10.03.2015

BAMBOUS - AGRICULTURAL LAND - LEASE-

(No. B/172) Mr R. Bhagwan (First Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière) asked the Minister of Business, Enterprise and Cooperatives whether, in regard to the plots of agricultural land leased to individuals at Bambous, he will -

(a) state the number thereof and,

(b) table a list of the beneficiaries thereof, indicating in each case, the

(i) extent thereof, and

(ii) conditions thereof.

The Minister of Agro-Industry and Food Security (Mr M. Seeruttun): Madam Speaker, I shall, with your permission, reply to this Parliamentary Question. I am advised that State agricultural land at La Ferme Land Settlement and Roches Brunes Seed Production Centre near Bambous is leased to planters and breeders for vegetable cultivation and livestock production.

Regarding part (a) of the question, I am informed that there are 24 lessees at La Ferme Land Settlement and 13 at Roches Brunes Seed Production Centre; that makes a total of 37 lessees.

Regarding part (b) of the question, I am tabling the list of beneficiaries. May I add that, regarding the main conditions attached to the leases, the offer is for a period of seven years, renewable, and the rental payable to Rs1,000 per *arpent* annually. The lease may be cancelled at any time and the land retrieved if the lessee does not comply with the conditions of the lease, that is, neglecting the land, subletting the land, using the land for other purpose or not paying the rental.

Mr Bhagwan: May I know from the hon. Minister whether he has inquired if, in the list, the former Minister of Local Government, Mr Hervé Aimée, benefitted a considerable amount of *arpents* of State land in that region?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, if we go through the list, indeed, we have one former Minister who is the beneficiary of land at Roches Brunes Seed Production Centre. He was awarded that lease in March 2008, and the lease expired in February this year.

Mr Bhagwan: Can the hon. Minister at least inquire from his officers whether there has been a case of sub-renting of that land which was awarded to him?
Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, I must say that my Ministry is undergoing an internal enquiry with regard to land leased to various planters and breeders. Wherever there has been breach of contract with regard to conditions laid out in those lease agreements, lands are going to be retrieved from those beneficiaries.

Mr Mohamed: Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister has stated that there was a former Minister. Could he please confirm to the House - if my information is correct - that this person referred to as a former Minister was not Minister at the time when he was granted the lease?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, what I can say is that, at the time the lease was awarded to that person, probably he was not a Minister, but since the lease went through the end of February 2015, at one particular time during that period of the lease, he was Minister.

Mr Ameer Meea: Madam Speaker, can I ask the hon. Minister what extent of land was he granted, and may I know also what was he cultivating there?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, the acres of land awarded to that person amounted to two arpents, and the purpose of the lease was for poultry breeding, vegetables and fruit cultivation.

Mr Jhugroo: May I ask the hon. Minister whether he considers taking legal action against those planters who have sublet their land?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, all those who have contravened the conditions of the lease are going to answer to that.

Mr Ameer Meea: The hon. Minister just informed us that the lease has been terminated. May we know whether the lease would be renewed?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, I leave it to my Ministry to reconsider if there is request of renewal, and we will deal with that matter as and when the request is made to my Ministry.

Mr Bhagwan: It is a case of double employment. At the time when he was not Minister, he was bargaining with the previous party to stay in that party. He was given that as a bribe.

Mr Mohamed: If the hon. Minister could, maybe, enlighten the House and enlighten myself. Normally, at the end of a lease, if there is no request for a renewal or if it does not come to an end as such, there is no notice sent by the lessee to the lessor or vice versa, there is this operation of renewal by tacit reconduction. Isn’t this included in the lease, therefore, the issue of renewal does not arise, and it has just been renewed automatically for the same period?

Mr Seeruttun: Madam Speaker, I need notice of that question.