PQ B/23: Whether, in regard to our diplomatic missions overseas, he will state if Mauritian citizens have access thereto, indicating the services offered thereto during the lockdown period implemented in the different countries where they are located?

Mr. Speaker Sir,

I wish to inform the House that all our Missions are accessible to any Mauritian abroad. They provide consular services which include the following: renewal of Mauritian passports, issue of travel documents, attestation of civil status documents and a whole array of assistance services to Mauritian nationals in various situations.

Since the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic, all our diplomatic missions, Consulates and Honorary Consulates have been requested to give utmost priority to the situation of Mauritian nationals in their countries of accreditation working in tandem with the Ministry.

At the same time, we established emergency instruments to initiate and maintain contacts with Mauritian nationals, either directly or through our diplomatic missions, and to respond to their concerns. These include:

(i) the creation of a local hotline number [181] and international Hotline number [+230 4052576] service available on a 7/7 day basis;

(ii) a dedicated email address [emergencymfa@govmu.org], for an easy and rapid submission of concerns and requests;

(iii) the crisis cell which had been set up for the repatriation of Mauritian nationals from China and consolidated thereafter;

(iv) the setting up of special desks to respond to all emerging consular and other issues.

These instruments have allowed my Ministry and our diplomatic missions to stay in touch with Mauritian nationals via telephone, email, hotlines and WhatsApp as well as any other means.
accessible to them. Since January 2020 till date, the special emergency mail alone received and replied to some **4500 emails**, whilst the hotline allowed our crisis team to attend to more than **3000 calls** till now.

The information, compiled through the database regarding Mauritian nationals who are stranded or in distress, is relayed to our Mission overseas for follow up. In parallel, our diplomatic service consisting of 19 Embassies/High Commissions, 2 Consulates and 58 Honorary Consulates, overseas are reaching out to our Mauritian nationals in distress. They have been dispensing all possible services to our nationals abroad, in the countries in which they are present and in those to which the Missions are accredited.

These services include, *inter alia*:

(i) registration of our citizens abroad and setting up of a database in view of organizing an orderly repatriation as soon as the international situation so permits;

(ii) liaising with authorities of the host country for the extension of visas with regard to stranded Mauritians who have overstayed because of lockdowns;

(iii) provision of information to those stranded on measures being taken by Government to assist them, including conveying information about the special loan facility initiated by Government at banks;

(iv) intervention with various government and private stakeholders to facilitate accommodation, for example by negotiating rates with hotels and calling on their understanding for the difficulties faced by our nationals;

(v) liaising with local authorities, including the police, in view of assisting our nationals who face special difficulties;

(vi) liaising with authorities in the host country for obtaining necessary flight and landing clearances as and when possible for the repatriation of our nationals;

(vii) liaising, as and when flights are being arranged, with airlines, local authorities, transport and the airports for the orderly repatriation of our nationals;

(viii) making necessary arrangements to facilitate COVID-19 testing for those stranded, wherever possible, such a test being a prime condition for eligibility to travel to Mauritius;
(ix) facilitating the issue of travel documents for those whose passports have expired;
(x) providing in some cases, either directly or in liaison with charitable institutions or well-wishers, basic requirements such as food and transportation facilities;
(xi) assisting those in a special medical condition to procure their medicines and ensuring continuity of their care;
(xii) counselling and comforting our nationals who are in a situation of anxiety and distress;
(xiii) maintaining contact with the relevant cruise liners to ensure the welfare and safety of our Mauritian nationals both, crew members as per their work contract and passengers;
(xiv) ensuring logistics arrangements through freight forwarders, and arranging for customs and other relevant clearances in respect of airlifting or shipments of unprecedented volumes of cargo of medical equipment, the greatest bulk of which has been procured by the Government.

Mr. Speaker Sir,

I call on the House to be alive to the exceptionally disruptive circumstances in which our Missions have been operating. These include nation-wide confinement, mobility restrictions, flight restrictions, closure of airports and airspace, cancellation of domestic and connecting flights.

Yet despite these constraints, all our diplomatic Missions, with limited staff and resources, have been responding as diligently as possible to our nationals. They have been delivering to the best of their abilities on the task of assisting our citizens who are stranded or in distress.

In many cases, they have walked the extra mile to respond to the exigencies of the situation. To illustrate, one of our nationals on medical treatment in India, on support of Government to the tune of 2 Million Indian Rupees exceeded the cost of treatment by 3 Million Indian Rupees. Thanks to the forceful intervention of our High Commission, the hospital agreed
to waive the excess amount and I am happy to report that she is expected to return to Mauritius on a repatriation flight which is being envisaged.

I am also pleased to report to the House that some of our Missions (in Beijing, Paris, New Delhi, Johannesburg) have been prime facilitators for the shipment of critical medical supplies to Mauritius. They have been involved at all stages of the delivery chain: from pick up point to the final embarkation on flights or cargo vessels and, in between, finalizing arrangements with ancillary services providers, medical certification authorities; freight forwarders and customs and port authorities.

I must also acknowledge that our Honorary Consulates abroad are also assisting to the extent possible in the constraining conditions of the lockdowns. Many of Honorary Consuls have, indeed, been solicited to support Mauritians stranded and have helped our citizens by coordinating, providing information of flights, airlines, opening of airspace, assisting in finding accommodation, food and medication.

Mr Speaker Sir,

Our priority at the level of the Ministry and our diplomatic missions is the repatriation of our nationals stranded abroad. Currently, there are around 2000 stranded Mauritians in across 75 countries as remote as Trinidad and Tobago, Siberia, Uruguay, Peru, Congo, Sudan and Uzbekistan; as well as in Europe, India and Madagascar. The Mauritians are found stranded in 25 African countries, 20 European countries, 20 Asian countries and 10 countries in Australasia and Americas. The figures are likely to increase with the extension of the lockdown and closure of university campuses in many of the countries.

Over and above, there are 1670 Mauritian crew members working for 21 Cruise companies on 122 cruise ships harboired in 41 ports around the world. The bulk of the Mauritians work for the Royal Caribbean (601), MSC Cruise (558) and Celebrity Cruise (358).
It must be emphasized that repatriation exercise depends on the recommendations of the Ministry of Health taking into account quarantine and treatment capacity and as sanctioned by the national committee on COVID.

Criteria applied for the repatriation of stranded Mauritians nationals:

- A valid return air ticket to Mauritius;
- Patients and their accompanying relative/carers;
- Elderly persons above 60;
- Families with toddlers; and
- Students and Mauritians in distress.
- Moreover, the passengers should have a PCR test not exceeding five days at the time of embarkation, confirming that he/she is COVID-19 free.