

Parliamentary Question – B/432

Sitting of Tuesday 09 May 2023

B/432 The Honourable Fourth Member for Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East (Mr Juman)

To ask the Honourable Minister of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training, Minister of Commerce and Consumer Protection -

Whether, in regard to ration rice, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the State Trading Corporation, information as to the (a) quantity of monthly consumption thereof (b) buying and selling price thereof and (c) available stock thereof, indicating if (i) the storage thereof meets the required standards and (ii) same are good for consumption?

Reply

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

Ration rice, or Long Grain White Rice 5% Broken, as it is technically known, is a staple food in the Mauritian population, including in Rodrigues, with an annual consumption of about 24,000 metric tons (MT), of which

about 5,000 MT is for Rodrigues. The ration rice sold on the local market is procured by the State Trading Corporation mainly from India and Pakistan. In view of the ongoing volatility in international prices, the procurement is carried out by STC through open international bidding exercise on a quarterly basis for 6,000 MT.

With regards to part (a) of the question, I am informed by the State Trading Corporation that, based on its sales figures, the monthly consumption of ration rice is about 2,126 MT, of which around 1,703 MT is consumed in Mauritius and about 423 MT in Rodrigues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

With regards to part (b) of the question, I am informed that between July 2022 to April 2023, the average price of one MT of ration rice was USD 489.60, representing a cost price of MUR 13.65 for ½ kg.

Both the wholesale and retail prices of ration rice are subsidised and are regulated under the Consumer Protection (Control of Price of Taxable and Non-taxable Goods) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 2012.

I am also informed that since 2006, the maximum wholesale price and maximum retail price of ration rice on the local market are fixed and have remained unchanged. The wholesale prices of ration rice are as follows:

2.5 kg bag is sold at Rs 26.55

5 kg bag is sold at Rs 53.10

25 kg bag is sold at Rs 255.50

Consequently, half a kg of ration rice retails at Rs 5.40, a 2.5kg bag retails at Rs 28, a 5 kg bag retails at Rs 56, while a 25 kg bag retails at Rs 270.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

With regards to part (c), I am informed that the STC has, as at 08 May 2023, a stock of around 4,400 MT of ration rice, which represents nearly 55 days of consumption based on the current sales trend of about 80 MT per day.

I am further informed that the STC stores its ration rice in a warehouse leased from and maintained by the

Mauritius Ports Authority and intends to move to a new warehouse in due course.

With regard to the quality of the rice, it is to be highlighted that all rice cargoes imported and commercialised by the STC need to have the required phytosanitary certificates at embarkment and health certificates issued by independent authorities. No import or commercialisation is allowed if these criteria are not satisfied.

I am informed that on 20 March 2023, insects were detected in sample of rice collected by Mauritius Standard Bureau from one lot of 950 Metric Tons (38,000 bags) of rice stored at Shed A as per established practice.

On 21 March 2023, in order to prevent any proliferation in the store, immediate actions were taken by the Entomology Division of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, to treat the product with phostoxin. Additionally, fogging exercises were carried out by the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,

Several on-site inspections have also been carried out on 28 March 2023, 10 April 2023, 18 April 2023, 21 April 2023, 25 April 2023, 05 May 2023 and 08 May 2023 to monitor the situation. Fumigation and fogging exercises of the whole warehouse has been carried out at regular intervals to reduce the infestation. In addition, the phostoxin treatment of rice are being done in batches at regular intervals.

Consequently, as at 05 May 2023, I am informed that about 60,000 – 70,000 bags were observed to have been affected and are being adequately treated as per the recommendations of the Entomology Division of the Ministry of Agro-Industry before delivery. Notwithstanding this, I wish to point out that action is being taken to fumigate the whole warehouse.

The Entomology Division of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security has confirmed that the rice

stored at Shed A is fit for human consumption following the treatments held within the warehouse by their team.

The Entomology Division of the Agricultural Services of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security, carries out regular inspections of the rice stored at the warehouse, the latest visit being on 08 May 2023.

I am informed by the STC that no product which is unfit for human consumption is delivered by the STC.
