

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

HORSE RACING - BETTING OPERATIONS

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr N. Bodha) (*By Private Notice*) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance & Economic Development whether in regard to betting operations for the current horse racing season, he will state -

- (a) the number of licences granted to bookmakers island-wise;
- (b) the revenue collected in terms of duties and taxes since the beginning of the season, and
- (c) if he has been made aware of cases of illegal betting and, if so, -
 - (i) the number of reported cases;
 - (ii) if inquiries have been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof;
 - (iii) the amount of revenue lost as a result thereof, and
 - (iv) the measures taken to combat same.

The Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment (Dr. V. Bunwaree): Mr Speaker, Sir, as regards part (a) of the question, the number of licences granted to bookmakers island-wise is 50 during this current season. In addition, we have two bookmaking companies operating by telephone.

As regards part (b), duties and taxes collected on horse betting operations since the start of the current season up to 30 June 2006, i.e., for nine race meetings, amounted to Rs82.9 m., of which Rs67.4 m. are from bookmakers.

Regarding part (c) of the question, Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that for the current horse racing season -

- (i) 21 cases of illegal betting have been detected and reported to the Horse Racing Board by the *Police des Jeux* to date. However, there is also a recent case that is under Police inquiry which has not yet been reported to the Horse Racing Board;
- (ii) Police inquiry has been completed in seven cases, out of the 21, and they have been referred to the DPP for appropriate action. For the remaining 14 reported cases, Police inquiry is still ongoing;
- (iii) It is not possible at this stage to compute or estimate the amount of revenue lost since, in those cases, inquiries on the extent of illegal betting have not yet been completed;
- (iv) Measures taken to combat the same include -
 - (1) the setting up of a *Police des Jeux*;
 - (2) creation of a Central Server in October 2005 that has been instrumental in increasing revenue collection and despite the resistance of some in the industry and an unexplained fire;
 - (3) widening the number of legal outlets for betting by increasing the number of betting outlets across the island;
 - (4) ongoing work on a new Gambling Bill to -
 - (a) strengthen the framework for betting;
 - (b) make provisions to foster responsible gambling in order to minimise harm caused by gambling, and
 - (c) to provide for one single regulator for better synergy and enforcement and for related matters.

I would like to mention, Mr Speaker, Sir, that the “*Police des Jeux*” which was set up in 2002 has since 15th April 2006, been placed under the

responsibility of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Anti Drug & Smuggling Unit.

Although the “*Police des Jeux*” has 19 officers, it is supported since that date, 15 April 2006, by the whole team of ADSU composed of 384 officers posted throughout the island.

The main objective of the “*Police des Jeux*” is to closely monitor all betting activities with a view to preventing and detecting offences linked with all aspects of illegal betting.

The “*Police des Jeux*” covers the whole island and gives particular attention to areas prone to illegal bettings. They also work in close collaboration with the Mauritius Turf Club, the Gaming Control Board, Association of Bookmakers, stable owners, Municipalities and other relevant authorities.

The Supervising Officer (Deputy Commissioner of Police, Anti Drug & Smuggling Unit) who sits on the Horse Racing Board regularly reports on the situation prevailing on the ground thus assisting the Board to take important measures for regulating all activities relating to betting.

On Thursdays, Fridays, race days (Saturdays/Sundays) and Mondays, the officers of the “*Police des Jeux*” closely monitor all activities at the Champ de Mars with a view to detecting cases of illegal bookmaking and racketeering. On the days preceding race meetings and on race days, bettings are heaviest at the Champ de Mars and on Mondays money transactions are at their peak.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the steps initiated for strengthening control over illegal betting are indeed yielding results. As a comparison, only 30 cases of illegal betting had been uncovered last year for the season as a whole, i.e., 30 race meetings which took place last year. This year, this figure has already reached 22 for 11 race meetings only which means that the results are positive.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank the Ag. Minister of Finance. As he has been Minister of Finance in the past, I think that he knows the subject very well.

Mr Speaker, Sir, this is a mega scandal involving billions of rupees. I have a series of questions to ask the Ag. Minister of Finance. My first

question is: can he enlighten the House about what is the sweepstakes for one race journey per bookmaker which is declared officially?

Dr. Bunwaree: Well, the question was not put, Mr Speaker, Sir. I can't answer offhand for sweepstakes. I need notice of the question. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition had put that in the question, he would have obtained the reply. I don't understand why it was not in the question.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the second part of the Private Notice Question is "the revenue collected in terms of duties and taxes". Duties and taxes are collected on the official figure which is presented by the bookmaker. So, what I am asking is: what is the average sweepstake for one racing journey? Mr Speaker, Sir, may I enlighten the House, it is about Rs3 m.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, as far as duties and taxes are concerned, I mentioned the figures as a whole. Now, if the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants for one particular aspect, it can be given to him. He will give notice and he will get it.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister said that the total sum for the last nine racing journeys has been about Rs82 m. It is about Rs9 m. per racing day. My second question is: does he have an idea of the sweepstakes per journey per bookmaker in illegal betting?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have replied that for illegal betting there is an inquiry going on. We don't know even, at this point in time, what is the extent of the illegality of the betting. So, how can we give the figures?

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I enlighten the House to the fact that the illegal betting figure is twice than what is being officially declared.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister how does illegal betting occur in cases of registered bookmakers and unlicensed people who are doing the bookmaking?

Mr Speaker: Is the hon. Leader of the Opposition asking the hon. Minister how does illegal betting occur?

Mr Bodha: Yes.

(Interruptions)

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I rise to take note of what has been mentioned by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He is aware that illegal betting is twice the figures I have mentioned. So, we are expecting him to go and report that to the Police because the Police is not in a position to say that.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: There is no need for this.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, everybody knows that illegal betting is done on credit and a lot of people bet on credit, thus evading the betting tax and also being involved in money laundering. That was what I was asking the hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker: What is the question?

Mr Bodha: So, my question now is: in the last case which has been reported and which is being investigated by the Police, may I ask the hon. Minister why the betting licence of the bookmaker has not been suspended by the Horse Racing Board?

Dr. Bunwaree: Well, the answer to this question is very simple because the inquiry is not over yet. The Police has got a very complicated case which they have to enlighten. I thought the hon. Leader of the Opposition was going to ask details about the case, which information I can give, but, as a whole, I can say that the Police inquiry is still going on. It has not yet been reported to the Horse Racing Board as I mentioned in my reply. The information has been given, but it has not been reported to the Horse Racing Board. This is why I took it as a *cas à part*. There were 21 cases, as I said, plus this one. This one is still ongoing.

Mr Speaker, Sir, the other question raised by the hon. Leader of the Opposition with regard to credits is pertinent. What we have to realise is that people who go and play on credit are usually *de gros joueurs*. It is a question interesting the whole nation. I think the Opposition will certainly show responsibility. As I have already stated, *la Brigade des Jeux* has been set up in 2002, but we have reviewed the way it works. There were only 19 officers working there, and now there are about 340 officers – the whole ADSU. It is the work that has been done which is today yielding results. Let's hope that we will be able to put some order and find what revenue is being evaded and what Government can do to bring it to the kitty of Government.

Mais il y a un problème de sécurité en ce qui concerne les gros joueurs qui vont jouer au Champ-de-Mars. S'ils gagnent, c'est pire encore. Ils viennent avec des centaines de milliers de roupies et s'ils gagnent, cela peut être par millions. Ce transport d'argent pose un problème de sécurité. Il faut se mettre à la place des joueurs. C'est une activité économique qu'il faut accepter. Personne ici n'est pour le *gambling*, j'en suis sûr, mais c'est une activité économique. Je vous rappelle que le *betting tax* a été institué en 1998 par ce gouvernement, et j'étais ministre des finances. L'ancien gouvernement s'en est servi et a eu beaucoup de revenus grâce au *betting tax* entre 2000 et 2005. A cause du problème de sécurité, les joueurs jouent à crédit. Avec le système actuel, les *bookmakers* et les joueurs sont dans l'illégalité, et pire encore profitent...

(Interruptions)

...et fraudent à travers ce système.

(Interruptions)

Members of the Opposition: Shame!

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Bunwaree: Il y a une fraude qui en découle. Maintenant, il faut stopper la fraude. Ils n'ont pas pu stopper la fraude, et ils disent '*shame*'. On est en train de dépister. Comme je l'ai dit, un projet de loi est en chantier, afin de résoudre ce problème. Mais, il faut être conscient que le problème existe, notamment le problème de sécurité accompagné d'une fraude qui doit être mise à nu, et c'est ce que ce gouvernement est en train de faire. Si l'honorable *Leader* de l'Opposition a d'autres questions à poser sur ce *recent case*, je suis prêt à lui répondre.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister is justifying the fact that...

(Interruptions)

How can we accept this?

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Mr Bodha: He is justifying that there should be illegal betting on credit. In the present case, which is a mega case, involving many personalities, may I ask the hon. Minister how is it that this case has not been reported to the Horse Racing Board?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have explained that the case will be reported to the Horse Racing Board when the Police inquiry is over. In the meantime, they informed the Horse Racing Board, but there has been no report, because the Police inquiry is on. I will not allow this House to believe, in any way, Mr Speaker, Sir, that this Government is going to leave any stone unturned in allowing uncertainty to prevail...

(Interruptions)

Don't think that people on the other side of the House...

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Dr. Bunwaree: The only thing I want to say, Mr Speaker, Sir, is that je constate que l'honorable *Leader* de l'Opposition ne veut pas avoir des explications concernant le cas. Il est en train de noyer le poisson dans l'eau. C'est un problème qui concerne tout le pays. Il peut poser des questions et on lui donnera les réponses.

Mr Bodha: Let me come to the present case, Mr Speaker, Sir. On a question of transparency and integrity, there has been a list of names which has been mentioned and which appears in one of the CD Roms which are in Police custody. May I ask the hon. Minister whether the names of any Ministers exist on that list?

Dr. Bunwaree: My information is that there is no name of any Minister. But, I would request the hon. Leader of the Opposition to lay on the Table of the Assembly the list that he has just mentioned, and to report to the Police the names that are on the list that he has just stated, immediately after the sitting.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr Bodha: I said ‘as a matter of integrity and transparency’. Because the Government has always said that they don’t want to have any cover up and that they want to see to it that transparency is there. That’s why I am asking whether the names of two Ministers, namely Ministers Dulull and Valayden, have not been mentioned in the list? That is my question.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, there is no such name mentioned in the list.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: I am sorry...

(Interruptions)

Order!

(Interruptions)

Order! I said order! The names of two Members of this Assembly have been mentioned. I am sorry, but I am not in a position to state, at this point in time, whether this is proper or improper. I will look into the Standing Orders and I will reserve my right to give a ruling on this issue in the afternoon, because the names of two Ministers have been involved. This is what I have to say and I request the House to be in order.

Dr. Bunwaree: J’ai demandé au *Leader* de l’Opposition de déposer les noms sur la Table de l’Assemblée. He has mentioned two names, but he also said that he has a list. I am challenging him to lay on the Table of the Assembly the list he has mentioned.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, I said on an issue of transparency and integrity, and I ask...

Mr Speaker: If it’s about integrity and transparency, it is alright. But, I have already said what I had to say. I will give my ruling either way in the afternoon.

Dr. Bunwaree: With regard to the issue of enlightening integrity in this matter, I am challenging the hon. Leader of the Opposition to lay on the Table of the Assembly the list of the names he has in his possession.

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, would the hon. Minister, therefore, admit that the efficiency of the central server that has been put in

place in fact to monitor illegal betting and betting in general has so far not achieved its goal?

(Interruptions)

In the recent case, it has not achieved its goal.

(Interruptions)

Illegal betting is still going on!

Dr. Bunwaree: The hon. Member is completely wrong. In fact, it is because there is a central server that now such types of operation can be carried out. *C'est clair*. This is the case since April last. This is the result of the good work that is being done by this Government, and ADSU is trying to uncover these types of fraud.

Mr Dowarkasing: Therefore, Mr Speaker, Sir, can I ask the hon. Minister how can he reconcile that the computer seized by the Police was, therefore, not linked to the central server?

Dr. Bunwaree: The hon. Member is making as if he knows everything. I am saying...

(Interruptions)

But lay on the Table the list of the names!

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order! Let the Minister answer the question.

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, I have gone through the files and I have not seen anything about the names that they are mentioning. I am challenging them, at this point in time, to give us the names in writing and table them on the Table of the Assembly. The central server is doing marvellous work. They must admit one thing. If this arrest did not take place, how would they have come with this PNQ in the House? Why did the arrest take place? This is because ADSU is doing its work and has been given the responsibility to act promptly and quickly. The difference between the previous Government and our Government is that it is not only a *bridage des jeux* which, when it had to take action, had to go to see this and that superior or even the Commissioner of Police. They now act on their own and immediately – *sur le champ*. This is the work that they have done and shown the result thereof.

Mr Bodha: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I ask the hon. Minister whether he can explain to us how the central server can monitor an illegal bet?

Dr. Bunwaree: Mr Speaker, Sir, this is what the inquiry is going to find out. What we know is that there has been illegal betting.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Order!

Dr. Bunwaree: Can those people on the other side of the House tell me that...

(Interruptions)

Can the hon. Members...

Mr Speaker: Yes, that would be better.

Dr. Bunwaree: ... on the other side of the House tell us that they were not aware that there was illegal betting between 2000 and 2005.

(Interruptions)

Mr Speaker: Hon. Jhugroo!

Mr Jhugroo: M. le président, si je peux demander au ministre combien de parieurs il y a dans le Joomun code?

Dr. Bunwaree: First of all, we have to know what is the Joomun code? I'll beg to be enlightened.

Mr Jhugroo: Dans les CD saisis chez le *bookmaker* Joomun.

Dr. Bunwaree: I did not hear the question.

Mr Jhugroo: Combien de parieurs il y a dans tous les CD saisis chez le *bookmaker* Joomun?

Dr. Bunwaree: The inquiry is ongoing, for the time being they have seen a few names only. They know there are other names and the inquiry is

ongoing, but what the hon. Member is mentioning about Joomun code is very interesting, maybe it will help the Police. So, he has to go immediately, after putting the question, to the Police to give the information...

(Interruptions)

Mr Dowarkasing: Mr Speaker, Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister whether *la Police des Jeux* and L'ADSU have effected searches in the offices or premises of other bookmakers, in the light of the recent case?

Dr. Bunwaree: They are inquiring in this case and I don't know whether they have gone to other places yet, but they will certainly do it if the need arises.

(Interruptions)

One thing is that the inquiry in this case is not ended and they have gone to certain places and have made certain arrests, but, of course, they will continue.

Mr Bérenger: Mr Speaker, Sir, I will put two questions to the hon. Minister. The Ag. Minister of Finance expressed a lot of praise for *la Police des Jeux* and for ADSU, especially, in the most recent case of illegal betting *à credit*. Can the hon. Minister confirm that there would be no changes *dans les enquêteurs*, that would result in a cover up? We've heard a lot about changes to take place *au niveau des enquêteurs*. Will the hon. Minister confirm that there will be no such changes resulting in a cover up?

Dr. Bunwaree: Dans ce cas, il n'y aura pas, mais seulement il y a d'autres cas encore, il y aura d'autres personnes qui feront d'autres enquêtes.

Mr Bérenger: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether he can tell us why the procedures to have access to the telephone calls involved in that case - the most recent case of illegal betting *à credit* - have not yet started?

Dr. Bunwaree: It's not easy for me to answer this question. This question must be addressed to the responsible Minister, but what I can say is that there will be no cover up at all, everything will be done to sort out this matter.

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr Bodha: M. le président, compte tenu des ramifications de ce scandale, est-ce que je peux demander au Premier ministre d'instituer une Commission d'enquête...

Mr Speaker: The question is addressed to the hon. Minister.

Mr Bodha: Through the hon. Minister.

Dr. Bunwaree: On va faire tout ce qui est dans la mesure du possible pour éclaircir tous les nuages qui pourraient exister, que l'enquête suive son cours et que la vérité sorte.

Mr Speaker: Questions addressed to the hon. Prime Minister!