

RODRIGUES

FIRST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Debate No. 03 of 2004

Sitting of Tuesday 30 March 2004

The Assembly met in the Assembly House, Port Mathurin at 10.30.
a.m.

(Mr Chairperson in the Chair)

The National Anthem was played

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MOTION

**RODRIGUES – BUDGET PROPOSALS –
FINANCIAL YEAR 2004-05**

The Chief Commissioner: Mr Chairperson, Sir, I beg to move the motion standing in my name, which reads as follows -

“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 2004/2005.”

Mr Chairperson, Sir, copies of the Draft Recurrent and Capital Estimates for financial year 2004/2005 are being tabled for circulation to members for approval by this Assembly.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, allow me to express on behalf of this Regional Government our deep appreciation to the people of Rodrigues for entrusting us with the responsibility to manage the affairs of our beloved country, Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this Budget is the third one presented by this Regional Government. This year's budget will consolidate the institutional reforms underway to sustain the social, cultural and economic development of Rodrigues and will also address the present challenges facing our small island.

M. le président, le 12 octobre 2003 nous avons célébré le premier anniversaire de l'autonomie de Rodrigues. Cet événement a été commémoré entre autres par le dévoilement des armoiries de l'Assemblée Régionale de Rodrigues dans la ferveur populaire. Nous avons eu l'occasion de donner de nouveaux noms à certaines rues de Port Mathurin pour rendre hommage à ceux qui ont marqué l'histoire de notre île. La citoyenneté d'honneur a aussi été octroyée aux personnalités qui ont contribué au développement de Rodrigues.

M. le président, notre grande préoccupation, c'est de mettre le peuple au centre de tout développement et dans ce sens nous avons déclaré cette année comme étant celle de la culture de l'entrepreneuriat et j'invite tous les Rodriguais à y participer activement.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this Budget has been prepared after my colleagues, the Deputy Chief Commissioner, the Commissioners and myself had a series of pre-budgetary meetings with representatives of the civil society and the economic operators of Rodrigues. We have received during these meetings many proposals for the improvement of the living conditions of the Rodriguan population. I am thankful to them for their valuable contribution.

I should like to mention that before the preparation of this budget, we had consultations with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, hon. Pravind Jugnauth, regarding our priorities. As this Assembly is aware, there are budgetary constraints at the national level and the general economic context prevailing has also been considered. Our proposals have, however, been given due attention and the assurance given that adequate financial resources will be provided in the Budget.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, our priorities for this year's Budget are -

- (i) the construction of a network of dams and reservoirs to harvest and store water for domestic and irrigation purposes;
- (ii) the development of tourism, agriculture and agro-processing together with the other productive sectors of our economy to provide employment opportunities;
- (iii) the continued improvement of the public and social infrastructure to enhance the living conditions of the population;
- (iv) the protection of the natural resources of the island and its environment for sustainable development;
- (v) training and education to promote economic and social development with the active participation of the population;
- (vi) delivery of quality health care services and promotion of healthy lifestyles;
- (vii) la lutte contre la pauvreté en mettant à la disposition des personnes défavorisées les moyens pour qu'ils puissent se prendre en charge;
- (viii) private sector development with special emphasis on small and medium enterprises and the promotion of joint ventures with local entrepreneurs;
- (ix) reforms in the public service, and
- (x) the development of Information and Communication Technology.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I shall now review progress in the implementation of the Budget 2003-2004.

Sustainable Economic Development Plan for Rodrigues

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, the formulation of a Sustainable Economic Development Plan for Rodrigues financed jointly by UNDP and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly is well under way. This project aims at -

- (a) establishing a framework to promote economic growth and a sustainable pattern of development;
- (b) harmonising policies, strategies and mobilising resources by a strategic planning process;
- (c) enhancing capacity development and enabling the definition of actions to facilitate the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Following consultation with stakeholders, a special report regarding the MDG has been prepared for Rodrigues.

A Rodrigues Economic Planning and Monitoring Unit is being set up to promote the long-term application of strategic planning and management of the development process in Rodrigues.

Public Infrastructure and Housing

Mr Chairperson Sir, this Regional Government is determined to continue strengthening and modernising the physical infrastructure to support our economic and social development programme.

Substantial investment is being made to improve our road infrastructure. During this financial year more than Rs130 m. has been invested in the construction and upgrading of roads. Some 22 km of roads would have been upgraded and asphalted by June 2004 namely -

Port Mathurin - Grand La Fouche Corail
La Ferme - Quatre Vents
Tammes – Mt. Chérie

Moreover, the construction of two other roads leading from Palissade Ternel to Mt. Malgache and Anse Quitor to Dans Coco and to Cascade Jean Louis are scheduled to start shortly.

The appointment of Consultants under the Global Management Consultancy Services has greatly facilitated the preparation for implementation

of some 18 capital projects including roads, buildings, sport complexes and water storage structures for a total project value of more than Rs300 m.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as regards housing, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that 83 low-cost housing units will be completed by May this year. Moreover, since October 2002, some 518 building permits have been issued for residential buildings.

Education

Mr Chairperson, Sir, from a Budget of Rs89.5 m, Rs67 m have so far been spent in respect of the following projects -

Construction of Mt Lubin Secondary School
Completion of Citron Donis Secondary School
Extension of Le Chou and Maréchal Colleges

The environment of several primary schools has been uplifted and schoolyards are being embellished. The new policy of awarding small contracts has accelerated the execution of several minor works. The damages caused by cyclone Kalundé have been attended to the satisfaction of one and all.

Tourism

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as this Assembly is aware, direct regional flight to and from Reunion Island is today a reality and it is now a priority to increase tourist accommodation capacity. To this end, five hotel projects have been approved and a 49-room hotel is under construction, while the construction of the other four will start soon. With the completion of these projects, the number of hotel rooms available will increase by 50%.

Moreover, the Rodrigues Tourism Committee is in the process of regularizing the operation of informal tourist enterprises. Norms and standards are being finalised and the leases of owners of "*Gites et Chambres D'hôtes*", whose enterprises comply with these standards and who are operating on residential leases, will be amended to allow them to obtain licences required under the Tourism Act 2002.

Creation of additional tourist attractions is also being looked into. An Industrial State land lease has been granted next to the nature reserve of Anse Quitor for the setting up of a Giant Tortoise Reserve and Cave Project. The project will introduce an analogue of extinct tortoise species in a natural

reserve over 18 hectares where exotic plants like “*vieille fille*” will be gradually replaced by endemic plants.

With the technical assistance of an expert from Reunion Island and the collaboration of ARTO, nature trails are being identified and created to promote ecotourism.

Agriculture

Mr Chairperson, Sir, a strong agricultural sector is important to the vision of Rodrigues of tomorrow and we are laying the groundwork that will fully develop the potential of this sector. With the help of the European Union, we have provided the basic physical infrastructures to increase agricultural production. However, water remains a major constraint to the development of that sector. Emphasis has been laid this year on harnessing more water for irrigation. Several projects are being implemented as follows:-

- Construction of river diversion and irrigation reservoir of about 8,000 m³ at Cascade Victoire. The project is at tender stage and the contract will be awarded for completion by end of June 2004. The Rodrigues Regional Assembly has provided consultancy services and will co-finance the project.
- Construction of a dam at Grenade of a capacity of about 75,000 m³. The project is at tender stage and will be co-financed by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, which has also provided consultancy services. The contract for the project will be awarded in April and construction will be completed by June 2005.
- Introduction of rotational grazing and creation of fodder reserves on pilot basis at Mt. Plate and Mt. Chérie to improve livestock production.

Other Projects implemented under the programme include seventeen track roads in villages, three “*retenue collinaire*” to harvest water for irrigation and a demonstration pilot green house at Grand La Fouche Corail.

Water Supply

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as mentioned in the last budget, the top priority of this Regional Government is to tackle the problem of water supply. I am

pleased to report that action has already been triggered to achieve our objectives.

The water distribution networks have been upgraded in more than 20 villages all around the island.

Three service reservoirs have been rehabilitated during this financial year, namely those of Petit Brulé, Petit Gabriel and Bigarade. These works will altogether provide safer water to the households of the regions.

Contracts for the upgrading of the following primary water networks linking the following reservoirs have already been awarded -

- Mt. Cabris – Bangelique via Anse Quitar
- Grand La Fouche Corail – Camp Pintade via Reposoir
- Grand La Fouche Corail – Citadelle
- Papayes – Manique via Mangles and Mt. du Sable

Moreover, a new pipeline has been laid from Quatre Vents to Papayes and Grand La Fouche Corail. These primary networks, coupled with those existing, will enable in a very near future an improvement of water supply by several folds in the south and western part of Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the first dam of a capacity of 65,000 m³ under construction at Anse Raffin will be completed in July this year to improve water supply in the southern region.

Fisheries

Mr Chairperson, Sir, following consultations with Fishermen Associations, proposals regarding the registration of professional fishermen and the payment of a bad weather allowance have been made to the Ministry of Fisheries which is reviewing the whole issue.

It is expected that the new procedures will encourage fishermen to engage in off-lagoon fishing to decrease fishing efforts in the lagoon, which is over-exploited.

During the year, the Fisheries Research and Training Unit has organised a training course for fishermen of the Rodrigues Seafarers Co-operative Society which is proposing to purchase a vessel for bank fishing.

State Lands

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the last Population Census carried out in 2000 shows that there were 9,254 housing units, as compared with 8651 households. On the other hand, the National Development Strategy Report estimated that 220 new houses will be required every year while last year 732 residential leases were finalised. I also wish to inform the Assembly that as at February 2004, there were 5,853 long-term leases duly signed.

The establishment of a Geographic Information System (GIS) for Rodrigues, which will make geographic information accessible, is scheduled for completion by June 2004. The GIS will be a dynamic tool to compile and share information between services and will improve physical planning and monitoring of development in all sectors. Necessary training in GIS will be provided to the services concerned to make use of this modern IT tool to keep pace with evolution and bridge the information technology gap in our management system.

Health Services

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the following projects are being implemented in the health sector to further improve health services -

- Upgrading and resurfacing of alleys at Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- Installation of an underground electrical network at Queen Elizabeth Hospital for security during cyclonic weather.
- Supply and installation of a 250 KVA standby generator to cope with power cuts.
- Upgrading of two Area Health Centres at La Ferme and Mont Lubin.
- Two standby generators for Mont Lubin and La Ferme Area Health Centres and medical equipment for X-Ray Department, Laboratory and Operating Theatre have been ordered.
- Two new ambulances have been received and a third one has been ordered.

The Well Wishers Hall at Queen Elizabeth Hospital has been completed.

These improvements have been accompanied by better health care delivery. A 24-hour coverage has been introduced in the Operating Theatre. Specialists in new areas such as oral surgery and hand surgery are now visiting Rodrigues. A new unit of Orthopaedic Surgery is now fully operational and almost all orthopaedic cases are being attended in Rodrigues. The NCD Services have been revitalised and nine thousand adults have been screened for NCDs' by the "*Caravane de Santé*". In addition, training of staff in NCDs have been undertaken and screening at work sites has started.

Environment and Forestry

Mr Chairperson, Sir, three sub-committees have been constituted by the Rodrigues Environment Committee to ensure constant consultation and participation of all stakeholders in the field of environmental education and conservation of biodiversity.

An Oil Spill Contingency Plan has been prepared for Rodrigues and necessary equipment which are compatible with those available in Mauritius and other countries in the region has been funded by the Indian Ocean Commission. The training of personnel to operate the equipment as well as a handing over ceremony is scheduled for next month.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as regards the creation of a Marine Protected Area at Mourouk, the project document has already been signed to formalise its co-funding by the GEF (Global Environment Facility), UNDP and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to the tune of US\$ 2.3 million. The project will start soon with the recruitment of personnel.

Under the Anti-Erosion Programme, an Information Centre has been constructed at Grande Montagne Nature Reserve to sensitise the population and visitors on conservation of endemic fauna and flora of Rodrigues.

Jeunesse et Sports

M. le président, l'île Rodrigues doit être fière de la belle prestation et le grand succès obtenu pour l'organisation de la compétition de Judo par équipe pendant les 6ème Jeux des Iles de L'Océan Indien l'année dernière. Ce fut la première fois que Rodrigues organisait une telle activité sportive internationale de cette envergure. Le peuple de Rodrigues dans son

ensemble doit être félicité pour son comportement exemplaire avant, pendant et après ces jeux. Il faut aussi souligner les performances remarquables des athlètes Rodriguais à ces jeux et ils ont été récompensés comme il se doit. Et dans le cadre de ces jeux, le gymnase de Malabar a été rénové et un *parking* aménagé.

Les dotations budgétaires pour l'année 2003-2004 ont été utilisées pour le bien-être des sportifs Rodriguais. La construction d'une piscine aux dimensions olympiques à Maréchal a déjà débuté et la rénovation du terrain des jeux de la Ferme a été complété et celui de Mangues est en cours.

M. le président, en ce qui concerne la jeunesse, depuis Juin 2003, six Ateliers de Savoir sont opérationnels à Malabar, Mont Plaisir, Trèfles, Grand La Fouche Corail, Songes et Cyganges. Quelques cent jeunes sont en formation dans ces ateliers.

Les heures d'ouverture des trois centres de jeunesse à Petit Gabriel, Grande Montagne et La Ferme ont été étendues jusqu'à 20 heures et les jeunes fréquentant ces centres peuvent avoir accès maintenant aux ordinateurs et autres facilités audio-visuelles.

M. le président, c'est la première fois qu'il y a eu une présentation de "Gold Award" en novembre 2003 à Rodrigues par son Altesse Royale, le Comte de Wessex. Sept participants au « Gold Award » ont été récompensés par des médailles et certificats.

Deux jeunes de Rodrigues ont de plus participé aux « Gold Expedition » à Dubaï/Oman du 17 au 27 février dernier. Un « Rodrigues Youth Task Force » a été institué pour aider à combattre les problèmes liés à la prolifération de la drogue.

Fire Services

Mr. Chairperson, Sir, the role of the Fire Services is to protect life and property. Fire officers have participated in fire prevention campaigns. The budgetary provision has been utilised as follows -

- Purchase of a water tanker to replace a defective one.
- Repairs of defective fire fighting pumps
- Purchase of radio communication equipment
- Refurbishing of the Fire Services Headquarters.

Arts and Culture

Mr Chairperson, Sir, there now exists strong institutional support for the full development of this sector.

The project for the construction of the first Cultural and Leisure Centre at Lataniers is at final tender stage. Bids have been invited and the contract will be awarded shortly. The building is expected to be completed by December this year.

An Artist Assistance Scheme is now operational at the Commission for Arts and Culture to promote artistic and cultural production.

Women's Affairs, Family Welfare and Child Development

Mr Chairperson, Sir, there have been extensive consultations with women stakeholders in general including women entrepreneurs and socio-cultural leaders which have led to the formulation of an action plan for a better upliftment of the status of women in the Rodriguan Society.

A professional and decentralised system of training for women has been set up. Some 500 women are following courses in family welfare, health education and “*sports de masse*” run by the women centre in five regions.

A strategic plan on the protection of the Rodriguan child has also been launched last year. This plan, which includes a parental empowerment programme, has been prepared with the assistance of international experts. The Commissioner for Child Development had the opportunity to discuss this plan at an International meeting organised by UNESCO prior to its finalisation.

Community Development

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as regards Community development, much importance has been given to the training of staff “*pour favoriser une meilleure mobilisation Communautaire.*” Project-wise IFAD Community Development Programme has been reactivated and projects amounting to some Rs6 m. have been approved. Such projects include construction of track roads and community development projects in different villages throughout the island.

Employment

Mr Chairperson, Sir, a Job Fair was organised in September 2003 with a view to promoting the professional integration of the youth through the dissemination of information on training and employment opportunities. Subsequently, a study on the “Professional Integration of Youth” was undertaken in view of the planning of a sustainable human resource development.

Officers of the Employment Division are participating in Job Searching Techniques Programmes organised by the Human Resource Centre.

Documents on occupational profiles, vacancies and training facilities are made available to job seekers at the Employment Information Centre.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I would like to inform the Assembly that the employed population of Rodrigues in 2001/2002 was 13,617 of which 3, 910 were engaged in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and 3, 383 in the Public Service and the rest in other services and sectors.

I am quoting these official figures to show that the public service may provide only about 25% of employment while the private sector has a major role to play in the creation of employment.

Social Security

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we have been particularly sensitive to the needs of the vulnerable groups of our society. Last year, I announced that one of our priorities is to protect the weak and the most needy. We provided a total amount of Rs126.9 m. as financial assistance to this category of people in terms of social aid and other benefits.

I would like to inform the Assembly that we have started the upgrading of social security services through a computerisation programme which is being implemented at the Social Security Offices of Port Mathurin, Mont Lubin and La Ferme. As from now, application for pension benefits and contribution to NPF will be on line with Mauritius.

The computerisation programme will eventually lead to the setting up of an Award Unit in Rodrigues with a view to accelerating procedures for the processing and award of basic pensions and other benefits. This is presently effected in Mauritius.

Another important achievement in supporting the vulnerable groups is the extension of domiciliary visits by Medical Officers to all bedridden cases under the age of 90. Normally, this facility is restricted to persons over the age of 90 years.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, until recently, our needy citizens were deprived of the right of appeal against a Medical Board's decision to disallow their pension benefits. Since September last, a Medical Tribunal has been set up in Rodrigues to enable claimants for a social assistance to lodge an appeal in case their application has been disallowed by the Medical Board. Up to now, there have been two sittings of the Tribunal and out of 49 cases examined, 19 have been recommended for a benefit pension.

Labour and Industrial Relations

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as regards industrial relations, we are conscious of the need to promote a safe work culture and social dialogue with a view to create a proper environment conducive to decent work that respect the rights and responsibilities of both employees and employers.

In order to meet this objective, we have started a strengthening of the programme of the Labour Office through the creation of additional and new posts which will soon be advertised. Meanwhile, an Occupational Health and Safety Officer from the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations is on a tour of service in Rodrigues. A series of education and sensitisation programme for employers and employees of the private sector have been implemented on labour-related issues. We are pleased to note the positive response of all parties concerned towards the concept of social dialogue, workers' right and safe work culture.

Budget Out-turn

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I will now outline the budgetary performance for financial year 2003-2004.

Total Recurrent Expenditure will reach Rs760.5 m. as compared to the budgeted figure of Rs720 m. The additional expenditure of Rs40.5 m. is mainly due to salary increases resulting in the implementation of the recommendations contained in the PRB Report 2003.

Capital expenditure will reach Rs389.7 m. as compared to the previous year expenditure of Rs317.7 m. The Assembly will appreciate that

many efforts are being made to accelerate the development of Rodrigues. Total expenditure for period July 2003 to February 2004 is Rs248.3 m. Commitments in respect of the following projects amounts to Rs142 m. –

- ◆ construction and resurfacing of roads; Port Mathurin - Plaine Corail Road Phase II;
- ◆ construction of swimming pool;
- ◆ water distribution networks;
- ◆ construction and rehabilitation of dams;
- ◆ construction and extension of secondary schools, and
- ◆ other minor works.

On the revenue side, the performance would be slightly higher than targeted. Total recurrent revenue will reach Rs770.9 m. as against a budgeted amount of Rs720 m. This increase represents mainly the contribution for the payment of salary increases due to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the PRB Report 2003. The non-tax revenue collected and credited to the Rodrigues Consolidated Fund in Rodrigues will reach Rs14.7 m.

Capital Revenue would amount to Rs389.7 m. being contribution from the Central Government.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I now turn to my budget proposals for next year. Total budget proposals will amount to Rs1.234 billion of which Rs427 m. is being provided for capital projects and Rs807 m. for recurrent expenditure, these represent an increase of Rs114 m. over last year's budget.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Recurrent Budget, as you are aware, provides for recurrent expenditure of which Rs481 m. are for the salaries and other staff costs, Rs110 m. for other goods and services and a sum of Rs216 m. as Grants, Subsidies, Social Benefits and Contributions to local organisations.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, may I highlight the following main provisions –

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| (1) | Grant to National Pension Fund
(old age) | Rs111.4 m. |
| (2) | Assistance to professional
fishermen | Rs50.0 m. |

(3)	Block Grant to RCEA	Rs25.5 m.
(4)	Social Aid	Rs18.0 m.
(5)	Primary School Supplementary Feeding Project	Rs2.2 m.
(6)	Patients inoperable in Rodrigues	Rs2.0 m.
(7)	Contributions to NGO's	Rs2.1 m.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, my main proposals for the next financial year are as follows -

Water Supply

I am providing a total amount of Rs103 m. to improve water supply in Rodrigues as follows –

- ◆ Construction and rehabilitation of dams and reservoirs - Rs75 m.
- ◆ Water supplies development project - Rs22 m.
- ◆ Desalination project - Rs 6 m.

The tender for the contract for the construction of a dam at Grenade has been launched whereas the studies for the construction of dams at Pavé La Bonté and Pistaches are nearing completion. The completion of the dams at Anse Raffin, Grenade and Pavé La Bonté will provide for additional capacity amounting to about one month of our water demand. A new tender document for the desalination project is being worked out with revised scope of work.

Education

M. le president, pour soutenir le développement dans le secteur éducatif, une somme de Rs 65.5 million est prévue dans ce budget pour -

L'achèvement de la construction du collège de Mont Lubin;

Les travaux d'extension aux collèges de Grande Montagne et de Maréchal;

La construction d'une école communautaire, et

L'achat du mobilier pour les collèges de Maréchal et de Le Chou.

Dans le but d'encourager les enfants des familles défavorisées d'être réguliers dans leur scolarité et en même temps leur assurer un complément d'alimentation équilibré, j'ai prévu une somme de Rs 2.2 million sous l'item "School Feeding Project". Ce complément d'alimentation sera composé de lait, des oeufs ou des fruits locaux et ce pour une meilleure alimentation à l'école. Je suis convaincu que l'approvisionnement en lait, oeufs et fruits locaux contribuera au développement agricole de notre pays.

Une section du cycle primaire sera introduite sur une base pilote au collège de Mont Lubin, ceci afin de décongestionner l'école du Gouvernement de Port Mathurin. Il est aussi prévu l'extension des écoles pré-primaires à Baie du Nord et Rivière Banane pour les petites classes du cycle primaire. Ces mesures énoncées permettront d'assurer une éducation de proximité aux enfants de ces régions, afin d'augmenter le taux de réussite au niveau du CPE.

L'orientation des jeunes Rodriguais pour des études tertiaires se fait à travers des sessions d'information et de conseil avec la collaboration des différentes institutions de formation telles que l'Université de Maurice, l'Université de Technologie de Maurice, le Conservatoire National des Arts et des Metiers (CNAM) de l'île de la Réunion et l'Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants'.

La Commission d'Education et Formation offrira un service d'orientation et d'insertion professionnelle aux étudiants.

Ce budget fait aussi provision d'une somme de Rs 25.5 million pour les écoles primaires de la RCEA ainsi qu'une somme de Rs 500,000 pour des travaux de rénovation aux bâtiments.

M. le president, une somme de R 1.5 millions a été prévue pour la formation des deux étudiants en médecine au Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Medical College. Ces bourses médicales destinées aux jeunes rodriguais nous permettront, dans les années à venir, de pallier au manque des medecins dans nos hopitaux.

Health

Mr Chairperson, Sir, Health, being an important sector, budgetary provision is being increased substantially to cater for an improved medical service. The capital expenditure provision on health will attain Rs10 m. and

recurrent expenditure is being increased to Rs130.9 m. Greater emphasis is being laid on health promotion and preventive medicine.

I should like to highlight some of the projects to be implemented during 2004-2005 –

- (i) provision is being made for the upgrading of the Sewerage System at Queen Elizabeth Hospital;
- (ii) upgrading of Maternity Ward, Operating Theatre and Psychiatric Ward at Queen Elizabeth Hospital;
- (iii) upgrading of the kitchen and construction of a Store at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and
- (iv) extension of Mont Lubin Area Health Centre.

Provision has already been included for the purchase of the following -

- (a) equipment for Laboratory and Blood Transfusion Service;
- (b) dental equipment for La Ferme Area Health Centre;
- (c) one industrial dryer for laundry service at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and
- (d) one ambulance for the Medical and Health Services.

Funds included in the recurrent budget provide for the creation of new and additional posts, such as one Head Catering Unit, one Senior Radiographic Assistant, one Senior Community Midwife and one Blood Bank Officer, ten Health Care Assistants to further improve health care delivery to patients. Provision for the purchase of medicines and surgical supplies has been increased by 50.4%.

Social Security

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this Regional Government will maintain its policy to protect and support the vulnerable groups to enable their reintegration in the society. We are initiating a series of measures to achieve this objective.

Provision for the payment of social aid to the tune of Rs18 m. has been included in this budget. Some 1500 recipients of social aid will benefit from this assistance.

Better attention will be given to the vulnerable groups especially the elderly and the disabled persons. We are, therefore, creating new items in this budget to cater for the celebration of the International Day of the Elderly and the Disabled Persons. Health and Nutrition Clubs will be set up on a regional basis to better monitor the health of the elderly through regular medical check-ups.

An amount of Rs150, 000 is being provided in this budget as grant to the registered Association of the Mentally Handicapped Children. This grant will enable the Association to run its school at Citronelle for the mentally handicapped children.

This year, I am creating a new item with a provision of Rs1.5 m in the Capital Budget for Social Security. Funds provided under this item will enable the purchase of wheel chairs and spectacles for recipients of social aid. I am also providing necessary funds for the payment of consultancy fee in connection with the construction of a Recreational and Training Centre for the elderly and disabled persons.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, in line with our priority to integrate the vulnerable groups in the society, a Network Support Services Unit (*le Projet Réseau*) will be set up very soon. The Unit will be located at Mont Lubin. Two officers are completing their specialised training in this regard. The objective of the Unit will be to accompany all persons in social difficulties, co-ordinate and facilitate their better access to existing services. More importantly, the Unit will also be responsible to help these persons to identify and realise, where possible, projects that will lead to their social and economic independence.

Protection of the Environment

Mr Chairperson, Sir, as regards the protection of the Environment, I am providing an amount of Rs5 m in the Budget to implement the following projects -

- (a) creation of a proper solid waste disposal site near Pte au Sel in replacement of the Roche Bon Dieu dumping site which has to be closed soon.
- (b) the upgrading of public beaches at Pointe Coton and St Francois.

A provision of Rs2 m. is also being made for the implementation of the Marine Protected Area at Mourouk.

I am also providing a sum of Rs1 m to implement the Botanical Garden project at Mourouk. I have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mauritius Wildlife Foundation, which will include *inter alia* the provision of technical support to update existing recommendations and implementation of the project.

Women & Children

Mr Chairperson, Sir, to improve the conditions of women and children in Rodrigues, I am making a provision of Rs3.5 m. in this Budget which represents an increase of 45.8% of this year's recurrent estimates.

A provision of Rs5 m. has been made for the construction of an Integrated Centre for women.

Other services will include -

- (a) the opening of a shelter at Baie aux Huitres to provide temporary protection to victims of domestic violence;
- (b) the Child Development Unit and the Family Counselling Service will now operate with full-fledged staff thus offering more professional and continuous services.
- (c) The financial assistance scheme to women and children in distress has been maintained and the grant to women's associations has been increased.

Youth and Sports

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we should spare no efforts to provide necessary resources for the development of our youth. One of the objectives of this Budget is to inculcate an entrepreneurial culture among the Rodriguan youth so as to enable them to launch their own enterprises and participate in the economic development of Rodrigues.

In line with our policy to improve the youth and sports infrastructures in Rodrigues, I am providing a total sum of Rs75.5 m for the upgrading of youth centres, improvement of the sports complex at Baie aux Huitres, the construction of a gymnasium at Grande Montagne and the completion of the

swimming pool at Maréchal. Provision is also being made for the upgrading of six community football grounds throughout the island.

Community Development and Poverty Alleviation

Mr Chairperson, Sir, this Regional Government cannot remain insensible to the sufferings of the people and turn a deaf ear to the needs of the poorest of the poor.

With the assistance of national poverty alleviation programmes namely “*A nou diboute Ensam*”, the Trust Fund for the Integration of Vulnerable groups and IFAD Community Development Programme, projects geared towards socio-economic activities will be implemented.

Funds have been provided for training in various economic fields including agriculture, fisheries and income-generating activities for women.

Industrial Development and SME

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I wish to inform the Assembly that several schemes do exist to boost up local initiative, to establish production units and to encourage investment from outside Rodrigues. In particular, I wish to underline that Rodrigues is a duty free zone.

With a view to promoting the transfer of know-how and technology, investors from outside Rodrigues will be encouraged to create joint ventures with local entrepreneurs.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I have approached the Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry which will soon assist local entrepreneurs to establish a Rodrigues Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I now invite Rodriguan businessmen to take advantage of this opportunity and to organise themselves to strengthen the private sector in Rodrigues.

In line with the decision of the Executive Council to proclaim 2004 as the year of ‘*culture de l’entrepreneuriat*’, action is being taken to accelerate the allocation of industrial State land leases. As far as possible the industrial sites will be grouped to create the ‘*villages industriels*’ where small entrepreneurs will be able to share common facilities.

A study to identify areas where private investment may be profitable will also be commissioned. The terms of Reference of the study will include the identification of market outlets in the region.

The Entrepreneurship Development Programme would be revitalised in close collaboration with SMIDO and assistance for the formulation of investment projects would be provided to potential entrepreneurs to start their enterprises.

Following a marketing study carried out this year, a competition for the Rodrigues Label as a mark of quality for products of Rodriguan origin would be soon financed by the European Union.

Reforms in the Public Service

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the decentralised administration process will rely much on the performance of the public service to support the policies of the Executive Council. Whilst there have been many constraints since the advent of the Rodrigues Regional Assembly, I must place on record my appreciation of the good work being performed by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly employees, including those posted on a tour of study from Mauritius under the administrative control of the Island Chief Executive and the Departmental Heads.

The problem of the Civil Establishment Order for the Rodrigues Regional Assembly employees is being looked into by the authorities to enable proper recruitment of additional staff which is so indispensable for the good running of the public service in general. New and additional posts are being created.

In this budget, we have given particular attention to the 187 employees on contract from the Anti-Erosion Programme. As you are aware, 200 general workers were employed under contract since April 2001 and their contract of employment has been renewed every year. Several of them have left the service and the present contract of employment of the remaining 187 employees has been extended until 30 June 2004. Thereafter, I have allowed for their employment on the Rodrigues Regional Assembly establishment after all administrative formalities would be completed. This will boost up the workforce in many Commissions as many of the labour force is above 50 years old and we are seeing an exodus of Rodrigues Regional Assembly employees going on retirement.

There is also a major improvement in the computerisation of the different services offered by the Rodrigues Regional Assembly for which a sum of Rs2 m. has been earmarked.

In its quest for modernisation, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly has opted to keep pace with the rapid change taking place with information technology. Besides the Human Resource Management System, the Payroll, Pension, Passage, Oracle Financials and the recently implemented Social Security Office, the computerised revenue collection system is a structure that is geared towards not only revenue collection from all existing sources, but also producing management information to top and middle-level management for decision taking with regard to generating revenue from new sources.

This system, having at its core the maintenance of a central population data base, is designed for a multi-units information sharing in a networking with State land lease, including the geographical information system, licence, water resources unit, fishermen, rent of buildings, stores and the National Transport Authority to ultimately, *inter alia* track down bad debtors and beneficiaries of different types of assistance.

The integrated features of this new system in a live computerised finance environment will help towards better monitoring of public funds.

The implementation of these computerised systems will no doubt assist in enhancing IT awareness and inculcating IT culture in the Rodrigues Public Service.

Much emphasis has been laid on the training of 500 Rodrigues Regional Assembly employees in Information Communication Technology with the assistance of the Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms. With these improvements, there is no doubt that the public in general will receive better service from the Rodrigues Regional Assembly staff.

Training and Information Technology Development

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Industrial and Vocational Training Board will be called upon to play a key role in devising training programmes to cater for the specific needs of Rodrigues. In the first instance, training programmes in Information Technology will be run to enable a larger number of Rodriguans to become fully conversant with computer

applications. Infrastructural facilities have been put at the disposal of the IVTB at Le Chou and Mont Lubin colleges. With a view to facilitating the implementation of vocational and industrial training programme in favour of the Rodriguan youth, a Memorandum of Understanding between IVTB Mauritius and the Commission of Education and Training had been signed in February 2004.

Furthermore, every year 22 seats are made available free of charge to the Rodriguan youth at the *Polytechnique* schools in Mauritius.

The Human Resource Centre will also be required to continue devising training programmes for employees in the public and private sectors. The constant training of employees will enable them to better their skills and hence improve their productivity. This will no doubt be beneficial to the organisations they are working for and in extension to the economy of the country at large. The Human Resource Centre is providing multi-pronged training sessions to various categories of employees of both the public and private sectors. To date some 1900 participants have benefited from the training programmes viz job skills training project, certificate in management, courses for host/hostesses, ICT training, etc. whereas some 1500 participants have been offered facilities for the conduct of training, seminars and workshops.

To that effect, I am providing an amount of Rs3.5 m. under the Human Resource Centre to meet necessary expenses in relation to the training programmes.

In collaboration with the National Computer Board, a Strategic Plan for Information Communication Technology Development in Rodrigues will be prepared.

Tourism

Mr Chairperson, Sir, we are committed to develop an environmentally friendly tourism in Rodrigues. This is a *sine qua non* condition to maintain Rodrigues as an eco-tourism destination. In addition, the service standards will be raised and in that respect, service providers will be required to observe regulations in force and in addition, strict norms will be established. We are also processing new applications for industrial State land lease to set up hotel projects. I am again providing an amount of Rs1.0 m. in the budget to support promotion campaigns with respect to Rodrigues.

Public Infrastructure and Housing

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I am providing an amount of Rs60 m. in the budget for the asphaltting of the following roads -

- (1) Rivière Coco coast to Rivière Coco Cemetery
- (2) Cooperative St Gabriel to Malabar
- (3) Grand La Fouche Mangles to Cité Grand La Fouche Mangles

Moreover, an amount of Rs3.0 m. is being provided to meet preliminary expenses to be incurred in connection with consultancy services for the upgrading of Mont Lubin – Pte Coton – St. François road. The project value for the above road is estimated at Rs150 m.

In addition, an amount of Rs2 m. is being provided to complete the small bridge at Port Sud Est, and to construct a new one at Grand La Fouche, Mangles.

Coupled along with our programme of improving our road network, the Regional Government is looking forward to providing an efficient public transport system throughout the island. It is in our intention to bring new regulations to limit the size of vehicles to be allowed on our roads.

A Memorandum of Understanding will be signed shortly with the National Transport Authority so that the National Transport Authority Branch in Rodrigues will be fully autonomous. Three Rodriguan Road Transport Inspectors will be recruited so as to monitor the operations of public buses and all the other vehicles at a more regular frequency.

As regards housing, consultancy services will be provided for the construction of another batch of core houses for low-income groups.

Agriculture

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I have assigned a very high priority to the modernisation of the agricultural sector and will facilitate any work or new investment in that sector to support our agricultural reform.

Agriculture Land Management and Administration will be looked into by addressing the issues relating to the allocation of State lands which will be further improved. This new thrust in the Agricultural Land Development Programme will include the development of the Agricultural Land

Information System through the GIS system and inventory of all agricultural lands. It will also involve establishing a list of genuine planters with whom the Agricultural Services will be interacting.

Moreover, agricultural production will be focused on agro-processing. As part of our developmental thrust for the agricultural sector, we are focusing on encouraging our youth to be much more engaged in agriculture. It is proposed to set up a Young Farmers Entrepreneur Scheme for the ex-IVTB students to facilitate access to capital and land to all those who have successfully completed a programme in Agriculture in the IVTB.

I am therefore making a provision of Rs1.8 m. under item “Incentive for Agricultural Livestock and Food Production” in the budget.

Fisheries Development

Mr Chairperson, Sir, fisheries being one of the most important sectors for the economic development of Rodrigues, a provision of Rs1.7 m. will be made to support its development. Offshore fishing will be developed to compensate for the shortage of fish inside the lagoon. In this context, consideration is being given for the acquisition of off-lagoon vessels under the Community Development Programme funded by IFAD. These vessels will be put at the disposal of fishermen to enable them to have access to fish aggregating devices.

Fishermen will be encouraged to group themselves to avail of existing loan facilities for the purchase of off-lagoon fishing vessels for fishing on the banks around Rodrigues.

We have received proposals from three Mauritian Fishing Companies who have signified their intention to invest in Rodrigues. Two of them have undertaken exploratory fishing expeditions in Rodrigues and have obtained encouraging results. These projects are being considered.

The Mauritius Port Authority has been approached to obtain equipment to dredge the estuary at Pointe Monier to create a fishing port to provide mooring facilities for fishing vessels. The *Maison des Pêcheurs* will be rehabilitated to provide support facilities to individual fishermen while the area between the *Maison des Pêcheurs* and the Fisheries Protection Services will be parcelised and offered on lease to fishing companies for the construction of cold rooms.

Arts and Culture

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I am providing an amount of Rs12 m. for the completion of the first Cultural and Leisure Centre at Lataniers which will be operational in early 2005.

The artist assistance scheme has already been formally set up. Four cultural animators will be recruited to work in schools, community centres and at the cultural and leisure centres also. These animators will train children and the public in general in the different artistic and cultural fields.

A study on cultural development and cultural industries will be carried out.

Library Services

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I am providing Rs15 m. for the construction of an administrative block cum library in Port Mathurin where the public library will be housed.

Another major development in library services will be the setting up of a multi-media centre, which will include a library at the Lataniers Cultural and Leisure Centre.

State Lands

Mr Chairperson, Sir, a provision of Rs3 m. is being made to continue the cadastral survey, which has been discontinued some years back. In the first instance, a housing survey will be carried out to assess the situation so as to rationalise the allocation of residential leases. Besides, the allocation of State land leases will be made with due consideration to the recommendation of the National Development Strategy Report.

Fire Services

Mr Chairperson, Sir, the Fire Services in Rodrigues have to be given the required equipment to enable them function efficiently. In that respect, provision to the tune of Rs1 m. has been included in the budget for the purchase of one trailer pump and one combined water and foam monitor on trailer.

In addition, funds have been provided for the construction of an infrastructure for the storage of expensive fire equipment.

In the context of the preparation of a Fire Prevention Plan, two consultants visited Rodrigues and their report is being expected shortly.

Prisons

As regards the Prisons Services, care should be taken to enable prisoners to be detained in acceptable conditions. In that respect, I am providing an amount of Rs2.5 m. for the extension of the Prison complex.

The budget also makes provision for the renovation of a building at Marechal to serve as a centre for the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents in Rodrigues.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I now turn to the Revenue Section of the Recurrent Budget.

The recurrent revenue to be credited to the Rodrigues Consolidated Fund will amount to some Rs17 m. next financial year as compared to a revised revenue of Rs14.7 m. for financial year 2003-2004. Receipts from public services and rental of Government property are expected to increase substantially.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, on behalf of the population of Rodrigues, I wish to place on record our deepest appreciation and gratitude to the Central Government for its continued support towards the development of Rodrigues

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and his staff for his advice and support during consultations with his office.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, may I also thank funding agencies for their continued support in the implementation of development projects.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, last, but not least, I wish to thank all those who have participated in the preparation of the Draft Estimates for Financial year 2004/2005 and, in particular, my colleagues Commissioners, the Island Chief Executive, the Departmental Heads and staff of the Commissions and the Chief Finance Officer and his staff for their invaluable contribution in preparing this Budget.

Mr Chairperson, Sir, I am confident that the Draft Estimates will meet the approval of the Assembly. Thereafter, I shall transmit the Draft

Estimates to the Ministry of Local Government and Rodrigues for presentation to Cabinet, which shall decide on the quantum of financial resources to be allocated to Rodrigues for the next financial year.

M. le président, les jeunes, les hommes, les femmes de ce pays sont notre grande richesse. Nous sommes encouragés par leur sens profond de progrès, de fierté, de solidarité par le travail. Je lance un appel aux uns et aux autres afin qu'ils regardent avant tout l'intérêt du pays, afin que nous puissions bâtir ensemble dans la discipline et l'amour l'avenir de notre île Rodrigues. Rodriguais, "*deboute lor to deux li pieds*" disait le Pape Jean-Paul II le 15 octobre 1989 à la Ferme.

With these words, Mr Chairperson, Sir, I commend the motion to the House.

Thank you for your attention.

The Deputy Chief Commissioner rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

The Deputy Chief Commissioner: Mr Chairperson, Sir, I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mrs Perrine-Bégué rose and seconded

Question put and agreed to.

Debate adjourned accordingly.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chief Commissioner: Sir, I beg to move that this Assembly do now adjourn to Friday 02 April 2004 at 10.30 a.m.

The Deputy Chief Commissioner rose and seconded.

Question put and agreed to.

At 17.20 hrs, the Assembly was, on its rising, adjourned to Friday 02 April 2004 at 10.30 a.m.

