposedly by the Prime Minister and when were they appointed?

**Mr Gokhool:** The Board to which I referred is chaired by the Chief Technical Officer of my Ministry...

**Mr Bérenger:** On a point of order, I am talking about the Board as provided under the law, not some committees set up by I don't know whom - the President of the Board *as per* the law.

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as I informed the House, the Board has not been meeting, but there is a committee, that is, a loan committee, which looks at the objects of the Board ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** It is through the loan committee that the objects of the Foundation are pursued. This is the arrangement ...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** As I explained, the Act was passed in 1981 and if the Leader of the Opposition is implying that this is an unsatisfactory arrangement, all I am saying to the House is that, the Act was passed in 1981, successive Governments have accepted this state of affairs...

**Mr Bérenger:** No, there was no loan committee!

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** In the implementation of the Act, there was no board as such.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Bérenger:** In 1981, Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam was in Government. They were in Government. I am given to understand therefore that there is no Chairperson of the Board, no secretary and no one appointed by the Prime Minister to represent the Ramgoolam family. There is, in fact, no Board.

**Mr Gokhool:** I have to be precise.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** There is a member of the Ramgoolam family who has been appointed. But, as I explained, since 1981 - and even when I looked at the file, I asked myself that this may not be a satisfactory state of affairs, and the Leader of the Opposition is aware of that - the Act was passed and successive Governments have allowed this situation to prevail. We may have to look at it and remedy the situation.

**Mr Bérenger:** I suppose the hon. Prime Minister knows that this was voted on 12 June after nationwide celebrations in 1980 for the 80<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. It was proposed by Sir Kher Jagatsingh, seconded by Sir Veerassamy Ringadoo, and the then Leader of the Opposition, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, approved the setting up of this Board. Will not the Prime Minister agree with me that it is shocking, it is a lack of respect for the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation not to have a board?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we have to look at this situation in a very dispassionate manner because the responsibilities are shared. If the Act was passed, subsequently, the same situation has prevailed, I do not think it is fair for the Leader of the Opposition to try and put all the blame on the side of the Labour Party. This is a situation which has prevailed and we have to address it. This is what I am telling the House.

**Mr Bérenger:** The law voted by Parliament and which is still in force provides that the accounts of the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation must be kept published in the Government Gazette every year. Can I ask the hon. Minister whether this has been done or is being done, if not, when were the last annual accounts gazetted?

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr Speaker:** Order!

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I said in my main answer that the Board, as it has been provided in the Act, has a lot of autonomy and independence. Besides, if you look at section 10 of the rules, I quote with your permission –  
“Notwithstanding the Rules and General Clauses Act, rules made under sub section 1 shall not be required to be approved by the Minister laid before the Assembly or published in the Gazette.”

**Mr Speaker:** I think I have given enough latitude to the hon. Minister in answering the question. There is a specific question which has been put about the accounts or whatever it is. Has this been done?

**Mr Gokhool:** I have given the answer in the last part of my reply. It should not be published in the Gazette.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has made reference to loans. The law provides that scholarships would be granted. Can I know whether scholarships have been granted and, if yes, when and to whom?

**Mr Gokhool:** What has been done is that loans have been provided to the needy students and not scholarships.

**Mr Bérenger:** The law says scholarships. Mr Speaker, Sir, I think we should all feel very sorry about what has happened and it is not too late to redress the situation, that

is, appoint the Board and show due respect to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam.

*(Interruptions)*

Can I ask the hon. Minister what is the situation as far as other foundations are concerned, for example, Sir Dayendranath Burrenchobay Foundation or the Mohunlall Mohit Foundation or the Hervé Masson Foundation? Are they all without Boards as well?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I do not have the answer because the question relates to Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I address my question to the hon. Prime Minister. Can I ask the hon. Prime Minister through the Minister who has been made to reply, whether the reply is yes that there will be legislation coming to this House to set up a Sir Rabindrah Ghurburrun Foundation?

**Mr Gokhool:** I have answered the question in part (b). If the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants me to reply once again, with your permission, I can do that.

**Mr Bérenger:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I want to know whether the hon. Minister has discussed it with the hon. Prime Minister, at least, to show due respect and whether the Prime Minister has agreed to the setting up of a Sir Rabindrah Ghurburrun Foundation?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, in all fairness, I have to discuss with my Prime Minister. I can't come to the House and give an answer. I have discussed with my Prime Minister.

**Mr Bérenger:** The hon. Minister has or he is to discuss?

**Mr Gokhool:** I have discussed, hon. Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr Bérenger:** The answer is not a definitive yes. But can I ask again to the Prime Minister through the Minister who has been made to reply that when the Sir Robin Ghurburrun Foundation is set up, that it be provided with what the law says, that is, a Board, a Secretary, a Chairperson, the financial means to fulfil the objects of the Board. Can I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister that this should be done in the case of the existing Foundations, starting with the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Foundation and the others, and should apply to the Sir Robin Ghurburrun Foundation?

**Mr Gokhool:** Mr Speaker, Sir, first of all, I have to say that we are not saying no. What we are saying is that the proposal of the Leader of the Opposition is worth considering, but there are other issues that have to be taken on board. The second thing is that I have also referred to is that, should a legislation be brought, then we have to bring about the necessary amendments so that the Foundation can function in a much more effective manner. This is what I have indicated to the House.

**Mr Bérenger:** Can I also, Mr Speaker, Sir, put the point to the Prime Minister through the Minister? I referred to Sir Robin Ghurburrun because he has just left us. He is the last case of a deceased patriot who has left us. There are other cases - I won't mention other names - that deserve the same kind of consideration. Can I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister that, going down memory lane, we should pay due respect...

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I am sorry, the main question is specific on two Foundations. It is not a general question and I think that it is not relevant to the question which has been put.

*(Interruptions)*

Order! No further questions. Time is over!

Hon. Members, the Table has been advised that PQ No. B/478

addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister has been withdrawn. PQ No. B/475 with regard to Fishing Facilities addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by Dr. the hon. Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries and PQ No. B/488 addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister will be replied by the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, keeping in mind that these questions will answered after the questions, time permitting. Questions addressed to Dr. the hon. Prime Minister!