

No. 06 of 04.04.2003

**RODRIGUES**

**FIRST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**Debate No. 06 of 2003**

**Sitting of Friday 04 April 2003**

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Mathurin at 11.00 a.m.

*(Mr Chairperson in the Chair)*

**The National Anthem was played**

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## STATEMENTS BY COMMISSIONERS

**The Commissioner for Social Security (Mr R. Mercure):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like to inform the House of the outcome of some of the activities which my Commission has been responsible for in the context of post cyclone Kalundé.

A Co-ordinating Committee comprising representatives of NGOs and officers of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly was set up by the Cyclone Committee chaired by the Chief Commissioner. The terms of reference of this Co-ordinating Committee was to look into the organisation and co-ordination of the distribution of donations received in kind for the victims. Once set up, this Co-ordinating Committee under the chairmanship of my Commission immediately met on 25 March 2003 to define a strategy for the distribution programme.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, our underlying rules and principles in this exercise are fairness, equity and that all donations received should go to people who deserve it and who have been really affected by the cyclone. The criteria on which the list of beneficiaries of these distributions have been defined were based on reports of field visits effected by officers of the Public infrastructure and the Social Security Divisions with a view to

ascertaining all complaints received concerning damages caused by Kalundé.

Based on these reports, all genuine cases of completely and partially damaged houses were considered together with people who have been affected by flooding and to whom a flood allowance as announced in my previous statement have been paid. The total number of beneficiaries based on these criteria is 944.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like to inform the distinguished members of the house that we have already received a first consignment of two containers of donations from a Solidarity movement organised in Mauritius by the Imagine Ltd, the Caudan Waterfront and the Radio 1. The keys of these containers were officially submitted to the Chief Commissioner on Wednesday 26 March 2003. These two containers contained mainly foodstuffs and clothes. As decided in the co-ordinating committee meetings, the clothes will be handed over to the Red Cross for distribution. All donations linked to constructing materials and agriculture will be channelled through the Public Infrastructure and Agricultural Services respectively for appropriate distribution. My Commission with the collaboration of NGOs will be responsible for the distribution of other foodstuffs and non-foodstuffs items to the victims.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we are very sensitive to the need of these victims and we are conscious that we have to deploy all means and efforts to bring timely assistance to these people. That is why, in addition to appropriate allowances paid to support the victims immediately after the cyclone, we immediately met a second time on Friday 26 March 2003 after reception of this first consignment to look into the details of the organisation of the first distribution exercise.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, with the good collaboration of my colleague, the Deputy Chief Commissioner and Commissioner for Public Infrastructure and representatives of NGOs, we have been able to organise the transfer of the donated items from the container park in Port Mathurin to the Marketing Board store at Citronelle and their packing according to the 944 beneficiaries within a relatively short period of time, although the works involved have been very laborious. Due to the commitment of each and everyone, we have been able to effect the distribution of this first consignment on Wednesday 2 April 2003 at the Social Security Centres of La Ferme, Malabar and Port Mathurin with the precious collaboration of these NGOs, which were present at all the distribution centres.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like to convey my heartfelt thanks and gratitude towards all those who have provided their supports so far,

especially the representatives of the NGOs who have been very collaborative and helpful. Indeed, it would have not been possible to effect this first distribution in this short time span if these NGOs were not present during the whole of Sunday last at the Store of Citronelle to organise the packaging of the different items.

During the distribution operation, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I have been personally to all the distribution centres and was impressed by the seriousness with which the work was effected by officers of the Social Security Division and the NGOs. I was also impressed by the collaborative spirit of the beneficiaries. This first distribution operation went through smoothly and this is attributable to the experience and the good sense of management which characterises this governing council. However, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like to report to the House that there are people who were not on the list of beneficiaries but who have claimed to have been affected by the Cyclone Kalundé, did attend the distribution centres to benefit from the distribution exercise. Unfortunately, we had to stick to the established list.

These people have been very collaborative after proper explanation by other officers but their details and doleances were registered. My colleague, the Deputy Chief Commissioner, has agreed that these people will be further

visited by a team from the Public Infrastructure Division and any genuine cases will be further added to the list of beneficiaries for other distribution programmes. Already, the Happy World Ltd has confirmed a donation of foodstuffs amounting to Rs 100,000 and the consignment will be received hopefully by the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, that is early next week.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson, Sir.

### **MOTION**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on the motion of the Chief*

*Commissioner, namely –*

*“This Assembly resolves that for the purpose of Section 44 (1) of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001, there is approved the draft estimates of recurrent revenue and recurrent expenditure and capital revenue and capital expenditure for the financial year 2003/2004.”*

**The Minority leader:** Mr Chairperson, Sir, I am proud once more to have the occasion and the privilege to bring my contribution to the House on the occasion of this motion regarding the submission of budget estimates to the Central Government. Mr Chairperson, Sir, members of the House will recall that during the seminar co-organised with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation that its representative, Mr Claus Peter Treydte, told us in the

very beginning of his opening speech that it is expected that the minority says “NO”. It is from the yes and the no that an agreed solution arises, from positive discussion and the acceptance of opponents’ opinion. It is within this ideology and with a positive approach that our opposition is going to critically examine the budget. We should constantly bear in mind that the matter under discussion concerns budgetary proposals only and when we will vote them here, central government can still bring some changes according to the RRA Act.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it is usual for the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the House of Commons and in Mauritius for the Minister of Finance to give an account of the state of the economy before giving his proposals to the House. Our humanist Chief Commissioner has not done this in his presentation. I will try to do it in his place and to alert the house and members about the seriousness of the economic situation in Rodrigues both concerning short-term perspectives and long-term conjunctures. At the same time I will show how this budget, which I would say has some good intentions, but which however is fundamentally wrong in the approach and strategies to be put in place to help bolster economic fundamentals in the island.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, Rodrigues is a very small vulnerable and dependent island. The main economic sectors are not competitive enough as regards economies of scale, quality, productivity and volume of output. Over the years with change in the mode of life, consumption practices and attitude, the transition from an agro-fishing economy has failed. Agriculture and fishing which constitute the two main traditional economic sectors of Rodrigues are today at the crossroads. At the same time the demand of the population for agricultural produce and for fish is not met. At present it is hard to see that Rodrigues is importing fish and vegetables in increasing amounts every year. No strategies have been put in place by the so-called visionary OPR party.

### **Agriculture**

Agriculture is on the decline – en chute libre without any significant response from the part of this regional government. Agricultural land has been abandoned and is today mostly unsuitable for agriculture. At page 9 of his speech, the Chief Commissioner stated that agriculture is the backbone of the economy. It must be a long time since he had a look at the statistics. The available data from the Digest of Statistics for Rodrigues prepared by the CSO shows the following as regards area harvested by food crops between the period 1993-2001.

| <i><b>Foodcrop</b></i> | <i><b>Area harvested<br/>in<br/>1993 (hectares)</b></i> | <i><b>Area harvested<br/>in<br/>2001 (hectares)</b></i> | <i><b>Remarks</b></i>                         |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Maize                  | 603                                                     | 350                                                     | Fall by 253<br>hectares i.e. by<br>42%        |
| Onion                  | 68                                                      | 39                                                      |                                               |
| Sweet Potato           | 82                                                      | 4                                                       |                                               |
| Cassava                | 47                                                      | 1                                                       |                                               |
| Beans                  | 29                                                      | 25                                                      |                                               |
| Groundnut              | 24                                                      | 13                                                      |                                               |
| Garlic                 | 71                                                      | 5                                                       |                                               |
| Potato                 | 1                                                       | 1                                                       |                                               |
| Banana                 | Not available                                           | 27                                                      |                                               |
| Other Food crops       | 50                                                      | 40                                                      |                                               |
| <b>TOTAL</b>           | <b>975</b>                                              | <b>350</b>                                              | <b>Fall by 625<br/>hectares i.e. 64<br/>%</b> |

The figures speak by themselves Mr Chairperson Sir. One analyst has qualified the agricultural sector of Rodrigues as “agriculture de dépit”. Others have said according to my parents “pioche crayon demon”. Today the Chief Commissioner is reporting that agriculture is the backbone of the economy. We can go further into the analysis. If agriculture, which is the backbone of our economy, is in a so deplorable state as indicated by the alarming fall in area cultivated, we can ask ourselves what is happening in the other sectors or the Rodrigues economy. Who was in power in Rodrigues

between 1993 and 2001? Who was in charge of the policies in the Agricultural sector?

If as the Executive Council believes that increasing economic growth will depend upon a viable and thriving agricultural sector, then it is high time to reinvent agriculture in Rodrigues and to promote professionalism. This can be achieved only through a number of policies including close protection of scarce agricultural land, substantive amount of subsidies to farmers and applying new technologies.

### **Fishing**

Along with agriculture, the fisheries sector is in crisis. There is on one hand deficiency of local supplies causing increasing amounts of fish to be imported and on the other an unsatisfied demand from the part of local consumers. Fish has become one of the scarcest goods in Rodrigues. Year in and year out the catches are decreasing while the number of fishermen is on the rise.

Mr Chairperson, I wish to pledge for a more active conservation of our lagoon resources as they represent the sources of food for future generations. The idea of a marine park at Mourouck is good, but however the need for setting up the proper institutional framework around a marine

reserve is important. Studies carried out on marine reserves by the University of York, whose specialists were in Rodrigues recently with the Shoals Rodrigues Association, have shown that the benefits of properly managed marine reserves are tremendous. The studies lay emphasis on the need for consultation and for the participation of the fishermen community. In the reserve zones, small fish can grow and breed in security. Fish get bigger and when the excess fish move out of the reserves it is the fishermen who gain. In addition Mr Chairperson, Sir, marine reserves constitute an ecological treasure, which benefits tourism. One good example of where marine reserves have worked well is in Caribbean island of **Sainte Lucie** with a marine reserve known as the **Soufrière Marine Management Area**. In such a marine reserve no fish zones have been established and there are guards to see that the rules and regulations are being respected. I am sure that the Shoals Rodrigues Association will be of tremendous help and will be glad to help set up marine reserves in Rodrigues together with local authorities. I am myself, as an economist, volunteering to the Rodrigues Administration to provide free services for project write up and design in any proposal involving the setting up of marine reserves.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, there is a major problem regarding the allocation of fishermen bad weather allowance and cards. The fisherman card has

become a tool of recognition of the fishing profession, but at the same time is causing some discrimination. Fishermen who have the card have facilities such as loans and others. Those who do not have the registration card but who are professional fishermen as such face discrimination. It is high time to say who is a fishermen and who is not. It is also necessary to develop aquaculture and to revitalize marine and fisheries research so as to get the best from public funds. The Fisheries Services have also to be responsible so that we no longer hear of accounts of officers messing with poachers to get an immediate gain at the expense of the country's future. Mr Chairperson Sir, at present the sea is not enough protected.

Nothing in the proposals have been mentioned about the development of outer lagoon fishing which could help alleviate the excess pressure on the lagoon. What is needed in this sector is investment. We do not have enough money here in Rodrigues to invest in the sector and we do not either have an enough visionary executive capable of attracting investments. These investments do exist however.

### **Tourism**

This is a sector in which there are good prospects but which may suffer in the short term due to the effects of cyclone Kalunde and because of

the war in Irak. I would like here Mr Chairperson Sir to express my sympathy with the children of Irak who are suffering because of this war.

Tourism growth will constitute one of the engines of economic development in Rodrigues. There is need to develop non natural attractions because you like it or not, tourism has its disadvantages. Tourists come to a country to have fun, to eat at restaurants, to discover the country etc. Actually at Rodrigues the “calm of the island” is being proposed. I am not saying that this strategy is wrong but I believe that we need to promote other significant segments of the market such as diving and water sports. There is also an urgent need of reviewing policies regarding the entertainment sector. Some people want to start restaurants, pubs, discotheques but are not given the appropriate permit.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, in this first budget nothing is being provided for our beloved small town of Port Mathurin. Access to an open and clean toilet is a matter of chance in the town. Increasing street traffic is starting to cause some problems while one can barely see a public bin in the streets. Some of the streets even do not have names! It is necessary to give a unique cachet to our town and to the main villages of Rodrigues such as Mont Lubin and La Ferme. With such policies implemented with the traders and the inhabitants

Rodrigues will become more tourist-friendly and will position itself as an exciting destination in the Indian Ocean Zone.

**Mr A. L. Emilien (First Local Region Member for Marechal):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like to put on record my heartfelt thanks to the Right Honorable Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, for keeping his words to grant our island a decentralized system of government with maximum autonomy. In fact, it is as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the people of Rodrigues aspired to such autonomy- not since a few years back as some people have the tendency to shout out.

It's a real pleasure to see eighteen elected members- and I stress on the word elected for reasons we all know- sitting in this House to discuss about matters relating solely to the future of Rodrigues and its people.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the first draft estimates for a budget review extending over an eight months period, i.e. from October 02 to June 03, was presented to the House and debated at the beginning of January this year. On Monday 31<sup>st</sup> March 03, the first Budget Proposals for a whole financial year was presented, on which we are presently debating. A first budget for a complete financial year prepared by people in Rodrigues, for the people of Rodrigues and, when I say for, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I mean for the benefit,

for the well-being of the people of our small beloved island. From this budget, we were expecting much for our fellow citizens.

But, Mr Chairperson, Sir, as there is always a but, disappointment was and is still easily perceived on the face of most people in Rodrigues.

The main reason for this, Mr Chairperson, Sir, is that the two major problems of the island, namely unemployment and water have not been tackled in such a way that one would feel that “enfin la lumière jaillira au bout du tunnel”. Without tackling unemployment-, everybody knows it’s a real pest for Rodrigues-the people of this island will never feel they are being considered as “des citoyens a part entière de la Republique de Maurice”.

L’exode de nos jeunes vers d’autres cieux en quête d’un emploi, le demantèlement voire l’éclatement du noyau familial a Rodrigues ne semble pas, M Le Président, émouvoir d’un iota la Majorité ici présente. Tout le monde connaît les problèmes qu’ont a faire face notre jeunesse a Maurice,...prostitution, logement, drogue, criminalité, entre autres.

What is being done or what the Majority intends to do for job creation in this island? In his speech, the Chief Commissioner confessed that unemployment is causing a lot of misery to our population. Is this a new

situation for our population? Has this occurred only during the past two years, as some people tend to believe that all the evil things in this country occurred during that specific period? Others would say that there has been total disorder during the past two years. Hasn't this gone on long enough? Let us be serious and honest...During all the time unemployment has been and is still causing a lot of misery to our population. What political party formed part of successive governments since 1982? Who has been minister for Rodrigues for more than a decade?

This proves that these people can't get rid of this problem which is causing, I quote " a lot of misery to our population"...unless it is with pleasure that some people look at the misery of the population from above, peacefully sitting at ease in their castles. People, Mr Chairperson, Sir, must earn a decent living to be in peace with themselves, in peace with their mind, with their stomach, with their family, etc... and to feel at ease in society. This, Mr Chairperson, Sir, is a major concern for the whole population and it's not entirely by accident that it is the main apprehension of local trade unionists. Les syndicats des travailleurs ont raison, M Le Président, de tirer la sonnette d'alarme sur le manque de vision de ce budget en ce qui concerne la création d'emploi.

I come now Mr Chairperson, Sir, to another big problem, if not the everlasting one of Rodrigues, i.e. water. This problem has been going on too long. Over the past two decades, there has been, and I will use words dear to some people, there has been total disorder in water distribution in Rodrigues. Despite availability of funds, everybody has seen rolls and rolls of polyethylene pipes scattering all over the place for months all throughout the island, the distribution network still cannot cater for the demand. Water management has been a total failure.

Today, Mr Chairperson, Sir, we are talking about desiltation of dams and other small reservoirs, which will require public funding. This could and should have been avoided if those in the driving seat of the affairs of the country over the past two decades had but only entertained same. I would like to recall, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that those dams were all built during the colonial period. What the local authorities had to do was only to maintain them...had this been done, the situation would have been much better today. Rodrigues, rightfully considered as “le grenier de l’île Maurice” would have kept it up.

In Mauritius, Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Midland Dam, “un joyau dans la catégorie”, which has cost more than a billion rupees is shortly operational and the authorities there have already the Bagatelle Dam in the pipeline. One

thing I don't understand here is the lengthy duration of studies concerning the Valley Pistaches Dam Project. It is in fact long since we are being told that study is under way. *Tou sa letan nou pe fer letide, fer letide la...kan nou letid pou fini pou nou gagne nou diplome? Doctere, prete, avocat, pilote ...apres 5-7 ans letide fini... pou nou la zamais fini ditou.*

The River Pistaches Dam, with a water holding capacity of more than a million cubic metres would undoubtedly give a considerable boost to agricultural production and the water supply for domestic use would no more be a “casse-tete” for the poor valve operators and reservoir keepers who continuously come across the incomprehension of members of the public. It is mentioned in the budget, I quote “and in the long run larger dams will be constructed”. During nearly a quarter of a century the water problem has not been solved and now we are talking in the long term. Should we understand that it would take some two or three decades again? Will our children benefit from these larger dams or are we, people of Rodrigues” condamnés à exploiter les réserves d’eau souterraine jusqu’à épuisement du stock et tourner carrément vers l’importation d’eau dans des avions ou bateaux citernes ?

Concerning the desalination plants, Mr Chairperson, Sir, this project needs to undergo an in-depth analysis, as far as the maintenance is

concerned. It is very paradoxical that we let all the rain water go to the sea, get it mixed up with salt and then pumped it back to the land for desalination and worst of all, dispose of the highly concentrated salt residue at very high cost. The Almighty, Mr Chairperson, Sir, has gifted us with an average annual rainfall of some 1400 mm. All this water is free of charge, we let it go and try to get it back “a coups de millions de roupies. A Bagdad, M Le Président, on brûle des millions de litres de pétrole rien que pour faire diversion, car ils en ont le moyen. Mais nous autres ici, les millions de roupies, c’est surtout ça qui nous fait défaut. Alors, ne soyons pas plus royaliste que le roi...Sauvegardons ce don du ciel et faisons-en bon usage.

In the budget speech, Mr Chairperson, Sir, mention is made of poverty eradication and the social integration of the weakest segments of the population; to protect the weak and the most needy, etc...All this is very good,-it sounds nice to the ears, but do you know, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that not a single word has been mentioned in the budget speech concerning the senior citizens, those people who live on a very paltry pension and, tenez vous bien, not a single word also for the disabled.

In the mainland Mauritius, the elderphone, a special telephone service for the elderly, has just been launched this week,--this is a sort of thankfulness to the immense contribution of these persons to our society...if

the National wealth has attained such a level for the whole Republic of Mauritius, it's undoubtedly due to the unflinching effort of our elderly. Referring to the budget speech, one would be tempted to think that the population of Rodrigues is so young, that those who migrate to Mauritius or elsewhere are only the elderly and that there are no inhabitants in Rodrigues above sixty. But, and unfortunately there is always a but, the front bench of the majority group catches the eye so flagrantly that one cannot deny the reality.

At a time where, all over the world people are talking of the social integration of the disabled in every sphere of life, here, Mr Chairperson, Sir, it seems that nothing will be done for this weak segment of the population. Is this not a shame for those people behind this 2003-2004 budget? I make here, Mr Chairperson, Sir, a fervent plea for the due consideration of these two groups of our society by the concerned authorities.

The Tourism sector, Mr Chairperson, Sir, will certainly give a considerable boost to the economic take-off of the island. In 2001, a Tourism Development Plan for Rodrigues recommended an Island Development and Management Plan. In this budget, nothing has been said concerning the recommendation of this plan. In the aftermath of Cyclone

Kalunde, tourist agents encountered numerous difficulties to keep up the smooth running of the industry. This situation, coupled to the Iraqi War leads way to a dramatic situation. Ways and means have to be devised to help remedy the situation as this sector can easily create hundreds of jobs in the short and medium terms.

Elementary information like village names and viewpoints should be affixed on large visible plates to facilitate visitors all throughout the island. Concerning hotel building, as we are in a very small island, land scarcity is a flagrant reality. The concept of “*lotel pas depasse pied coco*” has to be reviewed in my humble opinion. We cannot afford wastage of the little space we have by building bungalows scattered over hectares of land. Of course, Mr Chairperson, Sir, on the coastal regions, it would not be so esthetically pleasing to have very high buildings, but same does not apply to the inland regions.

Presently many promoters are interested in the Graviers –Mourouk region .The distance between these two places is merely two kilometers. If one has to move from one of these two places to the other, some five minutes trip at most in normal conditions, one has to , as we say in Creole, “*faire ene letour babilone*”, going, from Graviers through Batatran, Grande

Montagne, Pallissade, Pompee, Eau Claire, Port Sud Est. then to Mourouk and vice-versa. It is unbelievable. This road Mr Chairperson, Sir, has to be built in the short term.

As regards the lengthening of the airstrip at Plaine Corail Airport, it is a very laudable decision, as this will allow international flights shortly. But, in line with this project what is being done to boost up food production in the island to feed the tourists? What is being done to improve our handicraft and other services? Will fruits continue to be imported from South Africa, New Zealand and elsewhere? Will sausages and other canned foods continue to come from abroad? Is this what we call a boost to our economy? With direct flights from Reunion Island, it would not be strange to see foodstuffs and handicraft coming from there. Presently, without direct flights or maritime links with the Malagassy Republic we all know that Malagassy handicraft is all over the place. So let us be careful.

As regards the duty free zone, adequate promotion has to be made to boost up this sector. It has to be well known to both the locals and visitors. Most important is the close monitoring of the facilities offered to ensure that the legal provisions on the issue are strictly adhered to for the benefit of the public at large.

A few words on some other topics Mr Chairperson, Sir. Soil erosion is a major problem faced by planters, farmers and fishermen. Along the road under construction at Solitude, near the ex police station at Riviere Coco and on Montagne Plate at Baie du Nord, soil is being carried to the sea by rain water. On one hand, millions of rupees are being spent to build roads and on the other hand, millions of rupees are being earmarked in the budget for the dredging of the lagoon as a result of siltation. Siltation of the lagoon has a dramatic effect on fishermen, namely loss in depth, causing many problems at low tide, decrease in catch and the negative impact on marine ecology.

Another problem faced by fishermen is the absence of navigational aids. Provisions have been made in the 2002-2003 budget; I do hope that within the two remaining months of the present budget needful will be done. Before ending with fishermen, Mr Chairperson, Sir, as mobile phone is a reality in the island now, I would request that mobile phones at reduced price be granted to off lagoon fishermen.

The Cyclone Committee has made “un etat des lieu” in the aftermath of cyclone Kalunde but nothing has been said on the state of coastal roads. Some coastal regions have been so eroded that seawater reaches the roads at high tide. “Avec l’effet de succion qui s’ensuivra, M Le Président, il est

évident que la route va partiellement s'effondrer. Et cela s'est déjà vu à Rodrigues. D'autre part, en période de crue, les radiers de Rivière Coco, Tamarin, Anse Raffin, Anse Balleine, Port Sud Est, Baie Malgache, Pistaches entre autres ne sont plus praticables. Qu'advient-il en cas d'accident en période cyclonique ? Ni la police, ni le service ambulancier, ni les membres du public ne pourront porter secours à qui que ce soit. Dans les régions côtières, M Le Président, les pluies torrentielles couplées à une grosse marée montante rendent ces radiers impraticables pour tout type de véhicules. Il est grand temps qu'on pense à construire des ponts permettant le passage fluide d'eau en dessous dans les plus brefs délais. N'attendons pas au pire pour venir proposer des solutions « après la mort la tisane »

Il y a un taux très élevé de diabète, d'hyper tension et d'autres maladies y relatives à Rodrigues M Le Président, De ce fait, on s'attendait à ce que ce présent budget fasse provision pour quelques mesures qui pourraient éventuellement donner un coup de frein à ce fleau. Il est toutefois regrettable que rien n'est mentionné dans ce budget concernant le sport de masse. Est-ce que la santé de la population n'est pas importante aux yeux de la majorité ici présente ?

As far as the education sector is concerned, Mr Chairperson, Sir, the construction of a secondary school at Mont Lubin seems odd to me. Building of schools is normally done according to school population and not according to political consideration. We have a college at Le Choux, one at Grande Montagne and another one at Citron Donis. How come that students from the Southern, South-Eastern and Western part of the island have to leave home very early in the morning and be back home late in the afternoon while others having three colleges within “un rayon de quelques kilometers” will have another one; whereas the construction of a college at Songes “a été repoussee a l’annee quate zedi dimance rouze. This is illogical, Mr Chairperson, Sir. I am of opinion that the construction of that college at Songes is of utmost importance as compared to that of Mont Lubin.

We are nowadays talking about cyber island, motorway of information and communication and what not, Mr Chairperson, Sir. As all our primary schools are equipped with computers I consider that free access to Internet should be granted to all the schools throughout the island. This will help to create a highly IT literate population in the near future, thus being in line with the National Policy on the issue.

It has been said, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that unemployment is and has always been a major problem in Rodrigues. Some family men, to earn a decent living for their wards, ventured in corral quarry, providing people with coral blocks for building purposes. This was very hard a task. Today, fortunately or not, this has stopped. Those sites ought to have been preserved as historical ones and rehabilitated to enable guided visits. It is a pity, Mr Chairperson, Sir, to see the most important of these sites, namely the one at Petite Butte being used as a dumping ground. This, Mr Chairperson, Sir, has to be corrected “a la mémoire de la débrouillardise de ces pères de famille qui y sont trimé pour offrir une vie relativement décente a leurs familles ».

Un mot sur les services météorologiques, M. le président. Il serait souhaitable que des démarches auprès de la MBC soient entreprises pour que les nouvelles du temps a la télévision juste après le journal télévisé de 19hres 30 soient diffusées a Rodrigues également. Il y a des pêcheurs qui quittent leurs demeures très tôt le matin, soit avant les nouvelles à la radio. Cette démarche les aiderait donc en cas d’une détérioration éventuelle du temps au cours de la journée.

D’autre part il serait dans l’intérêt du public d’avoir des interventions directes à la radio de notre station météorologique locale en période cyclonique. Pendant le passage de Kalunde la communication avec Maurice,

comme tout le monde le sait M Le Président, a été momentanément coupée, laissant la population dans l'angoisse et sans nouvelles sur l'évolution du cyclone. Dans un tel cas de figure ces interventions auraient été d'une aide considérable. Un service audiotex sur les nouvelles du temps, bien actualisé serait également le bienvenu. Le service actuel laisse vraiment à désirer car j'ai moi-même téléphoné à plusieurs reprises, soit pour tomber sur un abonné absent ou recevoir des informations périmées.

Before ending my speech, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I must inform the House that I have been much surprised for not seeing the Capital Budget for the Commission of Social Security in the draft document. I don't know what has happened. May be those concerned will lighten me on the issue. I hope that corrective measures will be taken for the sake of the population.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I thank you.

**The Deputy Chairperson ( Mr Pierre Louis):** Mr Chairperson Sir, despite the degradation of the lagoon, there are still some areas where pristine habitats still prevail. A good example would be the Mourouk region where marine protected areas is being proposed. Apart from enhancing the ecosystem in that region, that huge project will also set the expertise in the field of Marine protected area management for both Rodrigues and Mauritius.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I have now a few suggestions for our Regional Assembly.

The secretariat of the Regional Assembly, the centrepiece of policy formulation in the autonomous structure has managed to deliver the goods albeit with a skeleton staff consisting of a Clerk, 2 word Processing Operators, 1 Executive Assistant who is available sometimes full-time and sometimes part-time and a telephone operator. Our minor grades consist of a Senior Office caretaker and two handymen.

Apart from some secretarial support and the presence of an Executive assistant who incidentally is now available on a part time basis, the secretariat is managed by the Clerk almost single handed. Let's hope that at the earliest opportunity a Deputy Clerk or Clerk Assistant will be provided so that the Assembly does not come to a halt, should the Clerk not be available through sickness or otherwise.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, first I would like to congratulate the Chief Commissioner and his team for the preparation of the first draft estimates of the capital and recurrent budget for the financial year 2003-2004.

This budget augurs well for the future socio-economic development of our island. It is underpinned by the time-honoured values of justice, equity and equality. The vision that this budget projects is one that covers every

region in the island. Thus is because the OPR Government really means business and intends to work for the whole population of Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it is obvious that, with the advent of the autonomy after years of neglect, the Rodriguan population have rising expectation which the government would wish to meet to a certain extent. That is through the judicious allocation of scarce resources.

Although we have limited financial and material resources, we still have an enterprising population that can work miracles.

We definitely require a mix of effective and efficient public management which will act as a catalyst for private sector.

Our economy will operate for some years to come as I see it on three main pillars Agriculture including farming and fishing, Tourism and the SMES.

This budget provides the guidelines for things to come.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, only a short time has elapsed since our island became autonomous. It is obvious that the population especially those who have been longing for a job are eager to see things moving quickly. This is also our wish. But our people should realise that things cannot be done overnight.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, allow me to make a few comments on agriculture which is the backbone of our economy. We should recall that some years ago we produced our own foodstuff (maize, sweet potatoes, manioc, onion, garlic, bean etc). There was even a surplus which was exported to Mauritius. Rodrigues was then considered as the granary of Mauritius.

The frequent drought and soil erosion have caused the impoverishment of the soil thus causing abandonment of agricultural land. Therefore, soil erosion is the eternal evil that we will have to fight.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the following measures announced in the budget speech by the Chief Commissioner to boost up agriculture will be a catalyst.

- (i) providing incentives for production of cash crops for export and ensuring a market;
- (ii) Facilitating access to land;
- (iii) Securing farmers against natural disasters by creating a Rodrigues Planters and Farmers Welfare Fund;
- (iv) Construction of dams in some river valleys to cater for adequate irrigation facilities.

The proposed sum of Rs.95,000,000 to be injected in the water sector gives an insight of the commitment of the governing council in favour of planters, farmers and the population at large.

### **Fisheries**

It is to be noted that the over exploitation of the lagoon resources and its degradation are now a concern even within the fisherman community. As a result, I think that the proposed measures will get a positive response from the fishermen,. The seaweed farming is an alternative to reduce the human pressure which is causing daily damages to our marine ecosystem. It is hoped the seaweed phase is proved successful and economically viable so as to help the government to achieve its goal. This very ambitious project, being a “grande premiere” in the Mascareines can set an example to the other islands of this part of the Indian Ocean.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Regional Assembly has functioned without a decent lounge or call it a meeting room outside the House. There is no Library – not alone books but shelves and armoires are not available. There have not been any facilities for cool drinks during the hot summer season.

Until some air-conditioning became possible members had to attend the meeting of the standing and other Assembly Committees in exiguous and

cramped rooms which are not conducive to meaningful work. But we must be reasonable. It will take us some time to obtain an ideal Assembly House. For the time being we must do with what we have and at the same time optimise resources.

**The Second local Region Member (Mrs.MEUNIER)** Mr. Chairperson Sir, Rodrigues has engaged itself fully in an unprecedented political revolution since 2002, compared with the fairly slow pace of its economic development during the last two decades. So, we all expect our island to experience an economic revolution in the years to come. The budget presented by the majority of this Assembly on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2003 proves that there is a desire for change but we need an economic change that will be in line with this great political change. But I should say, Mr. Chairperson Sir, that the full implications of economic development are far from being completely worked out in this budget.

Rodrigues as many of us are conscious would have to face the repercussions of the forces of change. It is not the time for utopian schemes of philosophical visionaries with no practical and concrete legislation with economic compromise for the regeneration of our Society. Our agricultural

sector is nearly dead, our unemployed youth disillusioned and our economy on the whole is at its lowest ebb.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, Our island is lagging behind in terms of economic and social development compared to motherland Mauritius. We are far from being able to produce a quarter of the food we require, at home. We are able to buy, the food we need because we are given grants by the central government. It will be noted that food, drink, raw materials makes up 2/3 of our total imports. The other goods that make up the remainder of our imports cover a wide range of articles. Our exports on the other hand consist of few things or is practically nil.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, every country tries to develop its own industries because they provide additional employment; and the greater the value of output per worker from industry, the greater the value of the goods produced the more money its citizen can earn and; hence the higher their standard of living. However, Mr. Chairperson, we can deplore that the budget of the majority offers no diversity of measures directed towards the boosting up of its industrial development. This budget shows a lot of projects but the when and the how of their taking shape need to be clearly defined. Will our people have to wait two decades more? Rodrigues needs to embark itself on industrialisation although it's economy can still rely partly on agriculture and

tourism. Sustained economic growth would encourage social development. The growth of education and literacy to create far greater uniformity on a national scale. Measures should have been taken to help narrow the gulf between our student population from different regions. At a time, when we are talking about globalisation and information technology, with ready and immediate access to information. In Mauritius we are talking about cyber island but in this budget nothing is said about information technology.

The project value is estimated at Rs.860,000.- and the budget estimates for the year 2003-2004 id Rs.92,500,000 compared to the estimates for the year 2002-2003 which amounted to Rs.95,500,500 . It will be noted that there has been a decrease in the budgets estimates. Why is this so? Is there less need for improvement in this sector?

Provision is made, Mr. Chairperson sir, in this budget for the construction and extension or conversion of schools but most of the colleges to be constructed are concentrated in the centre of the Island., We talk about decentralisation and there is a need to build a second college in the North. The existing colleges in this region are now catering only for the elite while the other students need to travel long distances to find a seat in a secondary school. I'm not against the construction of the school at Mt. Lubin but there are already two colleges in the vicinity. Why not the construction of a

college at songs? Mr. Chairperson Sir, Education should be assisted by information. The press is a good medium to transmit information. Measures could have been taken to encourage investors to set up a printing press with no political bias. Students will get access to education and information.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, the number of bookshops on our island is very limited. Students often face the problem of late arrival of books. Monopoly in this sector should have been discouraged by organising yearly school booksales in December, where local National booksellers can participate and books could be made more accessible to students.

However, Mr. Chairperson Sir to sum up the chapter of decentralisation in education, I would like to say that since now we have six regions for electoral purposes in the island of Rodrigues, Library services could have been decentralised to all these regions. I also regret that the Commissioner for Education has not thought it wise to include training for secondary school teachers in this budget. It is becoming more and more difficult to recruit qualified teachers. Most teachers who are recruited have no training. Provision should have been made in this budget for that purpose. This is a must!

Mr. Chairperson Sir, as far as culture is concerned in this budget for the construction of a Museum, Archives and Art gallery. We should say “thanks

Got at last” Our history will become accessible to our population who has been living on an island without knowing much of its history.

Provisions has also been made for the Regional and Leisure Centre in the centre of the island. Well what a glorifying effort! However, we remember there was a highly beloved and cherished “pied grenade” in La Ferme region. It seems that the little thing seems to have been left unwatered since the month of January or has it been moved to the region of Grande Montagne. Mr. Chairperson Sir, the Chief Commissioner said in his speech that women has always played an active role in our Society. Congratulations, the Council to be set up under the budget for women and family welfare would however not cater for pressing social problems that our families are facing: rape, juvenile delinquency, homicides and battered women. The integrated centre should be a multipurpose centre where victims will find shelter. Juvenile delinquents would not need to be sent to Mauritius and a good and efficient counselling and rehabilitation service to allow the victims to reintegrate society without too much trauma should be made available. Many of the juvenile delinquents who are sent to Mauritius are uprooted from the family cell and their stay in the rehabilitation centre are more detrimental than beneficial.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, a healthy population is the basis of a good and productive society. Many provisions have been made for renovation and reconstruction of hospitals. I think what lacks in the budget is the provision for the safe transfer of patients from the OPD to other wards as it is rather unhealthy to cross a busy road with patients on stretchers. The same could be said for the transfer of patients from the operation theatre who sometimes have to face the fury of the bad weather before reaching their wards. We also know that during cyclone Kalunde that a patient has had to undergo an operation under the light of a torch. Maintenance of hospital equipment should become a priority. In this era of high-tech we should not live like primitive people. The improvements of the sanitary conditions and the state of the public toilets should have been provided for in this budget Mr. Chairperson sir, we cannot tolerate that in a hospital public toilets have defective plumbing system and where the flushes are not working. Access to toilets should be made easier. I thought that Health would have been given a greater consideration as real development depends on a healthy population.

To cure the ills of our economy Mr. Chairperson Sir, a new economic policy should have been introduced allowing our farmers to produce surplus food and our unemployed to get jobs. Financial growth has little chance in a

country where political power rest in the hands of administrators. Agriculture, which have been suffering from a recent disaster demands protection. A combination of a policy of energetic state and protection for agriculture and a boost of industrial production would provide a platform on which small and big men, farmers, craftsmen and capitalists could stand together; the rich to defend the poor against the threat of high rise in prices. Rodrigues has to wake up from its sleep and we need to find the right remedy to the plague eating it up.

**Mr F. Grandcourt (The First Local Region Member for La Ferme):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, before considering the shortcomings of this budget, I would like to express my appreciation concerning the construction of a second access road to Plaine Corail from Piment to Cascade Jean Louis in the budget.

I remember I asked a question on that access road some weeks ago and believe me Mr Chairperson, Sir, that this second access road would alleviate the traffic to Plaine Corail and in case of any accident at Plaine Corail, this will be of great use.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it is a fact that our lagoon needs to be desilted for sedimentation has taken place in it since so many years without anything being done. As we have all concluded, this has caused a decrease in the catch per fishermen.

However, I think that the amount of money earmarked for the lagoon regeneration project is not enough.

Firstly, the dredging requires a lot of evaluation before the work can really start. Indeed, Environment Impact Assessment has to be done for every part of the lagoon to be dredged.

Secondly, I believe that the disposal of the silt obtained from the lagoon has also to be taken into consideration. Special measures should be taken to prevent the silt to be washed to the lagoon again.

Measures such as retaining walls in reclamation areas of bunds could be considered.

This is why if we want to respect all environment parameters concerning the dredging of the lagoon, 5 million rupees are not enough. And priorities should be given to most silted areas like Baie Topaze, Baie Pistache and Rivière Banane.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, with regard to the Fisheries Sector, it is surprising to note that only one million rupees have been provided for the development of the fishing sector in Rodrigues.

I think that in addition to the purchase of equipment for the Fisheries Division in Rodrigues, additional posts of Patrol Officers as well as a new post of Divisional Scientific Officer should have been created in order to strengthen enforcement there.

Moreover, this sector needs to be reorganized as recommended in the report on the reorganization of the Fisheries sector in Rodrigues, which was produced by a team of officials from Mauritius.

Consequently, some important steps should be considered with the reorganization of the fisheries department on:

- (i) the control of illegal fishing
- (ii) the review of the present system of attendance of fish landing stations and
- (iii) the review of criteria for the issue of fishermen cards to all fishermen not possessing one.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, you will recall that some weeks ago several boats were badly damaged and this resulted into a loss for both the fishermen and the government.

In spite of this, no measures have been taken to build official shelters for boats during bad weather conditions.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it has not gone unnoticed also that this budget has not made any provision for the construction and the rehabilitation of fish landing stations.

The construction of fish landing stations is of utmost importance for fishermen and should provide basic amenities such as toilets, bathroom; and these toilets should also be made available to the public who come and buy fish.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we must also remember that the *maison des pêcheurs* at Pointe Monier has remained almost inactive for years. And it is hence aberrant to see that no provisions have been made for its improvement with a view to reactivating it.

Recently, fishermen were obliged to sell octopus at a low price due to lack of cold room facilities.

I consider also that emphasis should have been put in this budget on the setting up of some professional structure for the proper handling, storage and marketing of fish and fish products in Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it is unfortunate that this budget has not made any provision for the development of off-lagoon fishing which is still a dormant, I say, dormant backbone of our economy.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, there is no doubt that Rodrigues, being a small island, has a very fragile environment.

It has been noted that some measures have been taken, for example, the construction of a visitor complex at Caverne Patate, it's very good. But, In my opinion, Mr Chairperson, Sir, one of the most important measures that needs to be considered is the rehabilitation and opening of other existing caves which would generate firstly employment and, at the same time, lessen the threat on the environment at Caverne Patate.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, in addition to this, this budget has not given us clear indications about the measures proposed to combat erosion in Rodrigues.

A member from the other side of the House considered it as an evil. As far as I can tell, some measures taken so far to prevent coastal erosion have not been successful. For example, the jetty which has been constructed at Mourouk and Port Sud Est has instead accelerated coastal erosion.

On the other hand, no measures have been mentioned to control invasive and exotic plants which cause soil erosion, for example, *piquant*

*loulou* and we all know Mr Chairperson, Sir, under which regime these plants were planted. It seems to me that no measures have been provided in this budget to reduce pollution and erosion by rock quarrying activities.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, what is the use of dredging the lagoon when these activities are accelerating siltation in it? What has been proposed to lessen pollution at Mt. Plate? And the members on the other side have considered erosion as an evil. Who has kept that evil alive for so many years? I believe that it is high time to ensure that rock-quarrying activities are carried out within environment parameters.

I opined that the Rodrigues Regional Assembly should have injected money in the creation of a Government nursery apart from that we have at Solitude with a highly equipped propagation system to propagate endemic plants in Rodrigues and above all combat soil erosion.

I believe that those plants are more appropriate to rehabilitate valleys and are more resistant to natural calamities.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, to conclude I would say that this budget has no objective concerning the improvement of the fishing sector as well as the environment sector in Rodrigues.

Thank you.

**Mr L. P. François (First Local Region Member for Baie aux Huitres):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, it is with great pleasure that I should like to comment on the first Budget for the Financial Year 2003-2004 presented by the O.P.R. Regional Government under the chairmanship of Louis Serge Clair (G.C.S.K.).

Many of the proposals made to create better conditions for the social advancement of all segments of our population have been highly appreciated by the Rodriguan people, especially the three main sectors namely water, education and public infrastructure where priority will be given with a provision of about Rs270 m which will be invested in the three main sectors mentioned above.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, with the achievement of autonomy due to a very long and uninterrupted battle which lasted almost twenty-five years, this Regional Government has spent no time to take very important measures to provide the essential basic structures for a rapid economic take-off with the setting up of the long-term plan for economic and social integrated development, the Rodrigues Economic and Social Committee, the Rodrigues Marketing and Trading Agency and the Rodrigues Tourism Promotion Authority.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we all know that unemployment remains a nightmare to many people in Rodrigues, especially school leavers who go onto the market looking for jobs. But this Regional Government is very conscious of this problem and in this context the private sector will be called upon to generate employment for many people where incentives will be offered to stimulate productive sectors of our economy such as agriculture, fishing, tourism, S.M.E's as well as handicrafts, manufacturing units and food processing. In doing so, this Regional Government has well done in proposing measures such as the boosting up of the Rodrigues Venture Capital & Leasing fund, the freight rebate scheme which will be reviewed and other facilities which in my opinion, need to be defined.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, our agricultural sector which has suffered a lot after the passage of cyclone Kalunde still remains the backbone of our economy and an important source of revenue to the island and where many people still earn a living.

With the reorganisation of the Agricultural Division proposed by the Regional Government, this will no doubt boost up this sector. The creation of a Rodriguan Planters and Farmers Welfare Fund is long overdue.

In line with the successful development of the agricultural sector, how can I not mention, Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Anti-Erosion Programme which

has reached its final year of implementation? This Regional Government has found it a must to take necessary measures in order to continue the employment of the 187 Contract General Field and Office/Premises workers up to June 2004 where a sum of Rs20 m. will be maintained for the said programme, thanks to this Regional Government on behalf of the said workers.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the health infrastructure of Rodrigues which consists of one main regional hospital, two area health centres and 13 community health centres cater for the promotion of the health sector in Rodrigues. The provision of a sum of Rs128.9 m in the Budget for the health sectors seems to be rational. The upgrading of Mt. Lubin and La Ferme Area Health Centres, the Pharmacy and Laboratory Services, the drainage system of Q.E.H., the renovation of Oyster Bay Community Health Centre, the Maternity ward and the Operating theatre, the purchase of medical equipment and ambulances, and the construction of a well-wishers Hall at the Q.E.H., among others, are clear signs from this Regional Government to maintain medical services in Rodrigues in good health. However, the large amount of money spent in terms of manpower should be re-examined and corrective measures should be proposed. And in my opinion, to tackle this problem, in a near future the Regional Government

should make funds available to Rodriguan students who will be encouraged to study higher practice of medicine.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, now I come to the education sector which has been given a special attention and a large part of the Budget devoted mainly to the development of infrastructure which will ensure opportunity to every Rodriguan to receive adequate education.

All our secondary schools have already gone through extension projects with a view to giving better and complete education to our youngsters. Measures have been taken to enable each primary school to obtain a fax machine to facilitate communication and wall fans to improve learning conditions during the hot season. A revision of the School Feeding Programme with a view to providing our school children with locally produced foodstuffs which, in turn can encourage the local industry, has been implemented in this Budget. And here I should like to draw your attention, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that the School Feeding Programme reform was one of the main propaganda of the O.P.R. Party during the September 29 2002 regional elections campaign “*Parole donnée, parole sacrée...*”. The recruitment of teachers of general and I.T. purposes, the provision of a block grant of Rs20.3 m of which Rs500,000 are meant for renovation works, the introduction of the Cyclone Reconstruction Programme where

funds have been provided for the repairs of Ste Famille and Don Bosco Primary Schools are excellent measures taken by this Regional Government.

I have also to mention the intention of the Regional Government to carry out a survey to re-examine the real specific educational needs of Rodrigues; and the review of the whole education system will be subject to discussion with the people concerned.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the protection of the weak and most needy people of our society through the Social Security, Community Development and Eradication of Poverty Programmes has been given special consideration in this Budget where a sum of Rs170.9 m has been earmarked for this financial year.

Thanks to this caring Regional Government, professional fishermen will still be paid bad weather allowance. The implementation of poverty alleviation programme financed by the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups, IFAD, European Union, the U.N.D.P. which will be widely spread through our media are very important tools to combat poverty.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I now move to the Youth/Sports Commission. With the advent of the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Ocean Second Games where the Judo Team Competition will be held in Rodrigues for the first time in the annals of its history, the Youth and Sports Commission will make every effort to make

this event a success and to enable the Rodriguan people to witness *ce grand événement*.

To cater for the promotion of football in Rodrigues which is still *le sport Roi* in the island, the renovation and upgrading of all sports complexes and football grounds have been highly appreciated by the population. Here, I should like to underline, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that the provision in this Budget for Oyster Bay football ground to be provided with stands and cloakrooms has been welcomed with *pétarades* in Oyster Bay. Again thanks to this Regional Government on behalf of the people of Oyster Bay which was something long overdue. The first Olympic swimming pool which will be constructed in the region of Marechal with a provision of Rs28 m has been maintained despite adverse opinion from the minority group when decision was taken to move the project from Port Mathurin to Marechal.

In fact, it is my opinion that this is the ideal place for the construction of the swimming pool. Congratulations to people who maintained this decision and to the responsible Regional Government. Other measures proposed by the Youth and Sports Commission including the extension of the opening hours of all our youth centres; creation of two more posts of Sports Officer, will surely help to promote sports activities in Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I should like to seize this opportunity to reiterate that the major objectives of this Assembly are to formulate and implement policies relating to the public administration of Rodrigues with a view to raising the quality of life of our people, to combating poverty and unemployment, to consolidating public finance and to creating a dynamic economy.

I have no doubt, with the support and trust of members of both sides of the House, we will achieve our goals.

Above all consideration, this Budget is everybody's concern, it is the Budget of the people of Rodrigues.

Thanks to everybody.

Thank you Mr Chairperson, Sir.

**Mr Chairperson:** Thank you very much. I now suspend the sitting for lunch.

*At 12.55 hrs the sitting was suspended.*

*Resumption of debate on the Budget*

**Resumption and conclusion of debate on the draft Estimates**

**2003-2004**

**Mrs J. Prosper (Sixth Island Region Member):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, Rodrigues is entering an era of change. The budgetary speech of the Chief Commissioner is full of promising projects but void as regards the planning of sound economy policy to create employment. Priorities in this budget are not clearly defined. The projects are vague and create paradoxes in many sectors. We expected actions. We can see that after twenty-five years we are still at the point of feasibility studies. Social stability and progress cannot be achieved if economically we still rely on the generosity of mother Mauritius. It's high time to build up an economic policy that will encourage productivity and thus improve the standard of living of our people. Sectors like fishing and agriculture which, though primary, could have been developed to generate finance. Mr Chairperson, Sir, the water sector which should have been made *la priorité des priorités* is still waiting between consultancy stage and costing projects. Initially the installing of the desalination plants in Rodrigues was considered due to the drought of the year 1999/2000. Rodrigues suffered a lot during that period. So did Mauritius where domestic water supply was interrupted and irrigation cut off. But since the rain has been falling in Rodrigues as well as in Mauritius as witnessed by figures at Meteorological office, all reservoirs in Mauritius including the Midlands Dam are nearly full; on the other hand Rodrigues is

still suffering from water shortage. There is only one reason for this long lasting situation. Mr Chairperson, Sir, not a single water collecting structure has been constructed in this island since the 1970s. In this context, please, do not talk about the fibre glass tanks with no gutters installed for rainwater harvesting project. Solving water shortage in Rodrigues involves the construction of dams. There is no doubt about it. In this line of action, the Anse Raffin dam project is most welcomed. Mr Chairperson, Sir, the desalination project is too ambitious, expensive and unecological. I think that the Advisors at that time were themselves in despair, so they just picked up that solution. Truly, it was the only solution. I am sure that they might see things differently at present. Desalination is a way to increase fresh water supply in countries where the cost of getting fresh water by any method is very high. Most of the desalination plants are found in arid parts of the world like Middle East, Northern Africa and Western Coast of US. In these areas the only mean of reaching fresh water demand is by the removal of the dissolved salt from ocean water or from brackish water. There is no other alternative. Mr Chairperson, Sir, is it the same case in Rodrigues? Rodrigues, with its annual rainfall, cannot be considered as an arid island. Rain did fall in Rodrigues in appreciatble amounts during the passage of cyclone Kalunde.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, how much of it was collected? Very little! The desalination plants are at the cost of Rs265 000 m. For the time being the installation of such a plant is not justified. Desalination has its downside effect, because it uses vast amount of electricity. Water in this way costs three or four times more than from conventional sources. Moreover, desalination also produces large quantities of brine containing high level of salt and other minerals. Dumping the concentrated brine into ocean water near the plants seems the logical situation, but this would increase the local salt concentration whereby threatening the food sources in that region. Most people of that region depend directly on fishing for living. Think about this dramatic social problem which will be caused by installing this plant there. Running a desalination plants needs a trained professional, thus in the medium-term Rodriguan officers will not be able to acquire sufficient knowledge as to how to take over this desalination. Even Mauritian officers in the water sector have not been dealing with a desalination plant. The only way to produce water by this means will involved foreign labour. I am sure that this will cost millions of rupees .Mr Chairperson, Sir, can our budget support this running cost? I do not think so. On the light of above, it will be more beneficial to Rodrigues if this money can be reallocated to other projects in the water sector such as construction of Pistaches dam. Mr

Chairperson, Sir, till now we have seen too many feasibility studies in the water sector in Rodrigues. I really want to know whether the studies carried out in the period during which the Chief Commissioner was Minister for Rodrigues are reliable. It is high time to spend efficiently intelligently, objectively each and every cent allocated to water projects in Rodrigues. We must start taking action according to previous studies lying in drawers. Please stop throwing public money through window.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the major problem causing silting of dams is soil erosion. Everybody here is aware of large amounts of suspended materials transported in our rivers after heavy rain. We must solve this problem. Soil erosion must be brought to a minimum in the catchment areas of these dams. The desilting of these dams can be carried out otherwise it will be a loss of money, because in the present situation newly desilted dams will be filled with unwanted materials after heavy rain. Mr Chairperson, Sir, when the rationalisation of the water network is implemented, I am sure we shall notice that most of our water networks have been laid without survey and planning. A good observer will easily find these failures. One may see pipes in the sea like Port Sud Est, pipes crossing rivers, pipes making loops, pipes of different dimensions getting mingled. I cannot understand why we are so unprofessional in dealing with this resource. We must provide

training to people involved in water network so that they can do this job in the right way. It is only this way that rationalisation of the water network will be possible.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we see with great relief that provision has been made to construct the two dams at Graviers and Grenade. We have always fought for the construction of dams in Rodrigues. Luckily, it seems that we have been heard. Thanks to all persons involved in materialising this project. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you very much. Now, the Second Local Member for Marechal will take the floor.

**Mr C. Agathe (Second Local Member for Marechal):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, first and foremost let me congratulate the people of Rodrigues and especially electors in the Island region of Marechal, Riviere Coco who have plebiscited my colleague Allan Ladd Emilien and me. I am proud to be here today to speak for all Rodriguans, especially for those who have not got the opportunity to be here.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the advent of decentralisation in the Republic of Mauritius following the setting up of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly raised new hopes for the people of Rodrigues, concerning the improvement of their social, economic and political lives. In view of translating this new

hope into reality, the minority group of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is of opinion that our Executive Council should have given special attention in dealing with the 2003/2004 budget to major problems affecting our daily life such as unemployment, productivity, poverty.

*Le budget n'a pas donné un signal clair aux investisseurs que ce soit à Rodrigues, à Maurice ou ailleurs.* The Executive Council is not committed since the private sector will shoulder the responsibility after having heard *plus demander zotte pas donner.*

Economic decline, Mr Chairperson, Sir, leads to all sorts of problem, which is presently affecting our social life. The extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society leads to behaviour patterns, which are at times so opposed to one another as to undermine any idea of community identity. Rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations and the globalisation of the economy affect human life more and more throughout the world. Rather than prospects of development for all, we witness the widening of the gap between rich and poor, as well as massive migration from underdeveloped to highly developed countries.

When we look at the budget, no emphasis is being laid on poverty eradication and the social integration of the weakest segments of the population, for example, Mr Chairperson, Sir, old people, handicapped and

children beyond control. Recently, Mr Chairperson, Sir, a small boy aged 12 years committed 12 cases of theft. He has been sent to a rehabilitation centre in Mauritius. There, he will meet all sorts of children guilty of different cases. Someone is tempted to say *quand li vini li vine ène gradué*. All this has been completely ignored.

Rs1.12 billion is nothing, useless if I can say, Mr Chairperson, Sir, in terms of our actual needs. So many millions are being disbursed year in and year out and the level of unemployment is considerably being increased. What a shame Mr Chairperson, Sir! The unemployed people are facing the same cost of living incurred by price increase, VAT and no compensation is being paid to them. Consequently, a hardship allowance should have been voted, because there is a significant percentage of price differentials between Mauritius and Rodrigues. Rodriguan households have to face higher prices in Rodrigues than in Mauritius, whereas the wage and salary rates are the same as in Mauritius, which means that for the same money income in Rodrigues the income earner is faced with lower purchasing power. The Rodriguan civil servants who are citizens of the Republic of Mauritius have to work and live in conditions that are difficult compared to their counterparts in the island of Mauritius. Civil servants who are working in Rodrigues and who are citizens of the Republic of Mauritius do not enjoy

the same facilities that are available in the island of Mauritius be it in terms of leisure, medical treatment facilities. The hardship allowance should be paid until *ki Rodrigues rattrape so retard*.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, if we refer to the RRA Act 2001 section 44 where it is said –

- (1) The Commissioner to whom responsibility for the subject of finance is assigned shall, not later than 31 March in every year, submit to the Regional Assembly in respect of its functions, draft estimates of recurrent revenue and recurrent expenditure and capital revenue and capital expenditure for the next financial year.
- (2) The Regional Assembly shall approve the draft estimates submitted in accordance with subsection (1) subject to such modifications as it thinks fits.
- (3) The Chief Commissioner shall not later than 15 April in every year transmit to the Minister and the draft estimates approved by the Regional Assembly under subsection (2) for consideration by Cabinet.

We wonder whether there has been any ‘in camera’ talk between the Chief Commissioner and the Central Government as to the quantum of financial resources to be allocated to Rodrigues. If ever this is the case, we would have misunderstood the concept of autonomy and all this, Mr Chairperson, Sir, is just a farce. On the contrary, is this sum of Rs1.12 billion our limit in terms of economic boost? Will it cater for our pressing needs? The elected members in regions, although they do not form part of the majority nor the Executive Council, would have been consulted on priorities concerning the respective regions. We should remind ourselves, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that we are not a government but a Regional Assembly.

Our youth is our future! Well-trained and educated youth will build strong foundations for our *société futuriste*. There are many young people, who shun effort, are incapable of self-sacrifice and perseverance and who lack authentic models to guide them, often even in their own families. Nevertheless, we could see that in this budget the youth *sont des laissés-pour-compte*. What has been concretely proposed in this budget to decrease exile of our youth to the mainland and to provide those who have spent years in academic and professional training a job in the field of their study so that they can work and put their knowledge to the best of their potential for the benefit of their island? Many of the qualities and talents of these youth are

not being efficiently exploited. No new post has been created in terms of career guidance for youth.

Cyclone Kalunde, Mr Chairperson, Sir, has opened our eyes and made us see our lacks. Rodrigues is facing an unemployment problem. But in the aftermath of the cyclone, many skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, for example, woodcutters, electricians, even street-cleaners came to Rodrigues. Is it not time to create a special squad with proper training for emergency cases?

Mr Chairperson, Sir, while studying the budget, I've understood the reason why the Commissioner for Youth & Sport *se sent perdu* on the budget presentation day. No technician in the world will create two additional posts of sports officer instead of sports coach. Mr Chairperson, Sir, I think that emphasis should be stressed on how to encourage the Regional sport committees that are doing fundamental work on a voluntary basis. Each and every sports committee should have at least six sports coaches to encourage people practising sport on a regional basis in line with the oncoming "Jeux des îles".

The budget, Mr Chairperson, Sir, is a zero policy budget. Nothing is added to encourage our sport people to achieve higher levels of performance be it international, intercontinental, continental (that is African) & Regional

compared to his fellow counterpart in Mauritius who have a cash prize scheme. Some of these sport people cannot afford to buy even his own training equipment.

*J'ai un petit pincement au coeur*, Mr Chairperson, Sir, talking of the case of Marie Noelle Ravina who has severely been injured by a javelin. Thanks to the people who supported her financially and morally. Even after that, Mr Chairperson, Sir, the budget does not make provision for the setting up of a Sports Medical Unit in Rodrigues which can provide –

- medical consultation and management of acute and chronic sports injuries;
- physiotherapy and rehabilitation exercises;
- medical assistance for national and international events whenever requested;
- first-aid kits to sports training schools;
- site work during training;
- lectures delivery to sports people on sports medicine, and
- anti-doping control nutrition consultation and advice.

The aims and objectives of the Sports Medical Unit, Mr Chairperson, Sir, is to safeguard the health of our sports people and to enhance their performance.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, Rodrigues is considered as the *pépinière de Maurice* in terms of sports people; Jean Marc Ithier, Eric Milazar are some examples, *quand nous pou capave plante nous pied dans Rodrigues*. Their performance was judged in participating in Olympic, Commonwealth, African Championship and Indian Ocean Intercontinental Games. Consequently, they have to proceed to mainland Mauritius to participate or to increase their performance under the aegis of a *Directeur Technique National*. A sum of Rs3 700 000 was earmarked in the budget. Is the sum for only two regional committees?

Mr Chairperson, Sir, concerning the allocation of posts under the Central Administration, I am proud that in the budget, provision is being made for finance cadre in Rodrigues but it is only under the Central Administration. Unfortunately, the Departmental Heads attached to other Commissions are responsible to incur expenditure under the aegis of the Chief Commissioner. It is a shortcoming, which needs to have been wisely dealt with.

Industrial Relations. All the Associations in Rodrigues are non-governmental organisations, but ironically, one post of Inspector of Association is being created. What Association does the Executive Council have in mind?

Mr Chairperson, Sir, if we refer also to the contribution to the local organisations, we see that these amounts always have remained the same for long. Therefore, I think that it has to be increased.

Concerning the Capital Budget, Mr Chairperson, Sir, concerning roads, there are roads which are ongoing, for example, we have Mt. Goyaves – Baladirou, La Ferme – Quatre Vents. Let's take for example the road at La Ferme – Quatre Vents and the same road appears as new Grand La Fouche Mangles – La Ferme. Therefore, the road on top, is it ongoing, but now new provision is being made for Grande La Fouche Mangles – La Ferme. I think that instead of writing La Ferme they could have written Limon, that is, Grand La Fouche Mangles to Limon.

Concerning Infrastructure to residential morcellements, provision is being made for electricity to morcellements and we have a list of villages, excluding Ile Michel. I think that Ile Michel also should have been included in this list.

Item 30-102.012 – Water Supplies Development Project – Rs25 m. have been earmarked.

*(Interruptions)*

Mr Chairperson, Sir, possibly there has been a mistake by writing Allée Tamarin instead of Tamarin.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I refer to the budget speech of the Chief Commissioner, which I quote

*‘L’homme, avec le monde qui l’entoure, est une tache*

*à réaliser, un immense reservoir d’avenir.*

*L’avenir est un faisceau de projets, d’espérance, de liberté,*

*Car nous avons encore a choisir entre des possibilités ou a*

*En créer d’autres.’*

I think the Chief Commissioner must have been proud of this! I have been reading to know where the Chief Commissioner has got this. It is from someone known as Roger Garaudy. Do you know who is Roger Garaudy? He is a former French Communist leader, philosopher and recently converted to Revisionism and Islam. Revisionist means politically incorrect person.

This is why, Mr Chairperson, Sir, he does not put the name of the author.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson, Sir.

**Mr J. Roussety:** Mr Chairperson, Sir, according to Standing Order 35 (5) (a), I’ll ask leave for just 15 seconds.

**Mr Chairperson:** Are you moving for special leave in order to intervene in the debate? You have to justify why I should give you 15 seconds.

**Mr J. Roussety:** I should like to ask either the Chief Commissioner...

**Mr Chairperson:** To ask?

**Mr J. Roussety:** No, no, to suggest either the Chief ....

**Mr Chairperson:** Not to suggest. Of course it is special leave...

**Mr J. Roussety:** What do you want me to say?

**Mr Chairperson:** You mean that we support your motion.

**Mr J. Roussety:** Yes. I'll put it differently.

**Mr Chairperson:** Yes, proceed.

**Mr J. Roussety:** If you will allow me.

**Mr Chairperson:** Of course, I will.

**Mr J. Roussety:** I would like either the Chief Commissioner or the Commissioner for Social Security to clarify the matter about the Capital Budget Estimates. Why are there no capital estimates for social security?

**Mr Chairperson:** What I can understand is that you are not moving for special leave to talk, but you are asking for .....

**Mr J. Roussety:** I believe that the Chief Commissioner will make a speech to resume what has been said. There is not budget for the responsible Commissioner who is laughing. Why are there no capital estimates? Until

now he could have brought an amendment or a memorandum to add this, because we cannot submit things like that to the central Government.

**Mr Chairperson:** Yes, I understand that you are not moving for special leave. So, I have to give a ruling. But as far as your request is concerned, this is outside the jurisdiction of the Chairperson to request a member to give any answer that you may wish to have. I think you have made your point. Does the Chief Commissioner want to give reply?

**The Chief Commissioner:** Members of the Assembly are making their suggestions. So, we, as Commissioners, are taking notes and surely we are going to reply to what they are saying.

**Mr Chairperson:** Thank you very much. This is understood. We now continue with the debate. The Fifth Island Region Member has the floor.

**Miss L. Castel (Fifth Island Region Member):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2003, sitting here in this House, I witnessed the Chief Commissioner, Louis Serge Clair, delivering his speech for this very first Budget of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

I was deeply moved by this speech, which shows the commitment of the Regional Government to assume its responsibilities fully for the betterment of our population.

There is a great determination to bring about new priorities and hopes that can meet the aspirations of our people, which I am convinced, will be successful, successful because the objectives that we can and want to achieve are clearly defined.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this Regional Government believes in good governance to enhance sustainable development leading to long-term progress towards increased prosperity.

This budget is essentially characterised by a wide scope for social and economic development, physical capital, human capital that are of utmost importance to set the necessary conditions for the take-off of our economy within this new era of our autonomy.

I fully support all the great measures announced by the Chief Commissioner to provide the framework for this economic take off by setting up the Rodrigues Economic and Social Committee, Rodrigues Economic Development Committee, Rodrigues Marketing and Trade Agency, the Rodrigues Tourism Promotion Authority, Rodrigues Venture Capital and Leasing Fund, Rodrigues Fisherman Welfare Fund and Rodrigues Planters Welfare Fund, among others.

These measures were taken by looking at evidence, by talking to experts but above all by listening to our mature electorate through Participative Democracy.

These measures will definitely help to boost up private sector's investment, which will eventually contribute to the creation of more jobs.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this budget offers a framework, which intends to improve the standard of living of our people.

The OPR government is seriously committed to poverty elimination and we will not put that target at risk by making wild promises.

The construction of 108 low-cost housing units in twelve regions around the island, which is scheduled to start shortly, is a sound example of our political will to help the most needy.

I think that's good government, because government means helping people impartially.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this budget focuses on economic infrastructure and services including:

- Public utilities such as piped water supply, solid waste collection and disposal.
- Public works like roads connecting Thames to Mourouk, Palissade to Port Sud Est and others.

- Upgrading and renovation of sport complexes around the island,
- Construction of a swimming pool at Marechal, Dams
- Rehabilitation and construction at Graviers, Anse Raffin and Grenade.

These facilities will certainly be very beneficial for irrigation for planters and as well as domestic purposes.

These infrastructures will further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of service provision as well as delivering major benefits for economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.

Mr Chairperson Sir, from these budget proposals the measures introduced by the Regional government do incorporate a gender perspective.

And its implementation will be based on a participatory approach, which will allow this government to highly value the important role of women in our society.

As Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros - Ghali rightly said *il ne peut y avoir de véritable développement social sans amélioration de la condition des femmes.*

This is fully supported by the measures taken by the Commissioner for women for the empowerment of women who have a crucial role to play in the strengthening and maintenance of the social fabric.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the emergence of a Rodrigues Women's Council and a Rodrigues Children's Council is a sound decision to provide the basic services and facilities for women and child development. The various courses that will be extended all around the island will further enhance Rodriguan women to acquire more knowledge and skills to promote family welfare and favour their integration in the social and economic development.

I thank the Commissioner for Women for her dedication to uplift the quality of life of women, family welfare and child development.

I can assure the Commissioner for Women of my full support and sincere collaboration towards achieving these goals.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the Chief Commissioner for his genuine interest in women's affairs by proposing a sum of ten times bigger as compared to that allocated in the previous budget.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we all know that good education is the backbone that conditions the success of a society, be it politically, economically, socially and culturally.

This budget proposed condensed measures to provide good education. The proposed development of infrastructure and training facilities in the education sector is a very positive move towards good education on the island.

I am pleased to note that this government does take at heart the importance of good education and training, which are very essential to meet the present and future challenges of our society.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, an absolute priority of this government is to promote a healthy population.

The provisions from this 2003-2004 budget, shows the determination of this government to provide better facilities in the health sector. The renovation of the Operating Theatre and the maternity ward and the upgrading of the Mt. Lubin and La Ferme Area Health centres is a classical example of this government's devotion in that area.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, all these matters I just mentioned are extremely important.

They are measures of what good government can do.

With the enthusiasm of our team, we are confident that we will be able to meet the greatest challenge awaiting the Rodriguan people in the years to come.

As a government and a party, we are reiterating our engagement towards our people, “*pour construire les bases solides d’une île Rodrigues autonome*”.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, with these words I will end up by saying:

Long live the Regional Government

Long live the Autonomous Status of Rodrigues.

Thank you, everybody for your attention.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson, Sir.

**Mr Chairperson:** Thank you. Yes.

**Mr Agathe:** Mr. Chairperson, Sir, I have a point of order on a point of explanation....

**Mr Chairperson:** Is it a point of order or an explanation?

**Mr Agathe:** It is a point of personal explanation.

**Mr Chairperson:** Does it concern what you have mentioned in your speech?

**Mr Agathe:** No, the speech of Miss Castel.

**Mr Chairperson:** No, it is not a personal explanation. Proceed.

**Mr. Agathe:** She is referring to government.....

**Mr Chairperson:** No, if...

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr. Agathe:** We have a Chairperson here. I am listening to him.

**Mr Chairperson:** There are two members who are standing.

*(Interruptions)*

**Mr. J. Roussety:** One member has said to another member “sit down”.

This is not an order. I want this member to apologise.

**Mr. Chairperson:** There have been lots of interruptions. Of course, what has been going since this morning is unparliamentary. The Chairperson is not paying any attention to these interruptions because at times I cannot hear what is being said in the House. Unless the member will rise and speak and will offend any other member then the Chairperson will intervene. So, we proceed with the debate with the Second Local Region Member for La Ferme.

**Mr G. Jabeemissar (Second Local Region Member):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, history will retain this day as being a very important and a memorable landmark in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. In fact, after the presentation of the first Rodrigues Regional Assembly annual budget, we are having the opportunity to debate on it for the first time. A budget being a very important feature in the life of a country, this budget will no doubt arouse the interest of our people as regards the development of our island.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, first let me express my appreciation for the great task the majority group have had to prepare its first annual budget and by the same time congratulate the Chief Commissioner for his first budget speech.

However, if I have to comment on this budget, I will make the following remarks

First, the majority group has not been able to present a budget which really meets the needs and aspirations of our people.

Secondly, it is a remake of previous budgets for Rodrigues thus lacking originality.

Thirdly, it is a budget of intention only, with no implementation measures.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, my colleagues having gone through every aspect of this budget proposal, I will focus my intervention on a few points only.

If the Executive Council intends to create better conditions for the social advancement of all segments of our population, allow me to point out some historical facts, which tend to show the opposite. Let me first take the case of infrastructural development. Major development started in the road sector only when the OPR didn't form part of the government. It is not a secret for anybody that during all the time the OPR had the Ministry for Rodrigues, one could witness the very bad state of our road network everywhere. In

fact, the very few roads, which have been built during their mandate, were in very poor quality indeed. The very few roads which will be improved in this present budget doesn't mean much for most of them were already earmarked in previous budgets. Others roads, for example, the one from Grand La Fouche Corail to Rivière Coco urgently needs improvement. The traffic on this road is becoming more and more dangerous each day due to the bad state of the retaining walls at different places and also due to the increase of the flow of heavy vehicles along it. No provisions have been made in this budget for such cases.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, I don't see that our beloved town interests the local government as far as road development is concerned. As we know, the streets of Port Mathurin are very narrow. The rapid increase in our road traffic will soon make it difficult to circulate in the streets of Port Mathurin. Therefore, I have noticed that at least at two places, bridges should be urgently built

First, the Winston Churchill which has been out of use for a long time, will relieve congestion in the flow of traffic in and out of Port Mathurin if it is now rebuilt.

Secondly, the channel passing next to the MHC site at Camp du Roi, needs to be bridged in order to link the road from Camp du Roi to the one which

passes next to the Cadastral Unit building. During the last floods caused by cyclone Kalundé, one could see that at different places water remained on the streets due to the bad drainage system – Don't we see that such situations need to be urgently considered?

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we cannot talk about our intention to create better conditions for social advancement of all the segments of our population when nothing is provided for them to have a good access road to their village. Let us think for a while of the people living in clustered areas like Cité Limon, Cité Ile Michel, Mt. Cabris Corail, Cité Patate, Anse Nicolas *entre autres*. Just imagine the state of their roads after Kalundé and during rainy days? However, one can see in certain places concrete track roads being built to serve a very few families only.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, there are no bridges on our coastal roads but one can see "radiers" at every place where the roads cross a river. Since the time these "radiers" were built Mr Chairperson, Sir, we have had enough experience to say that they are a great danger during floods. This morning my colleague, Allan Ladd, talk about it. At the most risky places like Cascade Pistaches, Riviere Coco, Anse Raffin and Anse Baleine these should be replaced by bridges. I wonder why the Executive Council has found the necessity of building a bridge at Port Sud Est only.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it's a pity to see the state of the roads in our morcellement. I don't see how R1 m can solve the problem. How can we want people to live in a decent life in clustered areas if we do not provide them with the basic requirements first?

Mr Chairperson, Sir, if we really want to improve the public infrastructure as I have mentioned so far, R.80 m is not sufficient.

We should not forget that most of our Labour force have got employment since the major road developments started. Otherwise, imagine where most of our young men would be. We should therefore see to it that this sector becomes more sustainable by looking for more funds to create more jobs opportunities.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, with the different projects in line with the Airport development, no doubt this will bring more employment and revenue to the island. To be able to cope with challenges ahead in this sector, provisions should be made for a comprehensive and sustainable training programme. The OPR government says they have the vision, what have they provided for training in this budget? How do we prepare out people to face the ongoing process of changes in society at all levels, especially now, that we are on the point of facing great challenges in

unemployment, economical development and the effect of globalisation without giving a first place to training needs in a budget?

Mr Chairperson, Sir, when the Chief Commissioner talks about the setting up of framework with incentives to stimulate the development of the productive sectors of our economy, as I said earlier, these intentions are not supported by any concrete measures. We know that there are budgetary constraints. But, I think that Kalundé should have helped the majority group to lay more emphasis on measures to boost up agricultural development and allow the spirit of entrepreneurship to take off rapidly. We should ask ourselves, for example, did the incentive measures provided in the previous budget meet their objectives and act accordingly.

Concerning the House, Mr Chairperson, Sir, the budget makes provisions for the construction of the new Rodrigues Assembly House but as regards the existing Assembly House we are now all occupying and which we will surely occupy for some times, nothing has been provided in the budget proposals for the comfort of members and workers. No new posts have been created. The number of workers has decreased instead from 23 to 21. We all know that inadequate number of staff in the service will affect entail the good running of the service.

**The Commissioner for Social Security (Mr. R. Mercure):** Mr Chairperson, Sir,

This governing council has lived up to its responsibility since September 2003 when it took office after the first regional election. We did not sit down and wait but rather, we quickly put ourselves into action by reviewing the on-going budget estimate of 2002/2003 and defined the priorities that have set the basis of actions of our electoral manifest and programmes.

Then came the Cyclone kalundé and again we have shown the proof of our management ability. Although we are still facing a difficult period as a result of the cyclone, this governing Council has been able to stick to and meet the deadline of presenting the budget proposal for the financial year 2003/2004 to the House on Tuesday last by the Chief Commissioner.

I would like to convey my sincere congratulation to him for his brilliant first budget speech that has successfully highlighted the main priorities and orientations of actions for the period 2003/2004.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, having successfully gone through all these events, there should be now no doubt about our maturity, our full willingness for action and our firm commitment to meet the obligations which we have contracted with the population.

Mr Chairperson, Sir,

I have followed the Chief Commissioner's budget speech with great pleasure and interest and having carefully gone through the various proposals I have been very appreciative and impressed on the priorities identified and the measures contained therein.

This budget strongly demonstrates the work that we want to tackle to reach the goal of the well being of our people. It sets forth the measures that are necessary to catalyse the social and economic development process of Rodrigues. Our ultimate aim is to achieve human - centred sustainable development that lead to improvement in the quality of life of our people. The consultation held with NGOs during this budget preparation and the social considerations that have been announced are indicative of the determination of this governing Executive Council to succeed in this endeavour.

We want to empower our people to become more entrepreneurial, to create jobs, generate wealth. I am fully satisfied and convinced that all the measures put forward in this budget will pave the way towards achieving this objective and create a 'sense of ' bien-être' among our people.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the measures identified for the protection and enhancement of our environment at large including our natural resource base

are of paramount importance for our socio-economic development agenda. It deserves the full consideration of the distinguished members of the other side of this House because the relation between the state of the environment and the quality of life of our people is a vicious circle .

From the unfortunate experience of many countries, we have seen that the level of poverty is directly related to how well the environment is managed and vice versa. We need to enhance the economic potential of our resources and the several measures announced by the Chief Commissioner in the field of environment will lead to the restoration of both the marine and terrestrial ecology and hence, will sustain our main economic sector including agriculture, tourism and fisheries.

Mr Chairperson, Sir,

We firmly believe that the social well-being of our people requires not only direct financial assistance to the most needy but before all, it requires an integrated package of measures and efforts that will enable such assistance, but more importantly create the proper environment conducive to the long term socio-economic development of our beloved island.

This budget is opportune as it brings measures that will boost up our various economic sectors and give better access for optimum resource exploitation. Catalytic The creation of a one-stop shop as announced by the

Chief Commissioner to facilitate the creation of more small and medium enterprises will be catalytic. The Infrastructure and water development capital projects, the re-organisation of the agricultural sector and the measures announced for proper land use amongst others, are all the enabling factors that give strong merit to this budget.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the measures announced by the Chief Commissioner to boost up the economic take-off of Rodrigues are numerous. The setting up of a Rodrigues Tourism Promotion Authority, the creation of appropriate welfare funds for farmers and fishermen and the setting up of an Economic Development Committee coupled with the proposed Marketing and Trade Agency in Rodrigues will undoubtedly have a effect on our economic sectors.

The social measures announced by the Chief Commissioner with a view to improving our health services and education system are visionary and laudable. These will enable better access to a more reliable health service and more empowerment of our people respectively. In fact, these are the bases for ensuring a better contribution and participation of our people in the advancement of our society. This OPR Government Council is conscious on the fundamental necessity and obligation for a proper health

services and more training opportunities to enable better access to employment.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, We have witnessed from experience of other countries how economic development may also entail negative side effects which may harm our society if due care is not taken on time. These side effects are numerous. We, the governing council of the OPR party, are fully conscious. Several measures are contained in this budget to cope with them.

We care for our people and we want to protect them, especially the disadvantaged and the most needy.

As laid down by the Chief Commissioner in his speech, one of the objectives of our present mandate is to eliminate the problem of high unemployment rate. Measures in this connection have already been initiated in the last budget review but are being consolidated further in this present budget. While we are aiming at job creation, we also want to promote good industrial relations between employees and employers, and maintain a good working environment conducive to productivity. This is why, Mr Chairperson, Sir, this governing council is adopting a proactive attitude by making the provision for the introduction of new posts in the recurrent estimates under the industrial relations heading. We want to set up a Registrar of Association Unit to register and keep records on trade union of

employees and enterprises while at the same time we want to make sure that occupational safety are carefully observed on the premises of these enterprises for the welfare of their workers. We are also strengthening the office of the Social Security Division with additional officers with a view to providing a better service to our needy citizens.

Mr Chairperson, Sir,

As I say this very first budget proposal makes provision for a certain number of new and additional posts which are necessary for the matching of the prevailing workload in the Commissions operating under this Assembly with the manpower requirements. It is a known fact that some sectors are under staffed and need strengthening but it is obvious that all the posts needed cannot be created because of financial constraints, and need for rationalisation cannot be ignored.

Mr Chairperson, Sir,

In such circumstances, the understanding of trade unions and all our social partners is important. We all have to strive in a way to ensure that limited human resources available under this Assembly are fully utilised at the level at which they are expected to operate. At this point in time where we are taking the challenge of the success of the autonomy, it is important that managers, head of divisions and supervisors of administrative units

ensure that individual officers have well-defined functions and tasks directed towards the accomplishment of organisational goals and objectives.

Mr Chairperson, Sir,

This Assembly cannot create posts only for the sake of creating posts to absorb the unemployed or to meet temporary needs. “Je suis sure que le Chef Commissaire conviendra avec moi qu’un homme sans principe est comme un bateau sans radar que bien souvent finit comme le titanic sous l’eau”. A responsible Executive Council cannot act in an irresponsible manner, nor can any trade union cannot mislead its members. Posts can be created when it brings added value to work and when a job inspection exercise has been carried out. The number of posts to be created and their concomitant levels must also be fully justified.

I am fully satisfied that this budget provides for the renewal of the contract of all the General Field and Office Premises workers of the Anti-Erosion Programme.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, although this budget has adequately set forth the measures that are required to boost up productivity and the economic take-off of Rodrigues, we reckon that there is still need to provide direct financial assistance to the disadvantaged and to the most needy. In this recurrent budget, provision announced by the Chief Commissioner to increase the

social aid to Rs 14 000 000 is most appreciated. This provision will be used for the payment to the poorest section of the population when the persons concerned are unable to earn a living.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, other categories of people who require financial assistance are our senior citizens, the widows, the invalid and orphans. Provisions have also been made for financial assistance to other categories of hardship cases including the unemployed persons with family responsibility where the income is not sufficient to meet the needs of the household; and assistance to professional fishermen in the form of payment of bad weather and a closed season allowance.

The introduction of a new item in this recurrent budget to cater for the setting up of a Rodrigues Economic and Social Committee is innovative. As I have mentioned earlier, we care for our people, especially the weak and those who need support. But at the same time, we want to stimulate beneficiaries of social assistance towards production according to their ability.

This Economic and Social Committee will consist of all stakeholders of our society including NGOs and will look into ways and means of how we can encourage our able citizens who are recipient of a social assistance towards productivity. The activities of this committee will be of paramount

importance for us to succeed in our ultimate aim of promoting a society with ‘des hommes et des femmes debout’. That is why, a token vote has been provided in this budget to ensure the financial means for the proper functioning of this committee.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the members of the other side of this assembly have raised the absence of a Capital estimate in this budget and has pressed for measures for the reintegration of the disabled and the Senior Citizens.

I would like to remind my colleagues members that the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act does not confer the responsibility for policy development with respect to Social Security matters to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. This responsibility rests with the relevant ministry of the central government in Mauritius. My commission is only responsible for the administrative matters as far as social security matters are concerned. That is why Mr Chairperson, Sir, we are aiming at providing better services to our needy people and I have mentioned earlier that we are starting in this budget a strengthening programme of the Social Security Division by providing additional staff to achieve this objective.

As regards the suggestion made by the Minority Leader to construct additional Social Security Centres, I would remind him that all government offices are constructed from funds available under the item 30-102-002

(construction of government buildings) for which a sum of Rs 15,000,000 has been earmarked and includes provision for the La Ferme Administrative Complex which will accommodate a Social Security Office. Besides there are 5 regional centres which are under construction under the Trust Fund for the Vulnerable group programme and will cater for the welfare of the most needy.

In addition, provision has been made for the provision of Regional Centres under the Commission of Arts & Culture, Women's Affairs, Family Welfare Child and Community Development which will integrate any need for Social Centres. In fact Mr Chairperson, this Commission is twin with my commission and our activities are complementary with respect to social assistance. Reintegration of the vulnerable groups will be undertaken under the Community development programme.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, all the measures announced in this budget strongly reflect the commitment of this governing Executive Council to honour its engagement contracted with the population who has doubly plebiscited our electoral manifest during the last September and January elections. We do not want to deceive the trust put in us and with this budget, I am confident Mr Chairperson, Sir, that we will meet the challenge.

Thank you.

**The Commissioner for Sports, Trade and Commerce (Mr N. Lisette):**

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like first of all to congratulate my Chief Commissioner for his 2003/2004 Budget Speech and also congratulate those who have been very closely involved in the preparation thereof. I would like on the same occasion to congratulate my fellow friends Commissioners for their respective speeches which they have so brilliantly delivered. Mr Chairperson, Sir, this regional government under the leadership of our Chief Commissioner is taking its responsibility to develop this country. The measures taken in this budget shows the longsightedness of this government. There is behind it a strong philosophy of development and a vision for a better society. *[The members on the other side of the House will understand better our philosophy as I proceed with my speech.]*

Mr Chairperson, Sir, with all these investments stated, we find that the minority party does not mention even the major works which are coming. I will avoid questioning the genuineness of the members on the other side but I will leave it to the respective Commissioners to reply to what have been said about their Commissions. Anyway, we will not allow pressure of the moment to steal over the promises of the future. I am very much surprised and deceived by the stand of the minority party. They criticised the regional government as spending lavishly public funds but they come here to say that

we should spend more on this and that. Mr Chairperson, Sir, as far as I know, the Chief Commissioner and Commissioners cannot sing incantations and have money coming from the sky. I know that the role of the opposition is to oppose, fair enough, but honestly one cannot change one's tone in so short a time !!

This budget is geared towards the people and I can venture to term it as the people's budget because it is based on people's priorities. This shows how this regional government is committed firmly to the people of this island and their welfare. This budget is strikingly non-discriminatory and no section of the population has been left out. In fact, it caters for a wide spectrum of the population right from the infant, the youth, women to the old age pensioners. It strikes a right balance between social welfare and economic activity incentives so that the people do not become excessively dependent on the welfare state but become achievement oriented. It encourages entrepreneurship and aims at achieving and advancing the aspirations of many, thus attempting to deliver the economy back to the people.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the budget has taken on board the views of each and everyone, the poor and the rich, the young and the elderly, the employers and the employees and has tried to conciliate all the parameters for the development of our island. This has been rendered possible by the

pre-budgetary consultations that were done with the different stakeholders, and I should point out here that this in line with our manifesto—*une participation democrative*.

This budget enhances access to education, training and human resource development and this is in line with the National Reform. Mr Chairperson, Sir, it is not by accident and surely not only by political motive that this government is proposing to invest massively in education, training and human resource development. No country can progress without education and still less our island since one of the main resources that we have is human resource. In fact, as far back as 1982, great emphasis was laid by the OPR party to increase the literacy rate of the population and still more, tertiary education facilities were given to our youth. A sum of 3.5 millions rupees for training has been earmarked at the Human Resource Centre. This shows, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that this regional government is aware that human resource development is a signpost for the future. The investment in education and training is going to prepare our youth to face the challenges of the coming years.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, let me now turn to a subject which is close to me and to the country -- that is sports. The practice of sports in Rodrigues is as strong as a religious belief as a result of our determination and dedication to

serve the island. The new impetus now provided by the Executive Council through the Commission of Youth and Sports will certainly lead the way to the highest level of the podium.

Under the banner of autonomy, a decoration has been awarded to one of our dedicated coaches. I am here referring to the award given to Mr Azarias Baptiste as the Member of the Order of the Star and Key (M.S.K) of the Indian Ocean for the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Independence and 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Republic for his dedicated work done for the promotion of sports in Rodrigues. This is a clear message of double significance that the Republic of Mauritius has sent to us. First of all, for our outstanding performance in the field of sports and more specifically in the field of athletics. Secondly, it is message to state that we people from Rodrigues can play and create together a Republic of Mauritius to which we all owe undivided allegiance.

I take this opportunity also to thank all the regional sports committees and the sport coaches for their contribution towards this new beginning, the new symbols and the new sporting ethos that has been built with the installation of the autonomy. Achieving the sports goals we have set for will depend on close teamwork between the regional government and the sports

world. On its part, the regional government is committed to the creation of an ideal climate for sports to thrive within the constraints of our budget.

Since the coming into operation of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, no effort has been spared to boost up the level of sports on the island. Hand in hand with our political transition, a broader vision for a free and vigorous sports community is coming into being. Many measures have already been taken to achieve these goals and these include the following :

The sports awards event which is going to be held at the end of every year will be the occasion where sports persons, administrators and coaches will be rewarded for their demonstrated dedication to sports, excellence and the ability to humble themselves even under the most challenging of circumstances. This award ceremony will also ensure their continuing contribution to sports and earn them the lasting respect of our island. I am confident that this award will encourage the recipients to build on their successful sports careers and continue to serve our country as the role models and ambassadors that they are.

The Sports co-ordinating Committee stipulated in the Sports Act

aims at promoting and monitoring the work of the different regional sports committees on the island and for formulating recommendations to the Commissioner of Sports for orientations of sports.

As the House is aware, the Rodriguan athletes are prominent members of the selection representing the Republic of Mauritius. The Executive Council at its sitting of 27th March has agreed to provide a stipend of Rs 500 to all the pre-selected athletes of the Indian Ocean Island Games to be held in August this year. This is with a view to enhancing the possibility of the Rodriguan athletes to reap in more medals in the games. Also, in view of the Judo team competition which is to be held at Malabar gymnasium in August this year, my Commission will start the renovation of the infrastructure shortly. Already, the Commission of Public Infrastructure is tarring the road leading to the gymnasium and parking facilities will be constructed.

The renovation of the Sports complexes of La Ferme and Mangué, tenders are being floated for the allocation of the work; and

As regards Camp du Roi Stadium, unfortunately, Cyclone Kalunde has caused much damage to the infrastructure. As regards the stadium, my Commission has already taken measures for the installation of the hammer cage and le saut à la perche.

I am very also proud to announce to the House that, for the celebration of the 35th Anniversary of Independance and the 11th Anniversary of the Republic, most of the sports disciplines have been able to organise an event proving that the sports sector is gaining momentum. (Just listen to the radio news everyday).

Mr Chairperson, Sir,

As announced by the Chief Commissioner, the budget under the vote item Promotion for Sports Activities has increased from 2 millions to 3.7 millions rupees representing a percentage increase of 85 %. This shows that this government is committed to boost up the level of sports on the island. In addition to this, my Commission is making arrangements for opening the gymnasium up to 20.00 hours at night.

Mr Chairperson, Sir provision for the creation of the post of two Sports Officers has also been made in the present budget. This is very important as these officers will provide training and assistance to team captains, in matters such as organisation, finance, planning and coaching. This has long been felt in the Sports Division. As you can see, Mr Chairperson, Sir, this regional government is setting up the necessary institutional framework for the promotion of sports in Rodrigues.

Provisions have also been made in the proposed capital budget for the sum of Rs 3 million for the construction of stands and cloakrooms on the football ground of Oyster Bay and upgrading of the other grounds . A further provision of Rs 28 millions has been earmarked for the construction of the swimming pool at Marechal. There is no doubt, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that with all these massive investments and measures, our sportsmen will be evolving in a better atmosphere.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, another subject, which is close to me and which I have at heart is the Youth sector. One needs to acknowledge the positive effects of sports on our youth. One also needs to acknowledge progress made in the transformation of the education system since 1982; the establishment of mechanisms to make health better; the encouragement of economic growth through sound political and economic policy. These are just some of the positive developments of which youth are among the primary beneficiaries.

The youth of today needs guidance from leaders. I agree to some extent that leaders are not made; they are born leaders but everyone will agree with me that the spirit of leadership can be learnt. This is why in this budget 2003/2004, special emphasis will be laid for providing leadership courses to our youngsters. I believe strongly that courses in leadership will

help our youngsters give a practical shape to their plans and visions and this will lead to a more prosperous Rodrigues.

My Commission also aims in budget 2003/2004 to organize a Youth Week which will engage the youth in various activities such as community work, in cleaning up campaigns, in repairing and maintenance work which at large will help in rebuilding a culture of learning and social responsibility. Such an activity will lead the youngsters in rebuilding communities, and by extension, in rebuilding our nation.

But I agree that this is not sufficient. Youth needs to be given enough time to interact among themselves. This is why my Commission had decided to open youth centres up to 20.00 hours especially during the weekends. Youth also needs to have direct access to government to input into the shaping of government policy, particularly around issues that affect them. Youth also needs to direct government in addressing the particular social, political, educational, economic, cultural and recreational needs of youth. The regional government will do its best to make democracy work by listening to the voice of the youth by organizing debates as frequently as possible with the youth clubs. Other activities which will aim at empowering our youth are training in

entreprenariat, regional seminars on life skill management for youth, talks for out of school youth on AIDS/STD and reproductive health.

For carrying out all these activities and other recreational activities, a provision of Rs 900,000 has been earmarked under the vote of item promotion of youth activities for the coming financial year.

The youth of Rodrigues are by no means lost for they have within them the seeds of a new, better, caring society. And it is the responsibility of all of us the leaders of today - to nurture those seeds, guarding against the harsh climate, so that they may grow and flourish. This is one of the noble and challenging tasks that my Commission aims at undertaking for these Rodriguan youths.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, SMEs have a critical role to play in raising the overall level of employment in the country. The SMEs of today, if properly guided and supported, can develop into major enterprises to-morrow. They are also the testing ground for the new breed of enterprising and risk taking Rodriguans who can take Rodrigues to the next phase of its economic development. These entrepreneurs deserve our full support.

First, Government will vulgarise the National SME Support Framework. The objective is to ensure that business support services like

advice, training, finance and marketing are provided in an effective and co-ordinated manner. The Rodrigues Branch of the Small and Medium Industries Development Organisation (SMIDO) will be strengthened to act as a gateway for SME support.

Second, the Rodrigues Venture Capital Fund will be boosted up. The Venture Capital Fund will provide loans for equity participation.

The setting up of the Rodrigues Marketing and Trade Agency will give a boost to the marketing and exports of our products. Our products will have its due recognition if they abide by standards and quality control. Mr Chairperson, Sir, this is why it is worth noting the visit of a delegation of the Mauritius Standards Bureau during the month of February where recommendations were made to appoint a desk officer in Rodrigues who will be responsible for the implementation of standards and quality control of our local products. Assistance will also be provided for identifying basic testing and calibration equipments that could be installed in Rodrigues for a better quality of our products.

I feel very strongly, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that our island is moving in the right direction for prosperity and this is done through hard work and sacrifice and not through nonsense talk as the other side of the House does.

I end here Mr Chairperson, Sir, by saying that through this budget, this regional government is preparing this island for the future and is looking at sustainable growth in the existing sectors. I congratulate once more my Chief Commissioner for bringing this budget to the Assembly and I am proud to say that I back this budget fully.

Thank you Mr Chairperson, Sir.

**The Commissioner for Health (Mr S. Sooprayen):** Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Draft Estimates presented by the Chief Commissioner last Monday contains many policy measures that will contribute towards enhancement in the living conditions of our population.

I wish to point out that this Budget will help stimulate the development of the private sector to create productive employment for our youngsters, facilitate the promotion of income generating activities, and the alleviation of poverty. The housing programme which is taking off is meant mainly for the poor and ,therefore, a social measure.

So far, as Health is concerned, I can gladly say that there are signs of progress throughout. For example, a decline in the mortality rate be it infants or adults as well as an increase in the life expectancy for both male and female is noted. Nevertheless our young, responsible and caring regional government aims at greater and further improvement particularly in

the field of Health Services. Much emphasis will be put on PREVENTION and protective measures to ease the living conditions of the people.

Besides our existing staff, we are proposing to create some new posts – such as 1 (one) Nutritionist, 1 (one) Principal Medical Laboratory Technician, 1 (one) Pharmacist and 12 Health Care Assistants to cope with the present situation. Some 40 trained Rodriguan Nursing Officers will take work in Rodrigues in three months.

We are also looking forward to see to it that visiting specialists in different fields stay longer to follow closer the state of their patients.

As far as care is concerned, besides the Intensive Care Unit, Haemodialysis Unit, Physiotherapy Unit, amongst others, a new Chemistry Analyser has been provided to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in order to ensure rapid quality analysis of blood in Rodrigues itself.

- A mental health facility will be set up.
- A SAMU service will be provided.
- The NCD programme will be fully established with health education unit including Community Physician
- Paediatric Services will be strengthened.

- A programme of development, general renovation, especially at the two areas Health Centres at Mt. Lubin and La Ferme and Community Health Centres will be carried out.
- Further decentralisation of operational management will be effected to promote local decision making on local matters and local management of operation budget.
- A “Carnet de Santé” will be introduced for each one.
- A Family Doctor Service will be developed.
- Establishment of a Geriatric Ward to cater for the senior citizens at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH)
- Establishment of an Information Centre for Health personnel to comprise a library and computers with internet facilities, etc.
- Need to integrate the Community Health Agents or more commonly known as “**agents de santé communautaire**” into the health sector
- Student Nurses could complete part of their training at the Human Resource Centre in Rodrigues with tutors from the Mauritius Institute of Health (MIH).
- Focusing on Workshops and Seminars allowing Talks on issues relating to health. The agents de santé would also contribute.

**THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT DEVOTE MUCH TO THE ADAGE**

**“HEALTH IS WEALTH”**

Mr Chairperson, Sir, a good percentage of the budget is devoted to Health. In fact a sum of Rs 128.9 million of which Rs 124.1 million represents Recurrent Expenditure and Rs 4.8 million for project expenditure and medical equipment, under capital estimates.

On the Recurrent Expenditure Rs 96 million have been earmarked for personal emoluments and other allowances to staff. Moreover a sum of Rs 25.5 million have been allocated for goods and services of which Rs 11.3 million is meant for medicine, surgical dressings and medical disposables.

Patients will continue benefiting from medicine and care free of charge. I am ensuring also that we have a stock of medicine in reserve through more effective procurement planning. A provision of Rs 2.5 million has been made for assistance to patients inoperable in Rodrigues.

Coming back to infrastructure health development project, provision is also made for:

- renovation of Maternity Ward and Operating Theatre
- resurfacing of concrete alleys
- construction of toilets, cloak rooms and bath rooms for kitchen staff.

We are not only thinking over the short term but are also planning and considering the long term. Only last Friday we had a consultative workshop on the subject of **“White paper on health sector reform and development”** at the Human Resource Centre in Malabar. About 35 stakeholders in the sector were present. Projects and policies and modality of financing elaborated in the white paper were discussed at the meeting and several interesting proposals such as the upgrading of the existing Health Centres, the establishment of facilities to receive the psychiatric patients, the upgrading of the Maternity ward with separate facilities for maternity section and gynaecology emerged during the discussions.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I have three other divisions under my responsibility. They are also important though they consume a small part of out budgetary resources. These are the Reform institutions, the Fire Services and the Co-operative Services.

The fire Services has acquired essential fire fighting equipment. We are in the process of procuring a tanker and additional fire fighting equipment would be purchased during the next Financial year.

I have had the opportunity of visiting Pointe La Gueule Prisons, the infrastructure and amenities existing there are quite reasonable and I have made arrangements to buy some books for the detainees. The wall

construction is now ongoing while the extension works on the first floor is nearing completion.

Thanking you Mr Chairman, Sir.

**Mr. L. ROUSSETY (Commissioner for Education & Others) - Mr.**

Chairperson, Sir, As the Commissioner responsible for Education and Training, I can but express my satisfaction for the brave and daring provisions made by the Chief Commissioner in his budget proposals, that is Rs 151 millions representing 13,4% of the total budgetary expenditure, of which Recurrent expenditure is Rs 50,9 millions and Capital expenditure is Rs 91,5 millions. A sum of Rs 89.5 millions has been earmarked to meet the massive investment in the construction and extension of our Secondary Schools. To date, the extension works at Le Chou College, has been completed to provide 12 additional classrooms and 6 specialist rooms. The student population has increased to 909 excluding 146 form VI students who are now at Citron Donis College.

Mont Lubin College which is expected to be ready for occupation at the end of May of this year will provide 27 classrooms and 10 specialist rooms. Meanwhile its 160 students are being temporarily accommodated in 5 classrooms at Le Chou College.

The extension works at Marechal College have just started.

Although it is to be regretted that Citron Donis College is suffering a long delay in the completion of its specialist rooms, we look forward to its completion very soon.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir

It is to be noted that thanks to the expansion of our Secondary School infrastructure that level of employment in our colleges has increased by 38 teachers and 12 in other grades. Additionally, as pointed out by the Chief Commissioner in his Budget Proposals, 35 new teachers have been recruited for Government Primary and RCEA Schools.

Mr. Chairperson Sir

It is an undeniable fact that the RCEA has been and still is a life-long and faithful partner of Government in the field of primary education in this our blessed island. It is therefore just and pertinent that sufficient provisions are made in the Chief Commissioner's Budget Proposals to meet the heavy costs of repairs to Ste Famille and Don Bosco Primary Schools.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir

In the face of an economy set to undergo unprecedented changes in relation to the boost-up exercises that are being applied particularly in the tourist industry, skills requirements for existing jobs and higher skills in specialized areas of both the public and private sectors will have to be met.

The importance of training becomes, therefore, an unconditional in the development of our human resources to answer the demands placed on every income-generating activity in an expanding economy, especially in the Private Sector such as agriculture and farming.

The Human Resource Centre is taking off as a hive of industry in the field of Information and Technology by the dispensation of training through its brand-new computer laboratory, commissioned earlier this week. Together, and in partnerships with the IVTB, the Human Resource Centre is set to play a major role in organizing courses to meet local demands in the hotel and tourist industry through the use of its modern industrial kitchen , as well as other courses to meet each and every demand from interested parties.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir

It is therefore highly commendable that the Chief Commissioner has foreseen a sum of Rs 3.5 million for the Training Programme. I would draw the attention of the 2<sup>nd</sup> member for La Ferme to the financial provision made for training on page 29 of the Chief Commissioner's speech.

### ***Library Services***

I also note with great satisfaction that library services are being given a boost and library opening hours are being extended within the next few days.

### ***Museums and Archives***

Last but not least, it was high time that one of our most important historical landmarks, that is Tombeau Marragon at L'Union, should undergo restoration works and the surrounding area developed as a tourist attraction and a memorial to slavery. This will be in a humble way our answer to the Aprovasi Ghat in Mauritius

**Commissioner (Mrs. Marie Arlette PERRINE BEGUE)** Mr. Chairperson Sir, My Commission has obtained a budgetary allocation of Rs.20,6 million for the next financial year, of which Rs.10.1 million are meant for Recurrent Expenditure and Rs.10.5 for development projects. I have the pleasure to express my satisfaction at the huge amount allocated to the Capital and Recurrent Budget. The provision in the Capital Budget has increased from merely Rs.1,1 million to Rs.10,5 5 million. On the other hand the provision for the Recurrent Budget has also risen from less than 4 million to Rs,10,1 million. The increase in the provision shows the importance that this regional government attaches to women and children.

In fact Mr. Chairperson Sir, my Commission deserves this allocation in view of the five areas of responsibilities which I look after. It is of course a new Commission with few staff, few infrastructure and lack of appropriate structures.

Firstly, I started with a small office for Arts and Culture where there was an only a clerk, an office attendant without any Arts Officer. Besides, there was no mechanism for the implementation of our cultural policies with the exception of an old building which awaits demolition.

As far as Women Affairs is concerned, it is also not well accommodated, located as they are in small rooms at La Ferme and Malabar respectively. Both centres are concurrently managed by only one Woman Organiser where only a limited number of women could stay at one time. As regard Community development it is new area of responsibility allocated to this Assembly. Here also I am in a certain way a pioneer Commissioner where I have to initiate almost everything though I must concede that a considerable work is already being carried out by the NGOs. I do not have any budget item under my control to carry out the poverty alleviation programme and I do not have any specialised technical staff to act in accordance with the rising expectations of the population and the political will of the Executive Council.

I would like to thank the Chief Commissioner for having recognised the sensitive needs of my Commission as a whole. The Budget allocated to my Commission will enable me lay down the proper foundation, organization

structures and appropriate infrastructure to favour the development of different activities which fall within my jurisdiction.

Mr.Chairman, Sir

Let me briefly review the budgetary proposals of my Commission for the next financial year 2003-2004. First, Arts and Culture. As I said in my maiden speech of 7 January 2003 the cultural dimension of our development is a sine qua non factor that will determine the success of our autonomy which resides in our specificities. The infinitesimal little thing that makes Rodrigues so different and special to the world is her culture. Rodrigues, like every single country, of the world has something unique. Here in Rodrigues what makes us proud to be who we are our traditions and customs. The fact that we put so much emphasis on our specificity makes us become more tolerant and respectful to each other's difference.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, I am proud to be "La gardienne de L'ame Rodriguaise" and my policies shall be meticulous, sensitive and ambitious. We will proceed slowly but surely.

This Budget makes a provision of Rs.69 millions meant for the construction of 6 Cultural and Leisure centres throughout the island. The first budgetary allocation of the first Rodrigues Regional Assembly will enable us to establish the first cultural centre in the centre of the island; we have already

prepared the tender documents and are awaiting the floating of the tenders.

We propose to start construction works before the end of this financial year.

The first Cultural Centre would be constructed right in Lataniers, the locality identified by geomorphologists as “ La Bouche de Rodrigues” that is the site where the crater of the volcano forming Rodrigues is situated and thus deserves being chosen as the artistic cradle of Rodrigues.

Not less than half a dozen drama groups are found there. It is there that the famous cultural group “Bois Sirop Di Bois Dir” and many of our singers, musicians and story tellers reside. The Centre will pay homage to the village, encourage the artists, the large number of drama groups, both traditional and modern, and the singers of the villages of Palissage Ternel, St, Gabriel and Mont Lubin to quote just a few.

We are planning to establish six (6) such cultural centres in Rodrigues in regions which show interest cultural values with a view to ensuring that they are fully utilised.

We believe in participatory democracy. All project activities will be identified and carried out on the basis of participative planning, that is in close consultation with the world of artists and the population in general. In fact, the whole population should be involved as it is there in the cultural centres that our cultural policy will be implemented.

The centres will promote productive cultural activities which artists could utilise. Secondly, training and activities relating to socialization would be organized. Thirdly, it will provide access to leisure at a time when we are asking the population to engage themselves more heavily in social and economic activities.

I am really satisfied with the provisions made for cultural development. In fact, a sum of Rs.1,2 millions is meant for the promotion of arts and culture. The budget has been increased by many folds compared to the past budgets. The funds would be utilized for the following activities.

Celebrations of Abolition of slavery and Music day,

Holding of 3 drama festivals in different languages

Exhibitions by artists and painters in Rodrigues and other places,

Culture exchanges with other countries and

Introduction of some form of assistance to the artists to encourage them produce creative works.

Despite several applications, no artists from Rodrigues has been able to benefit from the assistance earmarked for artists. The most important task lying ahead is how to utilise the funds judiciously.

I therefore propose to carry out a situation analysis on the state of our culture, our achievements to date, actual mobilisation, and the definitions of future axes of intervention.

Moreover, provision has been made for the hosting of three major celebrations in Rodrigues. A sum of Rs.1,2 millions is meant for the celebrations marking the Independence and the Republic days. A sum of Rs.1 million is also devoted to a Rodrigues celebration day to commemorate the coming into force of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly and a sum of Rs.1 million for celebrations of the “Festival Créole” which has now become an important festival at the international level when we take into account that a large number of foreigners visit Rodrigues on that occasion.

The Festival Creole has now become an important part of the life in Rodrigues.

Mr. Chairperson Sir,

Allow me one last word on the budgetary allocation to culture to underline the future reinforcement of the Commission in terms of personnel and the establishment of a cultural council.

I now turn to the other challenging portfolio of my Commission that is women Affairs, Child Development and Family Welfare. Here also I wish

to express my appreciation at the political will expressed by the regional government to develop this sector.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, when we speak of girls and women we are talking of 50% of our population. If the other children and families are added to it over which responsibility has been attributed to my Commission, we are in fact referring to the whole population.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, after the Rs.100,000 provided to start construction procedures of an Integrated Centre for women this budget makes provision for 1,5 millions to start the construction of a comprehensive infrastructure.

The first block will comprise the Child Development unit & the Family counseling service and the second block will comprise the Women Empowerment bloc where women's policies can be implemented.

When talking of women's policies, Mr. Chairperson, Sir, may I refer to the item 04-102.194 of the recurrent budget where the provision for Women's Development and Family Welfare has been increased the tenfold passing from Rs.293,981 to Rs,1,292,000.

I thank the Chief Commissioner, the Commissioner with responsibility for finance, my other colleagues and officers of the finance cadre in Rodrigues and Mauritius for their sensitivity to women's issues.

This budget Mr. Chairperson, Sir, will enable us to put into application ambitious project aiming at encouraging the women to participate actively in economic development through training and to establish a women health policy with emphasis on nutrition and sports. The Commission and the Ministry for women Affairs in Mauritius will jointly finance a programme for trainers in Mauritius on Home Economics, dressmaking , food processing and will also encourage the establishment of agricultural clubs for women.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, this budget also makes provision for the setting up of a Rodrigues Women's Development Council and a Rodrigues Children's Council. These institutions will act as key consultative bodies to my Commission on matters pertaining to women and children and will comprise an Executive Board each, comprising NGO members and officers to carry out a number of activities for the promotion of women and children.

An initial amount of Rs,100,000 has been provided for that purpose pending enactment of the relevant regional legislation.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, statistics on family problems is a cause of concern to us. It reveals that there are many cases of domestic violence, incest, rapes etc. and they are on the rise. The Children are the most affected. There is therefore a strong justification for the establishment of women refuge

centres which would be one of our future projects. In the meantime we have to send some of the battered women, and children in distress, to the refuge centres in Mauritius. With a view to enabling the construction of such centre in Rodrigues, a new item has been introduced in the budget with a provision of Rs.50,000 entitled “Assistance to women and Children in Distress”

Last but not least Mr. Chairperson Sir, as you are aware, I am also responsible for Community Development. This is another new area of responsibility conferred to Rodrigues by the RRA Act. As a pioneer Commissioner in this field, I am responsible to lay the foundation stone of this activity. I am quite conscious of the great responsibilities that is bestowed upon me.

Mr. Chairperson Sir,

I am of the opinion that the state should intervene judiciously in community development. I will rely on the collaboration of the NGOs who already play a leading role in this sector.

The performance of voluntary labour in Rodrigues has been a pillar of our socio-economic life. It is the commitment of NGOs that has contributed to the success of the established Community Centres. However NGOs do not possess adequate financial means to ensure the maintenance, the community

centre buildings which they now manage. The costs cannot be borne alone through voluntary contribution especially in regions where people are very poor. It is here that the regional government should bring its contribution, without taking over the buildings. Community development cannot be undertaken solely by the NGOs; it requires a collaboration of both the NGOs, the Government and the community at large. Through our actions we propose to bring some social activities around the centres and also encompass all sections of the population.

In fact, Mr. Chairperson Sir, in terms of community development this regional government has a vision to foster a community spirit and promote social cohesion among local communities in both the towns and rural areas.

Today with the introduction of media, our communities are more familiar with ways of living in other countries, and are taking foreign societies as reference, ignoring our customs and traditions. People tends to stay at home and it is feared that lack of socialization among the youths and the other segments of the population may prevent the transmission of Rodriguan customs and traditions. Only a good organisation of community life can help transmission of values and traditions from the older generation to the new ones.

Our first mission is to create, Mr. Chairperson Sir, a “conducive environment for our social structures to design and implement social welfare and community development programmes that are responsive to social needs and that encourage the participation and empowerment of the local community, and to act as facilitators and change agents in the process of social development through preventive social work based on improved and regular access to information, education, leisure and other social amenities.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, to do this work, I am of the opinion that we must have the necessary staff. Two additional posts of Welfare Officer have been created in this budget bringing the number to three. Three others will be required “a raison d’un officier par region” to be able to monitor the programme of activities offered at community level.

In fact, we favour a two pronged approach as far as community development is concerned. This regional government also proposes a new enactment to review the Rodrigues Council of Social Services so that it may become an umbrella NGO like the Mauritius Council of Social Services – MACOSS in Mauritius. The village committees may for their part form another separate entity which, as any other Rodriguan NGO can, be affiliated with equal rights to the RCSS. Discussions are now underway and we hope to have

consensus for “Une reanimation” of the social fabric of our beloved island in the interest of all.

As you are aware government has contracted a loan of Rs.41 million rupees with from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for financing part of community Development projects in the forms of grants. One of my Commission’s priority will be to mobilise and orient the grassroots level to benefit fully from the programme in order to ease the poverty situation.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, as you are aware the Executive Council has just conferred upon me the responsibility of “Eradication of Poverty” in Rodrigues. In the first instance I would like to recruit a professional with specialisation in the subject in order to help implement the policy of the Executive Council in matters relating to poverty and coordinate the activities of different organisations presently working in Rodrigues for the eradication of poverty.

Mr. Chairperson Sir, the seven members of the Executive Council are, as you know, collectively responsible for the preparation of the Draft estimates already submitted before this Assembly. As a member of the Executive Council I wish to affirm my pride at the budget presented by the leader of

this august Assembly that is the Chief Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Central Administration including Finance.

Although we had a tough time managing four “dinosaurs” since the beginning of this year, that is

First, the transition period faced with lack of personnel in all the Commissions,

Secondly, the restructuring of the budget 2002-2003,

Thirdly, the preparation of budget 2003-2004

And lastly, cyclone Kalunde

I am proud and we should all be proud, be it Commissioners, Departmental heads, officers of the finance cadre, collaborators and all staff for the colossal works carried out under the direction of the Chief Commissioner within such a short lapse of time.

To conclude Mr. Chairperson Sir, as the Commissioner responsible for Arts and Culture, Women’s Affairs, Child Development, Family Welfare, Community Development and Eradication of poverty I can assure you that, apart from the specific provision made under my Commission, many of the bold measures taken by the Chief Commissioner will have considerable impact on the different fields that I am responsible for. I wish to mention some of the measures:- for instance:-

The restyling of the school feeding project will allow women to produce and process local produce. Our women will save time on production rather than spending long hours carrying food for the school children. I am sure the children will be better nourished, with a more balanced diet. I am convinced this will be a great help for our poor children who are mal nourished.

In regard to Social Security provisions, here-again women and children will benefit from social aid to which they are eligible.

The Infrastructure projects especially roads will enhance community welfare and eradicate poverty.

In respect of education, the decentralized nine year schooling will guarantee access of poorer people to education.

With the establishment of the Marketing and Trade Agency many families will be able to sell their produce at competitive prices although prices will tend to fluctuate.

Mr. Le Président, je termine avec cette citation des paroles de Sénèque qui sont aussi valables aujourd'hui qu'il y a 2000 ans <ce n'est pas parce que la vie est difficile que nous n'osons pas, c'est parce que nous n'osons pas que la vie est difficile> Etant les premiers architectes de cette île Rodrigues

autonome, Le Conseil Executif a osé aller le plus loin possible selon les limites qui nous sont imposées.

Nous tous population, secteur privé et le gouvernement Osons à notre tour jeter les bases institutionnelles et économiques de ce pays a travers une implémentation responsable et efficace de ce budget , ceci afin de permettre au peuple Rodriguais de passer au travers des portails sous lesquels se trouvent l'égalité, la dignité et la liberté.

Certains, Monsieur le président, nous reprochent de ne pas avoir fait assez dans la conjoncture actuelle. Moi je fais fi de cette hypocrisie et ce cynisme, puisque il y a deux semaines seulement, ici même dans cette Assemblée, ces mêmes personnes disaient qu'ils ne fallait pas aller de l'avant avec les projets mais de ce concentrer uniquement a repenser les blessures de Kalunde. Nous ne sommes pas tomber dans ce quet-apens politique. Pour pouvoir s'assumer lui-même, L'homme doit d'abord assumer ses paroles et savoir ce qu'il veut et ce qu'il est.

Moi je réplique que ce premier budget de l'autonomie est prévoyant, planifie, courageux et calculé, eu égard au nombreux mesures et projets a court et a long terme qu'il propose. Notre chef commissaire a été tout autant ambitieux que mesuré, comme se doit de l'être un gouvernement responsable. Et Rodrigues sera comme la sagesse d'une rose qui ne

s'impatiente pas de grandir mais qui vit le rythme d'une évolution naturelle sans prendre le risque de travestir le processus.

Pas a pas, instant après instant nous faisons notre existence.

**Mr. Jean Daniel SPEVILLE (The Deputy Chief Commissioner)** Mr. Chairperson, Sir, It is my pleasure to comment on this 2003-2004 draft estimates especially with regard to the new philosophy of its contents and vision. In the light of major world developments and its impact on the economy of our motherland Mauritius, we have to prepare our Rodriguans to face tough challenges ahead of us. As we are small island with limited natural resources, this regional government has to ensure sustainable growth in all major sectors such as tourism, small industries and agriculture and at the same time provide necessary care to the old and the poor segment of the population .

Mr Chairperson, Sir, it was with a deep sense of duty towards the Rodriguan people that I presented the first Budget review of this Executive Council in January last. Allow me to quote the followings words from my speech.

*“Governing is about managing change efficiently and sustainably, whilst still allowing for change, flexibility and innovation. This first Budget*

*Review exercise, which comes along this line, is aimed at using financial resources already allocated to Rodrigues by the Central Government to the best of our possibilities and in accordance to our new priorities so as to implement major developments that can have a wide range of impacts on the island. We are now again called upon to take the necessary measures to face the challenges ahead and to lead Rodrigues to a brighter and prosperous future with much more confidence.” UNQUOTE*

I am pleased to note that this Draft estimates presented by the Chief Commissioner is not only a continuation of our vision but it provides the necessary tools and frameworks for the strengthening of this vision.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, allow me to recall some of the main philosophies behind the budget as stated by the Chief Commissioner:-

- Infrastructural development in the road, water and airport sector;
- Social and economic development;
- Creation of employment in productive sectors;
- Human resource development including training;
- Improved public service especially in the health and education sectors;
- Development of small scale enterprises;

- Protection of environment;
- Poverty eradication and social integration of the weakest segments of the population.

We have introduced a new style of management characterised by proactive management, good governance, transparency, productive dialogue and the enhancement of individual and collective responsibility, all based on a participatory approach. We are witnessing this great change by the vast majority of Rodriguans through their dedicated attitude at work, especially after the passage of cyclone Kalunde.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I must stress right here that these same efforts shall have to be relentlessly pursued over the coming years in view of the numerous emerging challenges ahead. It is clear that the task facing us will be a tough one indeed. And let me repeat it once again, it will have to be pursued relentlessly and with determination, year after year, over the next five years. **All of us, irrespective of our political opinion, will have to work in discipline, with commitment and dedication, year in year out, in order to reach our final goals.**

I will now comment on the budget proposals relating to my Commission.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, one of the key elements of our vision is to strengthen and modernise our physical infrastructure to meet the needs of our economy and the aspirations of our population. The road sector is one where massive investments will continue to be made. I am pleased to note that the Capital estimates of the Road construction item has increased threefold from Rs 20 millions to Rs 64 millions. This unprecedented increase will be used for the implementation of a comprehensive programme of road upgrading and construction. Our priority will be to improve access to remote villages. Improvement of access roads to the following villages will be carried as top priorities: -

1. Tammes to Mourouk via Montagne Cherie
2. Palisade Ternel to Port Sud Est via Montagne Malgache
3. Corail to Dans Cocos and Cascade Jean Louis
4. Piments to Cascade Jean Louis via Reposoir
5. Riviere Cocos Coast to Riviere Cocos Cemetery
6. Mt Cabris (est) to St Francois
7. Citron Donis to Tamarin.

The following roads are scheduled to be completed shortly: -

- La Ferme to Quatre Vents via Mangues
- Port Mathurin to Grand La Fouche Corail via Mont lubin

- Grande Montagne to Coromandel
- Le Chou to Malabar

Along with the other infrastructural developments that will be carried out, these roads will open up remote areas of this island, promote tourism and recreation and create employment.

I am further pleased to note that a budgetary allocation of Rs. 2.0 million has been provided for the construction of a new bridge along the river of Port Sud Est. This bridge will not only cater for pedestrian traffic but will also cater for vehicular traffic.

Moreover, road safety will be improved. Appropriate road traffic signs will be installed all over the island. Street lighting will be provided in villages all around the island.

Mr. Chairperson, Sir during the budget review of this financial year a sum of Rs 3 millions was earmarked under the item vote “ *Infrastructure to residential morcellements*”. I am pleased to inform the House that the Central Electricity Board is being awarded very shortly the contract for the provision of electricity to the following morcellements: -

- Roche Bon Dieu;
- Songes;
- Baie Malgache;

- Mt Cabri Est;
- Anse Goeland;
- Port Sud Est;
- Citronelle;
- Corail, Petite Butte; and
- Batatran

The budgeted amount of Rs 3 millions in the 2003-2004 draft estimates will be used to start the construction of roads to the residential morcellement of Songes and Roche Bon Dieu.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, One of the major problems faced in the implementation of projects has been the lack of technical staff for the design, supervision and execution of projects. To overcome this problem, a consultancy team is being appointed to design, supervise and execute development projects in Rodrigues until such time Rodrigues will be fully autonomous in that field.

Mr chairperson, Sir our determination to resolve the water problems has more than tripled. The water situation will be tackled on a three front basis. Firstly, by immediate actions followed by medium term actions and long term actions. The short term actions will focused mainly on

rationalising the water networks, desilting of small dams, carrying out feasibility studies for the construction of large dams and minimising water wastage. The medium term actions will be the provision of desalination plants, provision of new primary networks, construction of dams at Gravieres and Grenade and the construction of large dams in the long term.

Among the actions already taken by my Commission, I would like to name, among others, the following projects: -

1. The feasibility study for the construction of a major dam along Riviere Pistaches has already started. My colleagues on the other side will surely criticise by saying that it is yet another study. But I would like to reassure this house that this OPR regional government is not going to spend hundred of million of rupees blindly without being sure that the dam will be watertight and viable;
2. The contract for the construction of a new Dam at Anse Raffin was awarded in January 2003 and the dam is scheduled to be completed in February 2004. The storage capacity of the dam is about 70,000 m<sup>3</sup>. It has to be noted that provision was made for the provision of a treatment plant at Riviere Cocos to treat the water from the Dam. Following discussions with the consultants, I am pleased to inform the house that the treatment plant will be provided at Anse Raffin itself so

that the inhabitants of the vicinity could be provided with a regular and reliable supply of water. There will no longer be the perception of “*prends nou delo cote nous, alle donne le zotte l’endroit*”;

3. The laying of 150 mm pipeline to convey water from Papayes reservoir to Grand La Fouche Corail is presently being carried out concurrently with the road construction;
4. The upgrading and improvement of the secondary networks is still ongoing;
5. The installation of water meters at household level to control water distribution; and
6. The desilting of small dams all around the island.

Among other projects that are in the pipeline to be implemented shortly are: -

1. Rehabilitation of the dam at Graviers. The design and tender documents have been finalised and tender will be launched shortly;
2. The dam at Cascade Pigeon will be desilted and rehabilitated,
3. The Desalination project is being reviewed. It is to be noted that, in the present tender, no provision has been made for an Environmental Impact Assessment to be carried out on the disposal of the brine. I would like to recall the house that for each 1 m<sup>3</sup> of clean water

produced, 3 m<sup>3</sup> of brine has to be disposed of. Our objective is to focus on the need to maintain a healthy balance between the urgent human needs for water and a sustainable natural system. Consequently, we are proceeding with an EIA to ensure that no damage is caused to our marine eco system. Thereafter, the project will be commissioned. The Regional Government is determined to go ahead with the implementation of the project;

4. In the light of the commissioning of the desalination plants, it is imperative that the water produced be conveyed immediately to the population. My commission is, therefore, embarking on an ambitious programme for the setting up of a primary network of pipeline to convey water from Papayes reservoir to other reservoir in the south/south-western region. In that context, some 20 kilometres of pipes will be laid to enable the smooth transfer of the desalinated water to all regions of Rodrigues and particularly to the south/southwest region.

### **AGRICULTURE**

The Agricultural sector will be called upon to play a key role in the social and economic development of the island. Since October 2002, I have

been carrying out an “*état de lieu de la situation de l’agriculture a Rodrigues*” and I would like to report the following findings.

Despite numerous efforts that have been directed to develop the economic sectors in Rodrigues, the fact remains that the agricultural sector has faced serious difficulties. **Initiatives to revitalise the sector have often been hampered by numerous constraints**, the main ones being imposed by **climatic and environmental elements such as persistent droughts and soil erosion**. Besides, the lack of a good local marketing system in Rodrigues has also been a hindering factor to the survival of its agricultural sector.

**Facts and figures clearly demonstrate that agricultural production has known drastic declines over the past decade.** The total area under cultivation has dropped from 1294 hectares in 1990 to 367 hectares in 1998 (approximately 73% decrease).

**Livestock farming which is an integral part of the Rodriguan culture, with families rearing their own animals (cattle, pig, poultry etc) in their backyards is also in serious difficulty.** I am pleased to report however that the excess of cattle heads to the tune of 13,000 for 6000 hectares of pastures for grazing has been reduced to under 6000 heads. The

current policy of Rodrigues with respect to cattle rearing is to maintain the livestock population to that sustainable level.

With the globalisation process, it is becoming **increasingly difficult for items produced in Rodrigues to compete with standard mass-produced crops** like maize and onions.

An analysis of the production sectors in Rodrigues provides a very bleak overall picture, characterised by **an inefficient use of numerous schemes** for financial assistance from the Development Bank of Mauritius. The Rodrigues Venture Capital Fund has failed in its objectives to trigger an economic diversification and to create employment. In fact, the **drastic fall in the area of land under cultivation is one of the major reasons for the rising unemployment rate in Rodrigues.**

There is therefore **an urgent necessity to revisit agriculture in Rodrigues and to work on a reorientation strategy so as to give a new boost to the sector. The new strategies devised by my Commission will be focused mainly on**

- The targeting of niche markets of high value-added, traditional Rodriguan products with an organic labe;
- The institution of micro and mini agro-industries of selected Rodriguan specialities, supported by the appropriate

certification policy to ensure conformity to international norms and standards for export;

- The production and transformation of local products for the local markets, particularly for the implementation of school feeding project.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, allow me to expand on some of the priority sectors that are promising for the island of Rodrigues and for which incentives will be earmarked to cater for investments in land preparation, soil conservation, better equipment and increased production. Five sectors have been identified and are as follows:-

Over the years, Rodriguans have developed exclusive recipes of ‘piment-limon’ and ‘aigre-doux limon’, which are nowhere else to be found and are highly appreciated by many. Such recipes hold promising potential for export, provided they are produced in accordance with international norms and standards, taking into account the increasing customer exigencies and emphasis on food safety. Pickled lemons are also in high demand and hold good marketable potential in Europe.

Vacuum packaging of pickled lemon for export could provide promising opportunities.

There is an urgent need to rehabilitate the typical Rodriguan petit piments cultivation, which has been degenerating since the introduction of new imported varieties. We will constitute a strategic stock of typical Rodriguan chilli seeds to allow its propagation.

Chilli can also be marketed in the processed form as pickled chilli and ‘piment-limon’.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, everybody will reckon the exclusive characteristics of our local Onion Toupie, which include a special taste and a relatively long conservation time. The small onion can be prepared as a high-value added pickle for export. The results of an ongoing MRC funded project on vacuum packing of pickled fruits and vegetables will be used for this project.

Rodrigues possesses a special variety of red beans with typical local characteristics over years of selection. However, the actual production is relatively poor in terms of volume. There is a potential need to increase the production in that sector. Appropriate post-harvest drying and packing techniques will be developed to ensure optimum quality and premium prices for the export market.

The bee-keeping sector had initially a quite successful story in Rodrigues. Following the extinction of the local species of bees in Rodrigues, Italian species were introduced which have the characteristics of being more productive and less aggressive. Rodrigues is today well known for its high quality honey production. The potential of marketing processed honey in appropriate packaging needs will have to be harnessed. This would be carried out to the highest standards and marketing channels for the export of the honey and queen bees would be established.

As regards water scarcity projects are being worked out to devise means for optimal and sustainable exploitation of underground water reserves through controlled pumping of alluvial water deposits, to catch fresh water that would otherwise go to the sea. In that context, we are also investing in the improvement and extension of the irrigation network, which will include the implementation of a “retenue collinaire” at Port Sud Est as a pilot project. Moreover, the use of appropriate low water demand irrigation techniques such as drip irrigation will be promoted.

In spite of the above, we all know that agriculture is too much exposed to natural disasters and this has been a serious deterrent for our young to invest in that sector. I am pleased to note that my suggestion for the

setting up of a Rodrigues Farmers Welfare Fund has been accepted by the Chief Commissioner as well as the creation of a new vote/item entitled “*incentives to planters and farmers*”. The modalities of both programmes are being worked out and

I shall make a statement to this Assembly shortly.

Cattle rearing and pig breeding will be allowed within defined fenced plots with due environmental consideration given to their locations. Specialised agricultural zones devoted solely to the pursuit of organic production will be identified and developed.

I also welcome the creation of Rodrigues Marketing and Trade Agency under the aegis of my colleague, the Commissioner for Trade and Commerce. I, sincerely, believe that it will provide valuable tools for the marketing of agricultural products for both the local and export markets.

### ***Very low-cost housing***

Another key vision of this budget is the eradication of poverty and the social integration of the weakest segments of the population. This regional government is fully aware of the helplessness and despair of some of our fellow Rodriguans to find a decent house and we are proposing a durable solution to their problem.

We have given considerable thought to this matter and has started the construction of core houses on a large scale for the very low-income group and the homeless. During financial year 2003 -2004, 108 such houses will be completed. We are identifying places for the construction of another 200 more units. The Trust Fund For Social Integration of the Vulnerable Groups will finance another 500 social housing units.

Mr Chairperson Sir, These first draft estimates have taken on board the views of each and every one, the rich and the poor, the young and elderly, the employer and the employees, the consumers and the traders and, more particularly, the unemployed. These draft estimates have tried to reconcile all the parameters required for the economic development of the island. I feel very strongly, Mr Chairperson, Sir, that Rodrigues is moving in the right direction for prosperity and this is only possible through hard work and sacrifice. Mr Chairperson, Sir, this regional government, under the leadership of our Chief Commissioner, has taken a pledge to the population of Rodrigues to develop the island.

Je terminerai en disant ceci:-

Let us all join together in order to ensure that we build on these nine months, which were basically a period of preparation and consolidation.

Let us make sure that, after our second year of autonomy, we can say with conviction that we have achieved significant and visible movement towards our goal of a better life for our Rodriguan people.

With these words, I would like to thank all the members of this Assembly for their attention.

**Chairperson:** Deputy Chief Commissioner, Thank you very much. I understand that the Chief Commissioner would like to intervene in reply. Distinguished members we have reached a stage in the debate when all those who intended have already participated in the debate. Unless you have anything to say I will give the floor to the mover of the motion in reply.

So, Chief Commissioner, please.

**Chief Commissioner:** Monsieur le Président, Je tiens à remercier les membres de notre chambre qui sont intervenus sur la motion concernant ce budget 2003-2004. Je tiens à remercier les Commissaires qui ont répondu aux critiques et qui ont apprécié aussi les suggestions venant de l'autre côté de la chambre. Je voudrais cependant m'appuyer sur un point qui a été soulevé de l'autre côté de la chambre concernant la création d'emplois. En écoutant les membres de l'autre côté de la chambre, ils ont voulu écouter pour savoir quelles sont nos propositions - Les propositions pratiques – mais nous avons entendu un membre disant qu'il s'agit de création d'emplois de

personnes travaillant à l'Assemblée Regional de Rodrigues. L'Assemblée Regional de Rodrigues emploi des personnes selon les besoins, selon les postes créés et emploie aussi des personnes au bas de l'échelle selon les besoins. Mais puisque nous parlons d'économie. Qu'est-ce qui crée l'économie? C'est ça qu'il faut se demander. Qui crée l'économie de ce pays? Qui produit, qui transforme et qui exporte? C'est là le grand débat dans cette île Rodrigues. Nous avons entendu quelqu'un parler à la radio toujours venant dire qu'on n'a pas créé d'emplois dans le gouvernement. On parle du nombre de postes. 1200 postes qu'il faudrait remplir. Alors nous nous posons la question. Avons nous besoin d'une société Rodriguaise qui n'opte que pour le service public ? C'est ça la question. Or, nous savons que dans tout pays il n'y a pas seulement que le service public, il y a aussi le secteur privé. C'est là où il faut donner confiance à cette population lui faire confiance et c'est là où il faudra encourager les Rodriguais à produire et transformer et exporter. Pourquoi n'avons-nous pas cette appréciation en ce qui concerne les produits Rodriguais. L'économie doit être soutenue, le secteur privé doit être soutenu par des institutions. Nous avons annoncé dans le budget l'institution d'un comité de développement économique en collaboration avec le Board of Investment. Nous avons eu une rencontre avec le Board of Investment tout dernièrement. Monsieur Germain de

Comarmond et ses officiers; Monsieur Prem Nabasing qui avait voulu nous joindre ne l'a pas pu et nous avons établi une sorte de Memorandum of Understanding comment le Board of Investment avec ce comité que nous allons mettre en place vont travailler pour faire venir des investisseurs. Evidemment, le Board of Investment est répandu à travers le monde. C'est le Board of Investment qui remplace aujourd'hui la MEDIA. Donc, voilà une institution qui va nous aider au niveau de l'investissement. Deuxième institutions – le Rodrigues Tourism Authority pour permettre le développement du tourisme à Rodrigues et voir comment arriver à faire de Rodrigues une bonne destination touristique. Troisième, il y a localement, ce que nous appelons les Petites et Moyennes Entreprises. L'Union Européenne regroupement a employé quelqu'un à Rodrigues, le SMIS Challenge pour justement donner un élan aux Petites et Moyennes Entreprises. Mais il y a un problème, Monsieur le Président - notre système d'éducation. Le Gouvernement du Luxembourg avait financé un collège technique à Citron Donis. On nous a parlé de Collège Mont Lubin et Songes. Ce n'est pas nous qui avons décidé tout ça. Nous avons été attristés quand nous avons su que le Ministère de l'Education a voulu faire de Citron Donis un HSC Collège pour abriter 123 élèves. C'est pourquoi j'ai dit que ces 123 élèves pourraient aller à Mt. Lubin où il y a 26 classes, 10 salles

spécialistes, Autant ; Quand on voit ce bâtiment à 2 étages 3 qui coûte 157 millions de roupies. Voulez-vous qu'on n'aille mettre encore à Songes ce même type de bâtiment à 157 millions de roupies pour quelques enfants, 300 élèves de la région des catchments areas de Songes, Port Sud Est, Mourouk et un petit, peu dans les hauteurs.

**Another Member** : Pourquoi pas Rivière Coco

**Chief Commissioner** : Oui Rivière Coco - combien cela va faire. Il faut le faire, nous ne disons pas qu'on ne doit pas le faire, mais il faut le faire en repensant vraiment à quelque chose d'autre. Maintenant, nous sommes autonomes, c'est à nous maintenant de penser et je pense qu'il faudra mettre sur pied ce comité éducation et autres .....

### ***Interruptions***

**Minority Leader** : Vous avez dit vous n'allez pas mettre en place ces comités

**Chief Commissioner** : Mais on va le faire. On a dit – we are seeking advice – maintenant on va le faire.....

### ***Interruptions***

**Chief Commissioner** : Il y a toujours du temps comme ça les élus de l'assemblée pourront réfléchir justement sur le système d'éducation à

Rodrigues. D'ailleurs nous avons mis ça dans notre budget – repenser les choses.

### ***Interruptions***

Or donc, il y a le système d'éducation il faudra sortir de l'académique pour entrer un peu plus dans le technique et le polytechnique. Ainsi nous pourrions libérer nos jeunes étudiants qui font l'académique d'une certaine mentalité à toujours attendre un emploi dans le gouvernement, dans l'Assemblée Regionale de Rodrigues. C'est pourquoi Monsieur le President, tout ce que nous avons proposé, c'est en somme une direction, une politique d'avenir basée sur une réflexion. Notre économie, le développement social et économique de Rodrigues va être basé sur des piliers - sur des institutions qui vont nous aider justement à mettre sur place tout ce que nous avons dit dans ce budget.

La création d'emplois ne relève pas simplement comme j'ai dit tout à l'heure de L'Assemblée Régionale de Rodrigues, mais aussi du secteurs privé. Et c'est là où nous avons travaillé en étroite collaboration avec le secteur privé de Rodrigues et de Maurice. Déjà nous avons pas mal de propositions beaucoup de demandes pour l'hôtellerie, beaucoup de demandes pour le usines de transformation. ça va aider l'élevage, l'agriculture. Donc, il s'agit pas seulement de produire mais il faut aussi transformer et exporter. C'est

ça ce que nous voulons. Je voudrais dire, Monsieur le Président, avant de terminer que ce budget et nous avons eu une première consultation avec Monsieur Paul Bérenger pour avoir une idée comment nous allons présenter le budget comment le travailler, mais ce n'est pas le quantum final. Le quantum final d'après la loi, sera décidé par le Conseil des ministres, les propositions de ce budget seront envoyées au ministre de Rodrigues, qui les présenteront au Conseil de ministres et le Conseil qui va proposer le quantum, nous ne pouvons pas dire s'il va augmenter ou réduire celui-ci, mais il appartiendra au conseil des Ministres de décider du quantum final qui ira à l'Assemblée Nationale. Donc comme certain membres, et les Commissaires ont dit tous les ministres à Maurice, tous les Ministères et que nous ici parfois il faudra travailler avec un budget qu'on nous donne.....

### ***Interruptions***

**Mr. Chairperson:** Any member who wishes to take the floor, please signify his intention. Yes, Mr. Chief Commissioner

**The Chief Commissioner:** Je termine Monsieur le Président, en annonçant que nous avons la joie d'avoir présenté les propositions pour ce budget 2003-2004 et je réitère tout mon appui mon soutien à cette équipe autour des Commissaires et autour de moi-même, le Island Chief Executive, et tous des Heads of Department, les Finance Officers et ainsi de suite. Et voilà pour

terminer je souhaite que les propositions de ce budget soient approuvées par l'Assemblée de Rodrigues.

**Chairperson :** Monsieur Le Chef Commissaire, je vous remercie, Messieurs les membres, mesdames nous sommes arrivés probablement à la fin des débats sur le budget.....

I am sorry you want to intervene .....

**The Deputy Chief Commissioner :** I want to say that with the arrival of cyclone Kalunde, the Budget team and Executive Council have done an enormous work to get the budget prepared and we are conscious of the small errors that are found in the Draft Capital and the Draft Recurrent budgets and will correct them afterwards.

**Chairperson:** Well, it seems that you have escaped the fact that when a budget has been approved by the Assembly it stands approved as it is, with mistakes if you wish to say so. Maintenant nous sommes arrivés à la fin des débats et c'est à moi de poser la question.

**Minority Leader :** If you say that once the budget is approved, we would not be able to modify it, so would it be more advisable to adjourn the motion for another day and then we will have the opportunity to bring the amendments and there will be no further debate, I believe. Then, we shall have the opportunity to vote for it. We vote for something which is good.

We understand the fact that there are errors and that there has been pressure due to Kalunde etc. I myself I have been working in government. I have ancient colleagues. Mr. Jeetoo is my ancient boss. I know how the pressure is. I would invite the Chief Commissioner not to propose a vote today, I do not know when we are suspending. We would have the opportunity of correcting them so that we send something good to the central government because I repeat, we would not tolerate that something is voted here and then you go and modify it by yourself. It is not good.

**Chairperson:** Anybody wants to add anything?

**The Chief Commissioner:** Mr. Chairperson, Sir I think the corrections are not of figures or projects, but on say --- Grand la Fouche Corail.

**Chairperson:** Little mistakes

**Chief Commissioner:** Yes little mistakes, not correction on the figures

**Minority Leader:** Mr. Chairperson, Sir, a mistake is a mistake whether it be figures or I do not know what and when the Assembly approves something, this is approved verbatim as it is here. The law says, that the Assembly shall, subject to modifications transmit it to ... what will be the seriousness of our Assembly?

**Chairperson:** Do you have any modification to make?

**Minority Leader.** No, they have the modification, unless Mr. Chairperson, Sir they want to give us the budget to modify it and then we give it to them.

***Interruptions***

**Chairperson:** You have got that opportunity .... So, I will now put the question “This Assembly resolves that for the purposes of S 44(1) of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act 2001, there is approved the draft estimates of recurrent revenue and recurrent expenditure and capital revenue and capital expenditure for the financial year 2003/2004.

On question put, the motion was agreed to.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Chief Commissioner:** Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2003 at 10.30 a.m..

**The Deputy Chairperson rose and seconded.**

On question put, the motion was agreed to.

*At 17.45 hrs The Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Tuesday 15 April 2003 at 10.30 hrs.*