

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION (27.03.07)

B/54 The Honourable Fifth Member for La Caverne and Phoenix
(Mr. Soodhun)

To ask Dr the Honourable Minister of Agro Industry and Fisheries?

Whether he will state Government policy in regard to the importation of fresh vegetables following the shortage caused by the recent cyclone?

REPLY

Speaker Sir,

Following the passage of cyclones, a rapid survey is normally conducted by AREU to assess the extent of damage of vegetables island wide. Based on the findings of the survey, necessary measures, such as importation of vegetables over a limited period of time, are taken to ensure that such vegetables are available to consumers.

2. For the recent cyclone Gamede, the extent of damage to vegetable cultivation ranged from 50% to 70%. I personally chaired a Committee on 26 February 2007 with all stakeholders to take stock of the situation and to implement measures for the importation of vegetables to make up for the shortage on the local market.

3. From survey and market information, the shortage of vegetables on the market was assessed and import of short supplied vegetables was recommended namely carrots, cabbages and green beans. A Committee was immediately set up at level of my Ministry to allocate quotas for imports, quantities to be imported and time frame for imports while looking into the interest of local planters and consumers to access for a choice of vegetables. A press communiqué was issued to invite potential importers to express interest for imports with closing date of 2 March 2007. AMB was requested to import a certain quantity of carrots and cabbages by air freight for immediate supply to the market.

4. Fifty importers expressed their interest for importation of the fresh vegetables and a shortlist of fifteen importers was drawn according to a selection criteria based on experience in imports of vegetables, and logistic facilities to ensure reliable supply of fresh vegetable to consumers and at affordable price. Out of the fifteen (15) importers to which permits were issued for week 4 to 10 March 2007, only five (5) responded. In the spirit of empowerment, an import permit was also granted to one small farmer group.

5. Importation of fresh vegetables is subject to compliance with the phytosanitary regulations of the National Plant Protection Office of my Ministry and certified according to the exporting countries. Importation of leafy vegetables and fresh tomatoes is strictly prohibited.

6. The importation of carrots, cabbages and green beans was allowed and is based on weekly consumption volumes and shortfalls obtained from estimates of production. Importation of fresh cauliflower, which is an off season commodity, has also been allowed for the general public, since importers have not been successful in the procurement of fresh quality fine beans on the foreign markets. The import quantities were graduated on weekly basis to prevent eventual supply gluts on the market.

7. AMB had already a buffer stock for potatoes and onions for period of one month. Since these might be consumed as substitutes food items, AMB had increased orders for imports of such commodities for the month of March 2007. They have also urgently proceeded with importation of canned tomatoes.

8. The situation is being closely monitored on a weekly basis to determine future imports depending on crop establishment and crop recovery which is expected to return by end of April 2007 or early May 2007.