

Chapter Seven

GOVERNMENT-CREATED PLATFORMS S.A. INDIAN COUNCIL

Background

MATTERS RELATING to the Indian population in South Africa are handled mainly by the Department of Indian Affairs of which Sen. O.P.F. Horwood is the Minister. This department was instituted as a full department in 1961 and since then has ramified its work to cover social, welfare, educational, political and economic fields in the lives of the Indian people.

Working under the Minister of Indian Affairs is the South African Indian Council. The SAIC was established through the South African Indian Council Act (No. 31 of 1968) which came into operation on 1 July, 1968. The Act provides for a Council of not more than 25 members nominated by the Minister for a period of three years on a provincial basis in such a proportion as the Minister may deem equitable. The Council elects its own chairman. In addition, affairs of the Council in interim periods between meetings are handled by an Executive Committee of five, the Chairman of whom is appointed by the Minister and the other four members elected by the Council.

Composition

The first statutory South African Indian Council was appointed in 1968 and distributed as follows:

Natal	15
Transvaal	7
Cape	3

The seat of the Council is in Durban where meetings are usually held in February, June and October. The Executive Committee meets more regularly.

The Chairman of the Council is Mr H.E. Joosub from the Transvaal and that of the Executive Committee is Mr A.M. Rajab of Natal.

Functions

The functions of the Council as defined in the Act setting it up are:

to advise the government at its request on all matters affecting the economic, social, cultural, educational and political interests of the Indian population of the Republic;

to receive and consider recommendations and resolutions of the Education Advisory Council established under Section 31(1) of the Indian Education Act (No. 61 of 1965);

to make recommendations to the government in regard to all matters affecting the economic, social, cultural, educational and political interests of the Indian population of the Republic;

to make recommendations to the government in regard to any planning calculated, in the opinion of the Council, to promote the interests of the Indian population;

generally to serve as a link and means of contact and consultation between the government and the Indian population.

In all negotiations between the Council and the government, the Secretary for Indian Affairs represents the government. In actual terms consultation with regard to the following matters has been held:

proclamation of group areas

the provision of public amenities in group areas

housing

resettlement of Indian traders

beach facilities for Indians

local government for Indians

training and employment of Indians in various fields

economic development of Indians

radio programmes

educational matters.

As the Council 'matured' it became necessary to break down its structure for specialisation in certain areas. A system has now been introduced where matters are referred to specific ad hoc committees under the chairmanship of each of the Executive Committee members for investigation before a full report is considered by the Executive Committee for consideration by the Council.

New Powers for Indian Council

Towards the end of 1971 and early in 1972 there was speculation about the possibility of the Council getting increased powers from the government.

In his New Year message to the Indian population, Mr A.M. Rajab, Chairman of the Council, stated that the Council would see a change in its constitutional development from a fully nominated Council to a partly elected Council. He hoped to see compulsory education being introduced for Indian children (1). (It was reported in January 1973 that education for Indian children enrolled in class 1 would henceforth be compulsory) (2).

In matters such as education and social welfare, the Council would be granted greater control and more direct responsibility.

In anticipation of the increased powers, the Council created 5 portfolios distributed as follows:

Rajab	group areas and health;
Reddy	housing, amenities, local government and labour;
Joosub	commerce and industry;
Naidoo	education, culture and religion;
Chinsamy	welfare, agriculture, sport and recreation.

In March a Bill was introduced in Parliament, to amend the SAIC Act of 1968. This inter alia:

provided for an increase in the number of members of the SAIC (from 25 to 30);

provided for election of certain members of the Council;

entrusted certain additional functions to the Council and its Executive Committee;

further defined the qualifications of members;

made provision for the number of elected members to be increased by the State President after consultation with the Council;

provided that the qualifications for candidates and voters can be laid down by proclamation;

gave power to the minister to determine the period of membership of the SAIC.

Apparent from this legislation was the fact that the 5 additional members would be elected to represent Natal, Transvaal and Cape 'in such a proportion as the Minister may deem equitable'.

Issues taken up by SAIC

1. Meeting with Mr B.J. Vorster

It was reported in January that 'leaders' of the Indian community were to meet Mr Vorster to discuss, amongst other things, the following (3):

abolition of the inter-provincial barriers which necessitated Indians to obtain permits to visit other provinces;

the future voting of Indians at national level;

introduction of military training for South African Indians.

Following this meeting Mr Rajab issued a statement to the effect that the meeting produced 'a welcome reassurance of a place under the sun' for the country's 600 000 Indians. He was quoted as saying 'our future in South Africa is absolutely assured and I can now see no reason why we should worry too much'.

2. Representations made by the SAIC to the Government

In reply to a question in Parliament, the Minister of Indian Affairs revealed that the following representations have been made by the SAIC to the government in the period between 1970 and beginning of 1972 (4):

- (a) that restrictions placed on Indians travelling through the Transkei be lifted;
- (b) that a Medical School for Indians be established at the University of Durban-Westville;
- (c) that the Executive Committee of the SAIC be afforded an opportunity to discuss the question of the resettlement of Indian traders with the Ministers of Indian Affairs, of Community Development and of Planning;
- (d) that the Ministers of Indian Affairs and of Planning be requested to state clearly what the government's policy was in regard to the deproclamation of group areas;
- (e) that the appreciation contribution payments on the sale of

affected properties be abolished or suspended;

- (f) that the restrictions on the inter-provincial movement of Indians be eased;
- (g) that consideration be given to the conversion of the South African Indian Council to an elected body with certain executive powers;
- (h) that new premises for the Indian market stallholders be provided by the Durban City Council;
- (i) that the necessary steps be taken by the government for beaches and beach amenities to be provided for Indians;
- (j) that the difference in the salary scale applicable to whites and Indians in the government and provincial services be eliminated immediately or, alternatively, progressively over a period of ten years;
- (k) that committees consisting of members of the SAIC be set up to advise the Department of Community Development in regard to the resettlement of Indian traders in the larger complexes.

Of these representations only (c) (d) (e) (k) and partly (g) were accepted. Rejected outright was the plea to have free movement of Indian persons through the Transkei and decision on the rest of the requests was reported as pending.

Referring to one of the issues mentioned above, the Chairman of the SAIC commented as follows: 'In regard to the Council's representations to the authorities for the re-zoning of the beaches for Indians, the Council noted with gratification that legislation was about to be introduced in parliament to enable the Provincial Council to do this'.

3. Talks on Indian Traders

During a meeting with 3 Cabinet Ministers, Mr F.W. Waring (Indian Affairs), Mr J.J. Loots (Planning) and Mr Blaar Coetzee (Community Development), the SAIC made the following requests:

that there be provision of free trading areas where Indians could continue to trade with all racial groups;

the resettlement of displaced traders in Indian group areas in small rural towns;

encouragement to Indian traders to resettle themselves in industrial growth points.

4. *Formation of a Cultural body*

The formation of a national cultural organisation by the SAIC was reported in March 1972. The organisation includes representatives from all religious groups, viz. Hindus, Tamils, Gujeraties, Urdus and Telugus. Mr Rajab said that the government would be asked for financial assistance (5).

The main aims of the organisation are:

to promote Indian cultural activities

to arrange for distinguished musicians and artists from India to visit South Africa for exchange of views on Indian culture.

5. *Plea for control of towns in Indian areas*

Following on the institution of South Africa's 2nd all-Indian local authority at Isipingo on 1 August, 1972, appointed by the administrator of Natal, Mr Ben Havemann, SAIC Executive member, Mr J.N. Reddy, pleaded for Indians to be 'masters in their own areas' by establishing Indian Local Authorities. He further suggested that the minimum qualifications for Indian Town Clerks be the B.Comm. degree (5).

6. *Chatsworth Bus transport controversy*

The decision by the Natal local transportation board not to renew bus licences of Indian bus owners who have been commuting Indian workers to and from town, met with resistance from both the Chatsworth community and the bus owners and other members of the black community. The reason given for this move by the local transportation board was that the SAR is running enough trains to cater for the transport needs of the Chatsworth community.

The SAIC questioned this decision and Mr Rajab suggested that the question of the Chatsworth bus owners' certificates be referred to the Secretary for Transport and the Secretary for Indian Affairs who would together consider all aspects of the issue and come with a solution that would be fair and reasonable to all parties concerned (6). He further suggested that an extension of 3 months be given to the bus owners while awaiting the outcome of the investigation.

It was also stated that SAIC was satisfied that the people of Chatsworth were not particularly concerned as to whether the present Indian bus operations should be permitted to remain or not; all the people wanted were buses because they were much more convenient than trains.

The final decision on this issue was taken in November and the bus operators have been given up to February to terminate their services.

Criticism of SAIC

Criticism levelled at SAIC by NIC (Natal Indian Congress) and other members of the Indian community mainly revolve around the following points:

because SAIC is a nominated body it can never claim to represent the interests of the Indian community;

the leaders of SAIC are stooges of the government and avoid forthright criticism.

These criticisms were endorsed by a *Daily News* editorial and this prompted Mr Rajab to defend the SAIC. The defence was basically that:

half a loaf is better than no bread;

there is democracy in SAIC.

The SAIC also indicated that it favours press coverage to offset another criticism that the Council worked in secret.

Other groups opposed to the SAIC are BPC and SASO. These two groups reject in principle all system-created platforms and argue that these are merely extensions of the system into the black ranks.

REFERENCES

1. *Natal Mercury*, 1.1.72.
2. *Rand Daily Mail*, 13.1.73.
3. *Daily News*, 15.1.72.
4. Hansard Book 3 p. 349.
5. *Natal Mercury*, 18.3.72.
6. *Natal Mercury*, 3.6.72.