

# National Assembly Debates

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2007) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN**

## Part I of III

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16th Sitting

14:00h

Wednesday 14 February 2007

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### ***MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71***

#### ***Speaker (1)***

**The Hon Hari N Ramkarran SC, MP - (AOL)**

*Speaker of the National Assembly*

#### **Members of the Government (42)**

#### **People's Progressive Party/Civic (41)**

#### **The United Force (1)**

The Hon Samuel A A Hinds MP

*(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)*

*Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications*

The Hon Clement J Rohee MP

*Minister of Home Affairs*

The Hon Shaik K Z Baksh MP

*Minister of Education*

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey MP - (AOL)

*Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation*

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

*(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)*

*Minister of Health*

**NA-BUDGET DEBATE 14 FEBRUARY 2007**

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

*(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Esseq)*

*Minister of Amerindian Affairs*

\*The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP

*Minister of Finance*

\*The Hon S Rudolph Insanally OR, CCH, MP - (AOL)

*Minister of Foreign Affairs*

The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt MP

*Minister of Housing and Water*

The Hon Robert M Persaud MP

*(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)*

*Minister of Agriculture*

The Hon Dr Jennifer R A Westford MP - (AOL)

*(R#7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)*

*Minister of the Public Service*

The Hon Kellawan Lall MP

*Minister of Local Government and Regional Development*

\*The Hon Doodnauth Singh SC, MP

*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*

The Hon Dr Frank C S Anthony MP

*Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport*

The Hon Brindley H R Benn MP

*Minister of Transport and Hydraulics*

\*\*The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP

*Minister of Labour*

The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP

*(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*

*Minister of Human Services and Social Security*

The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP - (Absent)

*Minister in the Ministry of Education*

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

*Minister in the Ministry of Health*

**NA-BUDGET DEBATE 14 FEBRUARY 2007**

The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP

*Minister in the Ministry of Finance*

The Hon Manniram Prashad MP - (Absent)

*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce*

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

The Hon Gail Teixeira MP

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal MP

*Chief Whip*

Ms Bibi S Shadick MP

*(R# 3 – Essequibo Is/W Demerara)*

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP

Mr Albert Atkinson JP, MP

*(R# 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)*

\*Non-elected Minister \*\*Elected Member from TUF

Mr Komal Chand CCH, JP, MP

*(R# 3 - Essiquibo Is/W Demerara)*

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

*(R# 2 - Pomeroun/Supenaam)*

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

\*\*\* Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP

*Parliamentary Secretary*

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

*(R# 2 - Pomeroun/Supenaam)*

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

*Parliamentary Secretary*

\*\*\*Mrs Pauline R Sukhai MP

*Parliamentary Secretary*

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP - (AOL)

Mr Norman A Whittaker MP

*(R# 1 - Barima/Waini)*

\*\*\*Non-elected Member

## **Members of the Opposition (28)**

### **(i) People's National Congress Reform 1-Guyana (22)**

Mr Robert HO Corbin

*Leader of the Opposition*

Mr Winston S Murray CCH, MP

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl MP

*Deputy Speaker, performing duties of Speaker of the Nat. Assembly*

Mr E Lance Carberry MP - (AOL)

*Chief Whip*

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP

Mr Anthony Vieira MP - (Absent)

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP

Mr Keith Scott MP

Miss Amna Ally MP

Mr James K McAllister MP

Mr Dave Danny MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr Aubrey C Norton MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr Ernest B Elliot MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

## NA-BUDGET DEBATE 14 FEBRUARY 2007

Miss Judith David-Blair MP

*(R# 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)*

Mr Mervyn Williams MP

*(Re# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)*

Ms Africo Selman MP

Dr John Austin MP

*(R# 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)*

Ms Jennifer Wade MP

*(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*

Ms Vanessa Kissoon MP

*(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)*

Mr Desmond Fernandes MP

*(Region No 1 – Barima/Waini)*

### **(ii) Alliance For Change (5)**

Mr Raphael G Trotman MP

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan MP

Mrs Sheila VA Holder MP

Ms Chantalle L Smith MP - *(AOL)*

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr David Patterson MP

### **(iii) Guyana Action Party/Rise Organise and Rebuild (1)**

Mr Everall N Franklin MP

### ***OFFICERS***

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs

*Clerk of the National Assembly*

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah

*Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly*

## 4<sup>TH</sup> DAY - BUDGET DEBATE 2007

### PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the Prayer

### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Honourable Members, I wish to extend to all of you, ladies and gentlemen, a happy Valentine's Day, and I wish particularly to tell the ladies that, after his major *faux pas* in Parliament yesterday, the Honourable Member, Mr Overall Franklin has presented two boxes of chocolates which the ladies would have at tea time, especially for the ladies, especially for the female MPs.  
*[Laughter and Applause]*

Honourable Members, we will now resume this debate and Budget for the year 2007. The first speaker for today is the Honourable Member, Ms Amna Ally.

**Hon Amna Ally:** Mde Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, I rise to make my contribution on the 2007 Budget presentation by the Honourable Dr Ashni Singh, under the theme '*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana,*' and I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Singh on his maiden presentation.

Mde Speaker, in brief, I can only describe this Budget as one which is empty, full of promises, and offers no hope; and I submit, Mde Speaker, if it is in any way concretising any vision, it certainly will be blurred vision. There is no way we can look forward to the empty promises as contained in this Budget. We hope, though, that these promises can become reality.

Mde Speaker, education in any country determines the type of generation for today and for tomorrow. Education determines the progress rate, and the success of a nation. Education provides the indicators from which our society evolves and determines the way forward. It is because education is so important that, during the tenure of the People National Congress, we placed a lot of emphasis on investing in education.

Mde Speaker, you will recall that, dating back to 1966 - 1976 the PNC invested time, money, effort, and brains to invest in education. This period saw the expansion of education opportunities, and it was during that period that the PNC saw the development of an indigenous curriculum.

In 1976-1990 there was free education, hence the access to educational opportunities, and these are facts, Mde Speaker, stated in a publication by the Ministry of Education-Strategic Plan 2003-2007. I want to point out too, Mde Speaker, that between 1976 and 1992 many schools were built and staffed. So, from the onset, let it

be recorded, Mde Speaker, that building schools is nothing new. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the difference is that the PNC not only built the schools, but also staffed the schools (*Applause*) and provided opportunities for many. At this stage, Mde Speaker, I want to advise the Honourable Member ... and I don't see her here, the Honourable Member Ms. Shadick, not to mislead this Assembly, for the Leguan Secondary School was not built by, or under, the Administration of the PPP/C. I want to also remind her that it was because of the quality of education, it was because of the quality of education that the PNC provided that she could stand in this Assembly and speak so eloquently. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member said that, in 1992, all the schools were dilapidated. Well, Mde Speaker, that has to be a joke, or maybe it is because of age. But it was the PNC that built all those modern Multilateral Schools; many nursery schools, among others. I heard the Honourable Member of Region No. 2 speaking of brand-new state-of-the-art schools. I know that the Honourable Member was using term 'brand new' very loosely, and I hope that he would seek to find out what exactly is meant by a state-of-the-art school.

Mde Speaker, our education system in Guyana is weakened: It is weakened because of the lack of vision, it is weakened because of the lack of good management; it is weakened because of ad-hoc driven motives; hence,



while the plan might be good, the Government does not have the capacity to implement; hence a plethora of problems.

Mde Speaker ... [*Interruption: "I'll have to take good my facts Mr. Neil Kumar"*] Mde Speaker, I want to refer to Honourable Henry Jeffrey's speeches of the 2005-2006 Budgets. The Honourable Member expounded on methodologies and strategies of functional literacy. So these questions of functional literacy has been on the table for sometime now; but let us see what is the status of this literacy programme in Guyana which is in its third year. Mde Speaker, I wish to refer you to page 32 of the Budget Speech, which states; and I quote:

*Among the objectives of this plan is the attainment of one hundred percent functional literacy. This will be achieved through, for example, increasing access to Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools, through the construction and rehabilitation of schools in the ten regions; improving the curricula; introducing new teaching methods, especially in English and Maths; and making better*

*use of Information  
Technology.*

Mde Speaker, it is not ambitious to want to achieve 100% functional literacy, but we have to create the conditions which would provide the opportunity for 100% functional literacy. Mde Speaker, several times, in this House during this Budget Debate, we heard about building new schools etcetera. This also is manifested in this Budget. While that continued service is provided ... and it continued because building schools did not start under the PPP/C, the Government must understand that human resource is vital for its effectiveness, and I will return to this later.

Many of our young children, in and out of school, cannot read and write. If we carefully look at the results of the 2006 assessment, we will see that a number of children, their performance in Reading are exceedingly low, and I can say this because I examined it. While I'm on this assessment, we must not lose sight of the *modus operandi* in conducting the assessment. This has been a long outstanding issue on the table, and must be addressed forthwith. Mde Speaker, I repeat, the methodology for assessment must be examined, and the correct methodology must be employed.

Mde Speaker, I want to tell this Honourable House that the PNC/R-1G has done a survey in

Georgetown, and in some selected areas in other parts of the country, on the literacy/innumeracy question. The results, I admit, are alarming. I wonder what the Government has, as its plan, to deal with those who fall in the category of those who are not able to read and write but still go to school. My humble submission is that, if the BEAMS programme is administered in a systematic way, it will help. I wish to proudly say, Mde Speaker, that the PNC/R did not only conduct a survey, but it has its findings, and we have established learning centres in Sophia and East Ruimveldt to assist in alleviating this problem. *[Applause]* There is need to advance similar programmes, and the PNC/R will not stop at the two that have been established. We would continue to have literacy projects wherever we can.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Desiree Fox alluded to eliminating literacy, but that is not enough. There must be direct programmes but, other than the programmes, there must be proper supervisory mechanisms for these programmes, and indeed, the Ministry of Education must make education a priority of the nation: Saying it and doing it are two different things. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, every year we come here and make brilliant speeches on what is to be done, and every year the Government repeats itself about its grandiose plans to alleviate this literacy problem.

Mde Speaker, let me point this Honourable House to a very practical example: Mde Speaker, every year, on completion of the SSEE (Secondary School Entrance Examination), or what is commonly called the Common Entrance, there are children who may not have the required marks to go to a secondary school, hence they are placed at special schools. In Region No. 5, for example, there are three such schools, but in none of those schools exist an organised programme to take care of the special needs of those children. There are no requisite resources to upgrade them. They are just sent there and left to the mercies of the non-existent. This matter has been discussed at the Regional Education Committee of that Region, but to no avail. This is not so only in Region 5, but is so in all the regions.

Mde Speaker, it may be good if the Government, at minimum, could learn from some of our CARICOM countries how to deal with situations of this kind. In St. Kitts and Nevis, for example, their efforts, since 1986, to deal with special education has been working well, for they have instituted a lot of non-formal youth skills-training, which catered for high drop-outs and other unemployed young people. There are life skills development training programmes to address teenage pregnancy; peer education; adolescent development, and their vocational summer

programmes are quite effective. Mde Speaker, we must not lose sight of placing emphasis on that category of our young people, because if we neglect them, neglect can fuel a distasteful situation. The Government must focus on programmes for the academically challenged, and these programmes must be workable.

Mde Speaker, Page 15 of the Budget Speech - under '*Review of the Domestic Economy,*' and more particularly on the '*Education Sector,*' points to the Basic Education Access Management Support Programme - acronym the BEAMS Project. I want to say, from the onset, that we of the PNC/R-1 fully acknowledge and support this project. I am sure that this is a well-intentioned and ongoing project. We are proud when innovative renewed methodologies in teaching are introduced in literacy and numeracy. However, Mde Speaker, this Government lacks the capability to manage this project but, Mde Speaker, before I proceed any further, I wish to offer a piece of writing by the famous *Henry Fayal* (1841-1925) on administrative behaviour, and he said, I quote:

*To plan means to study the future and arrange the plan of operation; to organise means to build up natural and human organisation of the business by organising both people and*

*materials; to command means to make the staff do their work; to coordinate means to unite and correlate all activities; to control means to see that everything is done in accordance with the rules which has been laid down, and instructions which have been given.*

Mde Speaker, if it pleases the Government, it might be instructive that note is taken on that piece of writing in their plans and their projections.

On this very important project, the BEAMS project, I wish to refer to some pertinent facts; and as we think of them, let us ponder on Henry Fayal's writing.

Mde Speaker, there is an enormous flow of international financial resources for this project, which is absolutely necessary for effective implementation. According to the Ministry of Education's publication, this two-phase programme will cost US\$55M of which US\$50M is from the IDB. Mde Speaker, it was no less a person than, again, the Hon Henry Jeffrey, former Minister of Education who said in his 2005 Budget presentation, and I quote:

*The first order for the day for anyone who wants to improve education in Guyana must*

*be the issue of management and accountability.*

Mde Speaker, the BEAMS project was born since 2005 ... and I want you to listen carefully to this, but its first phase of implementation was in February 2006; the first phase of this programme ended during this year 2007.

Secondly, while this programme should have started in September 2005, it did so only in 2006.

Thirdly, between September 2006, and December 2006, the programme of work for the Level I pupils – that is Prep A that commenced in the second term. I wonder when the third terms' work will be done, and whether it will be done before the end of the school year, before the children go to the next level, Level II. *[Interruption and Laughter]*

Fourthly, Mde Speaker, there is no continuity. The booklet for the Level I second term is not yet printed ... *[Interruption: 'In you school.' "Is the Ministry got to print it. Why you so slow...?]* I wonder, Mde Speaker, where is the vision that Government speaks about. I said last year that too many important matters are dealt with in an ad-hoc fashion, and here we are again, it is manifesting itself once more.

Fifthly, on the question of strengthening the employment of cluster advisors, Mde Speaker, how can this be done, when the 10% input that the Government has to spend on

training is not yet forthcoming, so that the training can be extended to Region 7, and Region 9.

Mde Speaker, how will it be strengthened when already cluster advisors of Region 2 and Georgetown were issued with letters of not renewing their contracts? Mde Speaker, how will be strengthened when you will it have two advisors per region, with so many teachers. Mde Speaker is it that Government is advertising for new cluster advisors, or do they propose to utilise from the corps trained. I suggest, Mde Speaker, that Government takes a look at the theory of continuity.

I hope, Mde Speaker, that it is not calculated to have this programme run in this fashion for questionable beneficiaries. Let us remember what the Honourable Henry Jeffrey said about management and accountability. To this end, I want to caution the Government that it is not for the contractors to benefit, but that the real beneficiaries must be the nation's children. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, again under this sector, reference was made, on Page 16, on the procurement of furniture and equipment. Mde Speaker, while it is laudable for the Government to embark on infrastructural achievements, buildings without furniture and teachers is like having no buildings at all. Surely the Government does not expect the children to sit on the floor and teach themselves. Mde Speaker, if you go around in Georgetown alone, for example, you will see how inhospitable the Ministry of Education can be. Time and time over, schools request furniture, and you can't get any. Mde Speaker, I cannot



help referring the Government, again, to that writing by Henry Fayal, which I alluded to earlier.

Mde Speaker, Information Technology equipment in schools such as computers are just out there with minimum training programmes, no teachers, no plan ... How do you intend to facilitate building this modern Guyana. Mde Speaker, we all wants a modern Guyana, but we must have the vision to build a modern Guyana. Installing a few computers here and there with no support programme, cannot give effect to Government's intention.

Mde Speaker, at page 32 of the Budget, it reads, and I quote:

*We will continue to develop initiatives, and work with stakeholders to improve teaching conditions, and stem the out-migration of teachers.*

Mde Speaker, it is unbelievable that this Government really believes that, with the present conditions and wages for teachers, it can stem the out-migration of teachers. Our teachers are highly dissatisfied, disillusioned, and frustrated. The Honourable Minister of Finance, in his Budget Speech on page 10, represented the five-year's agreement as a landmark. What a shame! It is a landmark indeed, because here is where the Government inveigled the Guyana Teachers' Union President, and trampled on the rights of teachers. Mde Speaker, let me tell you that this agreement was not about teachers, it was

about the President - and not even his executives.  
*[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, could you imagine 5% over a five-year period, with 1% based on performance, when VAT alone is 15%? What must the teachers do to cushion this shortfall? *[Interruption: 'Organize and send home the President' "Send home you, that's why you get send home"]* Mde Speaker, the modalities for earning this 1% are not even known. If we take a look at Jamaica, one of our sister CARICOM countries, the Gleaner Newspaper of September 2006 the Jamaican Teachers Association spoke to 14%, and 8%, respectively, for two years- not 5% for five years. *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Deborah J Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Amna Ally:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, this is ridiculous, and certainly cannot help to keep our teachers in Guyana: The Government is chasing

them out. I want to call on the Government to take a harder look at salaries and benefits for our teachers. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, in this five- year agreement, there is talk about a revolving loan for housing, duty-free concession, scholarship, clothing allowance, etcetera. Mde, if you look at the details, you will find that they are highly impossible for many. There will not be many beneficiaries, and that is why it is styled in the way the agreement is styled - 2 pages, and plenty things on that 2 pages. Could you imagine 25 scholarships for teachers? That in itself will only add more stress to the teachers. Mde Speaker, when you speak of vision, I am reminded of that illustrious leader, Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham *[Applause]* whom, in his wisdom, gave to all free education in 1956. *[Applause]* [*'Honourable Member Manickchand, you benefited from that'*] *[Applause]* That, Mde Speaker, began to pave the way for a modern Guyana, *[Applause]* and again, to the Honourable Member Bibi Shadick, if the buildings were dilapidated in 1992, the PNC had a programme to fix them; programmes like SIMAP, programmes like PEIP, programme like the SSRP, which the PPP ran with as if they initiated them; *[Applause]* and you come to this House to talk about dilapidated buildings. You embraced all our programmes. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, this Government pays, to many people, exorbitant sums of money as contract workers, some of whom are retained to carry out supervisory and

managerial functions. There are many who stayed and toil to build this nation, but whom are not heeded. Resources will never be afforded so that they can get better salaries but, Mde Speaker, if it is that teachers ... and you must notice it's very important, it is the teachers who have to produce the Carl Greenidges, the Shahabuddeens, the Ramphals, [Applause] the Murray's - the real nation-builders of this country; hence we have a duty to our teachers.

I say today in this Honourable House, Mde Speaker, that if the Government wants a modern Guyana, then it is duty-bound to improve the existing wages and conditions. No trick in the bag, Mde Speaker, let me caution the Government to take heed of the teachers' plea, for if you don't, all the billions that are spent on buildings - new and renovated, they will stand up like 'white elephants.' [Applause] Mde Speaker, the PNC/R-1G has knowledge and experience. We call on this Government to embrace us, so that we can work together to improve the education system. The Government must not believe that it knows it all, for they have made too many mistakes.

Mde Speaker, I now come to Page 33 of the Budget Speech, which says, and I quote:

*Another \$500M has been budgeted for Education for all fast-track initiatives to*

*upgrade approximately ten schools in Regions 2, 3 and 10.*

I must say, Mde Speaker, quite evidently, that the millions are really being fast-tracked. Mde Speaker, it is heartening to note that Guyana is among the first eight countries to receive funding for Education for All Fast Track Initiatives, and that we have passed the test in 2004 for continued funding. But, Mde Speaker, in keeping with the objective, 1 and 4 of the EFA-FTI, which is to improve human resources of the education system, and improving the quality of education in literacy and numeracy. How could we achieve these objectives when many of the nation's children are robbed of a proper education?

In every region of this country there is a shortage of teachers. How could you expect to have 100% functional literacy when there are enormous gaps in the various levels of the teaching system? Mde Speaker, it is not unknown about the *status quo* of staffing in schools. Every month reports from schools are tendered to the Ministry of Education about various things, including staffing, but nothing is done. It is not dealt with in a systematic way; and so here again is a classic example of the Ministry operating in an ad hoc fashion.

Mde Speaker, for two years Region 10 has been without a Regional Education Officer - no wonder our supervisory mechanisms are falling to pieces. I say, if the Ministry of Education cares, appoint the Regional Education Officer

now, and don't tell me about the procedure, about PSC, and all the rest, I know it; but for two years they have been without. Mde, one may contend that someone might be acting, but doesn't it strike you that there are too many actors in the hierarchy of service? Or is it so designed that the political directorate can hover control over them?

Mde Speaker, I now wish to turn to the question of textbooks. Textbooks are tools for our children; and the absence of these tools will result in a poor quality of education. Forbes Burnham, a leader whose wisdom was unmatched ... [*Interruption: "Turn around and look at him Rohee"*] [*Laughter*] saw the necessity of providing text and exercise books for our schoolchildren. Today, Mde Speaker, even though we get a lot of international funding, yet we cannot provide these books to our schools. Mde Speaker, the school system is severely short of books; and I don't have to ask because I know, and when there are books they cannot be distributed in a timely fashion. I invite the Minister of Education to go to the Book Distribution Unit and take a look at what is going on. The time has come when we must stop the rhetoric, and get into action gear. Exercise books are given to the children long after the term begins. Why? The workbooks for Level I - second term are not yet done; the workbooks for Level II are still in the 'dream pipe,' and the BEAMS programme is coming to an end in 2007. Mde Speaker, I did not make those points to be critical, but did so because they are not new. Somebody is not listening ... somebody is not hearing!

Mde Speaker, in a Government of Guyana release of 2004, entitled '*Strategic Plan 2003-2007*' - on page 44, there are nine anticipated outcomes of the Plan. Mde, we are in the final year of the Plan, and I wonder what, if any, yardstick is used to assess the effectiveness of the Plan, or are we waiting for the next phase to 2011? Mde Speaker, notwithstanding, I wish to point to two of the outcomes. The first deals with a rise in functional literacy ... and I want to say, Mde, that we can improve the rate of functional literacy if we expand our horizons, and really make education a priority. As I said, talking about it and doing nothing will not help.

Secondly, Mde Speaker, in terms of delivery, a much better quality of education could be achieved if we provide strong leadership and supervision. This is something which is lacking immensely in the Ministry of Education.

Mde Speaker, the time has come when Guyana must illustrate, by its output, that it has been a strong recipient of funding from donor agencies. We introduced the entities, and with them accompanying programmes. We must now measure how much was achieved and the benefits accrued from those programmes.

In conclusion, Mde Speaker, I want to call on the Government to strengthen its supervisory and managerial capacities. We call on the Government to implement – not just speak of the programmes that will focus on giving quality education. We call on the Government to give the

teachers what you desire to get from them. We call on the Government to put in place a proper welfare system, so that truancy, absenteeism for compulsory school age children can be addressed in a systematic way for improvement of the deflating literacy rate in Guyana.

Finally, Mde Speaker, the PNC/R-1 Guyana will continue, with its best efforts, to improve education, generally, in Guyana. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr. Bernard De Santos.

**Hon Bernard C DeSantos:** Mde Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Budget debate. May it please you, Mde... Kindly permit me, at the very outset of this, what is going to be a reasonably short presentation, to join the litany of congratulations, which have flowed, and flowed encouragingly, from both sides in this Honourable House.

In his first Budget presentation the young Finance Minister has succeeded in earning deserved plaudits for a presentation characterised by one Member on the other side as simple to understand, and yet setting out, in detail, Government's balance sheet containing the hopes and aspirations for the next year. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the lucidity of the Honourable Minister's speech is especially laudable, as I know that thousands of our people are listening to these televised presentations. It is good that they should be able to grasp the contents



expressed in simple, but effective and persuasive language.

Over the past few days, Mde Speaker, I have listened to speakers from both sides of the political divide, and one thing has stood out. It has struck me, Mde Speaker, that, though there has been much politicking, the Opposition speeches have failed to effectively counter the arguments of the Government side. *[Applause]* Not a single project or programme was faulted in its content, or in its intent. Observations were made, only to be later debunked by succeeding speakers; old speeches on dead issues were rehashed, sometimes with great histrionics, but without great effect. Despite ... and I would give them credit for some amount of vigilance, the Opposition failed dismally to successfully attack this Budget presentation, and that is not surprising, Mde Speaker, because, with few exceptions, this Government has delivered on its promises. *[Applause]*

Since 1992, Mde Speaker, this Administration has, by its steady progression of people-oriented programmes, brought Guyana and its people from the precipice of a valley of despair, to firm and fertile ground. It can be argued ... and we should perhaps chide ourselves that we could have done more work, but who is to make that argument? Certainly not those who themselves brought us to the brink of disaster.

One Member on the Opposition benches has said that '*we should not look back;*' but I say that that is a very short-

sighted view and, of course, he has the resources, with Dr. Norton on the other side, to rectify his vision. I say to him to heed these words of wisdom, the authorship of which I'm quite unsure, but the counsel of which the entire Opposition benches should heed, and it goes something like this:

*For those who refuse to hearken to the lessons of history, will live to repeat its mistakes.*

When we speak of three decades, prior to 1992, we are not just looking back; but we remind ourselves of the colossal mistakes made by those who had usurped power, so that we may insulate ourselves against their repetition. This Budget is entitled '*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.*' It is not some harebrained scheme of high-flown utopian programmes, where the people's resources were squandered, and which asphyxiated them in debt. It is a composite of action in each sector of Governmental activity, with the main focus being on the social sector. This, Mde Speaker, has been this administration's thrust from 1992, and continues to the present time.

This is a people's Government, which several election results have established and confirmed. Despite all our detractors, this Administration has triumphed, and one

needs no great wisdom to understand why, Mde Speaker. It is simply because of good stewardship and prudent management of the people's affairs and resources; *[Applause]* and the people are not fools, Mde Speaker; they understand, particularly when their Finance Minister puts it in language which they can grasp. Who can tell them otherwise, when they can see progress all around them in education, in health, in roads and agriculture, in water and in housing? It would have to be admitted, one day, when the Truth Commission is established, then somebody will have to go and beat their breast and admit to the abject failure of their housing programme, and the consummate success of this Government's efforts in that department. *[Applause]*

We have earned international respect in foray throughout the world. The great take office now, Mde Speaker, and I enjoin our friends on the other side to come aboard and help us continue it.

As one of our representatives for Region 4, the largest of the Regions in terms of population, I can see the effects, in our region, in Agriculture - and this despite the floods, with both rice and sugar showing increased performances. Roads have been rebuilt, with the four-lane highway taking pride of place; works to counter flooding - both inland and against the Atlantic, and a housing boom, new hotels, a spanking new stadium; new hospitals and health facilities; and I can go on and on; and although the Le Retraite Road might have a problem, the Le Grange well is well on its way to completion.

I would not wish to repeat facts and figures already given by my colleagues on this side. All in all, this Budget is a balanced one, which will justify its theme. Ms. Alli, who has done her best, with very little material, has made a number of general remarks, which I wouldn't go to criticise, except to say that, when she speaks of blurred vision, she only tells me ... and tells the country, that she needs a change of glasses; *[Applause]* and perhaps even surgery; and she has no excuse, because she has Dr. Norton on her side.

Mde Speaker, there is not much more that I wish to say, except, in finality, to commend all my colleagues who have spoken, and who have taken individual positions in respect of particular ministries, that they have done an excellent job in articulating with the Finance Minister's presentation. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member Dr. George Norton.

**Hon Dr George Norton:** Mde Speaker, I rise to make my maiden contribution to this debate of the Budget for the financial year 2007; and how unfortunate because, if I had to do this presentation in my own Locoda language, I would have been quite confident that I would have not been corrected here for Grammar. However I am a good student and I am willing to learn, whoever feels so to correct me.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Dr Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, at the closing of this Budget presentation,

thanked his colleagues, from both sides of this Honourable House, for their encouragement. This was so true, that he did receive encouragement during his presentation, for I can remember, clearly, the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Robert Corbin, offering warm words of encouraging to him - words and phrases such as *wonderful, very good, excellent, fine*; and he even used the one time very popular *'that is good.'* These words of encouragement were very much in order, Mde Speaker, because, when one listens to the Minister and the plans of his Government for this country - to diversify the economy, to achieve high and sustained growth rates, create jobs and promote employment, to reduce poverty and improve standards of living, then, to use the Minister's own words *'the future looks bright.'* Our experiences, however, Mde Speaker, over the last decade or so, have been to the contrary - very disappointing; and that bright future that the Minister spoke about has remained but a dream. It has been elusive and seems very far from reality.

Mde Speaker, I join with my colleague on the other side of the House, the Honourable Mr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, and offer congratulations to the Honourable Minister, whom the Honourable Member described as *young and bright*, for his academic achievements, and especially of the fact that he has elected to remain in Guyana and serve this nation. This I truly admire of him, but let me remind my colleague, the Honourable Mr. Ali, that at this moment the Honourable Minister is young and still wet

behind the ears, and with the wind in his favour, the going is smooth and comfortable; discomfort. However, might just be clouded or just cast a shadow on the true patriotism that is mooted. We do hope that, when the wind changes its direction, and the tide turns, he does not cut and run, but remains in Guyana, and contribute, like so many of us are doing today, here in this Honourable House. This would certainly earn him much more admiration, and then we all can sing his praises of true patriotism. For many other professionals in Guyana today, especially in the teaching service, and in the health sector, the sailing is not so smooth at all; and quite frankly, the going is rough and tough. For this reason, many young professionals are leaving their jobs and the country. Yes, Mde Speaker, we do have many bright and young professionals like the Honourable Minister, who are as patriotic as the Minister and, as such, are willing to serve their country. Unfortunately, they are leaving this country, looking for better conditions, for they all cannot hope to become ministers of the Government.

Mde Speaker, my area of concern in this budget debate is in the health sector. My contribution has taken its cue from the second progress report April 5, 2006, of the IMF-IDA World Bank Report. This I refer to is the joint staff advisory note on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which addresses the inadequate delivery of health services in Guyana, and I read that report on page 20.

*The consensus was that the poor  
working habits of healthcare personnel*

*affect the quality of healthcare delivery here in Guyana. Reference was made to discrimination at hospitals; the hostile behaviour of some medical personnel; absence of medical personnel at health centres, especially during the night, and poor physical facilities. In addition, the lack of basic equipment and medical supplies in the health centres and hospitals, poor sanitation at health facilities, and a low level of maintenance of health installations, result in many communities being underserved. Specifically, inadequate supplies of drugs, discrimination in the distribution of medical supplies, poor storage of medical supplies, and marketing and/or prescription of expired drugs at government facilities, contribute to the seeking of alternative sources of care. The combination of these factors often leads patients to travel long distances to seek medical care, or to pay exorbitant fees to private practitioners who, in several cases, lack appropriate expertise.*

The report went on to say:

*Poor conditions of service also result in the migration and consequent shortages of medical personnel. This poses tremendous risk to patients, and undermines Government's investments in the health sector. Further, there are periodic outbreaks of infectious and other diseases - malnutrition, high levels of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS; high levels of teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, especially among the youths, and unhealthy lifestyles.*

Mde Speaker, let us examine the statement from this report, which says that poor conditions of service result in the migration and consequent shortages of medical personnel, and we can take a look at the situation of the nurses as it stands at the moment.

The Budget, in its review of the domestic economy under Health, in the Public Sector Investment Programme, made no mention of what was done in 2006, or if anything was done at all in 2006, to attract more recruits in the nursing programme, or what incentive was given, if any at all, or the strategies that are in place to retain the nurses, not only in the service but in the country as a whole. Their salaries, that is, the nurses', remain scandalously low, with no mentionable benefits to make their lives more comfortable. The rate of pay for the overtime is not attractive, and the amount earned is insignificant after



being heavily taxed. It must be noted that the overtime is very necessary for the proper functioning of the hospitals, and must be regarded as such, rather than an opportunity to earn an extra on the part of the nurses. Mde Speaker, the nurses do need more incentives and encouragement to remain and work, in the first place and to do proper work in the second place. The report did mention that the poor working habits of healthcare personnel affect the quality of healthcare delivery, for as the saying goes *if you pay with peanuts you will get monkey work*. The nurses can simply go through the motions of doing work, but if there is no stimulus to keep them going, they will not do a proper work.

While the Budget did mention that there is plan to address strategies for retaining nurses, along with effective recruitment tactics, no detail was given for same. This probably is a good example to demonstrate the reason for the Budget being described, in an editorial of *Kaitaur News*, as *full of promises, but empty of details*. Mde Speaker, there is no need for a rocket scientist to point out that, despite all the buildings constructed, with all the sophisticated and high tech equipment acquired in the health sector, if remuneration, and working conditions for the staff are not adequately addressed, they will go - period. The annual 5% increase imposed upon them across the board for the past years will not suffice. One would have thought that, after the nurses went off by themselves and complete the degree programme for nursing at the University of Guyana, then the Government

would have covered them up and offered them a raise in salary because of their now acquired higher qualification. Yes Mde Speaker, like some of us who find it so fit to write MBA behind our names, the nurses can also write BSc. and in a very short time MSc. but no such effort to increase their salary was realised by the Government, and this leaves the nurses more attractive to foreign markets after obtaining their degree in nursing.

Guyanese nurses are finding jobs all over the world, and this is why Staff Nurses in the hospital have become endangered species. The IMF-World Bank Report speaks of the absence of medical personnel at health centres and hospitals. Mde Speaker, in the National Psychiatric Hospital in Berbice one Staff Nurse is present out of a requirement of eighteen. This National Psychiatric Hospital, Mde Speaker, has one psychiatric nurse. Of course, there is no qualified psychiatric nurse at the Observation Ward of the Georgetown Hospital. Out of a requirement of thirty Nursing Assistants, there are only eleven. One wonders how the Ministry of Health intends to tackle the problem of the increasing number of psychiatric patients roaming the streets, posing a danger to the safety of ordinary citizens. This is particularly so since the hospital is in such a state of disrepair, and only now it has become a priority for reconstructions, with the government now mobilising funds for same.

At the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, Mde Speaker, many a time an entire shift may have to be without either a Staff Nurse, or a Nursing Assistant much

less a Ward Sister. In other words, Mde Speaker, at times an entire ward, a ward that is as important as the Female Medical Ward is managed by the Patient Care Assistants only. Now Patient Care Assistants are not nurses, and are there to assist patients, having been so trained, and as their names suggest; for their requirement/qualifications are far below that of a Nursing Assistant. They are, however, dressed in white, and look like a nurse and, as you have heard, doing a nurse's job. Mde Speaker, they are PCA's and these PCA's are known to have administered to patients dangerous drugs such as morphine injections, while being unsupervised on the ward, for there was no one available to supervise them. Mde Speaker, this is not only dangerous, but it is illegal; the reasoning is that, if the PCAs are made to function in the private hospitals and no one complains, then why can't they be allowed to do the same in the Government hospitals, even, and especially in the operating theatres. One would have thought that the standard of quality should be set by the Government's health institutions for the private hospitals to follow, and not the other way around.

The Budget mentioned that a number of persons are about to undergo intensive training as nurses. Let us hope that we speak of professional nurses and, to a lesser extent, Nursing Assistants, not Patient Care Assistants dressed as nurses. We urge that, in the effort to train medical personnel, that let there be a holistic approach to the realisation of these courses, and situations like in the case

of the Rural Midwifery Course in Linden, must be avoided, and not be allowed to repeat it. The participants are housed in unsuitable conditions, causing some of them to seek their own accommodation, or leaving the course altogether. One participant actually travels to and from Georgetown everyday because of unsuitable housing conditions.

The Budget Speech on page 34 mentioned that more doctors will be trained to meet the needs of the expanding system and, in this respect; a long-term medical scholarship programme with Cuba was established. Mde Speaker, this would have been commendable, only if there are equal opportunities for all Guyanese, regardless of political persuasion, precedence, or ethnic background. Mde Speaker, this seems not to be the case, for there are instances where youthful Guyanese, after being told by the authorities that they had been awarded a scholarship to pursue medical studies in Cuba, after having signed a contract, and after having obtained the relevant visa, they were told that the scholarship was withdrawn; the reason, Mde Speaker, they were told, is that the Cuban Government refused them because of their age; when asked for a written statement to that effect they were refused. If this does not smack of discrimination, nothing else does. It is of some interest to note that the giving of this award was before the General Elections, and the taking back of same was after the General Elections.

Mde Speaker, there is also need for specialist training for General Practitioners, for practically the only Guyanese

specialists there in the Government system today were trained twenty years ago under the PNC Government. [Applause] Mde Speaker, the doctors also need post-graduate training, or they will continue to leave. A hospital in St. Lucia is staffed entirely by U.G.-trained Guyanese doctors. Like in the 2006 Budget, where millions were allotted to the rehabilitation of the inpatient ward at the Georgetown Public Hospital, this year the Budget mentioned the same plan, rehabilitation of the inpatient ward at the Georgetown Hospital. This, however, is still to be seen, especially with respect to the eye wards, where male and female patients are sharing the same room for some months now. This is so, even though the Minister of Health, in *Kaitaur News* of Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> said that plans are apace with the rehabilitation of the wards of the Georgetown Hospital, and that more than 99% of the Health Budget was utilised in 2006; but Mde Speaker, this is not only so with respect to the wards, but also in the case of the upgrading of the electrical, potable water, and sewerage systems of the Georgetown Hospital. This has been repeated, verbatim, in the Budget Speech of 2005, 2006, and also 2007 in exactly the same style. I cannot agree more with my colleague from this side of the House, The Honourable Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, who expressed his disappointment with the style of presentation of the Budget, for he expected to see a different style of presentation, knowing fully well that the present Minister of Finance is quite capable of this, for he not only has the credentials to do so, but the scholarship as well. What we had in the past, and what we have today

at present, appear to be a case of a different Minister, but same Budget with same style.

Once again, great emphasis is placed on like in the Budget of 2006, a comprehensive treatment, prevention and eye care programme that has been developed, and is being now implemented. The Budget went on to say that it's evident, by the number of cataract surgeries performed during 2005, that it was possible to clear the backlog of cataract surgery by the end of last year - 2006; but this was a very ambitious statement to make. If we had cleared the cataract backlog last year, now with the establishment of the Eye Care Specialist Centre at Port Mourant and the Cuban Miracle Programme, there might be no cataracts for the private sector to operate on, but Mde Speaker, let me inform this House, and especially the Honourable Minister of Health that as luck would have it, and I say luck, that was not supposed to have happened, even if it was possible. We could not have done so, compliments of the administration of the Georgetown Hospital. That could not happen because of how things work there.

Mde Speaker, I beg to inform the Honourable Minister of Health that I do know how dear to his heart is the Georgetown Public Hospital. I heard him speak passionately about this institution - of how much it has improved and how efficiently it is being run. This was so even before the Minister became Minister of Health, before he became a Minister. He was then Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Hospital and he even

referred to it as his model piece of his reign as Minister of Health. The Georgetown Public Hospital, Mde Speaker, is the main referral centre of this country, and is certainly the yardstick by which we can judge the effectiveness of our national health system, in many respects; but please be informed, Mde Speaker, that I also treasure the Georgetown Public Hospital, for it is the only medical institution I was ever employed at, and attached to, in all my working years; I have never worked in any other place, and I do hope that my criticisms are taken as being constructive, and will be accepted in good spirit. We are all in this thing together, Mde Speaker, for all of us we want the best for this hospital, and for our country, as a follow-through, but Mde Speaker, all is not well at the Georgetown Hospital. The *modus operandi* of the administration of the Georgetown Hospital, with respect to the purchasing of consumables necessary for surgeries to be performed, is of such that efforts to replenish stock that have been consumed are not made until all the stocks that were available have been completely exhausted, in what is referred to, in Guyanese term, '*doing business like the cake-shop style,*' and months would pass before new stocks can be had. This, Mde Speaker, is in spite of having the funds available to purchase same. Mde Speaker, I am aware of this because the funds are from foreign agency donors, and these funds are there in foreign exchange – in US dollars. Funds were even diverted, or taken back because it was not utilised in time. Mde Speaker, it was only last week that we were able to perform cataract surgeries at the Georgetown Hospital for

the first time in the new year, and this situation of non-performance of cataract surgeries was so since November of last year; and this was due to the lack of necessary materials to do the same. What a coincidence ... and I say a mere coincidence, that the hospital got the material when a certain important Honourable Member of this House went to do his cataract surgery, and this is important, because we would have been depriving this nation of the service of that Member if we hadn't that material there to do his surgery. I congratulate the Honourable Member for demonstrating confidence in our institution, and encourage others to follow his example.

I will support this Budget 100% in its efforts to put in reality the statement it made on page 34 which says that:

*“the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation is earmarked to be converted into a genuine tertiary care hospital in order to reduce the necessity for treatment abroad.”*

Excellent; but this, Mde Speaker, has to start with us here, in this House, particularly on the other side, seeking treatment at the Georgetown Hospital before, and only going overseas if it is necessary; but there are lots of work to be done for this to happen, and I urge the Honourable Minister to ‘take the bull by the horn’ or to ‘take the sacred cow by the horn,’ as he is capable of



doing, and let us get the job done; the job that we have been paid to do. This has been the trend of this hospital with respect to the eye department and, by extrapolation, of the other departments for the longest while. Every time a consumable runs out of stock operations are suspended for a length of time; yet it is said that there are no sacred cows about.

Mde Speaker, there is still the dire need for that eye care specialised centre in Guyana, and I congratulate the Government for planning same. I would have liked for there to be specialised centres for most of the specialities, and with the ultimate aim of creating what is referred to as a poly-clinic of specialities. I, however, have made every effort to see the reason, to see the logic, the advantages, for I have worked as an ophthalmologist doing surgeries in all ten Regions of this beautiful land of Guyana, including Region 8 at Kurukabara. Mde Speaker, my question is why should this centre be located at Port Mourant? Show me the studies that demonstrate the prevalence and incidence of eye disease like glaucoma, retinal detachment, amathropic disorder, and macular degeneration, retinopathy of prematurity and chronic dachrysyntysis that are highest in and around the Port Mourant area. Let us not forget that the insistence of holding eye clinic at Port Mourant by the authorities has caused the only ophthalmologist in Berbice at that time to resign, leaving the whole of Berbice without the services of an ophthalmologist for a very long time; but yes, Mde Speaker, we do need that specialised centre, with all its

sophisticated equipment and medication that is necessary, for I can tell you, Mde Speaker, that at present the Department of Ophthalmology at the Georgetown Hospital is without a common torchlight for its ward. We had to borrow one from the guards at the gate, not so long ago, to manage an emergency.

Mde Speaker, the Department of Ophthalmology was told by the authorities of the pharmacy of this hospital that no eye drops were purchased for the whole of last year, and that all that were being used by the hospital were gifts and donations. In other words, use was made of what was available, and not what was necessary for the best care of the patients. The IMF five year Report refers to the lack of basic equipment and medical supplies in the health centres and the hospitals, which result in many communities being underserved.

Mde Speaker, I refer back to the Budget, to the part that referred to the comprehensive treatment, prevention, and eye care programmes that have been developed and implemented, which obviously include the collaborative eye care programme between Guyana and Cuba. This programme allows Guyanese patients with visual impairments to undergo surgery in Cuba. I would like to offer some comments on this so-called 'Operation Miracle.' First of all, I am grateful to the Cuban Government for offering Guyanese this opportunity; but it was somewhat strange, the secrecy with which this whole project was treated. The Minister of Health was not forthcoming with information when confronted; the

Medical Director of Professional Medical Services of the hospital claimed that all he know of the project was what was in the press; the Head of the Ophthalmology Department of the Georgetown Hospital was the one asking the questions, for he neither was informed, nor knew anything of the project. He just happened to see the setting up of a parallel eye clinic, run by Cuban doctors, utilising one of the rooms of the eye clinic of the hospital of which he was supposed to be in charge; not even the common courtesy of an introduction was afforded to no one at the eye clinic of the Georgetown Hospital, not even to the Departmental Head. Fortunately, or unfortunately, Mde Speaker, the Head of the Department of Ophthalmology of the Georgetown Hospital did not study in the United States of America, or in Israel, nor was he simply a General Medical Practitioner, or a specialist of an unrelated field of medicine. No, Mde Speaker, the Head of Department happened to study in Cuba, as an undergraduate and continued to do post-graduate studies in Cuba in the specialised field of Ophthalmology for ten long consecutive years. In other words, he lived in Cuba. Thanks to the then PNC government, he enjoyed a government scholarship, like so many other Guyanese, and many of us here, in this House, and outside of the House, the PNC had been there, and has done that, long before those who are now claiming so many credits for doing same. Mde Speaker, we even studied with, although being senior, with one of the Cuban doctors who were working here in Guyana on the project. This whole project was such an embarrassment for the staff at the eye

clinic of the hospital, especially when the clerks were warned by the administration not to tell the public that they know nothing of this project.

What did we know about this project? We knew that patients were going to Cuba to have their surgery done. Some died, for whatever reason we don't know; some went and came back with no surgery done ... we do not know why; others did not even know what type of surgery they had, and others had to return to Cuba to have surgeries on the complications they suffered; some had even preferred to redo their complication in the private sector, here in Guyana, rather than going back to Cuba. We also know that patients booked for surgery at the Georgetown Hospital were not turning up for surgery on their scheduled days because they went off to Cuba to have their surgery done. This slot on the surgery list at the Georgetown Hospital was left vacant, and could have been filled by another patient on the waiting list at the hospital. This happened, Mde Speaker, because there was, and still is, no communication between the two opticians that are available to patients at the hospital even though these two teams are working side-by-side. I ask again why the secrecy. [*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** Time Honourable Member...

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Mde Speaker I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Dr George Norton:** I ask, again, why the secrecy? Is this a military secret that somebody could not say anything at all to us? Having one surgery completed was very important to the patient, but obtaining a reasonable amount of success was far more important, in all cases, and this is where the problem lays, Mde Speaker. What is the success rate of these surgeries? No one knows for sure, for no study was done, to our knowledge, by the Cubans, nor by us, since we had no official access to these patients. Their follow-up was also done by the Cubans here in Guyana. Mde Speaker, a recommendation is now made for such a study to be commissioned; a study of success or failure of *Operation Miracle* can be done by the University of Guyana Medical School. Mde Speaker, studies are important, and should be encouraged by the authorities, rather than oppose it, as was done with the proposed study on the effect of casino gambling on the Guyanese society, as was introduced by the Honourable Member, Ms. Sheila Holder. Mde Speaker such a study was done by Jamaica, and *Operation Miracle* was found to be less than miraculous for some Jamaican patients. The result of this study was presented at the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress of Ophthalmological Society of the West Indies in St. George's Grenada last year July, by the Head of the

Department of Ophthalmology at the Kingston Public Hospital, one Dr. Albert Lue. Dr. Lue revealed that fourteen out of a sample of sixty Jamaican patients experienced serious complications; complications very similar to the ones we saw suffered by Guyanese patients, the few that we managed to take a look at. These included secondary glaucoma, cloudiness of the cornea, damage of the iris, chamber lens in anterior chamber, and poor stitching techniques. The problem which Dr. Lue stated was due to “*poor surgical techniques.*” The Jamaican survey, when extended to 200 patients 49, nearly a quarter, experienced post-surgical complications. This is my reason, Mde Speaker, for recommending that a similar survey be done here in Guyana, with some amount of urgency. [*Interruption*] ...

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, please keep the volume of noise down.

Mde Speaker, this is what the Barbadian Minister of Health had to say about Cuba ‘*Operation Miracle,*’ and I quote *Kaiteur News* of February 6<sup>th</sup> “*When contacted the Minister of Health Dr. Jerome Walcott gave assurance ...* [*Interruption*]

**Hon Dr George Norton:** I am still quoting:

*“When contacted, the Minister of Health, Dr. Jerome Walcott, gave assurance that, unlike the tales of*

*other islands, Barbadian health officials made sure to check out the quality of the Cuban health facilities before agreeing to send patients.”*

He went on to say

*In terms of Jamaica and other countries*

Guyana included

*they sent patients and then they went to see the facilities; we tried to do it the other way around, where we went to see how the programme was going to work, how it was being done, and then we've come to decide, in terms of selection of patients, and the criteria of patients being sent..”*

Mde Speaker, unless we are informed of what is the true situation, with respect to Cuba's 'Operation Miracle,' rumours would have it that the authorities are playing politics with the health and welfare of the Guyanese population, or the Guyanese population has become a pawn in the international chess game of politics involving Cuba and Venezuela or, in a worse case-scenario, that the Guyanese patients are being used as guinea pigs for resident ophthalmologists in training in Cuba. We are asking, Mde Speaker, to tell us: We are asking for you to tell us, to let us know what is going on.

Mde Speaker, the Budget mentioned that the Government initiated a project to increase access to primary health care for Amerindian communities in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9; the components include workshops to review and update referral systems and referral tools for regional health systems. Mde Speaker ... [*Interruption*]

**Hon Dr Leslie Ramsammy:** Mde Speaker...

**The Speaker:** Yes ...

**Hon Dr Leslie Ramsammy:** Standing Order 38:8 says

*No member may speak on any matter in which he or she has a direct personal pecuniary interest without disclosing the extent of that interest”*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member has an active private practice working on these things and this row ... [*Interruption: ‘It is...’*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister I do not think that this is what is conceptualised here. Dr. Norton is speaking in his capacity as Head of the Ophthalmological Department. Is speaking on health matters, and he is speaking, I think, from his knowledge as Head of the Ophthalmology ... I can’t even call the word out ... at the Georgetown Hospital; he is speaking in the context of that, not in the context of his private practice, and I do not think that he has ... You cannot say that he has a direct,



personal pecuniary interest in the Government sending a batch of students ... *[Interruption]*

Honourable Members, would you please stop this disrespect? I'm speaking; I do not want to stand. I'm answering Dr. Ramsammy, who made a point, and no doubt requires a ruling in this matter, and I am saying that the ... taking into consideration the factual content of what Dr. Norton was saying, it cannot ... you cannot use Clause 8 of ... of Standing Order No. 38, because he is not speaking ... he doesn't have a direct personal pecuniary interest in the Government sending a batch of people for eye surgery in Cuba. He may have even an oblique one, if you want to say ... but this is speaking of a direct one. If you want to say that he has an oblique interest, because I hear comments that he is not getting as much patients blah, blah ... but that is not the issue on which he is speaking now. We are lawyers, we are professionals in all capacities in this House, and we cannot use this section when they are speaking from knowledge of things that they know. I'm hearing what the Doctor is saying because I am listening too; what he is saying - that a study needs to be done about; what's the effect, and how many ills, and how many patients were cured, and how many had to go back etcetera, etcetera, and I do not think that this clause ... so my ruling is that he can continue in that vein, that this does not apply...

**Hon Dr George Norton:** Mde Speaker, thank you very much. Mde Speaker, the Budget mentioned that the Government initiated a project to increase access to

primary health care for Amerindian communities in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Its components include workshops to review and update referral systems and referral tools for the regional health systems. Mde Speaker, this project is either a total failure and should be disbanded or, it should be completely revised if it is actually functioning. This goal, as is stated in the Budget, of affordable access to quality health care by all Guyanese will remain but a vision, not to say a *'pipe dream,'* and health care would only be enjoyed by a certain section of the Guyanese community, and not by all, particularly not by the Amerindians of the hinterland locations. I do know that this was never the intentions of the noble and Honourable Minister of Health, but for this goal to be attained, and for it not to be a fleeting illusion, and for the residents in the hinterland locations to enjoy an equal share of health care that is provided by the Government, then, Mde Speaker, we have to do better with our system of referrals, and the official policies with regards to same. I say this Mde Speaker, because there is sufficient evidence to support this. Let us take a few examples of what took place during the last few weeks alone of this year, forgetting the past years and what has happened. Besides, we would only mention three cases of Region 1, 9 and 10 out of the so many others that may have occurred, and those that might not have been reported.

The first case is only recent, and involves an eight-year-old school child from the Amerindian community of Falmouth in the Essequibo River. Falmouth is a very well

known village to the ministers of this Government, for they have visited frequently during the election campaign, not to mention the effect their activities had on this little community; they shared Ministry of Health uniform vouchers to only certain people. This young boy had an accident in school and severely damaged his eyes. In order to save his sight, he had to be rushed down to the Georgetown Hospital to have emergency corrective surgery done. His parent, who is a single parent, was asked by the doctor at Bartica to find their own way down to Georgetown by their own means, because the patient was not dying and, as such, did not fit the criteria for Government-sponsored referrals. This, Mde Speaker, should never be the case, and one only hopes that a better system and policy could be put in place, for that child could have been the son of anyone of us in this Honourable House; we are all adults if not parents ourselves. This case, Mde Speaker, was brought to the attention of one of the Ministers of Health. The Honourable Minister was more interested in questioning the authenticity of the source of information, rather than offering to compensate the single parent, who had to borrow money in order to get medical care for her child. The Honourable Minister, Narine Nawbatt, spoke of a caring Government; the Honourable Mrs Shury spoke of a compassionate Government. I say, however, Mde Speaker, the response from the Minister of Amerindian Affairs was totally different, and the Honourable Minister did offer to pay the expenses through the regional system. We do hope that that promise is honoured, for the mother

is constantly questioning what is the situation; but Mde Speaker, the problem of referrals continue, and one of the subject Ministers seem not to be ... not to have a clue of how to solve this problem, or is downright not interested in solving same, for, only recently an Amerindian male, working on the hospital under construction at Lethem in Region 9, suffered a sight-threatening injury while on the job, similar to that of the little boy. This patient was placed in the hands of an official from the Head Office of the Ministry of Health who appears to be reasonable, who happens to be responsible for emergency referrals from the hinterland regions to be brought to the Georgetown Hospital. This was done by no other than the Medex in charge of the Region and the hospital.

Mde Speaker, this patient left Lethem on 22 December and reached Georgetown on 22 December but was left at the Amerindian Hostel until 28 December before he saw a doctor at the Georgetown Hospital. Of course he lost his eyes. This case was again brought to the attention of the said Minister, and what was his reaction? The Minister was more concerned about explaining that the particular Ministry of Health Official, even though he had a surname of Singh, is 100% Amerindian, and went on to say that she looks like one as well. The Minister said that the official, even though responsible for emergency cases, it is only the cases that travel around in an ambulance with siren blaring and red lights flashing that the official is supposed to take charge of. He did not even promise to conduct an investigation.

The third and last case I would like to bring to the attention of this Honourable House Mde Speaker, is the famous case that is creating so much sensation in the press during this past few days; the case of Kariabo in Region 1, where four days after a pregnant woman was buried, and the medical authorities exhumed the body, rumours sparked that the patient might have been alive when buried, because her baby was found outside her body. The real problem is why did the woman die? What were the circumstances surrounding her death in the first place? This is the real issue and, once again, every effort must be made to investigate this death. This investigation will once again reveal that it all stemmed from a problem of referrals. Contrary to the recommendations by a more experienced medex in the Region to refer the patient to Georgetown immediately as an emergency, the more recently graduated medex, but who was in charge of the Region, opted to wait until the next day for a regular flight to Georgetown in order to save on expenses. The rest is history.

Mde Speaker, persons in the Interior are still dying from Malaria; babies are still dying from diarrhoea and vomiting. Some are being discharged from health institutions only to die at home shortly after. Mde Speaker, I plead to the Minister in charge, the Senior Minister of Health, to look into these situations and bring solutions to these recurring problems that are causing deaths to citizens of this land of ours.

Mde Speaker, I beg to conclude by mentioning that a new epidemic is creeping into the hinterland communities, and I am appealing to the Minister of Health, the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, and the Minister of Social Services, and to all of us for, as Martin Carter says, *We all are involved and we all will be consumed*. To use all in our power to nip this epidemic in the bud for it appears to be blossoming.

Mde Speaker, the *Stabroek News* of 9 January of this year reads, *Four suicides, ten attempts rocks Santa Rosa*. Domestic violence and substance abuse are said to be the issues fuelling suicide in this community.

Mde Speaker, we have a problem on our hands. We have a problem with alcohol abuse, with marijuana abuse, causing suicide. Only last week another one from the same community committed suicide. We have a problem on our hands, Mde Speaker. Today we buried a young patient staff of the Georgetown Hospital - suicide. I close by appealing once again to all of us, especially to the ministers, that every effort must be made to nip this situation in its bud. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, Carolyn Rodrigues.

**Hon Carolyn Rodrigues:** Mde Speaker, I rise to add my support for Budget 2007, and in so doing, I must congratulate my colleague, the Hon Dr Ashni Singh, my immediate, Parliamentary neighbour and Minister of

Finance, on his first Budget presentation, but more importantly, for a job well done. *[Applause]*

||Mde Speaker, much have been said about the Budget; we heard more of the same things we hear from the other side each year; but, Mde Speaker, there were some differences this year, since I noticed that, even though scarce, there were words of congratulations from some Members in the Opposition, not only to the Minister for presenting it, but for various inclusions in the Budget. However, Mde Speaker, there were others who, based on their presentations, would make you believe that the Honourable Minister of Finance presented a book with blank pages. One such member is the Honourable Member Amna Ally. She said that the Budget is empty and full of promises, but then she said she hopes that the promises would be made a reality. I don't know if the Honourable Member because of Valentine is thinking about a past Valentine, empty and full of promises but certainly, certainly, she is very optimistic that there would be a reality.

Mde Speaker, before I go further, I want to refer to a few matters raised by the Honourable Member, Mr. Desmond Fernandes, and I want to say that I admire the way the Hon Member made his presentation, but I noted that all but one of the issues raised had to do with the Mabaruma sub-region, and I hope that he can find the time to visit the other two sub-regions because, from his presentation, I can tell that he has not visited the Martakai sub-region in a long time, because he said that the roads in the Martakai

sub-region are in a deplorable state. Mde Speaker, the Hon Prime Minister, and the Honourable Member, Minister Robeson Benn, were there just about a week ago, and in just over an hour you can travel from Arakaka to Port Kaituma and from Matthews Ridge to Port Kaituma. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member also spoke about sports, and I know that he's an avid supporter of sports, and I want to assure him that what has become the tradition during Amerindian Heritage Month, introduced by this Government, where hinterland teams compete in the regions before doing so in Georgetown will continue; only this time we will have all four of the teams - Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9, instead of two, being involved in football; and a number of other regions involved in other sports. *[Applause]* I know, too, Mde Speaker, that he is aware of the challenges associated with the promotion of sports in the hinterland, since many of our people, especially our young men, leave to seek jobs outside of the community. This has been the trend for as long as I can remember. Nonetheless, I am equally aware that many of the regions, including Region 1, look forward to competing in September, hence I expect full support from the Opposition in considering the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs Budget for national events. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member Mr Fernandes also spoke about Amerindians receiving handouts, and he referred to chainsaws and outboard engines. I want to urge the Honourable Member to not refer to these much-



needed items as handouts, since even the Honourable Member, Leader of the Opposition, Mr Corbin would tell him that he provided some engines, sewing machines and chainsaws to several communities in the period leading up to the elections. Mr Raphael G Trotman, the Hon Member, did the same; and while, Mde Speaker, they may not have yielded the desired results, I am sure that the Hon Leader of the Opposition does not see it as handouts, but as a broadening of the asset base in the community, and tools for development. Our Government is a responsive Government, and I want to assure the Hon Member that, wherever he sees this equipment being provided, it is as a result of requests from the communities.

On this side of the House we have seen that transportation has improved considerably in many communities as a result of the provision of outboard engines, tractors and other vehicles, such as in Red Hill, in Kaaho, Waramadong, Kamwata, Quatama, Masara, Yakarita, Orealla and Baramita, and this year we will continue to provide some more. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member Mr. Fernandes also said that Amerindians are not able to get contracts, and implied that there is some degree of racial discrimination. This is not exactly the case, Mde Speaker. I recall, some time ago, the Government had waived a number of requirements in a few hinterland regions, for a particular period, giving contractors in these areas enough time to get their paper work in order - NIS

and Income Tax compliances etcetera, so that they can bid for contracts. Some of them got their act together, while others did not. In some cases, Mde Speaker, we have awarded contracts to Village Councils, PTAs and CDCs. I want to ask the Honourable Member, when he returns to Mabaruma, that he visits the communities of St. Anthums, Aruca Mouth, St. Johns and Lower Kaituma, and find out who built the schools there, and he would find that they were all built by Amerindians. The same is true for Fallingover Bridge – Northwest Secondary, the PTA there got that contract; Sacred Heart and Lower Kaituma for empoldering and Red Hill – the Village Council for the provision of electricity posts.

Mde Speaker, I also want to say how disappointed I am in the Honourable Member, Mr Franklin of GAP-WPA... not about the women thing. Mde Speaker, I am advised that the Honourable Member Mr. Franklin being in this Parliament is largely due to the votes of the Amerindian people, yet I did not hear one word from him on Amerindian issues.

Mde Speaker, I could not help but notice, too, that this year the Honourable Member, Mr. Winston Murray who, Mde Speaker, can be considered the star speaker of the Opposition on economic issues ... In my view, he has a very analytical mind, and most of the time, offers constructive criticisms, and while his analysis are not always correct, on many occasions he puts them over in a very convincing and coherent way. This year, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member Mr. Murray was very

different. I would not blame it on age because he is looking younger. He is a man extremely capable of manipulating the English Language, but yet there were times in his presentation that he was short of words. Mde Speaker, I would not entertain the view that Mr. Murray, the Honourable Member, has lost the ability to analyse and constructively criticise. I refuse to believe, too, that the openness and friendliness of the Honourable Member Dr Ashni Singh, constrained Mr Murray, in his presentation. I therefore conclude that the Honourable Member, Mr. Winston Murray found it almost impossible to criticise one of the best Budgets yet *[Applause]* and, Mde Speaker, if the star did not shine, you cannot expect many sparks from the starlets. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, crafting a Budget cannot be an easy and uncomplicated task, especially when, as a Government, we have created a climate where citizens have come to expect something positive and good in the Budget, unlike times gone by. Many will therefore examine the Budget to see if their expectations are met. It is therefore not unusual for a few persons to castigate the entire Budget because they did not get their wish. In fact, Mde Speaker, the haste with which some of them let their discontent be known sometimes make me think that they had conceived of their criticisms even before the Budget was completed. However, Mde Speaker, the Budget must not be viewed through a needle's eye. We must consider the global challenges, the regional challenges, our own national situation, since there is a consensus that, on examining

our history; we must also examine previous Budgets. What I am saying is that the Budget must be looked at in its entirety, and not be judged by the exclusion of individual or selfish desires. Mde Speaker, wherever we attempt, or whenever we attempt, to compare a certain period of this country's history with what's happening today, some members of the Opposition react as if we have further disturbed a damaged nerve end; but, Mde Speaker, all Governments, at some time or the other, have to assess their period in office. Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker ... [*Interruption: 'I happened to attend school for the benefit of the Honourable Member Debbie Backer.'*] But since we took office in 1992, that year will always be the base for our comparisons. We are not saying that the PNC did not do a single thing during their term of office. Of course, of course some things were done, including damage. You have to justify - the PNC must justify, however minimal, being in office by undemocratic means. Equally we are not saying we have done everything that must be done, but Mde Speaker, the crucial question is this. Did the PNC, in their almost three decades in office, when bauxite and sugar and other commodities enjoyed high prices, use the resources of this country in a sensible and equitable way?

Mde Speaker, the answer is not *yes*. Mde Speaker, it is not infrequent in this Honourable House that some Members tend to judge our country's performance and development on the basis of the growth of our economy; and yes, growth rate is important, but it's not the only

factor, if at all, to determine quality of life. The Honourable Member, Mr McAllister ... I am sorry he is not here, spoke of the PPP/Civic Government being unable to return to the high growth rate of 7% in 1989; but Mde Speaker, statistics without analysis can be misleading, and mislead he did, the Honourable McAllister. What the Honourable Member failed to inform this House about; is that there was a very a small base in 1988. Mde Speaker, to add colour to the Honourable Member McAllister's unfinished painting, let me give you an idea of the Budget back then. In 1988, the Budget was \$2.2B, and in 1989, it was \$5.1B. Even if for argument's sake we used the exchange rate, the progress made by this Government is phenomenal. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, the 2007 Budget is \$100B - almost 90 times that of 1989. So I do not want to return to examine that.

Mde Speaker, my good friend, the Honourable Member Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, also referred to economic growth. He urged the Government to follow Singapore and Trinidad, where they have high growth rates, but, Mde Speaker, we have to be careful when providing such advice since, while I am not an economist by training I am well aware of the difficulties being endured by many people, mostly poor people, in countries like India, and yes, Singapore, where growth rates are relatively high. Trinidad is not without difficulties, we know that. Mde Speaker, take Singapore, where the economy has averaged a growth rate of 7% in the past three years. In

the *Newsweek* of January 29<sup>th</sup> 2007, here is what they had to say:

*New statistics reveal that middle-class households have tasted none of Singapore's spectacular growth, and that the island's poorest 30% are worst off than they were five years ago. What's surprising is that, even a country famous for its smart and transparent leadership, has been unable to prevent the gains of globalisation from flowing mostly to rich individuals and multinational corporations.*

Mde Speaker, there are many reasons for this situation, but most of them have to do with the concessions made to stimulate investment, some of which led to serious inequity. There is a similar situation in India, where if we are to judge the country by growth rate only, we are going to see a beautiful, but inaccurate picture. India has had a growth rate of more than, 6% in the last three years, and in the *Economist* of February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007, this is what they had to say about India:

*“Infrastructure, such as roads and power, and public services, such as education and drinking water, are woefully inadequate and limit growth. Even as the economy was*

*booming, many public services have worsened.”*

Mde Speaker, I pointed to these examples because, as a Government we have, on many occasions, unashamedly justified our bias towards the poor and vulnerable. We believe that, while we must encourage investment, we must ensure that there is balance and, above all, that there is equity. The importance of this balance has been outlined by none other than the Minister of Finance himself. In the very second paragraph of his speech, the Hon Member said:

*This Budget concretises our vision of a modern and equitable society for all Guyanese. We have to build safeguards, and to act to sustain economic growth and sustainability, long into the future, and we must continue to find ways of sharing, more evenly, the benefits of our economic success.*

Mde Speaker, very often some members of the Opposition tend to single out communities for special mention which, in their view, have been neglected by this Government because they are perceived to be PNC supporters. The one that comes to mind is Linden which, by no measurement, can be described as neglected. At other times our decision to implement a particular project in one area is judged by the Opposition by criteria other than merit or technical or economic soundness. Such was

the case of the Berbice River Bridge. Mde Speaker, we must be weary of anyone who only looks at the communities that give them political support, but see our responsibility, as parliamentarians, across the divide. We must spare no effort to have the Guyanese people see us as representing their interests, regardless of religious, ethnic, geographic or other considerations. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, this side of the House knows very well the benefits of doing so; our numbers have increased on this side. *[Applause]* We must be fair, Mde Speaker, we must be fair and objective in our criticisms, lest we, by our very utterances in this House, be guilty of fermenting racial and political divisions.

Mde Speaker, it is only normal to have persons pointing to a road that needs to be fixed, or a school that needs repairing, or a community like Honourable Member Mr. Fernandes said that needs more hours of electricity, but I challenge anyone in this House to say that this Government has not been doing a reasonable job in distributing to the populace in an equitable way. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, from Orealla in the East, to Baramita in the Northwest, to Konashen down south, almost every community can point to developments work; whether a school, a road, or a health centre that has taken place under the watch of this Government. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, I am not saying that this is not our duty, but you can be duty-bound and yet be oblivious to the needs of those you should be representing; we have seen this before. Mde Speaker, I'm speaking of equity and



balance. The PPP/Civic Government, since its assumption to office in 1992, and even before, made it very clear that, notwithstanding the difficulties associated with delivering social and other services in the hinterland, due primarily because of the high cost associated with accessibility and other factors, it will nevertheless reduce the socio-economic gap between Amerindians and other Guyanese; *[Applause]* but, Mde Speaker, accustomed as they were to political platitudes it is that, in my view, most of the Amerindian communities have grown tired of political parties and promises. However, Mde Speaker, true to its word, the PPP/Civic Government has kept that social pact they made with the Amerindian people. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, as my colleague, the Minister of Finance said, and I quote:

*We have remained undaunted and unbowed,  
and have seen an impressive improvement  
in the standard of living of all Guyanese.  
This is not an occurrence by chance, but is  
the product of purposeful consistency*

Mde Speaker, since the socio-economic gap was so wide and deep, the PPP/Civic Government knew that we had to put in place, special programmes and projects to bring equity between the Amerindian communities and their coastal counterparts. Some of these are seen in Budget

2007, for example, the Education for All Fast Track Initiative, School Feeding Programme, and the Amerindian Development Fund. Mde Speaker, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs also became necessary, and still is, to ensure that plans and programmes, whether executed by the Ministry, or other ministries and agencies, cater for the peculiarities of the Amerindian communities. The Amerindian communities knew and they still know how necessary the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is. Apparently, the only people who did not know were those from the Alliance for Change who, during their 2006 Campaign, said that they're going to close the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and replace it with something else. They got the response they deserved.

Mde Speaker, in the case of the hinterland Regions, and by extension, most of the Amerindian communities, we have demonstrated this consistency and commitment in tangible terms; and let me expand on this Mde Speaker, because I think, since the Honourable Member Ms. Amna Alli went back to 1976 ... I prefer to go back to 1992. In Region 1, Mde Speaker, the Budget was \$61.4M then, and in 2007 it is \$830.9M; *[Applause]* Region 7, Mde Speaker, \$57.5M - Region 7 ... and we can go to exchange rates and so; Region 7 - \$57.5M; in 2007 \$787.5M. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, that's 1367%. Region 8 Mde Speaker - \$30.1M, thirty point one and in 2007 - \$396.5M; in Region 9 - \$45M, and in 2007, it is \$744.2M. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Government has increased its total Budget of these hinterland regions from a paltry \$198M to \$2.7B in 2007. Mde Speaker, \$2.7B was ½ a billion more than the total Budget in 1989 of the country, and I use that because that's the year Mr. McAllister had used in his presentation. I should note, Mde Speaker, that if we are to add the expenditure of the central ministries and other government agencies, the figure will be much higher. So when the Honourable Member, my friend Ms. Judith David, speaks about Region 7, and budgetary discrimination, she should first seek to educate herself on what was.

Mde Speaker, there are no questions on our policies and programmes, as they relate to the Amerindian communities, the majority of Amerindians have, in no uncertain terms, given this Government the mandate to continue on the same path of development. They have rejected the call to make the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs redundant. Moreover, the majority of them have indicated that they want progress to continue. Mde Speaker, we feel this way, on this side of the House, for it is the first time in the history of our country that, as a party, we have won, at a single election, the highest number of votes in Regions 1,2,7,8 and 9. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, these regions combined have 80% of the Amerindian population; but we believe, Mde Speaker, that votes aside, it is our duty as a Government, on this side of the House, to never again have the Amerindian communities be placed on the backburner of

development, and we will make it extremely difficult for any government to reverse this trend. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, in 1991 the Amerindian population was put at 46,722, or 6.5% of the country's total population. In 2002, Mde Speaker, according to the national census, the population went to 68,819, or 9.2% of the population - a 47% increase, or an average growth of 3.6% for the period 1991-2002. At this rate, Mde Speaker, the Amerindian population is set to double that of 1991 in another 15-20 years. Mde Speaker, there is no deliberate procreation programme here, but I am making reference to the growth in population to indicate that such increases are normally attributed, not only to high fertility rates, but also to improvement in the health status, and declining mortality rates. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, my colleague, the Honourable Dr Bheri Ramsaran, would deal with some of the issues raised by the Honourable Member, Dr. George Norton, but I want the Honourable Dr. Norton to know that this Government has brought back the health sector in the hinterland. *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Minister.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Carolyn Rodrigues:** Mde Speaker, I want them to know that the Government brought back the Health Sector in the hinterland from extended unconsciousness to one of vibrancy. We know that it is not perfect, but it has improved tremendously. On the other hand, Mde Speaker, the increase in population also means that there is more pressure on the resources that such communities depend on, and since many far-flung communities still live on a subsistence economy, it is incumbent on us, together with the communities, to find innovative ways of improving livelihood.

Mde Speaker, I would therefore turn my attention to some of the programmes and projects that are directed to the Amerindian communities. In education, Mde Speaker, it is not good enough to say that we love our Amerindian brothers and sisters, and that they would be treated equally like all other Guyanese. Like all other groups, Amerindians must be able to see themselves, not only as craftsmen, or tour guides, or farmers, or fishermen, but also as doctors and lawyers, and engineers as well. No Amerindian child must be allowed to be left behind if he or she has the potential to be in one of the professions just mentioned.

Mde Speaker, the PPP/Civic Government has, and continues to match their words with action. I am happy to say that already the human resource pool of Amerindians has expanded significantly, and consequently, more role

models are being created. Today, we have more nurses, medexes, trained teachers, policemen, soldiers, engineers, and yes, more parliamentarians. Mde Speaker, this is not an occurrence by chance: we have invested heavily in educating our people and, while the challenges are still many, considerable progress has been made, and since I am speaking of education, I would like to return to what the Honourable Member Ms. Amna Alli said, and she spoke about free education, that the PNC provided free education from nursery to university, and she also said that my Hon friend from Region 2 used the word '*brand new*' loosely. Well, she is using the word '*free*' loosely. Mde Speaker, how on earth can the PNC qualify free education, when the south and north Rupununi communities - the Pakaraima communities, the Upper Mazaruni communities, and the Moruca communities had no secondary school in 1992. [*Applause*] How on earth, Mde Speaker, can the Amerindian children from those areas attend the University of Guyana if they had little primary, and absolutely no secondary education? Mde Speaker, that has changed, that has changed.

The Honourable Dr. Desrey Fox, my colleague, spoke of the many educational programmes being implemented in the hinterland; for example, teacher training. Mde Speaker ... [*Interruption: : "Yes Mr. Corbin, I never attended secondary school, for your information"*] Mde Speaker, in the hinterland Regions, 1, 7, 8 and 9, we have an enrolment of approximately 19,500 children. In the secondary schools we have 4,200, about that; a total of

twenty-three thousand, three hundred and something students. About 1/3 of those in secondary schools are accommodated at dormitories. Mde Speaker, this is the result of the government's increased expenditure in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. In 2006, Mde Speaker, we spent more than \$250M in education in these regions, compared to \$13.6M in 1992. Mde Speaker, it is therefore my submission that education coverage in the Amerindian communities is not the issue here. However, we have to work to ensure that we provide quality education, hence the various training programmes outlined by my colleague, the Hon Dr. Desrey Fox.

Mde Speaker, it is not a secret that, due mainly to remoteness, unemployment is problematic in many of our Amerindian communities. This has been the case for as long as I can remember. In recognition of this situation, and in order to assist the parents, the Government started a programme to provide school uniforms to students, since it would be an indictment on this Government if our children are not in school because of a lack of school uniforms; and I should say, Mde Speaker that in 2006, uniforms were provided to all, all, all of the children, Amerindian and others in Regions 1, 8 and 9, and to all the Amerindian communities [*Applause*] in the remaining regions. Mde Speaker, while many of our secondary schools in the hinterland are less than ten years old, already we have seen the results of our investment.

Mde Speaker, I am going to state facts, and that's what I'm doing in this presentation. Several of the Amerindian

students that travelled to Cuba, and who are at the University of Guyana came from these very schools. [Applause] Mde Speaker, last year 28 Amerindian students left for Cuba, bringing the aggregate of Amerindian students in Cuba to 50. [Applause] Mde Speaker, in another few years, my friend, the Honourable Member Dr. George Norton would be very happy, since he would have company. He would not be the only Amerindian medical doctor. Mde Speaker, an additional one hundred plus students are at the University of Guyana on government scholarship.

Mde Speaker, the PPP/C's commitment to ensure that, regardless of geography, or any other factor, our Amerindians are educated did not start in 1992. In 1962 they introduced the Amerindian Scholarship Programme, and six Amerindians were granted scholarships in 1963. For some reason, in 1976, the PNC changed the programme from Amerindian Scholarship Programme, to the Hinterland Scholarship Programme. This programme, Mde Speaker, which is based in Georgetown, has an enrolment of 289 students and has continued to be the first step to a career for many of our high flyers ... [Interruption: "You have a problem with it Dr. Norton, you told me that"] Mde Speaker, in the last three years we have maintained a pass rate of over 80% at C.X.C. Grades I – III. [Applause] Mde Speaker, 22 of the Amerindian students in Cuba, came from this scholarship programme. Mde Speaker, we have about another 100 students at the University of Guyana. The budget for the



Hinterland Scholarship Programme this year is \$58M, and that reflects the importance we place on this programme.

Mde Speaker, as we improve the Hinterland Scholarship Programme, and in response to more than 95% of our students, Cabinet has approved, in principle, the construction of a dormitory in Georgetown; at the moment staff members of the Ministry are examining suitable sites for the facility, and we hope to start in 2008. Mde Speaker, the progress in education has been phenomenal; however, there are still constraints that we face. For example, because of the remoteness, extended time to get supplies to the schools in the deeper hinterland, but we are working very hard to overcome those.

Mde Speaker, it is not possible for me to contribute to this debate without speaking about the Amerindian land issue. While I am the first one to say that totally resolving the land issue to the satisfaction of every Amerindian is utopian, it has become easier for me to speak on this matter because of the progress we have made. Mde Speaker, the PPP/Civic Government has not only outlined the policy for addressing land, but they have made it a Law. We have made it law in this House. Many countries prefer to just have a policy so that they can change it whenever they like. We have, however, demonstrated our commitment to this process by providing financial resources during the last ten years. More than \$200M has been spent on land demarcation and resolving land issues. Mde Speaker, on assuming office in 1992, 74

communities, or 6.5% of Guyana's total land mass were legally recognised Amerindian lands. Mde Speaker, I am more than happy to say, in this Honourable House today, that the percentage has more than doubled to around 14%, and 89 communities now have legal titles. In the last three years titles were issued to Baramita and Arucamai in Region 1, Karrow and Kaburi in Region 7, Honourable Member Judith, Maicobi and Campbelletown in Region 8; Konashen, Fairview, Apoteri, Rewa and Prashwater in Region 9; and Moresaro, Malari, Wairuni and Great Falls in Region 10. In addition, Mde Speaker, the communities of Annai, Waracoca, Kamwata, Orealla, Tapacuma and Kabakaburi had their titled lands extended. Mde Speaker, the State aside, Amerindian communities are now the largest land owners in Guyana. *[Applause]* As I mentioned earlier, Mde Speaker, the increase in population has also seen a similar increase in the need for resources and, since Amerindians depend mostly on their land for their sustenance, it is important that their land issues be addressed, and this is what we have been doing.

Mde Speaker, you probably heard of the demarcation programme, and I just want to inform this Honourable House that, of the 89 communities, six of them would not require demarcations because they have natural boundaries - rivers and creeks; fifty of them have completed demarcations, and the demarcation of fifty is in progress, and eighteen communities are yet to submit their requests for demarcation. In short, Mde Speaker,

75% of the communities have either completed, or are in the process of having their lands demarcated. Mde Speaker, in 2007 we intend to continue this process, and we want to focus on communities without titles, while simultaneously addressing those that require extensions. Matching our commitment to the process with the financial resources, this year \$40M is included in the Budget for addressing land issues. Mde Speaker, if we are to increase and improve management capacity in the Amerindian communities, to manage their lands, and the villages as a whole, training must be provided. In 2004 the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs conducted country-wide training for the Amerindian Village Councils in the area of leadership, natural resources, accountability and finance, and several other areas. Mde Speaker this was the first year that such training was implemented, and already we have seen the improvements in many villages.

Mde Speaker, following that training, during the period 2004-2006, we provided cash grants to the Village Councils and, in particular, to 77 communities in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 - a total of \$118.8M. These grants were given directly to the Council to implement projects that were priorities in the communities; and the projects included a community hall at Parima, a housing project, Mde Speaker, at Warawaka Kamarang, a road link from Caso to Waramadong, which would continue this year, a community centre at Kaikan, a number of cattle rearing projects in Region 9, to name some of them.

Mde Speaker, several communities successfully completed their projects, but we recognise that training should be continuous, especially since we have had village elections, and several councils have new members. We have also noticed an increase in economic activities in some communities, particularly in the area of lumbering, while many more are engaged in projects, either funded by the Government, or non-governmental organisations, hence the need for training is of paramount importance.

Mde Speaker, to further improve governance in the communities, we did this by providing a place where the council can conduct community business and, at the same time provide storage for their assets and records. The Government started a programme of constructing village offices in collaboration with the communities. To date more than ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to conclude her presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Minister be given 15 minutes to conclude.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion Carried.**

**Hon Carolyn Rodrigues:** Mde Speaker, to date more than fifty offices has been built, and this year an additional twenty-two will be done. Communities that will benefit this year include Arucamai, Manwaring, Capoey, Kopinang, Kairbarupai, Kanapang, Shea, Sowariwou, Rupanau, Aishalton, Yakarinta and Massara ... I'm sorry you would not know these places.

Mde Speaker, I should note that, except for Riversview, where the Honourable Member, Dr. George Norton, is Touchau, all other communities that have been allocated financial resources for Village offices, have constructed same. Mde Speaker, since 2005, and not for the want of constant reminders, we have been waiting, at the Ministry, for the Honourable Member Dr. Norton to uplift the cheque so that his village can benefit from an office. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, I hope that this is not indicative of his commitment, or lack thereof, to his community; and indeed, I hope this is not a representation of his functioning at the Georgetown Hospital.

Mde Speaker, since Amerindian communities own communally titled land, they cannot use these lands as collateral. This was a decision taken by the communities during consultation on the Amerindian Act, since land is life, and not just a mere commodity. However, Mde Speaker, the Government has started several loan schemes in the hinterland. We now have loan schemes in the North Rupununi in Region 9, in the Moruca sub-region of Region 1, and in Orealla; and all of these

schemes are managed by local people, and we hope to extend more of these in other hinterland areas.

Mde Speaker, one of the basic human rights of a person is to have a birth certificate. Unfortunately, Mde Speaker, for many years, the hinterland communities could not obtain such a vital document. In 2003 the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs, started a dedicated programme to correct this situation. Mde Speaker, you too will recall that the Honourable Member, former Parliamentarian Shirley Melville had raised the issue of provision of birth certificates, so that persons can obtain I.D. Cards and be able to vote at the 2006 elections. Mde Speaker, the programme was therefore accelerated in 2006, and more than 5,000 birth certificates were issued. Mde Speaker in the last three years, more than 10,000 certificates have been issued, and we just concluded a mop-up exercise on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January.

Mde Speaker, I'm also the Member of Parliament for Region No. 9, and I just want to point to some of the things that would be happening in Region No.. 9 in 2007, and to also say that the road from Lethem to Linden has significantly improved and I have been asked to extend an invitation to the Members of this House for the upcoming rodeo.

Mde Speaker, this year we will be completing the St. Ignatius Primary School, and we will be constructing new schools at Katoka and Sand Creek. Teachers' Quarters

will also be done at Katoka, Annai, Apoteri, Awariwaunau, and the Nursery School at Apoteri. In the areas of Health we want to ensure adequate accommodation for our nurses so we will be constructing nurse's quarters at Karasabai, and also, a doctors quarters at Aishalton. We also Mde Speaker, have also allocated some resources to continue the road link, or to improve the road link from Shulinab to Aishalton and, within the Lethem area, we will be putting BBST roads – Lethem and St. Ignatius, and the Ministry of Public Works, Mde Speaker, will be working very hard to repair and put in place, where they are needed new bridges on the road from Linden to Lethem.

Mde Speaker, in terms of electricity, we would extend electricity to St. Ignatius, Aishalton, Takchinga, Annai and Karasabai. Mde Speaker, I've pointed to some of the achievements in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, and I want to say that there are still many challenges, including HIV and AIDS, and we would be working very hard this year on educating our people; but we also have another problem that, to me, is becoming a bigger problem, and that's the non-payment of our Amerindian males working in mining, logging, and other areas. Already, for the month of January, we have more than twenty such complaints and, Mde Speaker, I would urge Members in this House to assist us in this because, many times, these arrangements are private, but when there is a problem of course the people would come to us for help, and so we

have to work and we may have to expose some of those involved in this madness.

Mde Speaker, not much was said by the Opposition, as yet, on Amerindian issues, and I take this to mean that they recognize the developments we have made and the progress we have made [*Applause*] and I want to let this House know that by no means the achievements and the programmes that I have pointed out constitute the exhaustive list of things happening in the Amerindian communities.

Mde Speaker, I am confident that we don't have to convince anyone of our commitment to develop the Amerindian communities. The task is not an easy one because there are many challenges that we have to face, but I believe that the foundation of a house is the strongest part of it, and the PPP/Civic Government has built that foundation, [*Applause*] and we will continue on this development path in collaboration with the Amerindian people. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Attorney General and Minister of legal Affairs.

**Hon Doodnauth Singh:** May it please you Mde Speaker. The legislative facility of the Chambers of the Attorney General has been considerably improved. We are grateful to the Commonwealth Secretariat for providing an expert, who has been working with us for the past two years. That person has since requested an extension, and it is



expected that the extension would be granted. We are grateful to the Government of Nigeria for providing an expert in the legislative field as well. Mde Speaker... the Government of India has provided twelve experts from the ITEC programme, and I am happy to report that one of those experts has had over thirty years of experience in legislative drafting for the Lok Sabha. The other person, a much younger man, is committed, hardworking, and dedicated. In addition, we have been fortunate in that the Commonwealth Secretariat has provided funding for a programme at the University of Guyana, which is an ongoing programme for drafting facility. In addition to students from overseas, we have sent three of our young drafting personnel to attend that course. Many other officers had applied but, regretfully, we could not allow them to attend, because the programme is a full-time programme for three years, but we have agreed, and three of our drafting young personnel are attending that course. I have had discussions with Dr. Imhoff, who is the Guyanese representative in the Commonwealth Secretariat, and who visited Guyana recently to evaluate the programme. The reports are refreshing and, as a result of the expertise that the University and our trainers have exposed to the students, a recommendation has been made to the Commonwealth Secretariat to provide funding for the incorporation of that programme into the syllabus of the University of Guyana. I am hopeful that the Secretariat will find it possible to fund such a project.

I am always inundated by my Cabinet colleagues, who request of me the enactment of legislation, and I am happy to say that I expect that their requests will be fulfilled within the possible time.

In relation to the senior personnel of the Chambers, Mde Speaker, regretfully, for several years, we have not had a Solicitor General, A Deputy Solicitor-General, and senior personnel. We have advertised, and we have received three applicants for the position of Solicitor-General. As you are aware, Mde, the post is to be filled at the discretion of the President, and I have made certain recommendations, and I am hopeful that the recommendations would bear fruit. In addition, recommendations have been made with respect to the position of Deputy Solicitor General and other senior positions.

Mde Speaker, I have heard my colleagues on the Opposition benches refer to the inadequacy of the salary structure for officers in the Public Service and other areas. With respect to the Chambers as such, you will be aware of the fact that there is a tremendous discrepancy between the salary that are paid to the State lawyers, and to the members of the Director of Public Prosecution, as opposed to the Revenue Authority and the other agencies, and representations have been made for an attempt to be made to find a solution to that inadequacy, because if that is not addressed; Mde, within a short time the Chambers of the Attorney General will find itself in difficulty. We are charged with the responsibility, Mde, of, under the

State Liability Act, to defend all litigation which had been instituted against the State and, unless we are in a position to be adequately staffed, we will find ourselves in the Litigation and Advice section with difficulty. I hope that the representations that have been made to address this situation will be dealt with by the Minister of Finance at the appropriate stage.

Mde Speaker, the Deeds Registry has improved considerably, and conveyance is being expedited, while registration of business and other activities continue to improve on an ongoing basis. With respect to the judiciary, however, as you are aware, Mde, I have parliamentary responsibility as Minister of Legal Affairs; but I am not, in any way, involved in the appointments of judges or magistrates and, as a result, Mde, we must bear in mind that those deficiencies, particularly in the judiciary and the higher judiciary, should be of concern to us all. It is expected that, perhaps in the end of the year, we may find ourselves with a shortage in the higher judiciary. Two members might demit office. So it has become incumbent on the Administration and the representatives, that these issues be addressed, and addressed expeditiously.

Mde, I don't wish to sound complaining, as it was, but I obviously intend to bring to the attention of all of us responsible for the administration of justice, the concerns that ought to be addressed in an appropriate way.

Mde, I am required, I suppose, to make a short presentation with respect to the Justice Improvement Development Project, which we have chartered. This is a programme which involves the police, the prison, the judiciary and the Chambers, and it has several components. I will briefly refer to some of the components, because it is an overarching exercise, and it will ensure adequacy of justice, the supremacy of the rule of law, the endearment of the Guyanese people to constitutionality, and generally, the satisfaction to ensure that citizens can approach the judiciary and expect expeditious determination.

The objective of the programme is to enhance the investment climate and rights enforcement in Guyana, through an improved Public Sector governance, and the proposed implementation of several sub-components. The sub-components, Mde, include the strengthening, the accountability and administrative efficiency of service delivery in the justice sector, enhancing linkages and coordination within justice sector institutions, and improving access to justice. This is intended - the enhancing institutional capacity, is intended to improve the quality, efficiency, and efficacy of service delivery in the justice sector institutions in Guyana by strengthening governance and accountability, building institutional capacity, streamlining legal procedures, and modernizing administrative systems by financing activities in the various areas:

Strengthening the Judicial Service Commission, with an objective to improve governance, recruitment, human resource management and accountability of judges as well.

Mde, and as you appreciate, the Constitution obliges judges to give their judgments within a reasonable time. Regretfully, we have not yet enacted what that reasonable time ought to be, and I expect that I will be advised as to what I should suggest.

The Court, by developing Government's policies... *[Interruption: "Debbie, please let us take it easy, take it easy Debbie, please"]* operational rules and regulations, together with developing a new Code of Conduct and Ethics for judges and magistrates, and conducting workshops to sensitize them to the new codes and guidelines.

- 1 Reducing backlog, Mde ... and as I am aware, the Chief Justice has put in place mechanisms to ensure that the backlog is considerably reduced. In addition to that, we have the commercial court, which has been working quite successfully, and of course, the arbitration and ADR mechanism.
- 2 Reducing backlog and raising clearance rates in courts, with an objective to eliminate the backlog of civil and criminal cases in the Supreme Court, magistrates' court, and the appellate court.

- 3 Strengthening court administration, which is a necessity Mde, with an objective to strengthen the administration in the Supreme Court of Judicature in the management, and to put in mechanisms for new rules of court, and administrative mechanisms, so that when the trial will have been fixed, preliminary steps will have eradicated the long process that is required at trials.
- 4 Strengthening the administration of Supreme Court of Judicature in the management of cases, and case-related information, human resources and its budgeting and financial activities.
- 5 Enhancing skills and productivity of judges and magistrates ... [*Interruption: 'I would seriously hope that that could be achieved'*] with an objective to improving the quality of judicial decisions and opinions, and the overall productivity of judges and magistrates by supplying, inter alia, specialized training, and continuing education in specialized areas and judicial skills.
- 6 Purchasing legal materials and subscription to online facilities.
- 7 The rehabilitation of physical improvements to courtrooms and courthouses. Ensuring that they are basically equipped and furnished according to

facilities hearing trials in both civil and criminal jurisdictions.

Improving the criminal justice by enhancing the functional and operational ... and this is very important, Mde, because I have heard my Ministerial colleague speak about a matter that has been pending - several matters which had been instituted and are still pending, and I think a year, or probably more than a year, have gone by, to increase the operational capacity of the Department of Public Prosecutions, and strengthening the effectiveness of public prosecutors.

Another component Mde is:

Institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, with an objective to strengthen the functional and operational capacity of the Ministry in carrying out its legal mandates, and improving its administrative efficiency by procuring consultancy service to review, inter alia, the legislative waiting process, policies and procedures, in relation to the conduct of Government litigation.

Mde, with respect to the litigation, as you are aware Mde, for us to properly represent the State, it is incumbent that instructions be given in a timely manner, and so, it is my plea to my ministerial colleagues that, whenever a request is made of them, to ensure that, in a timely fashion, instructions are given to the Chambers of the Attorney

General to adequately and properly represent the interest of the State.

By procuring, drafting civil ... [*Interruption: 'Well, we do that on a continuous basis'*] civil and criminal procedures of Laws, with an objective ... and there are several of legislations which have been identified as required, they refer ... and I don't wish to repeat the various legislations that we will have to deal with but, in addition to improving other criminal and civil law procedures to achieve greater simplification, uniformity, and predictability in matters of bail, sentencing, costs, appeals, and continuity of hearings and trials.

Developing comprehensive guidelines and granting bail, listing notification procedures to ensure day-to-day hearings in both the high court and the magistrates' court.

Establishing ... probably we will consider establishing guidelines for sentencing, and a framework to facilitate consultation between judges and magistrates on sentencing issues, and developing guidelines, and to refuse, as much as possible, all requests for adjournments.

Mde, another sub-component is intended to promote more efficient interactions among justice institutions in order to enhancing ... [*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Attorney General, are you going to be much longer? Because if you're not we can...



**Hon Doodnauth Singh:** Mde, I wouldn't be. I will shorten my presentation.

**The Speaker:** No, if you want we can ... I would allow you to go on and then we will take the break right after you.

**Hon Doodnauth Singh:** All right, very well, I am grateful to you, Madame.

Another sub-component, Mde, is intended to promote more efficient interactions among ... and this is important, between justice institutions, in advancing - that is the police, the DPP, the prisons and the other security services. This will entail the financing of activities to the establishing of a Justice Sector Reform Steering Committee - I will be heading that Committee Mde, and its technical secretariat would provide high-level policy guidance, and coordinate them for implementing the Justice Sector Reform Strategy. The Steering Committee will bring together key policy-makers from Government, the judiciary, and may include Ministers of Finance, Legal Affairs, Home Affairs, The Chancellor, and The Chief Justice, thereby providing an important high level forum for the various sector agencies to coordinate the overall reform, solving strategic problems as they arise, ensuring that the strategy is being followed, and that all organizations are delivering what they are obliged to, within the prescribed budgetary allocations.

The technical secretariat will provide the coordination and technical support to all justice sector institutions. It will ensure that complex reforms in different institutions are effectively linked and managed, while sourcing additional technical assistance, where necessary, to enable institutions to implement the reforms. It will also ensure timely and appropriate monitoring and evaluation of performance, as well as providing a secretariat functioning for the steering committee.

Improving access to justice, Mde, which is of fundamental importance whenever we speak of the rule of law? The objective is to improve access to justice in Guyana by enhancing citizens' awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and providing services to court-users to facilitate legal advice, and representation, access to information, and ADR mechanism.

Mde, if I might refer briefly to ADR. Having been a practitioner for over forty-odd years Mde, I have always attempted to have matters settled but, regrettably, Mde, my experience has always been that, whenever you suggest to a client that a matter should be settled, the natural reaction is that the other side bribe you, or you get paid off, or something; so the Guyanese mentality seems to be not consistent with wanting settlement, or ADR. As a result, the ADR mechanism has not been as successfully as it ought to be.

Mde, the following strategies will be financed under this initiative.

- Expansion of services... My learned colleague - my young colleague, was speaking of Legal Aid, with an objective to provide information, advice, and representation to citizens, especially poor persons. Consultant services, together with training activities and equipment purchases will be procured to provide expert support to develop an action plan for a national legal aid scheme and, once incorporated by the Government, will provide technical assistance and equipment to support the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic; an expansion of services, as was reported, to Berbice and Essequibo.
- Development of public legal awareness ... this is an important aspect, Mde, but of course, as Guyanese, we know that our citizens are very conscious of their legal rights, and you have a lot of 'bottom-house' lawyers all over the place, but we would develop a public legal awareness, ensuring that all Guyanese citizens are made aware of their legal rights and responsibilities, and of the services available for the resolution of their disputes.

- Another support and element and component, is the support for informal justice, with an objective to providing alternatives to the formal justice system, especially in rural areas - something like the '*Panchayat*,' or whatever, to the African systems that we had, and the poor and disadvantaged, by developing paralegal and voluntary social, remedial programmes, among other things.
- Mde, a most important and vital element of this project would be law revision. That is an aspect which we have neglected for a number of years, and there is no mechanism ... we don't have a Law Revision Commission; we don't have a mechanism in place to ensure that law revision takes place. What happens is that each particular minister requests that his matter be dealt with expeditiously. Law revision, improving access to justice, and judicial orders and opinions, through revision of specific laws, and of the updating of laws, Mde, and the law reports of Guyana.

To execute this programme Mde, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has overall responsibility from the implementation of the programme. The Minister will ensure that meetings with the Inter-American Bank to review the implementation, and the various benchmarks are met.

To implement the programme, Mde, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is required to appoint a secretariat and, in addition to that, the Chief Justice is required to appoint a secretariat as well. We have advertised for the positions, and in view of the fact that it is an IDB-funded project, and the salary structure is reasonable, and probably ... We have had a lot of applicants, and I have appointed two other colleagues of ours - Senior Counsels, to be in the review panel, and it is expected that we will shortlist and look at those applications within a week or two.

The Programme Execution Unit will be headed by a coordinator appointed by the respective agencies, in consultation with the Bank. This will act as liaison with the Bank, and ensure the coordination and consistency of their programme activities. They will also be staffed with a programme management officer, and Mde, I have had a problem with the salary structure because, bearing in mind that this secretariat will be housed at the Attorney General Chambers, what you will have is this great disparity of salary between my officers - the Attorney General's, and these other officers who will head this unit and, as a result, what I have done is that I have used the lower end of the scale, which was suggested by the Bank in the advertisement. The programme will be headed, and there will also be liaison, technical coordinators etcetera. The overall programme will be supported by the appointment of analysts and the other members.

Mde, as I said, these interviews will take place within a very short time, and it is expected that persons would be appointed. We are crowded; we have inadequacy of staff; inadequacy of funding, but I am sure that, at the end of the day, we would make every effort to ensure that the programme - the objectives will have been achieved.

Mde, I therefore wish to close my presentation by saying that I'm hopeful that the programme will result in benefits to the Guyanese society as a whole, and as Chief Legal Advisor to the Government, that I will continue to serve for as long as I possibly can. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, we would now suspend this sitting for half an hour for suspension.

### **17:10H SUSPENSION OF SITTING**

### **17:50H RESUMPTION OF SITTING**

Honourable Members the Sitting is resumed. Honourable Member, Mr. Dave Danny.

**Hon Dave Dibar Danny:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, I rise to speak on behalf of the People's National Congress/Reform -1Guyana on the 2007 Budget debate, but first let me congratulate the Honourable Minister, Dr Ashni Kumar Singh, on his first Budget presentation, which can also be referred to as his maiden voyage into this Honourable House. Let me also hasten to say that he was very virile in his presentation. The meaning I used here, Mde, and this is why I make some clarification...

the meaning here is strong and forceful, and further I say not.

Mde Speaker, Budget 2007 is labeled *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, but before we do any further investigation into the 2007 Budget, I would like to ask three questions:

- 1) Can the reorganized ideas and numbers brought before from the failed 2006 Budget bring salvation in 2007? I guess not.
- 2) Can reorganized failed ideas and numbers of 2006 Budget produce new results? I doubt this.
- 3) Can the leftover ideas and unworkable numbers brought forward as new ideas and magical numbers realize the dreams of our fellow Guyanese?

These are our grandparents, our parents, ourselves and, most of all, secure the future of our youths, who are presently in pursuit of their education and employment, so that they can live in hope, knowing that, sometime in the near future, they can realize their dreams.

Mde Speaker, the answer to all of these natural questions, to any sane person who has read the 2007 Budget, and comprehended, fully, these empty, unrealistic and hopeless juggling of ideas and numbers, would have to

answer to these questions by saying ‘*this will be impossible.*’

Mde Speaker, this Honourable Ashni Singh, on page 1, paragraph 2 of the 2007 Budget lay claim that this Budget concretized our vision of a modern and equitable society for all Guyanese; but what does ‘Peeping Tom’ of *Kaitour News* on Friday February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, page 9, had to say about this so-called vision of the 2007 Budget; and I quote:

*This 2007 Budget lacks vision, lacks imagination, lacks ideas and does not prescribe policies that arise out of any proper thought-out plans for the critical sectors of the economy.”*

Mde Speaker, in the 2004 Budget Debate Minister Nadir rebutted to Mr. Vieira’s presentation, and I quote:

*Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Honourable Member, Mr. Dev, said that the Budget was miserably mislabeled, that it had very little to justify its title. Mr. Dev also charged that the Budget has nothing for the poor, and did nothing to give any more money. Mr. Speaker I saw a bold headline today in one of our nation’s newspaper reflecting what the Honourable Mr Dev out there said yesterday ‘about the comatose state of our economy.*



Mde Speaker that would have been Thursday 15 April 2004, page 30, 50, and 30: 51 of Minister Nadir's presentation. That statement could be used today to describe the 2007 Budget.

Mde Speaker you would have observed that the 2007 Budget is not only brought forward from 2006, as I thought, but from 2004, and God knows when.

Mde Speaker, what about the plan for sports development. Here is what 'Peeping Tom' had to say, and I quote from February 9, 2007, page 9:

*What we have in Guyana is a numbers Budget so, for example, we say that we would have a \$2B sports development plan, but the plan has not yet been developed. That must be the joke of the year. If poor planning is to characterize development, at least let us plan poorly, but let us deliver on what must be delivered.*

Mde Speaker, there is much talk about tourism, but I am saying that before we use tourism as a means of supporting our GDP, then you have to look at crime, and this is what I am doing now.

Mde Speaker I would like to take a look at crime, as it relates to personal security, and creating a conducive business environment. On page 21 of the President's address to the Ninth Parliament he said and I quote:

*Mr. Speaker, the strengthening of security and public safety would be given a high priority in my administration.”*

And on page 6 he said:

*Central to our vision is the fashioning of an inclusive democracy, one where the rule of law is paramount, one that provides great personal security.*

Mde Speaker, here His Excellency, the President, is laying some emphasis on security. What is our current, or past and current security situation? Mde Speaker, allow me to turn to page 216 of the Budget 2007 presentation. Here the Honourable Minister lay claim for the creation of an economic environment that would attract investors and, on page 22, paragraph 4.1, he said:

*We envisage a Guyana that is a preferred place to do business.*

Mde Speaker, but what do we have in reality.

The *Guyana Review* dated November 2006, reported in the article ‘*The cost of crime; business reel under the blows.*’ Does this statement sound familiar? Of course, it reminds us of the troubled West Indies team under attack. A typical match these days for the West Indies would be

like this: West Indies has been set a target of 268 runs to win; the commentator says West Indies is in trouble. At this early stage, they are two for ten. I turn off my television; five overs later I turn it on, and they are now five for twenty-five and five overs later they were all out for forty-five. I hope this is not the place where the PPP/C Government has now found them - a place of no recovery. Woe onto the Guyanese people. So sad! The commentators closing remarks were 'The West Indies never had a chance of recovering.'

Mde Speaker, let's turn to the *Guyana Review* and see what it says there.

*Unconfirmed estimates indicate that business persons lost over \$2B to robberies between 2002 and 2006. Concerns were raised with the various business associations about the high cost of these crimes, and the ability of Police Force to deal, decisively with them.*

This report points out that everyday someone is robbed at the Bourda Market. This was supported by a member of the City Constabulary, who commented:

*if we were to run behind every thief in the Stabroek we would be unable to do anything else, and others would be robbed.*

In 2005 there were over 5,000 reports of robberies, including armed robberies, larceny from the person, simple larceny, theft of the nature severely burdened small business and micro enterprises. The crime situation is causing headaches for the Consultative Association of Guyanese Industries Limited (CAGI), the Georgetown Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Guyana Manufacturers and Service Association, and the Private Sector.

Former Private Sector Chairman, Mr. Yesu Persaud, stated in his 2005 Report *“Organised criminal activities continue to dominate the scene in 2005. A number of businessmen were killed with little progress report on the related police investigation.*

*The loss of a large number of weapons from the Guyana Defence Force further increased the fear of the business community. The effort to curb drug trafficking, for which Guyana is now a well-recognised transshipment point, has apparently not produced any noteworthy result.*

Joining the PSC in its concern was the GCCI, through its President, Captain Jerry Gouveia. In expressing concern about the crime situation, and its effect he said on the business community, Mr. Gouveia told the media that the Chamber and its sister organisations, including the

GMSA, were meeting to find ways and means to deal with the situation.

Here we have a situation, Mde Speaker, where we were just drawing your attention back where the President made claims, and similar claims were made in the 2007 Budget, where the crime situation would be given priority. Mde Speaker, on page 25 the *Guyana Review* of November 2006 reported that crime has a negative impact on the investment climate and can deter, or delay, both domestic and foreign investment, and hence growth.

Here again we have, Mde Speaker ... Here we're seeing, clearly, that the crime situation is having an impact on the investment climate. Mde Speaker, the assault on business is astronomical, and I seek your permission to bring to this Honourable House the Report of the *Guyana Review* of November 2006:

“For 2006 there were 990 reports of robbery under arms, compared to 836 for the whole of 2005. Armed robbers’ targeted restaurants, cellular phone stores, the Internet Cafés, boutiques, money transfer agencies, and gas stations. Some of the routine robberies that took place during 2006 were as follows:

## NA-BUDGET DEBATE 14 FEBRUARY 2007

### January

DeAbreu Creations	-	\$40M
Seeraj Jewellery	-	\$40M
Goldfiled Enterprises	-	\$215,000
Ansa McAl	-	\$300,000
Fazal Rahaman	-	\$250,000

### February

Azad Mohammed	-	\$1.5M
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### March

Seeran Sooknandan	-	\$100,000
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### April

Vishal Vendors	-	\$450,000
Stabroek News Market Vendors	-	\$450,000
Parswar Sookdeo	-	\$505,500
Bartica Speedboat passengers	-	\$6M

## NA-BUDGET DEBATE 14 FEBRUARY 2007

### May

Abdool and Abdool Insurance Brokers	-	\$2M
Ashraf Ahmad	-	\$712,000
Halimoon Alphonso	-	\$1.3M
Danmattie Shivmangal-Singh	-	\$14M
Parbattie Singh	-	\$13.2M

### June

Heeralall	-	\$300,000
GUYOIL at Herzburg Berbice	-	\$1.2M
Beyond Cell (a cell phone retailer)	-	\$60,000
Chinese Restaurant in New Amsterdam Berbice	-	\$615,000

### August

Parvati Persaud-Edwards	-	\$124,000
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## NA-BUDGET DEBATE 14 FEBRUARY 2007

September

Ashraf Ali	-	\$7.7M
Fazal Izack	-	\$70,000
Bhagwantie Hamid	-	\$577,000

And in October

Mohamed Haniff	-	\$1.1M
Hardyal Tulsie	-	\$175,000
Jairoon Rahaman	-	\$1.1M

So Mde Speaker, according to security consultant Featherstone, the way forward should include a meeting of the Guyana Police Force, the Guyana Association of Private Security Organisations, and the business community, to work out the modalities. Featherstone feels that the Guyana Police Force needs to upgrade its current training programme to the status of a modern accredited police college, which provides specialists and sophisticated law enforcement techniques, as well as balanced education, to ensure that recruits are socialised to become competent police professionals, with the relevant skills needed to address traditional and other sophisticated activities.



Mde Speaker, the *Guyana Review* of November 2006, in an interview with Mr. Christopher Ram, to answer a few questions on crime issues; [*Interruption: "Well, he is an accountant and he knows ... he knows about the effects of crime as it relates to business"*] Mde Speaker, the first question that was put to Mr. Ram was: '*Has crime affected business in Guyana*'? His answer was

*"Yes, there is far more awareness about the scale and nature of crime, particularly of the violent nature, often involving the use of assault weapons, causing lives to be lost. In addition, the availability of online news, the rapid exchange of e-mail among Guyanese, here and abroad, the official publications, and resort of the embassies include advisories means that development in the crime scene is easily transmitted on the international scene."*

Mde Speaker, the second question that was put to Mr. Ram was: '*What is the impact of crime on business?*' He answered and I quote:

*‘The impact of crime is manifested in several different ways; they are actual cash costs, the changes in lifestyle, migration, the economy and investment. There is also loss of property, changes in lifestyle occur because people consider the streets no longer safe, and therefore no longer go out often; a situation which affects the entertainment industry.*

*When crime is increased, there is much greater reluctance by business persons to invest, and this has spin-off consequences for job, taxes and spending, for investors too would necessarily factor security into their investment decision. In the tourism sector, crime is the destination decision, and every hotel room that goes unbooked is real money foregone.’*

Mde Speaker, the third question that was put to Mr. Ram was *‘How should the Private Sector Commission react?’ Obviously with concern, no one is really safe until all are safe*’ and he said *“some of us are safe I know especially on the other side of the House,”* but he is saying that obviously we all need to be safe.

Mde Speaker, the fourth question that was put to Mr. Ram was *‘Why is there an increase in crime?’* Mde Speaker, here is his response:

*There are unemployment and poverty, breakdown in society, and broke, down families, a culture of corruption, drugs and alcohol, major crime issues. Think of a AK-47, or the jailbreak. No one seems to want to know what happened, who is involved, and how to prevent a recurrence, unless we are prepared to pay more. The GDF would always be short of professionals, and lack motivational and motivated personnel.*

Mde Speaker, the fifth question that was put to Mr. Ram was ‘*What can be done?*’ The answer:

*‘We need political consensus on how we should deal with crime. Crime would not be solved in a piece-meal manner; the courts, the prison system, the laws and new approaches to crime detection have to be examined. The prognosis depends on whether or not the problems are fixed. If they are not, the situation will escalate.’*

Mde Speaker, I’ll like to turn my attention to tourism. In the Honourable Minister’s presentation, dated the 25<sup>th</sup> of

March 2002: I'll like to read from his presentation - Mr. Manzoor Nadir, and I quote:

*Mr. Speaker, it is not for the want of will that the Bill took so long, but if we are going to ask for consultation and dialogue, and input from all stakeholders, the process of bringing Bills to the National Assembly would be lengthened. Mr. Speaker, the Bill will put the development of tourism in the hands of the Private Sector partnership.*

Mde Speaker, I'll like to, I'll like to go over the reason why Minister Manzoor is pointing what would propel the Tourism Industry:

*“Mr. Speaker, the Bill would put the development of Tourism in the hands of a Private Sector partnership, and would lead towards significant development of the Industry. Mr. Speaker, last year I said that the two most important factors that affect tourism would be the political situation and the perception of an increase in the crime rate.”*

Here, Mde Speaker, the Minister is saying that:

He needs a Bill and to propel Tourism, then he is also saying that because of the political situation, and the perception of high crime. This shows that the Minister was in a state of denial. However, he went on to say that ... [Interruption: 'Who.' "Mr. Manzoor Nadir"]

*"Mr. Speaker, in 1986 Guyana achieved one of its highest targets, in terms of visitors coming to this country - almost 92,000 arrivals to Guyana; in 1997 - 75,000. 1997 shows down considerably, and the investor had a wait and-see attitude, in particular waiting to see the result of the elections.*

*In January 1998, four thousand persons, as against 5,700 in the previous January, came to Guyana; and I would like you to remember these figures because I turn to another report, the same plan that is promoted to be the haven, or the salvation that would salvage the Industry; you would think differently.*

*"In February, another protest march, 5,000 persons came, as against 6,000. In March, in the height of marching - 4,200, as against 7,000 in 1996."* Mde Speaker I just skip to move to 21:31, page 21:31. Mr. Speaker,

*“Mr. Speaker, there are some other encouraging signs in the tourism sector that, in two of the most important markets - the United States, we held our own in 2001, against 2000, doing marginally better by bringing 1,000 more people out of the United States. For me, perhaps the shining light will be arrival from Europe.”*

*“We are in the process of promoting Guyana, mainly as a country that has natural based tourism ... [Interruption: ‘nature-based’] nature-based tourism. [Laughter] Germany and the United Kingdom supplied the largest amount of such visitors to any country, and it is from People last year’s report, an almost ten percent increase in arrival showed that we had 8,700 persons from Europe in 2001.”*

Mde Speaker,

*“Tourism, the largest industry, [I’m still quoting from the Honourable Minister’s speech] Tourism, the largest industry in the world [and I’ll like you to listen to this figure, because it will take meaning*

*later on] \$600B travelling spending... over \$600B, and we are going to take our fair share of that market.”*

Mde Speaker, we talk here ... I'll like to register this figure to Mr. Nadir, the Honourable Member. Six Hundred persons travelled ... six hundred million persons travelled, and you have \$600M; and you want to have your fair share, yet you are only prepared to invest G\$65.6M, which is US\$330,000. If there are any businessmen in this Honourable House, I would like you to show me the mathematics how you would invest US\$330,000 and earn ... and take an earning that would be acceptable out of \$600B.

Mde Speaker, this whole fiasco of Tourism get sweeter and very interesting. The Industry has been the subject of several studies and development projects over the last five years, including the release of a policy framework in 2001. This plan highlighted the country's advantage, but also observed that the single most important constraint to tourism growth has been the tourists ... that tourism has not been given the recognition as a priority economic sector for the country.

Here, Mde Speaker, I'll like to stop and point out that, whereas in front Mr. Nadir spoke about the constraints, and the election, and the perception of crime, and here he is saying something else, contradicting his own self. The Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, in collaboration with the Guyana Tourism Authority, has recently been involved in a number of important initiatives aimed at tourism development and accord to greater priority to the sector. However, despite these positive steps, there is now an emerging consensus that there is need in the development of a new five-year Tourism Development Plan to provide the additional impetus required to propel the sector forward.

Mde Speaker, what I note here is that we have had several studies ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time Honourable Member.

**Hon Debra Backer:** Thank you for those warm words of encouragement. I respectfully move, Mde Speaker that the Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** Fifteen 15 minutes to continue.

**Hon Dave Dibar Danny:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Now, on recommendation No. 20, alternate tourism develops through the formation and implementation of a National Tourism Development Strategy, and this should bring salvation to Tourism.



Mde Speaker, I'll like to turn to the same ... After all the several recommendations that went before, which recommended that we should have the Guyana Tourism Development Action Plan; I'll like to turn to the introduction, and that is page 1 and this is what it had to say:

*Tourism potential unrealised. Guyana possesses a wealth of world-class natural tourism ... [Interruption: "18<sup>th</sup> of January 2006"] ... "including vast trails of wilderness, rainforests, river systems, mountains, and a variety of cultural and historic resources. Despite the general recognition that the country has abundant natural resources, Guyana has failed to translate its natural tourist resource- base into a viable industry.*

Guyana has failed to translate its natural tourist "*resource base into a viable tourism industry. Non-Guyanese related visa tourists number about 5,000*" - and I asked earlier, Mde Speaker, to remember those numbers of 5 and 6 and 7 thousands per month, and here, in this report, the Guyanese-related tourists number about 5,000 a year, which is like a month, which was reported earlier, which I just read; so definitely there is some kind of a

contradiction; the figure, which has changed little in recent years, yet, if you remember clearly, you reported some 10% increase sometime. This report says that there has been little or no increase.

Mde Chairperson, now I'd like to tell you ... What I'll like to tell you, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, what are the two reasons why you have not been succeeding, and this is based on the ... on the ... Mde, thru the Speaker - four fundamental constraints, 4 fundamental constraints are highlighted here. As described in the following paragraph, there are a number of reasons which have constrained the realisation of Guyana's potential: Of these the 4 fundamentals are:

- Too narrow vision of Guyana's potential as a tourist destination.
- Insufficient aircraft and expensive airfares
- Poor marketing place position
- Lack of critical mass

Mde Speaker, I'll like to turn to page 44. The implications are clear: to be a driver of the national economy, the tourism sector cannot rely solely on eco-

tourism; a more diversified tourist product must be put in place.

Insufficient airlifts - now listen ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, what you're reading from?

**Hon Dave Dibar Danny:** The Action Plan of the Tourism ... 2006-2007. "The implications are clear: To be a driver of national economy the tourism sector cannot rely solely on eco-tourism; a more diversified tourism product must be put in place, and these are some of the constraints:

- Marching in the streets
- Insufficient airlifts and expensive airfares

I find that the GTIS tourism cluster developed survey among the international travel intermediates was that Guyana was perceived to be an expensive destination; it is expensive to fly to Georgetown, and the interesting sites are distant and expensive to visit, once you get to the capital city.

- Travel logistics and flight schedules to reach Guyana are perceived to be insufficient. It takes at least a whole day to get there from most anywhere out of the Caribbean.

Mde Speaker, in closing from this section, I would just like to highlight, with the exception of a spike in 2004, Mr. Nadir, passengers' traffic has been virtually static, and it has been virtually static over the last five years. Again, the implication is clear, the air access situation must be improved, in terms of destinations served, frequency of service, and the cost of travel. So Guyana is virtually unknown. Now, Mde Speaker, remember I pointed out that Guyana invested, or is now budgeting \$330,000, as against St. Lucia of \$5M, which amounts to G\$1B, and this is comparison we talking about.

Poor market place position – Guyana is virtually unknown in the marketplace, except for very specific niche. The International Travel and Tourism Industry have very little recognition awareness of Guyana as a travel destination. Most people have not even heard of Guyana. We can only sell what people want. There has been little or no national destination promotion. Consumer awareness is non-existent. Guyana does not have any overseas information office and destination, marketing activities are primarily proposed; and participation at tourism fairs, WTM London, ITW Berlin, distribution of TAG Explore Guyana, Guide and PR releases. In effect, Guyana is largely unknown as a vacation destination in the marketplace. Mde Speaker, is there any wonder that we are not known in the world,

when we are saying that we would budget we're ... Mde Speaker, we're saying ... we're talking here about promoting Guyana as a tourist destination in a way that it would enhance the GDP of this country, yet we are prepared to invest nothing in this sector. *[Interruption: "Sixty-five million is \$330,000"]*

Mde Speaker, we listened with rapt attention in this House to the Honourable Minister Maniram Prashad, Minister responsible for Tourism - Honourable Minister Prashad, Minister with responsibility for tourism, and what did he tell us? What did he tell us? Nothing that gives life to tourism and how he will unleash the full potential of tourism.

Mde Speaker, what the Minister proclaims, was to name some places which had some rooms. He spent about 15-20 minutes misleading the House as to the hotels available, and the number of rooms - a flimsy and sketchy picture of the reality. Mde Speaker, let me say that I am very sorry that the Honourable Minister, Maniram Prashad, is not here. I believe he is somewhere in India touring, when he should be here learning about tourism. *[Laughter and Applause]*

Mde Speaker, let's take a tour of the Guyana Tourism Development Plan 2006-2020. Mde Speaker, on page 14 of this Plan, Table 4:1 '*Structure of the Guyana Tourist Sector 2005*' heading '*Facility Service and Accommodation*' – Hotel Resorts 26, plus rooms. Properties – 10, that will give us 500 rooms;

b) Hotels Lodge Inn 10 to 25 rooms – properties 25. In the 10 to 25 categories – properties 25 and here we have 240 rooms. Guest House – 16 properties with 110 rooms.

Needless to say, if we were listening to the Minister, he misled this House when he failed to tell us that some of the hotels that he was referring to were guesthouses. Needless to say what guesthouse are used for, and further I say not.

Apartments - 8 properties with 100 rooms;

Other - 3 properties, which failed to meet any classification here.

Mde Speaker, these 3 properties, the quality is so poor that they fall out of the range of any classification. Mde Speaker, this will give us a total of 1,180 rooms.

Mde Speaker, under the heading ‘*Tourism Budget a Glance 2007*,’ page 5: *Guyana Tourism Authority has been allocated \$65.5M to promote Guyana as a unique tourist destination.* Mde Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Finance on page 26 of the Budget said, and I quote: “*But for all these investments to pick up we need to succeed on the promotion front.*” Here the Minister recognises that we need to promote Guyana ... *[Interruption]* yes, the allocation we’ll come to.

Mde Speaker, I must say I agree 100% with the statement, but let’s look at the practical situation. Mde Speaker, on page 23 of the 2006-2010 Action Plan for Tourism, under the head ‘*Destination marketing*,’ permit me to quote for the benefit of the Minister of Finance, and I now do so:

*These days the main function of a national tourist organisation is Destination Marketing, achieved through a combination of promotional activities, such as advertising promotion, and distribution of collateral, public relations activities and through its website. The GTA undertakes all of these activities; the main constraint is the lack of funds. The GTA is severely under-resourced, in terms of destination marketing impact. There is little that can be achieved with an effective budget of only*

*\$14M that is \$70,000 ... [Interruption: 'Well that figure has now been updated to \$56M; that would have been US\$70,000 then). "By contrast St. Lucias target for Destination Marketing is about US\$5M yearly.*

Mde Speaker, some increase is allocated this year that is \$65.6; which is about US\$330. Mde Speaker, if you were to compare US\$5M yearly against US\$330, what we have is St. Lucia \$1B, and Guyana \$65,600,000; and those are in Guyana currency. Mde Speaker, how we look at this comparison, is it any wonder that the Tourism Industry of Guyana is not a profitable venture.

Mde Speaker, we're speaking about tourism yet. We're speaking about tourism, and here we have the crime situation in the *Sunday Stabroek* of February 11, 2007 – '*Lethem businesswomen robbed by armed Brazilian gunmen.*' Now, Mde Speaker, after reading ... Mde Speaker, I'll like to turn to Introduction on page 1 of the Budget: "*As we emphasise our vision is for a better Guyana, a Guyana where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoy... [Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member



**Hon Debra Backer:** Mde Speaker, I respectfully move that the Honourable Member be given 5 minutes to conclude his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 5 minutes to conclude.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion Carried.**

**Hon Dave Dibar Danny:** Mde Speaker,

*A Guyana where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoying great cohesion and prosperity, a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours, and a society that is recognised for the care and attention placed on children, women, youths and elderly, and the less fortunate.*

Mde Speaker here we are saying that we compare favourably with our distant neighbours, but I'll like to ... After I read that I pondered on who are our immediate neighbours, and I came up with Suriname, Brazil and Venezuela. *[Laughter]* Mde Speaker, if we were to compare Guyana with these countries, the first question that comes to mind is *'why is our fellow Guyanese leaving for these same countries by the thousands.*

*Further, why do the citizens of these countries don't seek to come to take up residence here?'* Mde Speaker, if I am not mistaken, only the Brazilians, Mde Speaker, if I am not mistaken, only the Brazilians come here; and the only reason they are here is because of our gold and diamonds; [Applause] and some use Guyana as a haven, especially the criminals – *Sunday Stabroek*, front page '*Lethem businesswoman robbed by armed Brazilian gunmen,*' page 23.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Danny Dibar Danny:** Okay, Mde President. [Laughter] Mde Chairperson, Mde, in conclusion ... Mde Speaker, in conclusion, please allow me to point out some of the pitfalls of the Budget 2007, and the President area of the 9<sup>th</sup> Parliament. First on page 4, under the heading '*Division*' ...

**The Speaker:** Time Honourable Member.

**Hon Danny Dibar Danny:** ... the President said Guyana has been propelled to a new threshold ... [Interruption]

**The Speaker:** No, go ahead. I was asking Honourable Members to give the Member a chance to ... he is winding up. Please give him a chance to wind up.

**Hon Danny Dibar Danny:** The President said: "*Guyana has been propelled to a new threshold that will see us emerge as a modern, democratic and united country.*" I think they want to hear what the President said: *Guyana*

*has been propelled to a new threshold that will see us emerge as a modern, democratic and united country.”*

Mde Speaker, I took time off to check the meaning of this word ‘threshold,’ and lo and behold, to my amazement, what did I discover - the meaning: i) a piece of wood or stone etcetera; the point where something begins. Then came 2007, this is the point where Guyanese problems begin to escalate to skyrocketing proportions; VAT was introduced at the unbearable 16%. The PNC/C 1-Guyana is recommending 8% and for a more detailed solution to this problem checks Order Paper for Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2007 - Public Business: motion in the name of Mr. Robert Corbin, Leader of the People’s National Congress/Reform -1 Guyana.

Mde Speaker, I must say that the President is a man of his word at last. He has now placed stones around our necks and fenced us with wood. One other meaning: ‘*a place beneath a door,*’ so you see, Mde Speaker, there is no escape; we are placed beneath a door. Mde Speaker, I want to be sure I understand the President clearly, so I checked the word *beneath*. [Laughter] Mde Speaker, listen to what I found - the meaning: 1 ‘*in a lower place below or just below, underneath, lower than the ground beneath his feet.*’ The second meaning is very important;

*the ground beneath his feet.* Mde Speaker, can you believe this? *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, I think you better ... wind up. Your time is exhausted.

**Hon Danny Dibar Danny:** I'll close now.

**The Speaker:** Yes. Please do.

**Hon Danny Dibar Danny:** The President has now placed the Guyanese people at a place lower than under his feet.

Finally, Mde Speaker, I now remind this Honourable House of the pitfalls. Mde Speaker, before I take my seat, I would like to say that, because of the above defects I find it impossible to support the 2007 Budget. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, Kellowan Lall.

**Hon Kellowan Lall:** Thank you Mde Speaker. It is indeed a great pleasure to participate in this debate on the 2007 Budget presentation, delivered to this House by the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. First of all, let me congratulate the Minister for first of all joining the PPP/Civic Government, and secondly, for presenting his first Budget on behalf of Vision 21Team. *[Applause]* I'm sure that he'll be here to pilot many more Budgets on behalf of the people of Guyana.

Unlike Members of the Opposite side, who get up and extol the academic and other virtues of Dr. Singh and then expose their inability to fathom the brilliance and depth of his presentation, I would like to do justice to him by citing a few key sentences that demonstrate that depth: On page 1 paragraph 14, Dr. Ashni Singh states:

*This Budget reasserts the fundamental objectives of our economic systems: that is, the formulation and implementation of appropriate and relevant policies and plans, aimed at improving the lives, and realising the aspirations, of all Guyanese. To achieve this, it builds on the foundation already laid, with respect to maintaining macro-economic stability, implementing and enabling trade and investment regime, building capacity to enable our economy to compete, effectively, in the global environment, and manage short-term external shocks; enhancing savings and investment to raise them to sustainable levels, continuously reforming the financial system, unlocking the potential and entrepreneurial talents of our people to achieve economic development, while protecting and supporting the most vulnerable members of our society, all aimed at achieving pro-poor growth, and building a modern and prosperous country.*

And further, Mde Speaker, on page 2, paragraph 8, the Minister stated:

*This Budget advances the policies needed for an era of sustained growth, wealth and employment creation, by securing the transition to a globally competitive economy.*

It is clear from the onset that the Minister delved into the essence of our strategy and goals for the current year. A perusal of this, and other sections of the presentation, also makes it clear that the Minister studiously avoided clutter and cheap rhetoric, so that the Government's message is unambiguous. In so doing, the Minister has afforded us the opportunity to focus on some of the real issues - an opportunity which those on the Opposite side, his Opposite side - much to their own disservice, have failed to grasp.

The paragraph I just quoted, Mde Speaker, captures the underlying approaches - outlook, if you like, of the present Government. It clearly suggests that for us to enter, much less compete, in the present global environment - an environment characterised by globalisation and trade liberalisation, we have to keep our economy open. Also, to be part of today's global

environment presupposes a strong commitment by the Government, and the Opposition, to the basic tenets of democracy. Having said that, and mindful of the fact that we're still a developing country, it cannot but alert us to the fact that the external environment is not one that is naturally always accommodating. It is an imperative, therefore, to prepare ourselves, first by appreciating that fact, and secondly to work steadfastly to avoid the pitfalls.

Essential to an understanding of what Dr. Singh is saying, is an appreciation of how an open economy works, and what our economic and social peculiarities are at any given point in time; and given our present circumstances, where we are attempting a host of reforms - and poverty is still a major cause of our underdevelopment, one has to have a very strong social policy, and it is that understanding that has propelled us into crafting a Budget that allocates significant sums to the social sector.

Preparing for the global marketplace and sustaining huge spending on the social sectors, entail continuous reforms of the various sectors - strong management of the economy; working together to give our people hope; creating a strong class of entrepreneurs, and a culture of entrepreneurship, and attracting local and foreign investment in order to create wealth and employment.

So Mde Speaker, Dr. Singh has put out a clear and unambiguous vision on how we will proceed this year, and in the near future, if we are to achieve our objective of making Guyana a place of prosperity.

Now, what does the Opposition have to offer? So far, apart from the oft-repeated shortcomings in the country, which we have acknowledged even before the Budget presentation, the Opposition has offered no viable alternative, and therein, I daresay, lies the brilliance of Dr. Singh's presentation, because they do not have a viable alternative to his Budget presentation.

Mde Speaker, we, on this side of the House, as Members of Parliament, as Ministers of the Government, pledge to work with Dr. Singh to accomplish those lofty ideals adumbrated in his presentation, and I join my other colleagues to welcome the Opposition side to come and indulge with us in the exciting enterprise of nation-building.

Mde Speaker, many of the speakers during past few days have spoken on various issues pertaining to Local Government. They have debated various issues from the various regions, and there have been answers to questions asked. I also want to say a few words on this issue of Local Government - not really because I am the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, but



there are some things that have been said which I cannot leave unanswered.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is not one of those ministries where a lot of earth-shattering even to take place; but, on a daily basis however, Mde Speaker, it is a Ministry, through the 10 Regions, 65 NDCs, and the 6 municipalities propel very small but very meaningful developments that touch the lives of people all over this country. I am pleased that local government affairs have been mentioned in a very lavish manner in the presentation by Minister Ashni Singh, perhaps signalling the emphasis being placed on local government in achieving the goals in improving the quality of life of our people.

In dealing with Local Government, the Minister pointed out some clear-cut objectives for the current year, and I believe that, in order to achieve those objectives, it will require strenuous efforts and a significant outlay of financial and other resources; and so, perhaps it's not by chance, that the Ministry has been given a Budget of \$14.6B for the current year. Out of this sum there is a capital budget of \$3.497B, and current spending totalling \$11.1B. In the current year, Mde Speaker, the various communities in different parts of the country would see added developments under the Community Enhancement

Service Programme, a sum of \$685M would be spent in the rehabilitation and construction of roads, markets, stellings, and institutional strengthening in Bartica, Charity, Parika, Supenaam - these locations which have been identified as new townships.

Under the Urban Development Programme, some \$722M will be spent on roads, markets, town halls; and institutional strengthening in Georgetown, Linden, New Amsterdam, Corriverton, Rose Hall, Anna Regina, and Bushlot; and my colleague over there, the Honourable Member, wants to hear about waste. There is, Mde Speaker, a very exciting project to come on stream within a few weeks. It is called the Solid Waste Disposal Management Programme which is going to be funded by the IDB at a cost of some \$4B. This year we've budgeted about \$170M, I think to prepare for the start-up of this operation. It entails a new solid waste disposal site in Hague Bosch on the East Bank of Demerara. It will also contain an element of the closure of the dumpsite in Georgetown. It will be a programme that will engage ... will involve the Private Sector and, within a few days I think, the Ministry of Finance will be organising the actual signing of this loan. Immediately thereafter we would be advertising for an operator, and from there, over the next 18 months, we would see this project being realised. It will result in making a very marked difference in the waste disposal programme that we currently have in Georgetown and its environs.

The capital subvention ... Mde Speaker, these are not the ... A lot of people sometimes believe that the capital ... that the amount of monies that we hear the Budget approves on an annual basis as subvention to the NDCs and to Local Government in general - mainly the NDCs and municipalities, that that is the amount that the Government ... or that is the amount being spent by the local authorities. This year, if the current rates of collection remain the same within the local authorities and the municipalities, these councils would be collecting an amount totalling \$1.5B in rates and taxes, and these are not monies that are going to come to the treasury. These are monies which these local authorities are going to spend, based on their own wishes, in consultation with the various councils. In addition, there are many other agencies, very many other ministries that will be doing work in the various regions – in the municipalities and in the neighbourhoods.

Mde Speaker, some of the more prominent features of this year's Capital Budget on the local government, which seeks to improve the conditions of the people in the various regions, include \$360M for roads, land and water transport; approximately another \$360M in land development, drainage and irrigation; \$134M in bridges; \$525M for furniture and buildings in the health and education sectors, under the regional administration; \$130M given for equipment for health; and expansion of water and electricity supply - \$50M.

Mde Speaker, sometime ago, when Mr. Elliot spoke, he referred to what he perceived to be discrimination in the allocation to Region 4. I want to point out, Mde Speaker, that all the regions, in their presentation, every year, would make submissions to the Ministry of Local Government, and through that Ministry to the Ministry of Finance, on what they perceive to be the needs of those communities, and not at all times can the Government afford to give all these regions the required amount of capital expenditure; and it's not only for Region 4 where the requests were not met in totality, but in all the Regions; but this year, Mde Speaker, as against last year, Region 4 would have \$133M more than last year: \$133M more than last year. So it cannot be ... and secondly, I want to make this point: Mr. Elliot selects Region 4 for special attention, and I don't know what the reason is. I don't know the reason why he would say that Region 4 would be selected for some sort of discrimination. It certainly cannot be that it is just because ... mainly because PNC controls the council; it certainly it can't be because of that, because the PNC barely got 50% of the votes. There are other people living in the community, so it can't be, and as I said, they are going to have \$133M more than last year - in addition to the \$1.6B they got last year.

As I'm on the Budget for the regions, in the current Budget practically - not practically, all the regions, all 10 Regions will be given significant increases in their budgetary allocations for this year, [*Applause*] all the 10

Regions. Region 1 - \$77M; Region 2 - \$61M; Region 3 - \$148M; Region 4 - \$133M; Region 5 - \$92M; Region 6 - \$184M; Region 7 - \$74M; Region 8 - \$47M; Region 9 - \$75M; and Region 10 - \$82M. [*Interruption: 'You never use to spend the money. You used to send it back to the treasury. It's only now you ... You never use to spend it'*]

So Mde Speaker I see no reason, no basis for this charge of discrimination against Region 4. Region 4 is a part of the administrative district of this Government, so why would we want to discriminate, for what reason, for what reason?

Now Mde Speaker, the Honourable Mr. Basil Williams came to this Honourable House and made the wicked suggestion ... [*Interruption: 'Revelation.'* "Wicked suggestion." 'Revelation']

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, it's one of the 'no-no' word.

**Hon Kellowan Lall:** Mde Speaker, I withdraw the expression. Mde Speaker, the Honourable Speaker, Basil Williams ... The Honourable Member Basil Williams said that the Minister can 'willy nilly,' *at his whims and fancies, dissolve a council;* and he said that there is something ... *ministerial authoritarianism,* or something like that.

Mde Speaker, Chapter 28:02 spells out, under the Local Government Act, spells out clearly how a council must be dissolved, and certainly it's not within the hands, or the powers of the Minister to do that. I am not a lawyer, but I suppose that if a council is dissolved then there must be some procedure for it to be replaced.

Mde Speaker, there are some other issues concerning local government that came up here during the debate. One of them is the operations of the various councils. The Honourable Member, Mr. Elliot, spoke about the administrative building for the region, in Region 4. I want to say that that matter has been decided upon already, and the building will be in Triumph. Those decisions have been taken long before I became Minister, or the new Council came into being, and that matter has gone very far already; but I want to make this point. These councils are made up of representatives of various political parties, and I think that it would just be a wasting of our time, and not focusing on what we need to do if the majority representations in these councils are going to use these councils for political purposes. At the end of the day these councils are there to carry out a programme, and if they are to continue in this vein, and making these Councils into political mouthpieces, just because they have majority, we're not going to get very far. I mentioned that because, after I had met the chairman of Region 4, and explained to him what has happened, they yet went ahead and passed a resolution in the council, saying that they're against the decision of the Government and that

they want something else. That is creating an area of conflict when there was no need for that - creating an area of conflict. That is clearly no need for that ...  
*[Interruption: "Why? Because it's like creating conflicts, and that's what you're looking for: that's why it doesn't matter to you: That is why it doesn't matter to you: You love to create conflict.*

*A lot of people are not alive, thanks to some people who are alive"]*

Mde Speaker, local government is not only a place for where you see public works – drains, roads, playfields and so forth going up. Local government is also a dynamic evolutionary process. It is a place where Government's policies touch the daily lives of people - the lives of people on a daily basis. It is a place where all interests cohabitate, where the richness of our diversity is very evident and, more than that, the regional, municipal, and neighbourhood governments have always been fertile ground for inclusively, and it's a place for the nurturing of a culture of respect, and tolerance, and harmonious relationships.

We see, at the local level, that when all the politicking is done, and all the views have been heard, the people on the ground level get together and get things done; perhaps that is a lesson for some of us here in the centre where, despite our differences, at the end of the day, we have to work together and continue with the development process. At the end of the day, Mde Speaker, we are all ...

Regardless on which side of the House we are, we're all called upon to assume responsibility for this nation, and to take possession of the developmental processes. Our people need leadership, and continued care for them, and we must always make sure that there is a place for them, and a place in the process of this nation-building.

Mde Speaker, as Mr. Williams is very keen on dealing with the reform process ... I think he mentioned most of what is going on; so I don't have any news for him; I don't have any news for him. The two major political parties have been involved in the reform process, in discussions on what should be the reforms in local government, and I am sure the PNC representative has been briefing the PNC, like the PPP representative has been briefing the PPP, and we are hoping that that process will come to a conclusion very early, and that we can put these ... [*Interruption: Yes I understand that all the political parties would be part of it, but we don't have a problem with that, we don't have a problem with that*] We hope that this process would come to an end very soon, so that we can start preparing the necessary legislation and bring them to the Assembly for approval. I am very hopeful that this will be done shortly, and that we will be able to conclude on these matters early, so that we can have local government elections this year.

Mde Speaker, in conclusion, I want to borrow a quote that was already quoted here in this House by my good friend, Dr. Anthony, from John Carter, in his book '*No Easy Victory*,' and it states:



*“Leaders have a significant role in creating the state of mind that is society. They can serve as symbols of moral unity in the society. They can express the values that hold society together: More importantly, they can conceive and articulate goals that lift people out of their petty preoccupations, telling them about the conflict that tear society apart and unite them in pursuit of objectives worthy of their best efforts: They can express the values that hold society together [I want to repeat that - again] They can express the values that hold society together.”*

I want to end on that note, Mde Speaker and like my other colleagues on this side of the House, commend the Budget to the nation. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister Dr Bheri Ramsaran

**Hon Bheri S Ramsaran:** Mde Speaker it's with great pleasure I rise to join this discussion today, and moreso, to thank the young and eloquent Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for a presentation well done. His presence among us, on this side of the House, signals the continued quest of the PPP/Civic for youth, vision, and a robust approach to the future development of this country. Indeed, Mde Chair, his presence is an indication that the PPP/Civic is expanding its engagement with more and

more sections of the society. As I get on with my discussion you will see how we are doing this with the communities even in the aspect of health. Dr. Ashni Singh's presentation captures Guyana's position as it really is, positions it in a realistic light, brings the challenges to the fore, and present a global, or possible solution, to our wider national issues. I must congratulate him, and I must note, again, that he has joined a team that has been joined by other young leaders, prospective leaders who did, in my opinion, make good inputs in this discussion. I did note, for example, presentations by Dr Frank Anthony and Minister Priya Manickchand - refreshing, short, to the point, and showing that they are in sync with national development. I noted, also, the presentation by other newcomers - Mr Norman Whitaker, coming from way in the depths of the country, but showing that he, too, is a national player. Welcome to this team, and welcome to the discussions on the future of Guyana.

Mde Speaker, I also noted some of the speakers from the other side of the House; and we even had to suffer a modern Columbus, my good friend and colleagues, Mr Danny, who discovered that Brazil, Suriname and Venezuela are actually our neighbours. I actually even came across another interesting speaker from the other side, which sometimes show that it's good to have these discussions. My good colleague and friend, Ms Judith David, made a spirited presentation, which did catch my eyes, and I will refer to it later; but most of all, what did

catch my eye was the presentation of one Dr George Norton, and I will come to that a bit later. I will constrain myself to some of his comments and deductions. I will address some of the conclusions to which he jumped a bit later, but I had hoped, Mde Speaker, to put the efforts of the Ministry of Health in a wider perspective on the national scenario. It seems that I would have, as you would realise from the reaction to Dr. Norton's speech, I would have definitely to restrict myself to narrower topics, relating directly to health; but before I do that friends, I would like to tell you that the Ministry of Health is a team. I would have passed around ... The Members of Parliament and the parliamentary staff would have passed around some little photocopies and handouts in the break - one of course refers to the surgical post-grad programme at the Georgetown Hospital, and there are two other inclusions. I'll like to tell you that, before I get into rebutting some of the misconceptions, and some of the inaccuracies that you were regaled with today, I'll like to let you know that the Ministry of Health rests its efforts on the broad shoulders of a sound team - a well oiled machine. My good friend, Mr. Franklin, referred to the very effective use of television by Dr. Ramsammy in projecting the image and message of the Ministry of Health, but that is only the tip of the iceberg. Let me tell you about some of the other efforts, some of which might have been mentioned, but I think I must emphasise that the Ministry of Health has long, strong relations with reputable international institutions: For example, the PAHO, one of our strong international agencies, over 100

years old, giving good backings to Guyana; and we see the result of that fusion of international help and local effort. I refer to you, Mde Speaker, to the award that was already referred to; I've passed it around: a solid team of public health workers, and I think I should use this forum to recognise their efforts, Mde Speaker, *[Applause]* why? Because the Ministry of Health has created, and continues to create, a solid team, and promotes them, and equips them and, unlike what Dr. Norton would have liked to tell us, continues to educate them and promote them. We'll come to that a bit later, but you would note that this demonstration that I presented, through the clerk of the National Assembly a little earlier, indicates that Guyana won one of the most prestigious awards internationally. We should congratulate our doctors and our nurses for this achievement. *[Applause]* It says that Guyana is among one of the best covered in Latin America and the Caribbean, in the Americas in the important area of Preventable Childhood Diseases. I'll like to congratulate, from this forum, Dr. Janice Woolford and her team of practitioners. You should join us in that congratulation; *[Applause]* and you should join the Ministry of Health.

As we look at the estimates ... and you will see that Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team have included adequate resources to sustain us at the levels we have achieved, and even somewhat more. Mde Speaker, before I get into the 'nitty gritty' of rebutting some the issues that I mentioned - coming out of the Norton triad, for example, I'll like to mention, too, that the Ministry of Health has formed

strong teams to deal with issues throughout the country – the length and breadth of this country. I'd mentioned one team. Another team of practitioners I think I should note at the beginning of my presentation is the team that leads the fight against malaria in the hinterland, and I'll like to reemphasize that, despite what has been coming from the benches of the Opposition, Guyana, for now, is on top of malaria, and thanks again to the team of anti-malaria workers, headed by such persons as Mr. Krishna Lall. I'll like us to use this forum to congratulate them. I'll like to note that this is not only an effort of the Ministry of Health. We believe in an inter/sectoral, inter/Ministry, inter/Agency approach.

The successes with malaria ... and I will not berate them, because they are all in the press, and Dr. Ramsammy does a good job of projecting them in the media. These are results of good cooperation between, and among, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, as led by Minister Carolyn Rodrigues, the Ministry of Local Government, now led by Minister Kellowan Lall, but previously ably lead by Minister Nokta, who had a special interest in the development of the hinterland. These are the solid foundations on which the efforts of the Ministry of Health are based.

Rewards for the good action, the good activities, and the good productivity of the Ministry are seen in the provisions that we will be discussing, shortly, over the next few days. You see where adequate provisions have been made to take care that the levels that we have been

able to achieve in rolling back malaria, that those levels are being maintained and developed, and even expanded. Let me only point out one fact that might have missed us, which is, the distribution of mosquito nets - a joint effort with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. It has resulted, to a large extent, or has been the basis, to a large extent, for the reduction to as much as 50% in the incidence of malaria in this country, so congratulate the Ministry of Health; *[Applause]* and while you do that, colleagues, I'll like to congratulate the teams in the fields who have braved bad weather and rough terrain to get that job done. It is on these foundations that we have built our efforts, but it has also been, Mde Speaker, it has been a foundation that we have built on cooperation with other countries, with imported best practice, and better practice, from other jurisdictions.

I'll like to recognise, and bring to your attention, the good work, and the good cooperation that we're getting with other countries. Not only do we cooperate with Cuba ... You might get that impression from the attacks that were levelled against Cuba and the Cuban effort by Dr. Norton, but we cooperate with ... and our cooperation is expanding, with such countries as China and India, and let me tell you the best one, which I want to share with you, because I have been able, since I have been around for few years in the Ministry, to be able to see the development of a new cooperation with Nigeria. I think that is significant and *[Applause]* we should congratulate

ourselves. We're reaching to Nigeria, which has now been able to help us, and to provide us with some technical support.

Now ... [*Interruption: "Yes, I think they should listen and learn in this regard"*] the efforts of the Ministry of Health are based on cooperation, not only with well-known and reputable international agencies, but with these countries: So whereas the focus, or the bias was towards attacks against Cuba by the Opposition benches today, I would like to point out that we, on this side of the House, on the side of the PPP/Civic Administration, we're proud of this expanding cooperation. We think that we are already seeing benefits, and we would expand it. [*Applause*]

Let it be known, Mde Speaker, that eye care in this country is not only provided by the great and glorious efforts by the *Miracle Mission*, but by the Chinese team too. The Chinese team at the Georgetown Hospital is actually, over the past few years, providing very good service: service which has forced patients and their relatives to call, for example, for certain doctors to stay in Guyana when their stint would have finished. Of course they were replaced by other Chinese doctors, other young Chinese doctors, who continue that tradition.

What I am doing here, Mde Speaker, is lying before you the wide and broad foundations of cooperation that the Government and the Ministry of Health have been able to hammer out, so as to ensure that some of the things we take for granted, we can take for granted.

India too is providing us with some support, probably not as big as Cuba in the area of health, not as big as China; but we note, for example, the efforts in anaesthesiology that we've been able to get from the Indian nationals.

This, my friends, bring me to address my mind to issues surrounding the recent Cuban initiative; an initiative which was painted in a very bad light earlier on. The Cuban initiative was expanded recently, following a three-day official working visit by President Bharat Jagdeo and a small team of his Government, and leaders of the Ministry. That team included Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh who, at that time, was Head of Budget ... Director of Budget - sorry, yours truly, who was then Director of Regional Services, Dr. Jennifer Westford, who was that time already Minister of Public Service, and who had studied in Cuba, and we had a very productive, but intense exchange with the Cuban leadership. Cuba has been providing us, for years before, with a small brigade. We were able to expand that ... or should I say the initiative of President Bharat Jagdeo, and President Fidel Castro, allowed that strong cooperation to be expanded, and that cooperation - that expansion, seem now to be misrepresented. I feel it is my duty to bring this very open and very transparent arrangement, again to the fore. Dr. Norton attempted to say that things were hidden non-transparent. This is far from the fact and I will show you that.



Mde Speaker, the initiative that was hammered out, including the addition of twenty doctors to the already existing brigade, that has added significantly to our capacity to put doctors in our hospitals and our health centres. Congratulate the PPP/Civic Government for that. *[Applause]* Twenty additional family practitioners and, further to that, we were able to negotiate the addition of two anaesthetic technicians, specifically because we needed that assistance for the West Demerara Hospital, and within the next few days, we will be sending, or I will be sending, those two technicians to the West Demerara Hospital. They are now, and for several months past, at the Georgetown Hospital, getting accustomed to our system; and that will add capacity to the surgical effort in West Demerara; that will take some of the pressure off the citizens of West Demerara who now would have to travel less frequently to Georgetown for surgical assistance. That is progress. *[Applause]* That is good South-South cooperation. Here is where we should not be maligning the Cubans but we should be able to ... and I would come to Region 5 ... I will come to Region 5, because if you were on top of your life in Region 5, of your business in Region 5, you would know that we've deployed Nigerians to Region 5, and Cubans to Region 5, *[Applause]* definitely, but we would come to that.

Further, Mde Speaker, this cooperation has allowed us to expand doctors to areas - for example, like Paramakatoi - the two doctors scheduled for Paramakatoi, where we built a special new house for them are now - I should say acclimatising, getting used to the system in Mahdia ... *[Interruption: 'They speak English?']* Of course they speak adequate English, and the patients are adequately interacting with them, and the response is very good. Let us take, for example, the team that I have at Nabaclis, which interacts very well with the populace there - and note, Mde Speaker, I did not say a doctor at Nabaclis: I said a team, *[Applause]* and you know where is Nabaclis. Analyse it from the jaundiced point-of-view ... from the jaundiced approach that we have been become accustomed to from those benches. Nabaclis in no way ... and the surrounding areas in no way supported this Administration, but after the elections I immediately dispatched - not one, but two Cuban doctors to Nabaclis Health Centre, which we intend to raise to the level of a small hospital. *[Applause]* That is progress that is sharing the marmite evenly... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, I'll have to cut you because I'm sure you are not going to finish and we have a suspension for half an hour at this time.

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Okay, Mde Chair. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** You would continue when we return. Honourable Members the House is now suspended for half an hour.

**19:31H SUSPENSION OF SITTING**

**20:05H RESUMPTION OF SITTING**

Honourable Members, the sitting is resumed. Honourable Minister Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, you may continue, Sir.

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** I thank you for the opportunity to continue on this debate. I am happy that we do have some improved technology in Parliament, and that we could get on with the debate under good conditions.

Mde Speaker, I was at the point of discussing the good things in store in health for Nabaclis. I was only dong that as an aside because I was developing the point, or elucidating the new approaches in health, and health cooperation, between Cuba and Guyana. I was at the point of using Nabaclis Health Centre, which we will upgrade to a small hospital now ... I was using that as an example to illustrate what is one of the components, the new components of the new initiative that was hammered out during the recent visit ... the visit last year, rather early, to Havana by the President. Twenty new doctors

would come: that's a big impact on Guyana - twenty family physicians, and the Cubans are good at that. Don't ask me; ask the United Nations, ask the W.H.O they have recognised them. They are giving that to Guyana, along with two anaesthetic technicians, whom, as I said, are now in the process of being transferred to the hospital at West Demerara. That would make a big impact. That is good. That is a miracle. That would bring surgical services to those persons; but let me tell you about this component: The twenty persons - the predominantly female Cubans who are doing a good job in Guyana, are spread across the coastland, and even in the hinterland; and that's a good addition. Further to that, Mde Speaker and colleagues, we were able to secure, for Guyana, the construction, with Cuban assistance, of four comprehensive diagnostic and treatment centres, plus *[Applause]* ... Yes, congratulate yourselves, and congratulate the Government: four comprehensive diagnostic and treatment centres, and a hospital to particularly care for the visually-impaired, and persons with eye diseases; and somebody - uninformed, had the audacity to ask why we are putting it in Port Mourant, despite the fact that we have been preaching in the press, and the television, and all over what is the aim and why we have chosen ... Why mention Port Mourant? Why not ask us why we're putting a comprehensive centre in Diamond, or at Leonora, or at Suddie, or Mahaicony? The attacks against Region 6 are becoming sickening. Mde Speaker, it's taking a certain disturbing tone, asking why we are putting at Port Mourant a state-of-the-art eye

care facility, but not asking me why I am putting a similar facility, for general use, at Leonora, at Diamond, at Suddie, and at Mahaicony. It is time that the Members of the Opposition come to their senses and stop trying to open old wounds, but I will say no more about that.

Let me, overall, give the philosophy behind the locating of these facilities, and let me remind you, Mde Speaker, that four comprehensive diagnostic and treatment centres - a brand new one on the East Bank where the old cinema used to be - somewhere around there. Why? Because the East Bank has never had, in its history, a hospital, or a facility of that size, despite the fact, or in spite of the fact that it's densely populated; and the Grove area is soon to be declared a little township. *[Applause]* That is forward planning; and that is vision. Why the Mahaicony Hospital? Why the Leonora Hospital? Why the Suddie Hospital? Because if our good colleague and friend, Dr. Norton - the Honourable, had been on top of the national discussion on health, he would have noted that these facilities were much underutilised. In other words, to use a term that should be familiar to him, the bed occupancy - the rate of occupancy was low, but we still had to maintain the facilities, because they existed, and because of that, and also because they had certain basic infrastructure; and because they were located, and are located in densely populated areas - that is the reason why we chose them. Which person of unsound mind would go and build a new facility somewhere else when you have a base that is underutilised. That is good planning. That,

Mde Speaker, [*Applause*] is good governance. That is using your resources rationally; and that is why I am doubly proud to have been on the team to Havana with Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh as part of that team. His discussions added or lent weight to these decisions, and that is why I feel proud that he is part of the team, and that is why we have many far places to go, and that is why I am convinced that persons like the Honourable Dr. Norton would be a long time over on that side of the House. Mde Chair, that gives an explanation as to the choice.

We would have liked to have four, five and more centres, but the Guyanese side, and the Cuban side have limitations. Cuba, as a poor southern country, a poor third-world country, is rendering aid to the better part of Latin America and, as more and more progressive regimes come to power: for example, Nicaragua, that medical capacity is being stretched. We are happy that we are getting cooperation for four significant centres - big centres, plus a hospital, and we have to choose judiciously; and those are the choices. Have I explained the positions to the Honourable Dr. Norton? I cannot say it in clearer language. I know that the populace of Guyana understands that, and that the populace is thankful.

Friends, four Diagnostic Centres and the hospital, the eye care hospital - the specialised Ophthalmologic Centre at Port Mourant ... then I hear a comment; I hear a comment that look, *Mission Miracle already mopped up all the backlog*. There were even snide comments to undermine

that claim: And then there was a claim ‘*well, wah gun happen to us private practitioners?*’ And I was a bit surprised, because there we should use a terminology ‘*Private-Public Practitioner*’ because we have a pathological condition in this country, whereby people who should be working in the hospitals are finding themselves on Government time doing private practice. *[Applause]* I have fought all my life against that - my professional life, and I have not been able, so far, to resolve it. Hopefully, at the level of a minister, I would be able to make a little dent on that pathological practice.

Now friends, it is just unfair and unjust to the Guyanese population. There is a strong feeling among my constituents, among other members of the hospital staff, that that is the real reason for the backlog in the first place: artificial backlogs created; but that might be just a perception, but the Government has acted, and the President of the Republic, Mr. Bharat Jagdeo, acted on that prompting from the populace, and that is why he introduced - not only the element in the discussion of a hospital at Port Mourant to develop capacity to treat - and to not only liquidate a backlog of the simple diseases like cataract, but to address the more complex ones like glaucoma and other diseases. That too will be addressed, but I’ll come to that later.

But friends, another component of the agreement was the creation in Cuba of an entirely new faculty, or school of medicine for Guyanese students. *[Applause]* Friends, that is a significant development: that is a significant

development; and we should shower praises on the Government for that - a poor country helping us. What I'll like you to note, Mde Speaker, is this: Cuba is creating for us some 500 professionals in the area of health, and Cuba will not steal a single one, whereas we have observed other co-operations, which have a lot of strings attached to them. They help us create capacity, but then that capacity is absorbed. That is why the Honourable Dr. Norton brought up the issue of post-graduate studies, but he misunderstood the approach of the Government, and that is why you would have seen, colleagues, that I have put another handout to show the foresight of the Government. I did not have enough to give everyone, so I put a little note, as we use to do in the good days of doing field work in the PPP and the PYO, to read and pass on. It says "*The 'Surgical Post-Graduate Diploma Programme'*" ... Now Dr. Norton doesn't even realise that there is such a programme. He said that there is no progression, but if we are to look at the back photograph, my friends and Mde Speaker, here is the Honourable Dagleish Joseph as part of the teaching team, but then, my friends, if Dr. Norton did not recognise, or know that Mission Miracle was actually operating in his compound, I am not surprised that he did not know that this progress is being made by Guyana and the Georgetown Public Hospital. *[Applause]*

I'll like to congratulate the Georgetown Public Hospital. I'll like to say that great work and great things are happening there. I'll like to tell you that Georgetown



Hospital Mde Speaker is becoming a focus for training in this country; but because, traditionally, we have recognised the university, and we have recognised the training division, we have overlooked the good work that is going on there. I hope that, under my stewardship, we will be able to lift that to the fore-burner - my stewardship as a Minister within the Ministry, and to fuse these various elements, and I'll like to tell you that this is not the first work that is going on; it's not something invented newly: Work had to happen days and years and months before - A foundation was laid.

Now, other programmes are being planned, coming out of this experience. Mde Speaker ... I hear a voice in the wilderness on the other side, [*Laughter*] but let us disregard that voice and listen to me as I tell you of the other programmes that Dr. Norton, the Honourable, failed to tell you about, or probably he knows nothing of. We hare hoping to have similar programmes in gynaecology and obstetrics; so when I look at Region 5, and I look at the Honourable Ms Wade: she asked a legitimate question: *Where is the surgeon for Fort Wellington Hospital? There use to be a surgeon years and years ago.* We inherited a situation whereby surgery was not being practised. We hope, Ms. Wade and colleagues, to be able to create ... because if I were to read from you, Mde Chair, it is so structured, adapted ... This home-grown programme is adapted to the Guyanese condition. This programme that would be funded by the taxpayers' monies, that has been crafted into this Budget prepared by

the Honourable Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh - This is what it will do; this is what it will demand:

- Candidates will be appointed [*that is when they graduate*] as Medical Officers with commensurate salaries and benefits. Guyanese graduates will be required [*and this probably is the element of serving country and flag*] will be required to work in a regional or district hospital for one year after completing their diploma, under contract to the Ministry of Health. That is where we will be creating a culturally accepted, culturally adapted, country - adapted practitioner, and they will be obliged to serve you because, right now ... and many of you complain of this, we are training persons who absorb the taxpayers' dollars, and then they say *tata, bye bye*, and we are snide about it, especially from the Opposition benches but that is nothing to laugh about. It's just taking from the poor and training yourselves and going; but we have made this fool-proof.

Similarly, Mde Speaker, the other post-graduate programmes in anaesthesia, which we hope to launch in September, that would be for nurses. Gynaecology and obstetrics will be similarly crafted and, of course, we hope to attract foreigners to this programme. Tuition fees are waived for Guyanese candidates, and so far, Mde Chair, this which was launched a few months - sometime I think in May-June, have attracted ten young Guyanese, the cream of the cream, coming out of the Georgetown

Hospital, but coming from all parts of Guyana. They will have their fees - tuition fees, waver, because they will be obliged to come and serve: for example - in places like the hospital at Fort Wellington. However, an annual tuition fee of some \$5,000 will be charged for candidates from other countries. We have great hopes, Mde Chair, of repeating the experience that we have had at the School of Agriculture, whereby we would be able to attract persons from the Caribbean. Incidentally, that is not a pipe dream. It is happening - not so far with the surgical programme, which is just a few months old, or a few months young; but, for example, with the refractionist programme, which we were able to launch in conjunction with the Caribbean Council for the Blind and Eye Care Guyana; and, of course, with support of PAHO. We have been able to train refractionists - Guyanese, and a few refractionists from the small islands. Right now that programme ... it might not be a lofty post-grad programme after you would have gotten an MP, but it is a professional progression which gives you significant increase in scale of your training, it opens opportunities for you and, above all, it allows the system to give added service to the population without having to rely on a foreign source of skills. Those are some of the things that are happening in training, and those are some of the things that we should sing praises to; but when I heard the Honourable Dr. Norton speaking, I could not but reflect on what, sometime ago, way back in Sunday School days ... *[Interruption: 'You went to Sunday school?']* "Yes, you may not associate me with Sunday School, but that was

long ago”] when, in Isaiah 5:20, it was so intoned, “*Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*”] Dr. Norton, take note of Isaiah 5:20. *Mission Miracle* has done so much, [Applause] and yet we are putting sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet, but then, Mde Speaker and colleagues, we must forgive Dr. Norton for jumping to certain confusions. He does not seem to be even properly integrated into the landscape of his hospital. Of course he said he works at one hospital, but I’ve worked at several across the country so I might have a little advantage there but I won’t pull that rank.

*Mission Miracle* was described by this Honourable Member as something clandestine and hidden and secret. Now I would like to consult a certain police officer on the street, right out here, a gentleman called Pompey. We had so much differently with crowd control when we introduced *Mission Miracle* we had to call Pompey and his boys to control crowds at the Georgetown Hospital for five days, and still Dr. Norton doesn’t know that *Mission Miracle* that had landed. What kind of accusation could this be against a Government? As a matter-of-fact, several panes, of windows, or window panes were broken because the allure of *Mission Miracle* was so much that the crowds were tumultuous, almost Biblical, coming for help, coming for help because they had been neglected for so many years - and yes, Mde Speaker, many of those who were in the original clinic abandoned that clinic

because they needed help, they needed to see; and I'll tell you something, Mde Speaker, I too know Mrs. Blair, but we'll speak about that, because I'll show you how she too, although she is a member of a PNC group, she too has benefited. I will show you that. *[Applause]*

However, what I would like to tell you, Mde Speaker, when my Presid ... *[Interruption: "Oh, don't make noise, man, I'm trying to tell you that we doing things equally. That's the point I'm trying to make"]* Now Mde Speaker, when my senior colleague, Dr. Ramsammy, rose to make an objection you made a very good observation. You said that the Speaker has a right to make his intervention - which Dr. Norton was on the right track. You said, Mde Speaker, that Dr. Norton did not have a direct pecuniary interest in opposing *Mission Miracle*. I made a little note. Mde Speaker, you said ... *[Interruption: "I'll tell you more secrets"]* Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, you've rightly said that Dr. Norton might have had some oblique financial interest, or pecuniary interest in *Mission Miracle*. I want to agree with you that he does have oblique, pecuniary interest. His private clinic is located obliquely opposite the eye clinic where *Mission Miracle* operates. *[Laughter and Applause]* That, my friends: That Mde, Speaker, shows that younger persons like me must bow to wiser counsel. I do accept your ruling that he does have ... and that is your ruling Mde Speaker, that he does have some oblique, pecuniary interest. The Guyanese public might have recognised that.

Mde Speaker ... *[Interruption]* Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, when the lights went out I thought we were in for the long haul, because when I came back to this country a few years ago, we were so accustomed to black-outs ... As a matter-of-fact, they baptised them - not black-outs, they started to call them outages. I am happy that we've been able to restore power so very quickly.

Now Mde Speaker, to illustrate this point of interest - pecuniary interest, I want to say this: I had an experience on elections day, sometime back - the last elections day, at the Bishops High School, where I went to vote, and I met a certain ophthalmologist by the name of Khan, who works at the Georgetown Hospital. We were in the line to vote, and we were 'small talking' and he took out a nice 'lil' gadget, and he was showing me on this hand-held thing how to do certain surgeries - a nice piece, and I found it interesting ... eye surgeries - an ophthalmologist, and then he said ... and this is where it's linked to this whole oblique interest. He said *'You know Doc, I'm in private practice, and I have some machines at a private hospital, but I am now willing to bring these things to the public hospital and work there with them, pro bono, because things are difficult, patients are not coming.'* That came out of Mr. Khan. *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** *[Inaudible]* ... to get this sorted out. Hopefully it will be only 5. You may continue Dr Bheri.

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Mde Speaker I thank you, once again, for the opportunity to continue.

Mde Speaker, I was on the ... Of course, my colleagues are calling that I should stop addressing the Honourable Dr. Norton's issue. I am not doing that. I have actually gone beyond that and addressing big issues now. What I am doing is using this as an example to show you certain things - how our society sometimes can be so small and pull us back.

Now Mde Speaker, I was referring to the fact that across the country persons have benefited from the health programmes of this Ministry and this Government, and I was using a flagship programme to show that, and I'll tell you that, I know that there is a certain person, a certain good lady in this House, who comes from a far away location, and she might not necessarily be seated on the benches of the Government, and her better half has also enjoyed going to Cuba and winning better sight from *Mission Miracle*, and you know what happened? He is now able to better appreciate her good qualities and beauty, and I think that is a good thing. [Applause] What I am saying, Mde Speaker is that sometimes the truth does hurt. It's written somewhere. However, we will continue to provide answers to the accusations that this Government is discriminatory. [Applause] [Interruption]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, could you please...?

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** This Government is in no way discriminatory against anyone... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members ... Honourable Minister, please go on.

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Thank you Mde Speaker. I'm happy that you defend my right to rebut the accusations that this Government discriminates. I have heard consistently in a recent intervention that this Government discriminates in giving Cuban scholarships. We have a right to answer to that, and I will like now to address the unfounded comments by my good colleague, and my good colleague over on the other side, the Honourable Dr. Norton, when he attacked, again, the awards of Cuban scholarships. I would like to tell you that totally unfounded criticisms were made. Look at the newspapers - the front page pictures of young people going to Cuba; look at the ethnic cross-section, go and speak to them when they are State House; look at their religious backgrounds - a cross-section; look at their geographic spread. I am addressing that question. I might crush a few corns, but remember when the shoe is on the other foot then that is when you start to feel it. If you do not want to incur my wrath of criticism then stick to the truth.

The Ministry of Health, and the Government of Guyana, has consistently awarded scholarships on the basis of merit. *[Applause]* That is why we can say, now: that is why we can say, now, that many people of indigenous origin are in Cuba studying, and will be back, to serve the



country. What I'll like to tell you, Mde Speaker, is that a significant component of our efforts to create a better system is to create software, and the efforts to send persons overseas must now be analysed. I'll like to inform those who do not know ... and trying to shout down the facts will not change them. We are now able to train some 315 scholars in medicine, starting late last year. This year, again Mde Speaker, we will add to that repertoire another 100. After that - the next year, in 2008 we will send another 100 from all nooks and crannies of this country. *[Applause]* That is equity in opportunity, and that should be congratulated.

I notice, Mde Speaker, that when certain attacks - unfounded attacks, were being made against *Mission Miracle*, especially as far as the discriminatory aspect was being expounded, not a sound was being made. Silence is agreement: being silent with those unfounded attacks says you were supporting them. When they're being rebutted, you have to sit in your seats and take the answers.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Thank you Mde Speaker, and thank you Mr. Prime Minister.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Thank you, Mr Prime Minister, and thank you colleagues for the opportunity to continue. Mde Speaker, we've heard the calls for various studies. Some of my constituents have asked: *Whether the works of certain people could be able to stand similar scrutiny, and if they have ever been studied? That is results of those works?* Those are interesting questions that we must answer if you want, in the first place, to pose difficult questions.

Mde Speaker, certain concrete cases were mentioned. In the Ministry of Health we sometimes confront difficult situations. We are not averse to facing them. The Honourable Dr. Norton mentioned three cases which did not have favourable outcomes. What I'll like to note, Mde Speaker, is the fact that the unfortunate incident in Region1, Mabaruma, should give us, collectively, the urging to start doing things in a different way. The Ministry of Health and its apparatus responded adequately as long as this patient got into the system.

What are the facts? What are the facts? The fact of the matter is that a 36-year old woman, who had already given birth to seven children, and who was in her eighth pregnancy had, on a certain day, that is, on 26 January, had incurred an injury, and on 27 January she presented herself for admission, or treatment, at the Mabaruma Hospital. She was given a speedy treatment. The notes, as seen in the system, indicate that she died within two hours of addressing medical personnel. What further investigations showed was that every effort was made to

get her on a plane - What it showed too, was that, on her way other ... *[Interruption]* The cause of death was given by the pathologist that we flew in as a ruptured uterus. A doctor sitting on any side of this House would know what that means. What is said, further, is that Ms. 'X' - the person, *[that is the deceased]* had related to the medical personnel that a relative had rubbed her belly. Further, that on her way down, her husband also indicated that they had stopped at an aunt, who again massaged Mrs. 'X's' abdomen.

Now Mde Chair, we should not be making politics out of this. We should be saying that we need to have a joint effort to make motherhood safer. This has been the pronouncement of the Senior Minister, Dr. Ramsammy. *[Applause]* Where did we, as a community, go wrong? Not at the hospital level. What happened was that this woman fell in the late stages of pregnancy, sustained some injury and immediately applied for help to the CHW, one Mr. Edward De Santos, who dispatched her to the Mabaruma Hospital. Somebody was telling us about the referral system. That is the referral system working. That is what they are trained to do, *[Applause]* and it was done judiciously, expeditiously. What happened afterwards is that, at the hospital, she related her complaint and arrangements were made to bring her out. The revelations also showed that, although she had been attending ante-natal clinic, she was indeed multiparas - meaning, in simple language, that she had already produced several children. What is interesting here,

friends ... and this is where women, especially our good colleagues, the female members of this House, should take note and want to help. What is happening here is that this woman, living in a distant community, had allowed herself to be subjected to so-called traditional medicine. Mde Speaker, this is what we should reflect upon, that the advocacy of the Ministry of Health has not been adequate. That is why, for example, even on the East Coast we had forbidden birthing at certain centres, because we know that some things can go well in 99 cases, and then, in the hundredth case, you can get problems, and we would say on the East Coast to bring them to the Georgetown Hospital. Only now we are trying to develop a skill base at Nabaclis, and we've forbidden birthing services at certain other health centres where it is used to be given, even before this incident. We have to cherish our mothers. We have to take the advocacy to them, especially from both sides of this House, because then, not only would it be bipartisan, it would be triple and quadruple-partisan, because we have many opposition forces here.

We would be able, first of all, to speak about spacing the children, one between the other. This here, Mde Speaker, illustrates the amount of misinformation that this poor woman's case is being subjected to. The Ministry of Health and its operatives, once she was in our custody, acted in a fair and correct way. We do sympathise with the relatives and with the community but, like the former chairman of Region 1, who already understood, even

before this, the need for greater advocacy, whereby even the traditional midwife, or nanny, who would do the rubbing, we must train them too. We must train them to when it's not proper to rub. This was a ruptured uterus. *[Interruption: 'Ruptured belly.'* "Very well, it could be; it could be"] Now, note too, friends, I'll like to note those instances, and I'll like to move on a little bit more. I'll like to note too, that to make snide remarks of such serious comments, as are coming from the Ministry of Health, does not do good service to our Ministry. We need to re-educate, at the lower level - the poorer and vulnerable sections of our reproductive female population, so that they do not any longer fall prey to this; and I'll like to let you know, Mde Speaker and Members of this good House, that in many cases it's the understanding, and the difficult understanding of the Ministry of Health, that women who have produced many children think that they know it all, and those are the ones that sometimes get into trouble. This case illustrates it.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, Mde Speaker, forgive me for the mistake - slip of tongue, I'm accustomed to the right Honourable Ramkarran. Mde Speaker, another flagship programme, another flagship effort of the Ministry of Health, which is also reflected, if they were to look at it, reflected in the Estimates as presented - not only are we looking at the simple eye care project that we have enunciated, but I'll like to point out that continuous training is continuing; continuous training by such effort as Orbit. Orbit is an international eye care effort which is

currently engaged in training our doctors and medexes. Right now efforts are under way to kick-start, or to get started, a high level five-day training programme for these practitioners. They, hopefully Mde Speaker, will be able to go back to their communities, not only to be the ordinary practitioner who dispenses drugs for diabetes and hypertension, heart ailments, and other such ailments, but they would be able to actually bring eye care to the primary level, to the regional hospital, to the district hospital, and even to the health centre.

We would like to say how much we appreciate the efforts of Orbit, and we would like to say how much we look forward, in the next few weeks, to this course of five-day training for our doctors, medexes, and nurses.

Further to that, Mde Speaker, I'll like to point out that we have a very robust programme of eye screening in schools. This is of particular interest to our parents, especially to our mothers. This programme is of course financed jointly by PAHO. Here again I hear a much uninformed voice. I don't know if it's un-parliamentary to say a raucous voice, bubbling up, saying that it is the Lions Club. We have respect for the Lions Club and for the Rotary Club; but in comparison to the efforts of this special school screening project, those efforts are puny. This is a national effort, undertaken by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and PAHO, the Pan-American Health Organisation - the strongest and largest technical support organisation of the Ministry of Health, no other organisation. That, Mde Speaker, would ensure

that teachers are no longer insensitive to the plight of certain slow learners. In many cases, Mde Speaker, teachers become impatient with slow learners and relegate them to the back benches of the schools. This forever cripples or harms that student, because that student, who might have a simple preventable, or remedial eye disease, is further disadvantaged by being sent to the back benches, making his/her chances at passing the exam, or getting on in life, even harder. This Ministry of Health, under the PPP/Civic, with the cooperation and support of PAHO, has a very imaginative and national eye screening project. It is being headed, of course, by the doctors attached to the Ministry of Health, and by the technical people at PAHO office in Guyana. Congratulate them for that. *[Applause]* It means, Mde Speaker, that very soon eye care will be the property, not only of the medical practitioner, but of the community activist - the teacher in the school, the junior health worker visiting the school, or visiting another public place will be able to easily identify and screen a student, or a young person in need of eye care, and send that person up for qualified, superior intervention. That is good. That is investment, not only in the youths, but in the children of this country.

Let me say that several thousand students have already been screened, and let me say that several dozen non-health workers and junior health workers have been trained in this screening, this mass screening to identify this preventable problem. Don't let's snicker about it. Let's support. Let's understand that this opens new vistas

for these students, who will be able to perform better, and hopefully, Mde Speaker, be able to do better at their exams, and probably compete for spaces on the next flight out on a Government-sponsored scholarship. What I'll like to point out too, is that to facilitate similar activities, a specialised low-vision centre has been established, again with the support of our international partners, at the Georgetown Public Hospital. We congratulate the persons who are working there, and we would like to recognise, on behalf of the patients who have benefited, their contribution.

Mr. Speaker, Mde Speaker sorry, forgive me again. Recently I have been having interactions with some people whom I think are worth mentioning, for example, the Executive Director of the Caribbean Council for Blind. This man is a visionary. This man is a joy to work with, one Mr Avril Grant. The man has a vision. The man sees things in the distance, and he is willing with the Ministry of Health, and has been working with the Ministry of Health, to help us, for example, source resources so that we can train refractionists; and we've recently opened discussions at the hospital in West Demerara to have a little refractionist centre there. This means that eye care is moving out of Georgetown and going to the peripheries.

Already, Mde Speaker, the refractionists programme resides at Linden. We trained, specially, a nurse - a refractionist, to do the job there, and we hope that, with the new efforts, we would get West Demerara covered,



New Amsterdam Hospital covered, and also Bartica. I once again would like to point out... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Mde Speaker, I'll like to point out, too, that we have put on the front burner eye care on the periphery in the following regard: We are very responsive to demands and complaints from the poor and marginalised, and this is how the Ministry was able to respond recently: I mentioned that we have the *Mission Miracle* in Guyana, it is not only stationed in Georgetown but has visited Jawala, Kamarang, Phillipai, and dozens of other Amerindian settlements. It has also recently been sent to Region 6, the second time in two years.

This recent effort, Mde Speaker, is to address concerns by residents in New Amsterdam and Greater Berbice, complaints which say that they were being asked, or requested, to make payments for eye care at the hospital. The Ministry of Health immediately responded, and the

activists or the functionaries of the *Mission Miracle* quickly dispatched personnel to put that problem in order.

Mde Speaker, I would also like to point out that we have made efforts in other sections, or aspects of health that I would like us to speak of Hinterland health. This is an important aspect of health, and I'll like to take the other few minutes emphasising certain things. We have emphasised, for example, that we will be developing, and we will be improving certain rural hospitals. I'll like to remind Members that in Region 5 we've been able to deploy one of the Nigerian doctors to Fort Wellington. I'll like to acknowledge the thanks from my right Honourable colleague from across the floor, Ms. Wade, and I'll like to tell her that we empathize with your plight at not having a surgeon at the Fort Wellington Hospital. I'll like to point out, good colleagues, that the Mahaicony Hospital will have such capacity, and therefore the improved roads from the catchment area of the Fort Wellington Hospital, we should be able to provide a satisfactory service. *[Applause]*

Recently we had community meetings in Region 5 and I stopped at places like Bath Settlement, Fort Wellington, Sea Field and I got good responses, especially from Fort Wellington, about the activities of the newly-dispatched Nigerian doctor. That, good colleague, the Honourable Wade, is a good improvement, a good addition to your community. I would like you to note the efforts to produce surgeons' right in this country, and I'll like you to know that they have been contracted to serve at such

hospitals as yours. As soon as they are prepared, and the system is happy that they can comfortably work independently, such hospitals as yours would enjoy the benefit of one of these ten young people. Those are some of the things in training that we are doing.

Mde Speaker, in keeping, or in sync with the national drive to overcome the digital divide, the Ministry of Health is aggressively re-training those senior medical practitioners - be they doctors, medexes, nurses, who would not have been exposed to computer training. This is revolutionary. This will allow a new management of knowledge, and this will allow these persons to independently access information from the virtual health libraries that PAHO is able to afford the Ministry of Health. This is important. Many times, when we would have tried to introduce computer training to persons on the periphery ... for example, in the Rupununi, where we've started a project - ten of my sixty-two CHWs are already trained and have a sound training in computer skill, although we are criticised. *Where are the computers?* Well, I did pass around a little inclusion to show you that there is hope that, soon on the peripheries, poor countries like ours would be able to have the technology. What the Ministry of Health is doing now is providing the skills. In other words, we do not have to own a car before we learn to drive a car. The Ministry of Health is, in a revolutionary way, recreating its software base, in other words, equipping those health care

providers who did not have the benefit of computer training.

On the other hand, we have already actively started integrating, into the regular curricula, robust components of computer training. Those colleagues, combined with access to the virtual health libraries, will allow our health care providers to self-educate, to upscale, to upgrade them, and that in it will open new opportunities for better treatment to the patients for professional progression. Those are things that we should congratulate ourselves on.

Further to that, Mde Speaker, in conclusion I would like to remind you that I started by saying that the Ministry of Health does not exist in a vacuum, and the Ministry of Health, in its efforts to improve the delivery of services, including the training of personnel, has been able to rely on the good input from other ministries: For example, the Ministry of Education. What I'll like to say is that the input material that we now have in our training programme is far superior to that we had a few years ago - to such an extent, Mde Speaker, that we've done something that, again, is revolutionary and ground breaking.

Formerly, Mde Speaker, to become a medex you would have had to be first a nurse, and then be trained for eighteen months. This would have caused a tax, a burden, on the existing and dwindling supply of nurses. The Ministry of Health, noting the fact that secondary schools

have sprung up in many rural and hinterland communities, and that the robust and effective programme of delivery of education by the Ministry of Education has succeeded in producing hinterland students - many of them Amerindians, who are now equipped, academically, to compete with their coastal counterparts; we have now been able, or we have now recognised that we have the opportunity to start recruiting, directly into the medex training programme, people who would have come out of the in-school system, providing, of course, that we expanded the period of training from eighteen months to forty-two months, and provided that we would have upgraded, or adjusted the curriculum, to take account of the fact that these would have been persons without previous medical training. That, Mde Speaker addresses the demands of many young people in the hinterland, who have writing to us. We can speak to the former chairman, the Honourable Mr. Whittaker, who himself brought many such letters to Georgetown, from persons in the hinterland, saying *I want to become a medex*; but under the previous dispensation, under the previous curriculum, that was not possible. Now we have opened up, for a wide cross-section of young people, the possibility of joining the medex ranks.

Mde Speaker, last year we graduated some twenty-four medexes and those have added to our pool. This is a significant increase, and we should be congratulated for that. We should pat ourselves on the back for that. It means that now on the Essequibo Coast, every single

health centre has a substantive medex. It also means that ... and listen to this well, besides putting two Cuban doctors at Nabaclis, I now can put also a recently-graduated medex, who is also a midwife. That will increase the capacity, very much of that institution. The medex training programme is taking off more.

Further to that, Mde Speaker, we have been able to introduce, in the new programme ... I told you that we've introduced a 42-month programme with a different, a slightly upscale curriculum; we've been able to introduce a further fifty trainees, which means, currently, starting as of mid-December, we have fifty medexes being trained. This is something good, which means that there would be fifty well-trained medexes; and many of them, colleagues, and Mde Speaker, will be dispatched to communities in the hinterland.

Mde Speaker, those are some of the achievements of the Ministry of Health. Those are just a few, but those are the things that are overarching. The Training Division, for example, having this year admitted some 250, nurses would be in position, in a short while, to help us address the vexing shortage. Those things are irreplaceable, and those things must be noted.

Yes, Mde Speaker, in conclusion, I'll like to point out that the Ministry is happy at the effort of its public health providers to keep the flag of good health flying, and to bring new practices to the profession. I myself would like to, once again, commend, the Budget. I'll like also to

point out to some of the persons who raised questions that those are well addressed. For example, in Region 5, they spoke about the difficulties with pathology. We empathise with you, with my good colleague Wade, but remember, if you were to check in the estimates, we are going to be up-scaling the mortuary in that county. Hopefully ... and I see a positive acknowledgement, hopefully that would go some small way to addressing your issues. Unfortunately, pathologists are few and difficult to attract and retain. In the meantime, we will upscale your capacity to help relatives of deceased by providing them with better mortuary facilities. That, of course, you could find in the relevant page.

Mde Speaker, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to be able to address this august House and to once again, point out that it has been a pleasure and an honour listening to the delivery of Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, when he presented his Budget Speech. I commend his recommendations to you, and I hope that during the debate we will have healthy criticism, constructive criticism, and I hope, at the end of the process, when we would have passed this Budget, we would be able to go back to our regions and in a very effective manner implement the 2007 Budget. I thank you Mde Speaker.  
*[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Ms Vanessa Kissoon.

**Hon Vanessa Kissoon:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on the 2007 Budget presentation, and National Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, as presented by the young Minister of Finance. As a youth, I offer my congratulations on this, his maiden presentation. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, Linden is in an unfortunate situation, where the PPP Administration is not dealing with the community as though they have elective political representative. The people of Linden in particular, and Region 10 in general have chosen the PNC/R-1G as its representatives. Unfortunately the PPP Government does everything to undermine the regional administration. Mde Speaker, let me illustrate: The PPP Activist, Ms. Sahoy-Shury, walks around advocating the establishment of community groups. However, in the case of Christianburg, where there has been a long-standing community group, what does the PPP do? The PPP goes to Christianburg and deprive the people up there of work and impose two PPP groundees, Mrs. Drepaal and Mr. Venture on them, so that even cleaning of drains have become a tool of the PPP, to be given only to PPP Party cards is the basis for getting work.

Mde Speaker, former Member of Parliament, Ms. Sandra Adams, said on 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2006, and I quote:



*“This morning, in the Retrieve area Mrs. Drepaul, who lives in Wismar, took her team over to Retrieve, and the people came out with cutlasses, forks, spades, knives and said that they will not allow her and her team into their area.”*

Now, that is causing some chaos because, if the Region is being given money under D & I, it should be properly channelled to the CDC group to do work in their communities, but because, of the ad hoc and the discrepancies, discrimination, all sorts of things that are happening, it is going to cause people to kill, Mde Speaker, to kill one another, just for a few dollars. We need to take note of this matter.

The Honourable Member, Mr Benn, suggested that the PNC/R-1G raise the issue of the Linden Highway and alleged discrimination... *[Interruption]*

**Hon Gail Texeira:** Mde Speaker, I'll like to ask your guidance.

The young Member of Parliament is referring to two people who are not Members of Parliament, who are citizens in another Region, who have no right to reply, or to protect them, and I am asking your guidance on this issue. Thank you.

**Hon Raphael G Trotman:** Mde, may I report?

**The Speaker:** Yes Mr. Trotman.

**Mr Raphael G Trotman:** I believe that the Honourable Member was quoting from last year's Hansard which, if not disallowed then, is proper tonight. Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2006. The Honourable Member of Parliament is quoting.

**Hon Gail Teixeira:** Before that, before that...  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, the Member is on the floor. Yes, go on.

**Hon Raphael G Trotman:** To rise on a point of order should have perhaps, I agree, should have been at the time when the so-called offensive statement was made, if at all, but not after the quote. There was a quote.

**The Speaker:** I do not under... I do not understand ... This business about Mrs. Dreypaul is from what? It's a quotation? It's not something that you are saying alone. Is it? Let me hear Ms. Kisson. What you quoting, is that about Mrs. Dreypaul taking ...

**Hon Vanessa Kisson:** Yes, I'm quoting what Mrs. Adams said last year.

**The Speaker:** Could you read it back, so just read it back so that we will clarify if it is ... you know.

**Hon Vanessa Kisson:** On Thursday 2 February 2006 Ms. Sandra Adams said: *"This morning in the Retrieve*

*area, Mrs. Drepaul lives in Wismar; she took her team over to retrieve... [Interruption]*

**Hon Gail Teixeira:** I would like to reiterate...  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** It is a piece of quotation. Okay. Honourable ... you may sit now. Ms ... Honourable Member, Honourable Member, there is no Standing Order against calling the names of outsiders. I know that the substantive Speaker had said that he thinks it's a bit unfair to talk about people and functionaries outside when they have no right to reply; but then, on the other hand, this is the Parliament, and there is National Assembly, and we cannot avoid sometimes mentioning names of people. I mean, it's kind of difficult to make a ruling because it's not a Standing Order issue, but I recall myself when the substantive Speaker had said that he thinks it's a bit unfair to challenge people, but then this is a case where we have the right to speak without even being challenged, you know, because nobody could challenge us to libelling them or anything like that. So I think, in the interest of, of ... free speech which we have, more than if we're outside the perimeter of this building, and I think we can exercise it. On the other hand ... the Member was just quoting. Yes Miss, miss... *[Interruption]*

**Hon Gail Teixeira:** Mde Speaker, I appreciate your guidance, which is what I asked for. Secondly, it was that the comment that I was referring to was made before the

quote. It was not part of the quote from former...  
[*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** What comments are you referring to?

**Hon Gail Teixeira:** It was referring to two people who are not Members of this House. I accept your ruling, but it was two... [*Interruption*] two persons, Wayne Venture and so on, before the quote that came from Ms. Adams, who was a former Member of this House. It is prior to that quote but anyway, I appreciate your ruling and therefore I guess it is the guidance for us in the House – the leeway that we can take. Thank you very much.

**Hon Vanessa Kissoon:** Mde Speaker, as I was saying, the Honourable Mr. Benn suggested that the PNC/R-1G raised the issue of the Linden Highway, and alleged discrimination. Mde Speaker, the argument about the Highway was in the context of Guyana's relations with Brazil, and the impending Guyana-Brazil Road, that it was necessary, but he does what he does best; that is, arrive at a conclusion, based on what he had in his mind, rather than what was said. The Soesdyke-Linden Highway is an important gateway for the development of the people of Regions 7, 8, 9 and 10, and so should be properly done.

Mde Speaker, there has been much reference to strategic plans, including one for the sugar industry. I submit that this Government has failed to articulate a proper plan for

Linden. In fact, the Government seems to adopt an approach in which Linden and Region 10 must continue to be a deprived community, so that it becomes vulnerable. Once it is vulnerable, the PPP then goes with resources, use those resources to lure people to the PPP. This strategy, I will tell you, will fail. It might attract, it might, Mde Speaker, attract a few short-sighted people, but this terrible practice must end.

Mde Speaker, I submit that what Linden needs is a proper plan, which does the following:

- 1) Seek to make bauxite viable
- 2) Diversify economic activities in the Region
- 3) Establish schemes that would help people to become self-employed
- 4) Undertake activities that will create paying jobs
- 5) Develop programmes that will result in the development of needed skills in Information Technology
- 6) Develop programmes that will deal with HIV and AIDS
- 7) A proper programme to deal with the many several problems in the community.

Mde Speaker, if the PPP Administration could implement such a plan, it will be then, and only then, that they could talk about having an interest in Linden. This Budget Speech does not address the problems of Region No. 10. Mde Speaker, at page 16 of the Budget Speech, it states that, and I quote:

*Under the health services delivery component, a contract was signed for the construction of a clinical block of the Linden Hospital Complex.*

This is welcome. However, this and other buildings that are stated to be built, will not deal with the fundamental problems that Linden faces, which is the absence of paying jobs, so that people can take care of their families.

In the area of allocating of contracts, more needs to be done to ensure a larger number of Lindeners are afforded the opportunity to execute Government work. Mde Speaker, Linden has engineers who have no work; people leaving school with no work; university graduates returning to no jobs. This Government needs to face the reality, and take the measures necessary to ensure that

Linden becomes a viable, independent community.  
*[Applause]*

Allow me, Mde Speaker, to deal with the housing situation in Region No. 10, especially in Linden. The Honourable Prime Minister, in November of last year, went on public television and said that the allocation of house lots would have commenced in December of the same year. To date, nothing has happened, and approximately 3,500 applicants are still awaiting their house lots. The cost of a house lot has moved from \$58,000 to \$90,000; and there are plans to repossess people's house lots from those who cannot fulfil their obligation to complete payment, and the main reason for this is due to the high rate of unemployment. Let me say that there is strong resistance from the people. Is this, Mde Speaker, being done to create conflict?

Mde Speaker, on page 45 of the Budget Speech states, and I quote:

*Work will be executed to renovate the fire station at Bartica, and to construct officers' quarters at Linden.*

Mde Speaker, what about the teachers' quarters in Linden, where 10% is taken from teachers already meagre salaries without any repairs or renovations being done? Just imagine, Mde Speaker, three houses, including two teachers' quarters, are using one septic tank. The pipe running from one house burst in the other woman's yard. What an unhealthy situation. This problem was brought to the attention of the REO, and the Ministry of Education. To date nothing was done. Unfortunately, Mde Speaker, I am living in one of these houses, and this causes serious health problems, especially since children are living in these homes.

Mde Speaker, page 18 of the Budget Speech states, and I quote:

*Refurbishment works were executed at West Watooka; pumps were procured and distribution lines were installed.*

But what about Blueberry Hill, Well Road, and other areas without water? It was only two weeks ago GWI was in the Retrieve area to cut off water at teachers' quarters, and let me make it known, Mde Speaker, the water is not drinkable. Residents have to purchase drinking water, and those who cannot afford to purchase



drinking water, have to boil, and this is also expensive, taking into consideration the price for a bottle of gas.

Mde Speaker, Lindeners and Region 10 in general are crying, and it's even worse with the implementation of the 16% VAT. Mde Speaker, indeed works are being done on the roads, but I say, if something cannot be done properly, it is better not to do it all. In the industrial area the roads, after work was done, within three months they were destroyed. In the Retrieve area, Mde, where I am living, could you imagine that the contractors are only done 50 feet into the streets? You should come and see the length of some of those streets. Just let your imagination run wild, Mde Speaker.

Mde Speaker, in the Honourable Minister's presentation, under education, he talked about making better use of Information Technology in schools. As a teacher, I support this venture but, Mde Speaker, in Region No. 10 this would only be a dream. Take, for example, the MacKenzie High School, which is the elite school in Region No. 10. A computer lab is in place but there are no computers at the said school. There is need for at least 30 to 35 computers. Mde Speaker, this school operates in two buildings, and the Licius Building, which houses first, second and third formers, had to be closed on Monday because the stairs, especially the front stairs, they're not good.

I believe, Mde Speaker, that the GTU, the President of the Guyana Teachers Union, was blind-folded when he signed for that miserable package for teachers. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, to the shocking surprise of teachers, \$6,000 per year was allocated for teachers' uniforms. Yes Mde Speaker, you heard me right - \$6,000 per year. This means two suits for the school year, and for the male teachers, one pair of working shoes. Teachers will have to be very skilful in their wearing.

There is much talk of over-staffing in Region No. 10. I would like this Honourable House to know that secondary schools have departments, and at the MacKenzie High School there are only two teachers in the Home Economics Department. Mde Speaker, just before I went on Maternity Leave I was teaching ten classes. Yes, during my pregnancy, and each class had at least thirty-five students, and this is the least. Mde Speaker, I was reliably informed that some head teachers in Linden received a circular stating that each class should have no more than twenty students, and some teachers would be sent to the river rain areas because the school is overstaffed. For your information, staffing is allotted like this: 25 children – 1 teacher for levels I and II; 35 students – 1 teacher for levels III and VI; so tell me how you calculate over-staffing? Mde Speaker, teachers are not robots, so that you press a button and send them where it pleases you. Mde Speaker, consideration must be given for new living arrangements to be made, or the Government has to provide proper living quarters.

[Applause] The Government must not mislead this House.

Mde Speaker, like me, the Honourable Minister of Finance recognises that youths are the present and future of this country. I refer to page 37 of the Budget Speech, and I quote:

*“We have embarked on the preparation of a 5-year Youth Development and Empowerment Plan.”*

I know that he must have read the Manifesto of the PNC/R-1G, and he wanted to say ‘yes’ to the ‘Yes - Youth Empowerment Scheme.’ The plan would outline critical areas such as employment, education, training, skills development, health, volunteerism, community service, service learning, civic responsibility, patriotism, housing, juvenile justice, and the family. I congratulate you on that, Minister of Finance, but I was a bit disappointed, because I was looking forward to see something being said about the voluntary national service.

Mde Speaker, this is a good plan, but it’s all a dream, especially for Linden, where we have so many unemployed youths. We would like to see immediate action in Region 10 under all these areas identified.

Mde Speaker, the idea of an Olympic-sized swimming pool is a good one, but I think it's fair that the Mackenzie swimming pool be given some attention, especially since the first Olympic swimmer Guyana produced came from Region No. 10. *[Applause]* I am looking forward to see the work on the Mackenzie Sports Club ground commence. Mde Speaker, I turn your attention to page 38 of the Budget Speech, and I quote:

*We would also provide opportunities for writers, musicians, artistes, dancers and others to develop their talents. Programmes at the Burrowes School of Arts and the National Schools of Dance will be strengthened, and young artistes will be given the opportunity to showcase their artwork in prominent places.*

I must commend this also, but Mde Speaker, what about protection? We, the young people, would like to hear about the Copyrighting Law. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the health sector in Region No. 10 is in a mess. I will give you a few examples. Could you imagine, Mde Speaker, visiting a doctor at the Linden Hospital Complex and neither you, nor the nurses working with that doctor, understand what is being said by the doctor? Well, I experienced this, and to date, Mde Speaker, I don't understand the language spoken by the doctor; so I

was, up to four weeks ago, not aware what was wrong with me, but I went to a private hospital and got some cure for my illness ... and the Maternity Ward. As we all know, babies are born at any time, any hour. Well, Mde Speaker, there is no water available during the night, so pregnant mothers have to endure dirty toilets and bathrooms. Mde Speaker, I gave birth to my bouncing baby boy on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 2006, *[Applause]* so I know exactly what I am saying, thank you.

A young woman was referred to the Georgetown Hospital, she was pregnant and she lost her baby at the Georgetown Hospital because of negligence on the part of the doctors and the nurses. Yes, Mde Speaker, this has happened. I would like the Honourable Minister to take note.

Mde Speaker, this Government likes to talk about democracy and freedom of press. Linden, unfortunately, does not experience a choice of television programmes. This Government continues to have a monopoly of television in Linden. Lindeners are compelled, if they want to watch television, to watch NCN's biased reporting. Everything that is shown is Government propaganda. You live in Linden and you see no proper news in Region 10. You're expected to watch whatever the Government wants to show. Mde Speaker, Linden people are fed up with NCN's propaganda. *[Applause]* Lindeners are all desirous of having their television station returned to management by the community. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, Lindeners want to determine

what they want to see and the PPP must end the domination of television in Linden. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the young generation in Region No. 10 see no hope for people in the Budget. Mde Speaker, I believe that if the Government is prepared to listen and take some of the advice given, and develop a plan for Region No. 10, generate employment, and address the many social problems, then Region 10 will genuinely be on the move. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Odinga Lumumba.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Good evening Mde Speaker, and my colleagues on both sides, I believe that it's important in these debates that some of us take a philosophical position, and that some of us, in our presentations, try to bring this country together, and this is a good place to start; but first of all I think, before I speak on the Budget and defend the Honourable Minister of Finance, Mde Speaker, I think I need to respond to a few things.

First of all, I am really being philosophical, and I feel terrible that the Honourable Opposition Leader is not here tonight, but I am sure that he must get the information.

I find it very interesting that the Honourable Member of Parliament, Dr Norton, was so critical of the Cuban programme and, by extension, the Cuban government - in particular because of the known relationship between the

PNC and the late President Burnham, and Fidel Castro. I find it very painful to stand here tonight and observe this onslaught. I don't hold any Brief for the Cuban style of government, but I know that, throughout the world, even the Americans have said that the best medical system in the world is in Cuba; *[Applause]* and to hear a person who should be on the side of Cuba - in particular when we talk about oppression, and when we talk about imperialism, to hear my brother - an indigenous citizen of this country, to declare a philosophical war on the Cuban medical programme, the PNC has an obligation to take a formal stand on this position. *[Applause]* This position by Dr. Norton cannot be brushed aside, and we intend to up the debate on what is the PNC's position on the Cuban medical programme. *[Applause]*

Dr Norton must recognise that for years we have had a hospital without doctors. We've had a nation without doctors, and here we are, in a situation where hundreds and hundreds of doctors will be trained for this country - to service all - regardless of race, colour, or creed, how dare Member of Parliament Norton to attack ... and he - how is he ungrateful for the training he received in Cuba; what an ungrateful man; *[Applause]* but I know that Dr Norton believes in the Lord, and the Lord would deal with you. *[Laughter]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member earlier spoke about Region 10. I want to point out that the Budget - the Capital Budget for Region 10 for 2007 will be \$138M, with the current Budget just about \$1M; but what's most

important is that we recognise that there are problems in Linden: we recognise that; but the problems in Linden cannot be isolated from the problems in Guyana, and the problems in Third World countries. Linden is a bauxite industry. When bauxite was doing well ... and it did extremely well under the PNC in the early days. When bauxite was doing well, Guyana did well and Linden did well... *[Interruption]*

**Member of the Opposition:** We did very little...  
*[Laughter]*

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Of course, no question: and we must understand that, with the demise of the bauxite industry, Mde Speaker, Linden went down.

**Hon James McAllister:** Under the PPP.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, under ... I did'nt want to go down there, but I would go down there now, because the records would show that under the PNC the bauxite industry suffered from layoffs, suffered from union busting, suffered from dogs and police, and jail, and guns being pulled on workers; so don't go down there, because I was trying not to go down there.

**Hon James McAllister:** You were there and all.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** No, I wasn't, I wasn't there. I was too young. Mde Speaker, when we speak about Linden today, we must speak about Government's



attempts to improve the lot of every human being in Linden - modern hospital. Mde Speaker, all of us know, even the Opposition knows that ... We don't need to fuss over that, because we all know that there was no housing programme in Linden before 1992. We all know that. We know that: We know that the modern Amelia's Ward was built by the PPP. We know that, so we don't need to argue over that. *[Applause]* We don't need to argue over truth. We must debate ... Mde Speaker, we must debate on principle. We must debate about what's true, and what's untrue. We know that all the modern water systems in Linden and Wismar today, and all the modern roads were done by this Government. We know that, but *[Applause]* that doesn't mean that we shouldn't do more, and I agree with the Member of Parliament that we need to be more sensitive, and that we need to do more. However, we must recognise that resources are limited, and what we need to do is work together to increase the revenue flow of this country so all regions could get a better piece of the cake.

Mde Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to defend the 2007 PPP/C Budget that was presented by the able Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. Mde Speaker, it is important that we understand that, even though this presentation has brought out the brilliance of Dr. Singh, and in many ways, showcased the capacity and intention of this Government to promote new youth leadership, the fact is that this Budget is the continuation of the vision of Guyana's only legitimate democratic elected Government

in modern times, and the vision of a young President, His Excellency Bharat Jagdeo. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, my emphasis in this debate is about the vision. Therefore let me take you, immediately, to page 1 of the summary of Budget 2007, and I quote from the Minister himself:

*As we have emphasised, our vision is for a better Guyana, a Guyana where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoying greater cohesion and prosperity; a society where our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours, and a society that is recognised for the care and attention that it places on children, women, youths, the elderly, and the less fortunate. We must, therefore strive for economic success in order to establish a better society for all; we have to build safeguards and have to sustain economic growth and stability, long into the future; and we must continue to work to find ways of sharing, more evenly, the benefits of our economic success.*

*The Budget reserves the fundamental objectives of our economic system: that is, the formulation and implementation of appropriate and relevant policies and plans, aimed at improving the lives, and realising the aspirations of all Guyanese.*

*Mde Speaker, to achieve this, it builds on the foundation, already laid, with respect to maintaining macro-economic stability; implementing and enabling trade and investment regime; building capacity to enable our economy to compete in the global environment, and manage short-term external shocks; enhancing savings and investment to raise them to a sustainable level; continuously reforming the financial system, unlocking the potential and entrepreneurial talent of our people to achieve economic development, while protecting and supporting the most vulnerable members of our society - all aimed at achieving pro-poor growth and building a modern and prosperous country.*

*Our agenda for the next five years and our policies and plans for 2007 reflect these objectives and will work tirelessly to achieve them*

*[Interruption: “I want just make sure that you read the book Sir”]*

Mde Speaker, the Government’s vision for development of this country did not begin in 2007. It has been an ongoing process. It began with the late President Cheddi

Jagan, and the late Forbes Burnham. They combined their energies and intellectualism to lift us from the shackles of imperialism. Mde Speaker, this process continued, even when neo-colonialist forces, like those that exist now, attempt to reverse the gains of our people that are defined by democracy.

Mde Speaker, many on the other side represent ... I said many, not all, because I know those who are with us. Many on the other side represent the hopes and aspirations of the new imperialists. I don't want to use words as *boot-licking*, and those harsh words, but I want to refer to those who like to spout a lot of venom, like the micro-politician Member Khemraj Ramjatan ... and I am sorry that he is not here tonight. He has attempted to move our vision from what is, and what is indigenous to this country's development, and introduce a part of euro-centric reasoning. His bitterness and individual egotistical behaviour has led him to violate the rules of client and attorney relationships, and this issue must be dealt with. He is no other than a political knave.

Mde Speaker, the division of the past... [*Interruption*]

**Hon Raphael G Trotman:** On a point of order. I believe that the Honourable Member has a right to rebut, but to impugn a person's profession, and to go on ... [*Interruption*] May I be heard? May I be heard? [*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, would you please ... Let me hear what he is saying.

**Hon Raphael G Trotman:** If I may, Mde, the Honourable Member said that Mr. Ramjatan was violating client privilege – client/attorney privilege. That is a serious charge against a professional. That is a serious charge, and it is imputing improper motive against a Member of the House. I visit the Standing Order 41:6. At the same time Mde, as I have your attention, as offensive, Mde, as the red ... as the ‘Robinous’ red shirt that the Honourable Member Persaud has on, the ‘gambling’ green shirt that Mr. Kumar has on, and the presumptuous pink of the Minister of Home Affairs, I don’t know whether those are new parliamentary colours for men, but to impugn improper motive against a Member by challenging his client/attorney privileges is, I believe, going too far.

If in fact, Mde, Mr Ramjatan said things that he ought not to have said, and then the proper thing should have been for a Member on that side to call him on that.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Mde Speaker...

**The Speaker:** Yes...

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** In response to Mr. Trotman, I need to...

**The Speaker:** Yes, let me hear... let me hear what you have to say.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** In response to Mr Trotman I have to let this Honourable House know that Mr. Ramjatan continues to raise the question about dolphins and the Auditor General report, and he was my attorney. He was my attorney; [*Laughter and Applause*] and I have a right to condemn Mr Ramjattan, Mde Speaker. [*Interruption*]

**Hon Raphael G Trotman:** In that case, the client desires then, Mde, to waive the privilege, if the client desires to waive the privilege... [*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** Let me hear what he is saying.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Mde Speaker, I'm responding to a particular thing he did, and I'm willing to move past that. All I'm suggesting, Mde Speaker, is that this gentleman, this Honourable Member of Parliament, should not continue to do this, or I have to respond to him every time he does it. I spoke to the Leader of the AFC about this matter; and he knows I spoke to him. I told him that Mr. Ramjatan has gone beyond, and he has done it on several occasions, but Mr. Ramjatan behaves like a serpent with this wickedness, and it must stop. [*Laughter and Applause*] [*Interruption*]

**Hon Raphael G Trotman:** Madame, the words such as 'serpent' and 'wickedness' are not appropriate to describe a Member of Parliament.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Mde Speaker, I revoke those last words.

**The Speaker:** Mr. Lumumba, I think that you are really overdoing it now, because your words - your choice of words - 'wickedness and serpent' are no-nos. *[Interruption]*

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** I withdraw those words Mde Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Those sorts of words are 'no nos,' they are in the book here - 'wicked and wickedness' and so should not be used to ... and I find that ... you know, if you feel that Mr. Ramjatan has done you harm in his legal capacity, why don't you raise it elsewhere?

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, Mr. Ramjatan... *[Interruption]* I just want to remind you that Mr. Ramjatan raised this issue here.

**The Speaker:** Where?

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** He raised it here, when he debated, on his debate...

**The Speaker:** Okay. Yes.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** ... and I have a right to reply.

**The Speaker:** Okay.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** I have a right to reply; and I'm exercising my right.

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** But I'll withdraw the harsh statements.

**The Speaker:** Yes.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Technically he doesn't deserve those kinds of response.

**The Speaker:** Yes, the words, the un-parliamentary words. Yes, all right then.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** All right, thank you. *[Interruption: 'I need the bolo, keep the bolo for later']* Mde Speaker, the divisions of the past did not deter the PPP/Civic from the original vision, which was the quest for housing for all; potable water for all; electricity for all; low income housing for all; and an economy that can sustain development and empowerment of our youths, our elders and the working class.

Mde Speaker, the disunity of the 60s and the 70s, and the People's National Congress 'Mo Fire' of recent times, have not been able to obstruct this original vision. Mde Speaker, today this vision has a positive impact - from the day the PPP/Civic rescued this land from oppression, and from the realms of dictatorship. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we must always remember that our country lacked educational tools when the PPP/C came into office. This country lacked ... had schools without roofs, schools without teachers. Mde Speaker, we had teachers earning \$6 to \$7,000 a month; and we rescued the public



servants from the slave-like salaries that were the norm of the past rulers.

Mde Speaker, it's important that we understand that the implementation of this vision has not been easy. It has been a constant battle. Mde Speaker, we took a nation where people had to walk miles for potable the water. Mde Speaker... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Yes, Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I would like, relying on 10:3, to move that we suspend the standard time - 10:1, so that the House can continue the debate and have all the members listed and present this evening agree to ...

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the House would continue in session until all our speakers ... We have, apart from Mr. Lumumba; three other speakers; so we will not stop at 10, but continue until the three would have spoken.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**The Speaker:** Okay, continue Honourable Lumumba.

**Hon Odinga Lumumba:** Thank you. We took a nation ... and this is to remind the young parliamentarian from Region 10, that we took a nation that had major hospitals without drugs and doctors. Mde Speaker, we took a nation

that was embroiled in daily union disputes, in particular in the bauxite industry, the Public Service, and the agricultural sector - in particular the sugar industry. Mde Speaker, we rescued the nation from a government that had a whole country that was deemed homeless. Imagine that, Mde Speaker, the majority of Guyanese citizens were homeless before 1992.

Mde Speaker, the PPP/Civic, from 1992, decided that our vision of a new Guyana must point towards the development of all our major sectors, therefore, Mde Speaker, it is only important that I identify a few of these areas. Let us look at the accomplishments from 1992 to 2006; and I refer to the PPP/C 2006 Elections Manifesto, and I would briefly earmark a few:

Agricultural production increased several-folds in all sub-sectors, including sugar, rice, and other crops. Drainage and irrigation has been transformed through the Government investment of over \$18B - that was over the past thirteen years.

Guyana has provided a favourable incentive regime to promote investment in the forestry industry, resulting in a significant increase to large and small concessions to both local and international investors. There has been an increase in the valued-added industries.

Production levels have soared in all mining sub-sectors. A more favourable incentive regime has led to greater investment in this sector. The sustainability of the

Bauxite Industry, and the support by direct government financial support ... and it's important that I remind the young parliamentarian from Linden that, while the PNC was closing down the bauxite industry, this Government used to subsidise that industry by millions of dollars, on an annual basis, and our President - our President, has said that, as long as he lives, and as long as he is President, he will never close the bauxite industry down.  
*[Applause]*

In 1992 Tourism was a small industry. The PPP/C has transformed the tourist industry, and today tourism is a major contributor to the GDP and employment. In 2005 the country recorded more than 116,000 arrivals.

The transformation of the physical infrastructure has been so remarkable that it will be very difficult to itemise all of the development that has taken place since 1992. Billions of dollars have been spent on the highways, roads, streets, bridges and ferries. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport has been completely transformed into a modern airport, and all of us know that at present we are completing some modernisation works at the Ogle Airstrip.

Telecommunications improved significantly. More than 250,000 homes are now registered, and even today we can celebrate the arrival of another telephone company.  
*[Applause]* The PPP/Civic Government has stabilised electricity supply since 1992, when transmission feed was unpredictable, and blackouts were the norm. Today the

electricity supply is reliable; total average outage is less than 1%, and outages periods, except for scheduled maintenance, are less than two hours.

The Government of Guyana has expended \$5.7M in a programme that has provided electricity to more than 29,000 households, and would provide another 12,000 households by 2006, and a further 18,000 households are earmarked for 2007.

Mde Speaker, when the PPP/C came into power it had been recorded by the Ministry of Housing that only 75 house lots were distributed to this country by the late President Hoyte regime – 75 house lots – 75, not 75,000. Under the PPP/C, more than 70,000 house lots, in 150 new communities have been distributed. *[Applause]* Today we don't talk about house lots, we talk about housing schemes - whether it be Amelia's Ward, whether it be Diamond, whether it be Eccles, whether it be Non Pariel, whether it be Tuschen, where we want to go, we can talk about dozens and dozens of housing schemes, and we have ... and I have mentioned Amelia's Ward. We can also talk, Mde Speaker ... and I think sometimes the PNC are correct, in that we say the things, and we don't add the extra thing about it - in particular Mr. McAllister; so ... and Mr. McAllister will normally say *okay, you have all these house lots*, but what are you doing to encourage people to build a house? And I notice that he has bowed his head, but I want to raise his head up, because I want to mention to him that the interest rates were 30%, when we came to power, for mortgages,

now it's 7% and I just want you to raise your head up. *[Applause]* In the spirit of working together, sometimes you must give Jack his jacket and I would like you to do that for us - every now and then.

Whereas less than 40% of people had access to potable water in 1972, today more than 85% have access to potable water.

Mde Speaker, there were days in this country where women had to take a shower in ... Imagine, Mde Speaker, a beautiful woman like you, on Old Year's Night, you have to take a shower, or take a bath, in a canal or a trench. Then, I mean ... *[Interruption]* I'm not personalizing I'm just saying to just imagine; but let me say imagine Member of Parliament Backer ... *[Interruption]* alright, alright. Imagine Member of Parliament Backer that you have to go to the 'Blacka' Old Years Night and take a bath, *[Laughter]* you know. Mde Speaker, imagine the days when all those lovely kids had to be pulling all kinds of little trucks and all *kinds* of vans down the road to get water. Now you don't see that, you don't see that.

Mde Speaker, in 1992 the education system had crumbled. It was a mess. Schools had no roofs. I remember a certain Minister of Education rejecting an offer by me for him to repair a banister for a school in Buxton - the banister cost \$36, *[Laughter]* Guyana dollars, and he said he had no money. *[Interruption: 'In Buxton?'* "Yes" "Who?" "The man is meh friend, I can't

*call he name.”]* Today, more than \$20B of the total Government expenditure has been allocated to the education sector. The result is that the physical infrastructure has been completely rebuilt; more than 1,000 schools have been reconstructed or rebuilt since the PPP/Civic came into power. Mde Speaker, under the PNC - the last fifteen years before the PPP came to power, I can't recall - 2½ schools have been repaired a bit. Maybe there is something wrong in the record books. Teachers' minimum wage has increased from US\$25 in 1991, to US\$125 in 2005. Mde Speaker, the people of Berbice was denied access to university education, except if they moved to Georgetown, but we have been able to expand the university in Berbice. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we have developed new Technical Institutes in Essequibo and Corriverton; HEALTH. Mde Speaker, the investment in health in 1991 was almost zero. The PPP/C has increased investment by \$8B of National Budget; and because of our investment in health, our infant mortality rate, which was about 78 to 120 per one thousand, has improved to 25 - 48.

The Amerindian people are no longer neglected – again, just like some of my colleagues, Dr. Norton ... God will handle him – Guyana's first people, our Amerindian brothers and sisters were totally neglected from the previous Government. The only time they received anything from the PNC was elections time - two old engines and two old boats. *[Laughter]* The PPP/C in its policies of equity, has transformed those communities,

where we have integrated the Amerindian people as full citizens in this country. We have created a Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, and a Minister was appointed in 1992, with a full Ministry, and full employees and staff, and a Budget, to ensure that our programmes are implemented soundly.

Over \$1B has been spent on the President's Youth Award Programme - the President's Youth Choice Initiative and, Mde Speaker, we did not discriminate with the Youth Choice Initiative. *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable member be given another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Odinga N Lumumba:** Mde Speaker, this is 2007; and we are accelerating the development of our country. Even Stevie Wonder and Clarence Carter can see the economic and social transformation of our society both of them are blind, and they can see it, but the PNC can't see it.

Mde Speaker, we're not in Parliament to deal with personalities, and to deal with narrow issues and spread lies. We are laying down the foundation for the next 100 years; and we are preserving and protecting the future of our country. Mde Speaker, would the Opposition understand ... Mde Speaker, would Opposition, in particular Member of Parliament McAllister, understand, how the Manhattan Bridge, and Brooklyn Bridge, and other bridges influence the development of the great states of New York and New Jersey? Mde Speaker, identify a modern society and I can show you the relationship between a bridge and development. Since the ancient days bridges were important, even the Canje Bridge in Burnham's time was important. Mde Speaker, it does not mean that the engineers cannot give their opinions, and it does not mean that community activists cannot air their views.

Mde Speaker, when the Opposition wastes this Parliament's and taxpayer's time and argue about petty issues as to where a bridge must be built, this is an example of economic slow-down and economic sabotage. *[Applause]* It is also an example of a visionless unit. Mde Speaker we see the bridge as an integral part of Guyana's development. Its necessity is a given and the debate is over, so it is time to move on. Mde Speaker, the bridge is a nexus, as it relates to business flow from Georgetown to Berbice, to Suriname, to Cayenne - all within a day.



Mde Speaker, the Opposition appears to have a single goal in life - oppose, just oppose. Surely, the intellectual capacity of PNC stalwarts as Dr. Kenneth King, ex Minister Hubert Jack, former Minister Carl Greenidge, must have left some residue on the other side; must have left something. These were brilliant men who did not only oppose, but they also proposed.

Mde Speaker, the Opposition has preached gloom and doom when it comes to the World Cup Cricket; Buddy's Hotel, casino gambling, the Berbice Bridge, the Skeldon sugar project, or every economic or social plan that the Government has proposed: Every economic or social plan the Government has proposed the Opposition has tortured it with gloom and doom. Mde Speaker, where is the beef? The Opposition has no beef. Mde Speaker, how can the Opposition provide leadership in a modern society if their vision is blurred by ethnicity and narrow economic and political analyses? *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, name a country in the world that is serious about tourism and international development that lacks a hotel of 250 rooms; that lacks a modern stadium that can host 20,000 persons; that lacks casino gambling - a tool for economic development, or some type of gaming whether it be horses, lotto, or dog racing.

Mde Speaker, our vision is about the future; but the Opposition has mental ties to the past. It's an Opposition that can only relate to the ice age. *[Laughter]* Mde Speaker, the Opposition does not believe in constructive criticism, but yet, Mde Speaker, this same Opposition

wants shared governance. How can we agree to shared governance, with an Opposition opposing everything, every single thing? In Parliament, if we say to let us use the air-conditioning unit, Opposition would disagree; if we say go the bathroom they disagree; so just imagine what would happen if they are Cabinet; the Government would then be in a state of permanent gridlock. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, His Excellency, President Bharat Jagdeo, the architect of new leadership in Guyana, has clearly identified issues that would strengthen and boost our economy. Mde Speaker, these issues are expanding the mining industry; hydroelectricity; aluminium smelter; development of our oil industry; expansion of our agricultural economy; an IT- friendly society; developing an infrastructure that can withstand floods, so that we can stand on our feet, unlike New Orleans - the great city in modern America.

Mde Speaker, it is not by accident that we want to see it in every geographical zone in Guyana. Mde Speaker it's a manifestation of our vision, and the trust that people have in the PPP/C Government. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, it's our thoughts and ideas, and our total commitment that has brought about this glory and prosperity to our nation.

In closing, Mde Speaker, let me state that this society is going forward and we will not be distracted by forces that represent pettiness, and forces that just said no - to oppose, and lack the moral and intellectual capacity to

propose. Mde Speaker, there are too many people who want water without rain; who want gains without pain; who want to reap without sowing a seed; who want to eat without chewing. These people, Mde Speaker, lack vision, and lack purpose and foresight in life. Finally, once again Mde Speaker, to the Honourable Dr. Ashni Singh, you must be congratulated, because you are a very good messenger, and a very good fighter - for the Government, and for the Leader, His Excellency President Jagdeo. Mde Speaker, to this National Assembly and masses of people like Dr. Martin King I say proudly *'Let Freedom, Democracy, and Social Development reign.'* 'No' to petty Opposition: 'No' to venom, and in time, this Government will be vindicated. Members of Parliament on both sides I hope that we can work together in the future. Thank you. [Applause]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr. Komal Chand.

**Mr Komal Chan:** Mde Speaker, I rise to embrace the Budget, so well-crafted, ably and presented in this August Body on February 2<sup>nd</sup> by our youthful Minister of Finance, Honourable Dr. Ashni Singh. The Minister and the hard-working team of his Ministry must also receive commendation for their invaluable work towards the early presentation of the 2007 Budget, and the compilation of the voluminous Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, which this National Assembly will approve, following this debate.

Mde Speaker, hardly in a Budget Debate is so little said by Members of the other side, and with so little substance. Take the presentation of our Honourable Member, Winston Murray, who opened the Budget debate on behalf of the Opposition. It might be the first time he has failed to score in a debate. He had nothing new to say. He was repetitious with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act; the lotto fund; contract employees; more about this later. He was not kind to the sugar industry, and the thousands of workers and their families, whose livelihood is so much dependent on the industry. I believe he is supporting those while advocating the closure of the Demerara estates, but more on this, Comrade Speaker, later.

Comrade James McAllister again repeated what he said, just a few weeks ago, about the Berbice Harbour Bridge, when this House debated his motion, which called for the suspension of all works regarding the construction of the bridge, and which, understandably, all Guyanese are looking forward to, especially the thousands of Berbicians, including those who voted for the PNC/R-1 Guyana. I believe that his Party's support would further wane in the Ancient County if he continues what is tantamount to his clouded opposition to identify the Bridge. As I said, there are lots of repetitious contributions.

The Budget, Mde Speaker, exemplifies that of a caring Government, which has shown that it is capable to utilise its limited resources in a fair and equitable manner for the development of every facet of our society. No one can deny that the Budget caters for the important areas, such as agriculture - putting emphasis on the modernisation of the sugar industry to ensure greater productivity and efficiency to meet the challenges which confront the industry. The Industry will suffer a substantial loss in revenue from its main market, the European Union, which is committed to purchase, annually, 167,000 tonnes of sugar and is currently ... the Europeans is currently slashing the price of sugar imported from the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Countries, and by 2010 the price-cut will be 36%, resulting in a revenue loss of \$US7.4B - almost 25% of the Corporation's current revenue. We have to see, Mde Speaker, the industry, from where it was ... and I want to go back to the Budget Speech of 1992, and to look at what the then Minister of Finance had said; and, talking about sugar, he referred to what the sugar industry was at that time: he said *a second crop of one ...* and I quote:

*A second crop of 117,328 tonnes, and a budgeted 1992 first crop of 73,176 tonnes, have placed Guyana in a favourable position to meet the EEC quota in full for the first time in four years, and improve the likelihood of us being able to resume exports to the USA after a three-year hiatus.*

Now the point, Comrade Speaker, is this: that the Industry was run-down because of the entopic policy and the political interference, by the past government, in the Industry; that, by 1988, the sugar production was 167,550 tonnes; 1989 – 160,800 tonnes; 1990 – 129,920 tonnes, and 1991 – 159,680 tonnes. This is where the Industry came from, and this is where we have to see the recovery of the industry - from this background. I am sorry, Mde Speaker, that ... I am sorry, Mde Speaker, that the Honourable Member Anthony Vieira is not here. He spoke a mouthful yesterday about the industry. He spoke about the sugar industry being in a bad state at this point in time, and he referred to the production of the sugar industry, in the years 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004, and compared the production in those years with the production in 2005 and 2006; but I hope that my good friend, Comrade McAllister, who is holding the brief for the Honourable Member, Anthony Vieira, will report to him about what we have to say today. He is not ... that is, Anthony Vieira is not unfamiliar with a private estate on the East Bank of Demerara: he is not unfamiliar and he can tell you that that private estate, which no doubt is an efficiently-run estate, has had its production plummeting in 2005. When you compare the production in 2005, it was 2,187 tones, when you compare the production last year it was 2,565 tonnes, and compared with those that he compared GUYSSUCO's production with those years the production was an average of 4,000 tonnes. Indeed, in

2005 and 2006, for the sugar industry in Guyana, those that are owned by the private owners, and those that are owned by the State, the industry went through a bad patch; because the floods and the impact of the floods, and here it is, an industry and an estate that he is familiar with, that he's close with, suffered similarly, and had the same experience; yet he tried to show that the industry is falling. He, like others in the PNC, wants the sugar industry to close in the Demerara estates, because they don't care about the people, and they don't care about their families.

He said that the industry is closing itself in the Demerara estate; what a lie! Comrade Speaker, I withdraw ... What an untruth! Comrade Speaker. Look at the position with the Demerara estate in 2005. The Demerara estates made a production of 90,110 tonnes of sugar in 2005, in 2006 the Demerara estates made a production of 999,123 tonnes. Here is an increase of 9,013 tonnes - a 10% increase. When you take the production ... When you take the production of GUYSUCO in 2005 - 246,047 tonnes - the production of GUYSUCO in 2005, when you take the production of GUYSUCO in 2006 - 259,550 tonnes, you have an increase of 13,503, an increase of 5.48%; but you have, of that increase - 2006 over 2005, the Demerara estates contributed 66% to that increase. These are the facts; yet those who are calling for the closure of the Demerara estate; support of the doomsayers, who have strengthened their voices and they are now more vocal. We have to beware of them, because

they want to see the Industry closed and they want to see the Guyanese people suffer.

Yes Comrade Speaker, he talked about ... [*Interruption: 'Who he?'*] The Honourable Member Vieira spoke about the Skeldon Modernisation Programme. Comrade Speaker, emphasis is placed on the US\$169M Skeldon Project; with capital projection of GS11.78B allocation for completion of the factory, which is scheduled to commence sugar production in February next year. Together with this new factory there will be 9,000 hectares of additional land, between farmers and GUYSUICO, being brought into cultivation and ten megawatt of 35 megawatt of power will be made available to the national grid, expected to start by June this year. In other words, the new factory will see a production of 35 megawatt of electricity; of which ten megawatts will be sold to the national grid, and about 25 megawatts will be used by the estate itself. That, Comrade Speaker, is an important development, and it's important to recognise that this will have a positive impact in saving our sugar industry, which is facing such an important challenge for the first time in many years - a challenge that if this Government was not in office, and in power, no doubt we would have seen our industry go; as is the case in Trinidad and Tobago while, after three centuries of cane growing in Trinidad and Tobago, after three centuries of cane growing in St. Kitts, and after many years of cane growing in Barbados, Belize and



Jamaica we have the greatest possibility of defending our industry, of maintaining our industry, and of making it sustainable, and the Skeldon will ensure that this happens.  
*[Applause]*

It is refreshing to note, Comrade Speaker that the Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Robert Persaud, cleared all doubts that the Demerara sugar estates will remain. This is refreshing, and this, no doubt, is not good news for many of the doomsayers.

Yes Comrade Speaker, over \$150M has been injected in the bauxite industry to help its retooling. According to page 24 of the Budget presentation, and I want to quote:

*This has helped to increase production and exports while, at the same time, revitalising bauxite, dependent communities in Linden, Ituni, Kwakwani, Everton, and surrounding areas. Over the next five years, the Government intends to work with the Private Sector to develop an integrated bauxite alumina complex. In this regard a major investor is already engaged in feasibility studies for an alumina plant, with capacity of at least 1M tonnes per year. This could generate significant investment and job creation.”*

We saw today in the news, Mde Speaker that Bosai is coming on board. We saw in the news today that we will have an alumina plant; and we will see the industry revitalised and no doubt bring tremendous benefits to the community of Linden. Mde Speaker those are not the only areas in which we will see improvements. The Government is also putting emphasis on forestry reforms, which would see incentives being provided to encourage diversification into value-added activities in that sector. Fisheries, Other crops and Livestock will also be given an additional boost in this year's budget, resulting in livestock, seafood and agricultural production being increased.

The Government is not moving into modern production modes without putting emphasis on information and communication technology. It continues to encourage and, in fact, continues to give free incentives. Mde Speaker, the environment is developing to create more jobs for more Guyanese, particularly those who would have completed secondary and tertiary education.

Mde Speaker, I cannot say that I am totally happy with the relief given for income tax, which has moved from \$300,000 a year tax free to \$336,000 - an increase of 12%, which is said to cost \$1B. The new threshold should have been, in my view, Comrade Speaker, between \$30 and \$40,000 per month. However, it is understood that the adjustment is taken within the context of the Government's consistent efforts toward easing the plight of the workers, especially those in the low income

bracket. Over these years the Government has addressed the issue of income tax reforms, and to create income tax relief to a number of employees, and the \$36,000 per year increase in the threshold would allow for workers to benefit from savings of \$12,000 annually. This must be seen as half of a month's pay at the minimum wage level. The improvement in income tax threshold would allow for a 16,000 - odd employees being removed from the income tax register and, given the consistent effort of the Government in seeking to improve the threshold, it is my view that by the time this term of office would have come to an end - to a close, there would be drastic re-organisation and modernisation of our tax system.

Mde Speaker, I want to refer to the Budget Speech in 2008 and the then Finance Minister had this to say:

*Mr. Speaker, while the Government was able to significantly increase revenue over the last ten years, a glaring anomaly has been the small contribution made by the self-employed. We are cognisant of the efforts made by the Guyana Revenue Authority, including moral persuasion, but these have met with little success. This year I wish to announce that the Government will strengthen the income tax laws to enable to enforce presumptive assessments on professional and other categories of self-employed persons."*

Mde Speaker, this point is important, and we would like to see some movement, that the tax net is spread to also collect, from the self-employed, their part of tax. If that is done, Comrade Speaker, the pressure on the payees will be reduced, but the problem here is the ... I understand that the Fiscal Enactment Amendment Act is today before the court and, as soon as we can get some movement there, no doubt we can get a greater help with the income tax threshold, and to this end we look forward to have some movement.

Mde Speaker, we are not a nation that can be considered anywhere close to the developed countries. We cannot be considered to even rival smaller countries which are endowed with an abundance of petroleum resources, but we have shown that by the prudent use of our relatively limited resources, that we are surely forging ahead. The fact that progress is seen all around, despite the limited resources, is testimony that Guyana is being managed by capable hands, dedicated and honest stalwarts, and people who put the interest of our country and its people first. This is exemplified, Mde Speaker, by what the Government has done over the most recent years for the workers of this country. Consistently, there have been improvements in wages of workers, and whether criticism flow from the Opposition benches of 5%, the reality is that not in a single year under this current administration was there a wage freeze, or withdrawal of wages. Wage freeze, increment withdrawals, and high inflation rates

were hallmarks of the past regime. No one can deny that our workers deserve a greater increase than 5% - much more those in the lower scales, but for fifteen years, consistently, since free and fair elections in October 1992, there has been a significant improvement in real wages, and consistent control of inflation. Everywhere the workers are in a far better position than they were during the mismanaged days of our economy, and now contract employees.

I'm amazed at the presentation by the Honourable Member Basil Williams, whom I thought would have been more objective in his presentation, but whom, unfortunately, took a 'cock-eyed' position on wages. Comrade Speaker, the learned Member has to distinguish between a breakdown in negotiations, and where an agreement is entered. He failed, miserably, to grasp the areas where collective agreements were entered into between unions and employers, as against where Government is mindful about the plight of workers and made payments to those who had often protracted negotiations, failed to yield results.

Again, Mde Speaker, I must reemphasise that the workers in this country deserve higher salaries, and an improved standard of living, and undoubtedly the Government will continue to pursue that this happens, but we need to be realists to understand what is desired, what their desired goal is, and what can be accomplished immediately. Purchasing power and real wages will increase in the years to come. Mde Speaker, if one is to take the period

from 1993-2006, it will be seen that real wages increased by 731%, while inflation grew by 86%, indeed real wages grew over the past years, thus improving workers' welfare and well-being and, Mde Speaker, I mentioned 731% and my good friend might want to ask me what that represents, and let me give him an idea. In 1992, the minimum wage, in US dollars, was twenty six dollars and fifty-one cents. If you compare that ... and I want to give you some years: In 1982 its \$90.30, minimum wage in the Public Service. You had wage freeze in 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985 it was \$92.05 because of the falling exchange rate, 1986 \$91.14; 1987 - \$56.70; 1988 - \$59.50; 1989 - \$21.63; 1990 - \$25.97; 1991 - \$13.78; 1992 - \$22.39; 1993 - \$26.51, and today, the minimum wage has gone up to \$130.35, *[Applause]* so there has been some relief.

Honourable Member Williams also spoke about the disunity of the labour movement and that the Government is plotting to divide the labour movement, using GAWU and NACCIE for this purpose. I sympathise with the Honourable Member Williams, for he has been removed from the labour movement. I understand that he is no longer a member of the GLU for some years, and he does not even understanding what is happening in his union. The fact, Mde Speaker, that the labour movement is not unified is not because of anyone's pressure, and this is my opinion. Are we saying that the GLU, and the oldest union in Guyana, the Union of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, whose current President General is no other than the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Comrade

Robert Corbin, is pressured? Is he pressured - that that union is part of FITUG, and that union hardly sees itself as part of the Guyana Trades Union Congress at the moment? What a wicked piece of information that the Honourable Member has brought to this Assembly!  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, this is about the fourth time, or third time for the night we are hearing unacceptable words.

**Hon Komal Chand:** I'm sorry Mde Speaker, I'm sorry Mde Speaker. I withdraw. I mentioned that the GLU, the CCWU, GAWU, and NAACIE are members of FITUG. They together constitute FITUG, and to talk about GAWU and NAACIE, and leaving out the GLU, is not putting the picture properly and clearly to this National Assembly. He has got it here to score ... to score no doubt, Comrade Speaker, to score political points - cheap political points.

Comrade Speaker, reference was made about the 5% and the 6% and there was a big issue - talk about discrimination, talk about buying over union, and talk about how it is unfair to discriminate, and to give some workers 5% and to give some workers 6%. Let me read, Comrade Speaker, from the Budget - the 1992 Budget, 30 March 1992; and this is what Minister Greenidge had to say:

*“We anticipate continued economic growth in 1992: For the reasons outlined above, such growth cannot finance unrealistic upward wage movements. In recognition of this constraint, we expect, and have been promised, help by the international community (that is to pay wages and salaries). The 1992 wage policy has therefore been fashioned as follows:*

*Medical and Teaching Profession - average percentage increase*

*Pensioners*

*The remainder of the Public Service*

What discrimination! Persons sit here and talk about discrimination, yet here you give the teaching profession 27%, and you give the Public Servants, who you said you so love 10%, and they were done - average salary; then came to the Parliament in March without talking to the Union, without talking to the TUC, that was under their thumb, and that was what they were doing over the years. They just announced what they will give. Here we talk about talks broken down, and here we talk about talks protracted; but there are talks: But there we had a situation where the PNC used to impose ... In fact,



collective bargaining was suspended from 1977 to 1987, from 1977 to 1987, and even the TUC that was under their control -16 Unions were made to affiliate to the PNC, yet they were not negotiating with the TUC; and yet they have the gumption to come here and talk, in this Parliament, about 5% to one union and, 6% to one union.

Comrade Speaker, they talked about contract employees, and they talked about what is being done with contract employees, and get the expenditure for the contracted employees going; but where did it start. I have here, Comrade Speaker, a handbook for Members of the National Assembly – October 1992, and this is what it says:

*“The monthly allowance payable in respect of each chauffeur employed is as follows: Details of allowance to the Prime Minister, Basic Salary to be paid by the employee to the Chauffeur - \$9,720.89.”*

When you put the duty allowance and employer’s NIS it would come up to \$10,612.39, plus gratuity at a rate of 22% of the basic salary ... [Interruption: “I am quoting from ... the Comrade must listen”] the Handbook for Members of the National Assembly. The point I want to make ... [Interruption]

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Samuel Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

**Mr Komal Chand:** Mde Speaker, in am dealing with contract employees, and to show where this thing started, and to say that, even if with chauffeurs, they had them on contractual arrangement - \$9,720.89. When the salary was \$3,137.00, they were giving the chauffeur, working with the Prime Minister, \$9,720.89 under a contractual arrangement - over 200%. On top of that they were entitled ... I have no problem because whatever workers get they deserve. At the top of that they were getting a gratuity payable at the rate of 22½% of the basic salary of the chauffeur, and this was paid by the Parliament Office as an allowance, to the Speaker,

That 22½% was paid once the Clerk of the Assembly was satisfied that their performance was satisfactory. This is we started out with contracted employees. That is why Permanent Secretaries and a number of other people ... The HPS then, of the Office of the President was under that arrangement, and now they come and lament, and

they talk about contractual employees should only be professionals and special people; but here we have records of when it started.

Yes Mr Speaker. Yes Mr Speaker, I think that we have to be consistent if we want to move this country forward, and while I don't agree with my friend, the Honourable Mr Franklin, when he said that we should not look back to the past, we have to, because we have a situation where comrades in the Parliament forget about where we came from, and I want to, I want to ... [*Interruption:*] because the past, Mr Speaker, the present, and the future are not separate time compartments, but it continues. We live in the present that is forever slipping away into the past. Anyone wanting to shape the future would do well to learn from whence we came, as well as where we are heading. If we ignore the past we should not think that understanding of today's situation will be ever complete.”]

Before I conclude, I remembered that I should respond to the contribution that was made by the Honourable Member Sheila Member, when she questioned whether we are not ensuring that ‘Guyanization’ is respected in GUYSSUCO, and then she claimed that there are a number of foreign employees in GUYSSUCO, but she is a stranger to the truth, Mde Speaker.

When Booker-Tate was brought on board in October 1990, over thirty-odd persons came and took up positions in GUYSUCO. In 1993, when the new Board took over GUYSUCO, after the first free-and-fair elections in October 1992, there were 28. At the moment there are only three. The present Board, and the revised contract, ensures that they were reduced: only three; and the Honourable Member Sheila Holder are unaware of this; because she came here and lamented that we are not disrespecting this process about 'Guyanization.' More than that, apart from those three, we have five others, but they are attached to the project at Skeldon - the Skeldon Sugar Modernization Project. This should be conveyed to her, because she was not there, and therefore she was no doubt misled by someone who wants to make criticism for the sake of criticism.

Mde Speaker, I want to just give some information to Comrade David, and this information comes to hand. I want to give her some information. She was bad-talking the Government's performance in Bartica. I want to make the point about the millions of dollars that have been spent by this Government in Bartica. After she had spoken I just wanted to give this information:

**Projects of Bartica:**

\$

Construction of Bartica NDC Building

Construction of a New Market

First Street, Second Street, right on to Third Street

(a number of projects are going on that started sometime ago, they are going on) that would cost almost

Because she came here to the Parliament, not explaining why the PNC had done so badly ... We were reminded by *Stabroek News* the other day in their famous Editorial... talking about 50 years of age by the PNC... They told us, and reminded us, that it is the first time since the PNC was formed ... that their voting strength has been reduced from 39% to 36% - for the first time. I am not bothered about the elections in '68 that was rigged, in '73 that was rigged, the Referendum that was rigged in 1980; Elections in '85... I am not talking about those.

Comrade Speaker, in conclusion gone is the days when the role of the Opposition is seen as one of terror, one of destruction, one of more fiah! One of slow fiah! and one of division. We have to work together, and we must work together if this country is to move forward. I hope that for the rest of the debate, Mde Speaker, that my colleagues from the Opposition benches would bring forward reasonable proposals, which would be added to the menu of measures that have been introduced by this Government in the 2007 National Budget - a Budget with vision, a budget that leads the way to 2011 - the next

Elections, which we would win again, *[Applause]* as the people would have confidence in us. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Mervyn Williams

**Hon Mervyn Williams:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, I rise on this St. Valentine's Day to make my contribution to the debate of the 2007 Budget, as presented by the Honourable Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh. Mde Speaker, you would forgive me, I am certain, if my presentation does not sound very romantic, for it cannot.

Mde Speaker, I was deeply disappointed and saddened as I listened to the Honourable Minister, Dr. Ramsaran, insulting a Member of the National Assembly, because her husband benefited from the services - a facility offered by the State, and if elected officials, who were elected to represent the people of this country, are treated in this way, then, Mde Speaker, I am wondering how ordinary citizens would be treated. *[Applause]*

*[Interruption]*

**Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** On a point of Elucidation, or a point or order. Now, there was no ... I think they have thin skins, Mde Chair, thin skin. There was no such intention. I was referring to Dr. Austin's hypothetical person, and I said '*I know such a person.*' I was going to develop how I sent such a person to Cuba. When you have thin skins, when you have glass windows you don't throw stones. *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, Ms David is on her feet.

**Hon Judith David-Blair:** Mde Speaker, on a point of order. What the Honourable Bheri Ramsarran said to me, it was a second time in this House that he did make this statement, and that statement referred to me. I am going to say it. This is the second time he made this statement in this Honourable House and that statement referred to me... [*Interruption: 'On a point of education ... it was a second time you do it. A second time'*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, Honourable Members, would you please ... would you please ... If you all don't stop this I would just adjourn the House and leave the because I have that authority, because if this House continues to be rowdy in this late hour of the night, I would just rise and adjourn this Assembly, even without a date, because I think you all are really overdoing it and abusing it. You couldn't get away with this with the substantive Speaker, so I think it's a little bit eye-pass here, so I may have to assert my, my ... the authority given to this Office if you all don't desist. Mr Williams, you may continue.

**Hon Mervyn Williams:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, I want to address the question of some omissions from the Honourable Member Norman Whittaker's presentation, with respect to his accomplishments as chairman of Region 1.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member forgot to mention that he added significant value to the asset register of Region 1. He bought a bulldozer which his Administration said was new, and it took two operators, a crew of mechanics, and 40 gallons of lubricating oil to get it to Wauna. It stopped short, never to move again; and then there was a road roller which he bought, and the road roller was to compact roads in a hilly region. It had to be towed up the hill, where it stopped short, never to move again; and then there was the grader, which suffered the same fate; so now the Honourable Member has been elevated to this level. Region 1, Mr Prime Minister, can contribute significantly to the scrap iron trade. *[Laughter and Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr. Whittaker forgot to tell us that, under his watch, the Barima House, an eighty-nine year old wooden building, that should have been preserved, it was moved from Morawhana to Mabaruma, and under his watch, it was left to fall to pieces - a place where dignitaries, including foreigners and presidents of this country had the pleasure and privilege of staying, was finally mowed down after the elections of last year. His accomplishments have caused his elevation to this Honourable House, I presume.



With respect to the roads at Matthews Ridge it was suggested, Mde Speaker, that there was never a road from Matthews Ridge to Baramita, but I lived at Papaya, and as a boy the National Service took me on several tours overland, from Papaya to Baramita by road, and beyond to Tasawini, so this is nothing new. There was a road, and the abandonment of the National Service caused the road to go to ruin.

Mde Speaker, I wish to address a few points raised by the Honourable Minister of Amerindian Affairs. She spoke, Mde Speaker, about land distribution, but failed to advise the House that, at Redlock in Region 2, a settlement that is 40 years old, a settlement of Amerindian people who were well under way to being established as a reservation just like Whyaka under the People's National Congress, after they got educational and health facilities, is now under pressure. Mde Speaker, at the moment the crops, the permanent crops of these people are being raided by members of the regional administrations, and they are being advised that they can do nothing about it because their crops are on State lands. They are also being advised that they will get titles if they move further inland.

Mde Speaker, with respect to Orealla, it is unfair to suggest that it was following consultation on the Amerindian Act that Orealla was considered for the kind of treatment that they got, in terms of credit. I submit to you, Mde Speaker, that it was after the consultations hosted by the ERC, in partnership with the UNDP, where strong representation was made ... and that is not so long

ago, that the PPP Government acted to save itself from losing support in Orealla, because the people were disappointed that Moruca was being treated better than they were. The people are also upset, Mde Speaker, that they cannot get work in Guyana, and so they must travel all the way to Suriname, where they are open to exploitation as they seek jobs in another country which they cannot get in their own. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, I wish to now address the matters of the Honourable Minister and his presentation. In his introduction, the Honourable Minister said, and I quote:

*“As we have emphasised our vision is for a better Guyana, a Guyana where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoying greater cohesion and prosperity; a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours, and a society that is recognised for the care and attention it places on children, women, youths, the elderly, and the less fortunate.”*

Very impressive, Mde Speaker, this is a perfect vision, and it is a vision to which I subscribe. However, Mde, in the same way that faith without works is dead, vision without effort, commitment, and political will is no vision at all. *[Applause]* Guyana is so far away from realising

that pipe dream, that as I listened to the Minister, I thought he was going to say '*a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant dreams.*' Mde Speaker, let us examine this statement in the context of Region 3, as it relates to children, women, youths, the elderly, and less fortunate. I should start with the elderly. The system of issuing social assistance, simply put, is not working in Region 3. On a visit to the office at Plantain Walk, just a few days ago, a large number of senior citizens were waiting for an unbearably long period of time to see the only officer on duty at that office. With inadequate seating accommodations, and insufficient standing room in that cramped hot space, our senior citizens, who served this country well, are forced to endure major inconveniences; and the evidence is right here, the evidence is right here - a legacy left by the last serving Minister of Human Services. And then there are our senior citizens who live in the Essequibo Islands, they would tell you, Mde, of the times when their Social Security travel passes were cards of which they were proud. These days, Mde, they cannot ride the public transport vehicles for free. They cannot make the Demerara River crossing with the ferry for free, or at all. These days they no longer can prepare to travel to and from Essequibo and the Islands, using a time scheduled ferry. They must now await the high tide, which is the only time the ferry could make it to the stelling. Our senior citizens can neither afford nor endure the speedboat, so they must wait until late into the nights, instead of the usual 5pm. They must wait in a very

uncomfortable environment for hours on end, and if perchance they want to use the public convenience, these elderly people, these poor people, who did their bit to develop Guyana, must dig into their petty social assistance package to fork out cash to pay for its use; and when they get on the ferry they sit in fear in the dark, on its lower level, as it is propelled by a tug boat. Mde Speaker, this is so simply because the caring Government alluded to by the Honourable Minister has seen it fit not to dredge the Essequibo and Demerara Rivers. Residents of Region 3 are wondering if the roll-on and roll-off ferry, spoken of on page 29 of the Minister's address, will solve the problem. They are wondering if these ferries will be able to roll-on and roll-off the sandbanks and mudflats in the rivers. They are also wondering if these ferries will roll onto Berbice to help save the floating bridge from the fate of the floating wharf.

Mde Speaker, please bear with me. Much of my prepared presentation had disappeared. There was a Bill that was passed in the Eighth Parliament that had to do with the question of the reformation to accommodate our children. Mde Speaker, it is unfortunate that even after the Bill was assented to it has ... the Bill has been passed, it was not assented to. Mde Speaker, I refer to the ILO Conventions, and Mde Speaker, I quote from ... I quote, Mde Speaker, from this document, which is a review of child labour laws in Guyana. Mde Speaker, it says:

*A fundamental principle of international law, enshrined in Article 26 of the Guyana Convention of the Laws of Treaty, ratified by the Government of Guyana, is that every treaty enforces binding upon the parties to it, and must be performed by them in good faith. Article 27 prevents a party from invoking its internal laws as justification of its failure to perform a treaty.*

It goes on to say:

*Within the jurisprudence of Guyana, unlike Suriname, ratified treaties are not considered to be directly applicable without enabling legislations. Therefore, where there is an inconsistency between national law and the provisions of an ILO Convention, which Guyana has ratified, the Government of Guyana has one year, from the ratification, to enact enabling legislation, to ensure compliance with ILO Conventions.*

Against this backdrop of Guyana's ratification of ILO Conventions, Nos. 138 and 182, Mde Speaker, and its obligations associated therewith, one wonders why assent was withheld, and whether this was on the advice of the previous Minister of Human Services.

Mde Speaker, Convention 138 has to do with:

- ILO member-states being required to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour.
- Establishing by law a minimum age for admission to employment and work within its territories, and a means of transport registered within its territories.

Convention 182 targets the worst forms of child labour, and addresses certain unconditional worse forms of child labour, which comprise:

- Slavery and all practices similar to slavery, including forced labour, serfdom, or prostitution or pornographic performances, and other forms of commercial sexual activities, illicit activities such as the prevention and distribution of illegal drugs.

Mde Speaker, Guyana ratified ILO Convention No. 138 on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1998, and they were required to enact legislation within 100 days. Convention 182 was ratified on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2001. Essentially, Guyana is non-compliant, as far as the fulfilment ... as far as fulfilling its obligations to the ILO is concerned: thanks, in a large measure, to the efficiency, or lack thereof, of the previous Minister of Human Services. In this regard, the Government needs to take immediate steps to reverse this situation - not just to look good, but to protect our young people from the continued exposure to the dangers that

they now face. Mde Speaker, this challenge must be confronted now. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the research findings of the ILO, conducted by its Caribbean office in 2002 tells us that 25-40% of children in Charity and its environs were child labourers. In Parika, which the Honourable Ms. Shadick referred to, more than 15-20%, Georgetown, 30%, Corriverton 15-20%, Bartica 15-25%, St. Cuthbert's Mission 50%, Black Bush Polder 35-75%. The majority of child labourers start to work between the ages of 10-14. Female child labourers work mainly as vendors, sales girls, domestic servants, babysitters, and in commercial sexual activities. The report tells us that child labourers involved in sexual activities could be found in six of the eight communities studied. These communities are Corriverton, Bartica, Parika, Georgetown, and Linden. It quotes the UNICEF study titled, 'Child Prostitution and Child Sexual Exploitation in Guyana,' as estimated, that just over one out of every ten persons, engaged in commercial sexually activities in Guyana, were children. Another legacy left us by the previous Minister of Human Services. *[Applause]*

Clive Pigas wrote at page 18 of the Review of Child Labour Laws of Guyana: 'The Government of Guyana indicated that there have been no major incidents of child labour.' I believe, Mde, that it was the then Minister who would have spoken for the Government. Mde Speaker, there are children in Region 3 who are employed in road building and with other contractors who are beneficiaries

of huge contracts. The evidence, the evidence is right here. Children as young as twelve years old work for \$1,000 per day in order to provide for their mothers and younger siblings. Sadly they sometimes have to work for lazy stepfathers as well.

I recently spoke with a thirteen year old, whom I'm trying to get to go back to school. He no longer works on the road project, because he had to split his pay with his twelve year old buddy, whom his boss refused to pay. They both now work on a farm in the back-lands of the East Bank of Essequibo. This young boy started to work two years ago. That was before the preparation of the report by Clive Pigas.

Government must ensure that provision is made in contracts prohibiting the hiring of children. Such provisions must have harsh penalties, and must form part of an ongoing scorecard of negatives which will, at some stage, prevent defaulters from securing contracts.  
*[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, our children are quickly becoming proficient in begging and gambling at Parika, which is soon to become a town. Some are already hooked on drugs and alcohol, and the females among them are engaged in commercial sexual activities at night. They do not beg or prostitute because they want to, but rather because they want to live and know of no other means of eking out an existence. Some of them sleep under a tree on the shore of the Essequibo River without an adult



being present. [*Interruption: 'You used to sleep there day and night.'* "I am an adult, unlike you"] others sleep under a tree, at Parika facade. There are two children, ages six and four who slept under a tree but have now graduated to sleeping under bottom-houses ... under a bottom-house. There is the evidence, and those are the children, so go find them and fix it. I have already spent what I could spend from my own pocket. [*Applause*] These children are being denied a fair chance to be the best that they can be. They have no access to education, health care, or social assistance. They live by the mercy of God alone. Approaches by an elderly couple to the former Minister on their difficult circumstances yielded no results; yet when children such as these emerge into the wider society, sporting their negative attributes, we condemn them and call them ... and even make them into criminals. Our society continues to fail them in every respect. We allow growing with a yearning for a better life, without an education, or life skills to realise their dreams; and when they turn to a life of crime, we kill them. Does that make us any better than them?

I agree with Sister Bonita Harris when she said, in her letter of *Stabroek News* on 30 January ... and I quote:

*especially my view that behind every problem child (like Neil for example) there are at least two adults with serious deficiencies.*

[Applause] To that I would add “*and an unconscionable, uncaring, and unresponsive minister and government.*” I say that against the background of the ILO Review I alluded to earlier, which says at page 31:

*“The author found no evidence of prosecution, either under the Employment of Young Persons and Children Act, or the Education Act, for the illegal employment of children.”*

[Interruption: ‘We will find it under the tree with you and the children.’ “We have the pictures here to prove child.”] With respect to women, let it be known that in all of Region 3 there is no home or shelter for battered women, neither is there the type of structured counselling service that is necessary to ensure that abused women are afforded the quality of treatment that ought to be afforded them. There are also the cases where vulnerable women are preyed upon by those they go to in search of justice. [Interruption: ‘That is why they can’t come to you.’] [Laughter] Our indigenous sisters are brought to Region 3 and other commercial centres and are exploited by

operators of restaurants and entertainment places. Some are held against their will, but historically got no support from the human services ministry. It will be recalled that the previous Minister of Human Services vehemently denied that trafficking in persons existed in Guyana. Well, we all know the truth about that.

Mde, our social infrastructure is in need of urgent repairs, and we can't spare a moment more before we apply the many remedies in the interest of our people. In this regard, it is hoped that the new Minister will steer clear of the veiling of her predecessor. *[Applause]*

Mde, I'll like to turn to education in Region 3. Mde Speaker, in his Budget Speech at page 15 the Honourable Minister said, and I quote:

*Capital spending in the Education Sector exceeded \$3.1B and goes on to say that "\$1B was expended to expand school infrastructure, and improve school performance, organisational and human resource capacity.*

He goes on to page 32 to say

*"Among the objectives of this plan is the attainment of 100% functional literacy. This*

*will be achieved through for example, increasing access to nursery, primary and secondary schools through the construction and rehabilitation of schools in the 10 Regions”.*

But he goes on further Mde Speaker to say, and again I quote:

*“A number of initiatives will be undertaken to advance the literacy and numeracy programmes in schools, for example, literacy contests, radio advertisements, printing of brochures, posters and newsletters.”*

If this is the vision of the Government, then I submit, Mde that the Government is out of touch with the reality with which the people of Guyana now grapple, as far as the education sector is concerned. Earlier in my presentation I spoke about the children who sleep beneath the trees and bottom-houses. These children do not attend school; so would build a school mean anything to them? Would printed matter serve them any purpose other than that in the process of tidying up after a call of nature?

Mde Speaker, as recent as a few months ago a study was started in Region 3 to determine the number of out of school children in the region; all 58 primary schools were being targeted. So far there is documented evidence to prove that 305 children were found to be out of school. *[Interruption: 'Name the Study.' "I can give you better than that. I can give you the name of every child, as well as the address and the name of the parents."]* Of that number 165 were classified as not in school, while 140 were classified as having dropped out. It was done by Educare Guyana Incorporated. This suggests, Mde, that of the 305 children, 165 had never attended school.

A check on Monday February 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 with the agency which was conducting this study revealed that the out-of-school population is now established to be in excess of 1,000, and the study is still in progress.

This suggests the view that our national enrolment number stands at 93%, as posited by the Honourable Member Irfan Ali, is indeed unbelievable. In a region of 186 established villages under the control of fourteen Local Democratic Councils, that translates to over five children in every village, or just over 71 children in each neighbourhood in Region 3 are out of school, while the count continues. *[Interruption]*

Educare Guyana Inc ... The Report is here and I will give you a copy. The Government will do well, I believe, to cause the School Welfare Officers to be trained; appointed and designated responsibility, in each

Neighbourhood Democratic Council area, to attend to matters of this nature. It may also be a good thing for the Government to consider reviewing its policy of admissions towards schools, as far as the mandatory requirement of birth certificates is concerned. There are many children who, only because they do not have birth certificates, cannot be admitted to schools. The system of obtaining a birth certificate is such a difficult one that, by the time the parents manage to secure one, the affected children may be beyond admission on account of age. Check 'Plastic City' in Parika and its environs and you will see for you. I say admit the children - birth certificate or no birth certificate, school uniforms or no school uniforms, then ensure that there is a system to secure both birth certificates and uniforms for children - all of them. That is, of course, if the Government is indeed serious about solving the problem of our out-of-school children. *[Applause]*

That now brings me to the subject of those children who are already enrolled in school. There is a furniture crisis in the region, but the Government, it seems, is oblivious to this fact. Cornelia Ida Primary School was giving an annexe to house 150 Grade Six pupils. This school ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Mervyn Williams:** Mde Speaker, these 150 pupils got not a single piece of furniture, and the building now stands unoccupied. Maria's Pleasure Primary in Wakenaam only got furniture when an overseas group of concerned Guyanese donated furniture to the school. As I speak, the PTA of Leguan Secondary School is hosting a Bar-B-Que and Valentine's dance to raise funds to outfit their school with furniture, while the Region's premier primary school, Leonora Primary, will be holding a fund-risen on 20 February to buy furniture. I ask what good is it to construct these buildings if you are not prepared to equip them for the good of our children and, by extension, our country? What purpose would they serve if our children cannot be placed in them, and even those who are placed cannot find somewhere to sit comfortably in them as they are engaged in the process of learning?

Then there are the children who are in the school system, but whose parents cannot afford to maintain them so they fall by the wayside. Educare Guyana Inc. is currently pursuing a programme, in collaboration with non-governmental community-based and faith-based

organisations to provide one meal per day, literary classes, and school uniforms for children in an effort to ensure that these valuable resources of our dear land attend school. This must be commended, because 500 children are now being provided with meals. Mde Speaker, since the Educare programme took off at the commencement of this school term, the rate of attendance at beneficiary schools has improved dramatically. This gives rise to another problem. At Parika-Salem CHS attendance has swelled by over 120 children per day, but there is no place for them to sit. Mde Speaker, this is a cue for the Government to do its part - not just for one academic year, but rather for the entire school life of our children.

Mde Speaker, recently, while I was in Parika, this is what I saw - School children in uniforms fetching furniture, which their parents bought, from the Parika koker to the school, so that a Grade II student could find a place to sit. Mde Speaker, a visit to this school will reveal that it is the only school with a kiln, where pottery pieces were once fired and displayed with great pride. Sadly, the last pieces that were made and fired - 14 years ago, are still standing there, while the kiln has been abandoned and the electricity service disconnected.

Mde, this Grade 'A' school has a trestle and four overhead tanks, which have not held water for the last four years, only because there is no functional pump. Pupils must perilously position themselves on top of a cistern - this is the hole, and dip water out of a child-sized



hole in its top if water is needed for an emergency; while teachers work under the most sub-human conditions, without proper chairs to sit on. Yet there are those who live in mansions in the city and dare to stand in this House and purport to represent Region 3, profess to know everything about Parika, and speak of exciting things to come. What about what is there already that is urgently in need of rectification for the future of our young people and our country. *[Applause]* The Government should wake up to page 29 of the PNC/R-1G Manifesto for answers to the nation's education woes.

With regards to technical and vocational training, Mde, I would recommend that the fellowship PIC be equipped with tools and technical staff so that the students there could become meaningfully involved in the development of their Region, even as they are being trained. I say train them while simultaneously offering them projects to manufacture furniture for all the schools in the Region, and as an integral part of their training programme. This would empower them, equipping them with skills for life while, at the same time, providing them with a stipend in order to facilitate the acquisition of their own tools after they would have graduated. Allow the PIC to earn from the project and provide meals for their students, as well as to pay them a stipend, while at the same time making the institution a financially viable one, and eliminating the woeful furniture crisis in the Region. *[Applause]* This should be treated as a pilot project and could inform the way forward for other regions. I also recommend that the

Den Amstel Youth Camp be handed over to the youths of Den Amstel tomorrow. We would find ways to refurbish that valuable place, which has been neglected over the years and left to ruination, principally because of its history.

Let us not just give fanciful talks about glamorous visions, while at the same time rob our youths of the things that they need for their own growth and development in the name of partisan politics, and deny them an equal opportunity to contribute to the cause of nation-building.

There is also urgent need for centres of remedial education in our Region 3 communities. The Government will do well to ensure that there is at least one facility to house our destitute children in the Region, *[Applause]* an institution which is geared to mould them into top quality citizens, equipping them with a sound education and skills for life: Not the Genesis Home, which was given to the government on a platter by the Catholic community, only for it to in turn be given to another organisation, which is running it to the ground, and which has rules to put shelter and protection beyond the reach of our vulnerable children. That, Mde, is another legacy left behind by our previous Minister of Human Services. *[Applause]*

There is in addition, Mde, an urgent need for a shelter staffed by professionally-trained social workers to attend to our battered women who, in large measure, must parent these children of Guyana's future.

Let's talk about what will interest you, Irfaan - contracts and corruption. Someone on the government side spoke of the absence of corruption; but this is what the Auditor General had to say about Region 3 in qualifying their accounts - 2004, I quote:

*However, because of the significance of the comments as contained in the relevant section of my report relating to the following statements, I am unable to form an opinion whether they properly present their respective state of affairs, as at December 31, 2004.*

Mde, Items 1148, 1150, 1158, 1159, 1162, 1165, 1168 and 1180 all speak of shady matters, for example, 1148 tells us that \$3.746M should have been refunded as unpaid salaries. Out of that amount the sum of \$1.095M was paid into bank accounts for thirteen persons who had already left their jobs. Mde, item 1180 speaks of only 33 tables and 164 chairs being accounted for, out of a total of 40 tables and 240 chairs, which were bought for nursery school children. You see, Mde, Region 3 must have been on the President's mind when he spoke about fighting corruption in his address to the Ninth Parliament. Why are contracts awarded to construct buildings which are not being used? The abattoir at Meten-Meer-Zorg, built five

years ago; multi-purpose centre at Grove, East Bank Essequibo, built over a year ago; the multi-purpose centre at Belle Vue, built over one year ago; the Health Centre at Versailles, over one year ago, and which cows are using as a toilet. The cows are using it as a toilet: *Look at it; see that?* The health centre at Caria Caria, which was spoken about by the Honourable Bibi Shadick, is yet to be handed over, and the contractor still awaits his money several months after completion of the contract. The cost of these buildings will easily be in the order of tens of millions of dollars. Add that to the cost of refurbishing the Leonora Cottage Hospital, which was demolished six months after being repaired, and is now being constructed ... reconstructed at tremendous cost, and you would run into wastage of taxpayers' money that is in excess of \$60M. That money could have been better spent on feeding our vulnerable children for the entire duration of their school lives, which is what is needed if we are to effectively mould our young people. *[Applause]*

Mde, I had cause to write, in the letter columns of our newspapers - *Kaieteur News* of 15 September 2005 at page 4, and *Stabroek News* of 2 March 2006 at page 6, about corruption in Region 3. The fact I provided are irrefutable, to the extent that no one dared to rebut them. *[Laughter and Applause]* The Honourable Komal Chand could tell you that he was part of a 3-man PPP commission set up to investigate Region 3, with respect to matters pertaining to the award of contracts, preferential

treatment of certain contractors, pricing and variation, among other matters.

There is the example of the West Demerara Regional Hospital. In 2005 a contract was awarded to effect repairs to the kitchen at little over a million dollars. By the end of the last term in office the regional powerhouses managed to extend the cost of the West Demerara Regional Hospital kitchen to in excess of \$12M. Over at Wakenaam the value of the substantive contract to build that school is now less than the total variation. Numerous contracts were awarded without regard to tender procedures and regulations and given to special contractors. Mde Speaker, if that is not corruption, then we may as well start to sing “Teacher Percy.” What is disappointing is that it was a Member of Parliament from Region 3 who stood up and said that there was no corruption. I believe, Mde, that the same MP, the Honourable Irfaan Ali, was a sitting Member of the Regional Tender Board of Region 3 when all of this happened. The Honourable Irfaan Ali will also remember that the people of Guyana also felt the effects of the school uniform scam, and the Pension Books scam, that were all presided over by his colleague MP from Region 3, then a minister of Government.

Mde Speaker, at pages 17 and 18 the Minister speaks of the tons of money being spent at La Grange and Metem-Meer-Zorg wells, among others: Then at page 36 he speaks of a five-year plan which, among other things, will

see the completion of major water supply systems at Parika and other communities... *[Interruption]*

**Hon Irfaan Ali:** Mde Speaker, I stand in relation to Standing Order 41, 41:5 and 41: 3-5. 41:4 says

*It should be out of order to use offensive, insulting language about Members of the Assembly.*

Mde Speaker, if what the Member said is not offensive, I would take my seat, but when I get up to speak again I would take this as a precedent. Thank you. *[Interruption: 'You are threatening the Speaker!'* "I am not threatening the Speaker but he was imputing that I am corrupt"]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, would you please ... *[Interruption]* Mr. McAllister please ...

Honourable Member, I don't find that, he is saying ... He is just saying that you were a Member of the Board ... I don't think that that would refute ... on you ... when contracts were granted and so ... I can't find anything that directly inputs to you. He was just stating a fact. If you want to challenge the veracity that ... Honourable Member, if you want to say that you were not a member of that Board, or that he is wrong, that is something I can

understand; but he was just saying that you were a member.

**Hon Mervyn Williams:** Thank you, Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, the Government continues to suffer from acute deadline failure with, regard to the La Grange and Meten-Meer-Zorg wells, and the affected residents are wondering if the June deadline is the final deadline or whether they are at a dead end. The Honourable Minister of Water and Housing must be commended for boldly apologising to persons affected by his Ministry's failure to meet deadlines which he gave only a few weeks ago in this Honourable House. After all, Mde, he styles himself as the nation's waterman and must perform, or be stripped of his title. Mde Speaker, one would have hoped, in his Budget Speech... [*Interruption: 'Are you moving a motion?'*]

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Deborah J Backer:** I, Mde, I rise to... [*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, I am the time ... the official time-keeper here. [*Applause*] Mr Mervyn Williams, would you please cut this out on this side of the House? I am the official time-keeper for this House, and Mr. Mervyn Williams began his presentation at 10:50, 10:50.

**Hon Deborah J Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude. Yes, Honourable Members, are you giving the Member 15 minutes to conclude? I am hearing 'yes' and 'no' from this side. Are you giving the Member 15 minutes to conclude?

**Motion put and carried.**

**Motion carried.**

**The Speaker:** Go ahead Honourable Member.

**Hon Mervyn Williams:** Mde Speaker, the villages of Sisters and Goed Intent and Belle Vue West are in need also, are in need of water. These communities have been suffering from the want of water for over ten years as is the case of De Kindren and other communities affected by water crisis, due to the non-completion of the two wells at Meten-Meer-Zorg and La Grange. Whenever it is hoped that the truck will arrive, someone must be at home to collect the household supply of water. That means that someone would miss either a day's work or a day's school at least three days a week. Our productive sectors are adversely affected at the same time as the education of our nation's children. So, Honourable Minister, promises and apologies alone will not be enough. Take lessons



from the date of the Honourable Shadick – produce or perish.

On housing Mde Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Housing spoke at length about the construction of houses, particularly in Region 3. The Minister would have done well to inform this Honourable House of the reasons for homeowners' refusal to pay the full asking price for the majority of these houses, but since he did not do it, I will do it for him. The houses are falling apart: door cannot be locked unless they are removed and remedied, walls are cracking and plaster falling off walls is separating from their supporting columns, then, to add insult to injury, a very special contractor is being given house lots already allotted to other persons. This contractor then proceeded to erect houses on these lands, as part of his commercial operations, before the rightful owners can do so.

Mde Speaker, in April 2006 the Regional Housing Department repossessed 200 low-income house lots. The reason given was that these persons failed to build their houses. These persons who did not build could not build because they had not the resources to build. Many of them do not have jobs. Surprisingly no middle-income lots were repossessed, even though about 500 persons who were allotted middle-income lots have also failed to build. The people of Plastic City, Pouderoyen, Parika Foreshore and Sea Dam, and those who now squat in the Malgre Tout church cemetery, are still awaiting word from the Minister about their fate.

Mde Speaker, any wise Government would consider the establishment of a viable and sustainable industrial and/or commercial centre, side by side with the establishment of a housing scheme the size of Tuschen, or Parfaite Harmonie, but not the PPP Government. This Government expects people to work for six days per week for \$24,000 a month in Georgetown, pay \$14,040 in travel expenses, pay Georgetown rental, electricity and telephone bills, feed and clothe themselves, and their families, and send their children to school on the remaining \$9,060, and still build their own dream homes – with a mortgage. Low interest, or no interest. That is some vision for the building of a modern and prosperous Guyana! *[Applause]* I say, Mde Speaker, develop the back lands, take them away from the one man who controls about 100 acres aback of Tuschen Scheme and let the people go back to the lands. *[Applause]* Open more lands and make pastures for people who rear livestock and allow animals to roam our highways. Do it tomorrow, for the people are suffering while you pretend not to know. *[Applause]* We are fully prepared to work with you for the good of our people and our country; and in closing, Mde Speaker, I wish to cite the words of our patriotic song, which says

*'Let us cooperate for Guyana; let us cooperate for our land; let us resolve to*

*work together, learn to call our neighbour brother.'*

I know that we can do it, Mde Speaker, if only there is willingness on the other side. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member Mr. Harripersaud Nokta.

**Mr Harripersaud Nokta:** Mde Speaker, I too wish to congratulate our young Minister of Finance for presenting to the nation a wonderful Budget, and no doubt, because of the quality of what is put into that Budget, much discussions are going on over it. I would like to quote from page 2, paragraph 1:6. I quote:

*Over the years we have been steadfastly laying the foundation for sustained economic growth and prosperity. Along the way we have had to cope with both domestic and external challenges, but we have remained undaunted and unbowed, and have seen an impressive improvement in the standard of living of all Guyanese. This is not an occurrence by chance, but is the product of purposeful consistency.*

Mde Speaker, this paragraph speaks volumes 'purposeful consistency,' because what is happening in Guyana, in terms of development - social and economic development, it has been a product started in 1992, and today we are reaping the fruits. I quote paragraph 1:7

*More than any other time in our country's history a large percentage of our people own their homes, and have access to electricity, piped water, telephones and other amenities.*

Nobody can doubt that, because that's a reality, and it came about because of careful and constructive planning.

This Budget is for all of us. It has something for all of us - for those at the bottom, and those at the top of the social ladder. Mde Speaker, for over fourteen years I listened to Members of the Opposition side of this House - year after year, spelling doubts about the social and economic prospects of Guyana. Spilling doubts - fourteen years I sat here as Minister. Remarks such as *Budget lacks vision, Budget do not address the need of the poor* etc. Those are rhetorical remarks that are repeated here year after year. Contrary to the views expressed by those on the Opposite side, Guyana has been making progress since 2003, and the living standards of the ordinary people continue to improve year after year - and nobody can doubt that; because that's a reality: and no doubt that

is why Members over there are feeling guilty; taking into consideration that because of Guyana's huge debt burden and collapse of the social and economic infrastructure, it became necessary that a new strategy, be adapted to pull Guyanese out of the desperate situation. The late Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the then President and '*Father of the Nation,*' and a visionary, instructed that the economic strategy for Guyana must be based on human development and that is why, when we talk about developing the human person, it means homes, electricity, piped water, education, health, and so forth - based on human development.

Mde Speaker, we started in 1993 - first Budget after the 1992 election, with a Budget of G\$33B, dividing the cake to meet all sectors, but at the same time, placing emphasis on human development. Effective management and strict control of the finances of this country resulted in increased production and economic growth. Mde Speaker, we can see and feel that trend in every walk of life. Human development means improved services in education, health, housing, water, transportation, sports and culture, electricity etc. Travel the length and breadth of Guyana and you can see improvements - even in the most remote areas; in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Such development did not come about by wishes and dreams. It came about by consistently hardworking people toiling, working, planning, and implementing dedicated financial programmes, resulting in improved social and economic development.

Mde Speaker, we started at a time when everything was collapsing. We did not have money at that time. We were not printing money. We were not printing money, and the donors' country had closed the doors to Guyana. Mde Speaker, at that stage Dr. Jagan said that for us to pull this country out of the mess that it was in, we had to be *lean and clean*, and when we implemented *lean and clean* Mr. Hoyte said *you got to mean too*, but we didn't want to be mean, but you cannot have, you cannot have Cadillac-style living with a bicycle economy, Mr. Burnham said so. Mde Speaker, just to illustrate a little the economics of those days ... [*Interruption: 'Voodoo economics' "I am not an economist, voodoo one and so forth"*] Look, pay-sheet – Harripersaud Nokta, Senior Minister – 13<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1992: Salary \$14,060: Duty Allowance - \$450; entertainment - \$306. Mde Speaker, when all the deductions were taken out my half month's take home pay was \$9,950. Ask them how much they are getting now. Ask them how much they are getting now! So whether you call it *voodoo economics*, or Ram and McRae economics, or McAllister economics, the point is today Guyanese people are earning more, and living a better life. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, much has been said by my colleagues, and so many of them spoke on the related developments in every part of Guyana, but I would also like to give my little two bits, or to add my little quota: I have extracted from the estimates, as I do normally ... because when I

travel in the interior I don't walk with that big heavy book. My colleagues know that I don't walk with plenty paper, but I extracted it – Region 1, 2001: Capital \$76M; Region 7 - \$133M: from 2001 – 2007 the capital programme was \$692,569 9 [*Applause*] - from 2001 – 2007; Region 2, same period – from \$170.1M it reaches \$232M in 2006; Region 3 - from \$132.7M it reached \$183M; I am doing this because some people read but they don't understand; Region 4 \$78M now \$130M. These are all capital development: I am dealing with capital development. I don't want to talk about current, or to tabulate them together. I have the total figures ... but just to let my colleagues on the other side understand, the road we traversed, from a country that was collapsing, and when there was no money in the country, the donor countries had closed their doors on us. We were not printing money, but the PNC was printing money. We were able to pull the country out of the mess that you had put it in. Let us go on. Region 5 - \$144M in 2001, \$179M; Mde Speaker, when they were speaking and wanting extension - 15 minutes and 15 minutes, we didn't ask them what you... [*Interruption*]

Because we were making sense.

**Hon Harripersaud Nokta:** Let them listen and learn, because, Mde Speaker development calls for four Ms in this country. It calls for money, management, machinery and materials - 4 Ms, and on top of that, it takes time; so in a matter of fourteen years the PPP-Civic has been able to transform this country to what it is today. If I have to

go into each one of these, and relate all the hundreds of schools which we have built, renovated and extended, all the health centres that we have built, renovated and equipped, solar panels and radio sets, all the roads that we have built, this fourteen years of change for the better of Guyana will take me fourteen days to relate; but, Mde, the fact of the matter is that those who destroyed this country do not want to hear the truth now: They do not want to hear it, and all they're trying to tell us is what they did in the past; but everybody knows that, because that's history - that the PNC Government destroyed Guyana.

Mde Speaker, I heard a lot about Region 1 from some speakers, and I'm sorry the Honourable Member Judith David is not here. She disappeared because the truth hurts; but what does it matter to this Parliament and a Budget when she will stand up and say that she was born in Mabaruma and she see the light? What does a Budget have to do with that? The point is that she talked about electricity. Today electricity in Mabaruma goes into the Mabaruma Settlement, Mabaruma Township, Mabaruma Compound, Kumaca, Hossororo; and we have money this year to carry it further.

Mde Speaker, under the PNC's time there were four vehicles at Mabaruma: today you got over 23 mini-buses, so 40 if the roads were bad do you think the people would have buses and so forth? But you go now and, as the Honourable Member said, you can drive from Mabaruma, because you have mini-bus services now that the roads are better off now than what they were.



**Education** - Mde Speaker, we heard about secondary schools and dorms, which the PPP put it, but Honourable Member Judith David didn't say that under the PNC administration they had a few schools yes - mud floor, mud wall, thatched roofs: that is what they had; but today we have transformed our infrastructure in education, but she didn't mention that. She didn't mention that the Mabaruma Secondary School, which they said they established - The construction of the Mabaruma Secondary School started in 1970. I was living then in the North-West. Mde Speaker, that school building took 23 years to be completed, and when this Minister became Minister of Local Government in 1993 we completed it - 23 years to build one school, yes, but... [*Interruption: 'They don't know.'* "*They know it, and she knows it.*"]

Hospital ... They didn't have any proper Health Centre, but you go in every village now in Region 1, in every village there is a Health Centre and a trained health worker. If I had to talk about the condition of the Mabaruma Hospital then - I used to be living there, at Hossororo, and I know, but why should I go back to history?

Mde Speaker, I heard the other Member ... and he also left, Mervyn, the Honourable Mervyn Williams..., all he could see is scrap iron. Some are like Sharma, and all they can see in Region 1 is scrap iron; but I want to remind this House, that the most amount of scrap iron in Region 1 is

at Matarkai-Matthews Ridge, and the PNC, when the manganese company closed down in 1967 they failed to fix and repair the road, so the people had to resort to the train; and when the locomotives broke down they were land locked because they couldn't use the road and couldn't use the train. Nine persons were put in the gondola from Matthews Ridge to Port Kaituma. I invite Mr... anyone of you to go to Matthews Ridge, go to Matthews Ridge where the gondola is sitting next to the train station at Matthews Ridge. We should have it as a museum piece; because I used to read in my book at school that man used to pull punts during the slavery days; but under the PNC man had to pull train.  
[Applause]

Mde Speaker, it's nice to talk over there, but you must recognise your past, because one of the things, apart from the gondola which should be a museum piece, is that the PNC has brought disgrace to Region 1. They brought a man named Jim Jones and Jonestown; and I want to remind them of that fateful night, that when Jim Jones was poisoning 914 people he was saying ... his chorus was, *if you fail, if you forget yuh past, you would be doomed ...* [[Interruption: 'How you know that?']] That is what he was saying. I knew not everything that was going on, but I used to be living in the area then. I once attempted to go to Joestown to sell some Mirror newspaper, but that place was like a republic. A man named Chuck – a strong American man; when I attempted to go in he pulled a line across with his toe and he said 'if

*you only step over here you will die.'* That is what the PNC did – allowed Jonestown ... Jim Jones and company to make that place into a republic. When the people died and he would ask Mr Burnham what is happening, then he said *'that is not my problem: that is an American problem.'*

Mde Speaker, I wonder if I have to go into ... I don't like to dwell in the past. I don't like to dwell in the past, but if they are going to tell us of all their glories of the past, then we have to tell them of the truth too. That's the point. *[Interruption: 'Tell stories of the past, not glories.']*

Mde Speaker, I want to touch a little on Region 5. I listened attentively to Honourable Member Jennifer Wade of Region 5, and I want to say that, as a young Member of Parliament, she is doing her work, because when I listened to her presentation, and her talking about Ithica and Bath, and you have there Fort Wellington Road, and Mahaicony River, and Abary River, and what's happening, it means that the young MP is doing her work and at least she knows some places, and I want to compliment her because, instead of coming in here and reckoning, she does her work - and what was good about it is that she criticised what was not done properly, on what wasn't done, but she gave Jack his jacket, and that is what is good for Guyana. I want to encourage her and to say don't wait till the next Budget to come here and talk about these things. If they are going wrong, the Ministry of Local Government is here in Georgetown, come in, our

doors are open. If there is a problem we'll invite her and we invite all of you. Don't only come with the problem; don't only come with the problem. Let us discuss how we will solve the problems. That is what we have to...  
*[Interruption: 'But you're not there though.']*

Mde Speaker, Region 5 – Bridges - \$18M for bridges in Region 5 in 2006 ... *[Interruption]* Buildings, education \$26M; completion of Latchmansingh and Zeeland Primary School, Mahaicony Secondary School, Nursery School at Hope Waterloo. Mde Speaker, I can deal - \$37M for drainage and irrigation; Abary River, Mahaicony River, Mahaica River and so forth. So, while we have not been able to solve all the problems in Region 5, like all the other regions, at least this Government has done a lot. It is in the 2006 Budget, and I have also 2007, and I want to admit that there is still much more to be done in every aspect of social life, because we are living in a society where human beings – people, want something more, something better, and something faster; but it calls for money. It called for money, something which we didn't have; but with the resources we have now – and, as I said, not only money, but management, materials and machinery, you have to have all together, and that is what we have been doing over the many years to make Guyana what it is now.

Mde Speaker, my colleague, Minister of Amerindian Affairs, has related to this House all that has been happening in the hinterland over the many mornings, and I don't want to go back to Honourable Desmond Hoyte, I

quoted this last year, so I wouldn't go back, but education today in the hinterland is a success story. More children are passing at the Common Examination every year, and every year we have to continue building bigger schools, extending dorms, and providing more and more food for the children; and today we have, we have hinterland children - not only at President's College. Under the PNC that was only for certain people; but today Amerindian children are at President's College, rubbing shoulders with every other child there. We made that possible, because we were able to offer them ... and the Honourable Minister talked about Amerindian scholarship. PPP - in those days we introduced Amerindian scholarship, and we not only introduced it, but in those days we brought down the level of qualification so that they would have been able to qualify, but when the PNC got in government they changed from Amerindian Scholarship to Hinterland Scholarship because they wanted their supporters who were not Amerindians to get scholarships: That is what had to be happening.

Mde Speaker, when we think about health, that also has improved, and that is why the Amerindian population is growing. Sometimes I ask the question what is the secret? And the Honourable Minister, mentioned about the growth - an increase in Amerindian population, so much so that, not only in the Amerindian communities, but the entire Guyanese population is also growing. Comrade Speaker, I don't talk through my hat like some over there.

Look at Guyana's Population Census, Official Report: population - 749,190. Although people are dying and people are migrating, our population is growing at 3.5%. For a poor country, and a developing country, that is not a bad figure; and two of the main reasons why our population is growing, as the Minister said, is that mortality rate has dropped, and moreover, Guyanese are eating better under the PPP/Civic Government [*Applause*] than what used to happen before. How hypocritical it was when you told the people to eat ... In fact you gave them a slogan 'free milk, free cassava, and free bread; and then, at the same time, you told them to '*eat less, sleep less, and work more hard,*' because they might as well tighten their belts. When there was no food, you told them to tighten their belts. Mde Speaker, Guyanese today are eating better, they are wearing better, and they have disposable ... a little disposable income, but today they can take their children and their families ... look at the seawalls. Look at the seawalls every Sunday night. There are eating houses all over the place, so much so that our young women don't want to cook at home. When they invite the guests at 5 o'clock, the food is delivered at half past four. It costs money, and that is to show that they have, they have disposable incomes, where they can involve themselves with a certain amount of culture and recreation. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, education is a success story in this country, and I want to challenge all of them over here. Was there any C.X.C. passes between 1964 and 1992 under the PNC

Government? [*Interruption: 'You know what CXC is?' "Caribbean Exams, look at it."*]. Our educational standards had dropped so badly that when we compared Guyana with the Caribbean we were next to Haiti, at the bottom, but today ... today, because of the amount of billions we have been spending on education over the past fourteen years, Guyana is on top once more. [*Applause*]

Look, *Chronicle* – 2003, *Guyanese student topped C.X.C:* again in 2007 - for the past 4 to 5 years we have been topping in the Caribbean when, under the PNC's time in office, we were down and out at the bottom. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, this is what the Government has been doing. Our people ... and I want ... Comrade Speaker, I want to say, that with the PPP/Civic in Government, there will be more progress in education and health, [*Applause*] housing and transportation, and the other social services.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Samuel A A Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Harripersaud Nokta:** Mde Speaker, in Health Services ... and we are not saying that we have cured all the ills of the society; but it is a reality that once you are born, you must get sick. What we have been able ... this Government has been able to improve the health services of this country so that today Guyanese have better facilities for health services, and as a result of that, they are living a healthier life than before, although malaria, tuberculosis, and typhoid are still with us. What we want, my friends, we want, Mde Speaker, we want our people to live a healthier life, and once we live a healthier life, then we would be able to live a longer life, and as a result of that, Mde Speaker, Guyanese are living longer now. There is big discussion going on now - that we must increase the age of retirement from 55 to 60. Why? Because we are healthier, and we are living longer, and that is testimony to the progress that is being made in this country.

Mde, I don't want to touch anymore on health, because it is history, and it is there; but what I want to deal with now is communication.

**Communication:** Today we have telephone service in nine of the ten regions, and not very long from now telephones will be established at Mahdia, apart from all the radio systems and radio sets we have all over Guyana; but we have done what the PNC had a dream of doing - in terms of road. Mr. Williams said that he was born at Papaya, and that there was a road from Papaya to Barimita; but he is misunderstanding a road from a



footpath; but today ... today we were able to spend, although limited money, but last year March three Land Rovers drove from Matthews Ridge to Baramita and back. What does it mean? It means that without roads a society or a community with over 1,500 Amerindians was landlocked for years, but today they have access. What we need now is some more money to build more bridges, and to improve it so that the lives of the people at Baramita can be better.

**Region 8:** Mde Speaker, what about Region 8? Five years ago it was a dream to travel from Georgetown to Orinduik, and I want to invite those Members over there, on 5 of March, whom the fifth Safari will start from Georgetown at 1 o'clock. Join us to drive again to Orinduik, join the Safari. It is a road that never existed before and today tourism, agriculture, transportation of goods and services ... The people there are benefiting from the road. Mde Speaker, I want to also say that, last year, a Guyanese woman made history in this country, driving a Land Rover from Georgetown to Orinduik and back. You didn't have a road, so nobody could drive but because of the road ... and she is now known as 'Mountain Dolly' – a Guyanese woman from Georgetown. Mde Speaker, that road today opened avenues for more production, and this is what is happening now. Trucks are going in with gasoline and other things and bringing out produce, so there has been expansion of agriculture, and that is why the Government can tell you that in the Pakaraimas you have seven rice

hullers. For the first time people are growing their own rice in the mountains. If I take you on a trip in the Ireng River ... When I visited Whyaka the last time I was pleasantly surprised to see a paddy field. Mde Speaker, they don't know these places, because under the PNC those places were like lost lands. They never thought about those people; but we did not only open the roads. Under this democratic system of the PPP/Civic there is freedom of travel, because you don't have to get permission anymore from the Amerindian Minister to go, as they used to do with Nokta. When Basil James an Amerindian, attempted to go to Mazaruni and he landed at Kamarang, the police grabbed him in and asked: Where are you going? Yes, he was arrested and taken to the station. They asked: Where are you going? He said: I am going in the Waramadong area. The police asked: Do you have permission? He said: I don't need permission, I am an Amerindian, and the policeman said: "You are a political Amerindian. *[Laughter]* PNC was restricting the people from even travelling in their own place. Mde Speaker, we are not content with only going to Orinduik, but some money is available in this year's Budget, and the road will continue from Cato to Parisparo, and from Mile One to Chinapau. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, a new airstrip will be opened some ... not very long from now, at Iwokrama. What does it mean? Visitors and people coming from overseas don't have to travel unnecessarily. They can fly into Iwokrama.

Another airstrip is being constructed at Chenepau, so that the people from Chinepau... *[Interruption]*

**Hon B H Robeson Benn:** Mde Speaker, on a point of clarification, the aerodrome is already opened at Iwokrama. *[Applause]*

**Mr Harripersaud Nokta:** I thank my colleague for correcting me. Mde Speaker, another airstrip is being built at Chinepau. What does that mean? For centuries the residents of Chinepau - for them to come to Georgetown, they had to paddle a boat 30 miles from Chinepau to Kaieteur, and then join a plane. Today, when that airstrip is finished, an aircraft touching down at Kaieteur can hop over to Chinepau in five minutes and they're at home. That is what we have been doing, because we want to establish a road link so that the people can have more access.

Mde Speaker, there is also every year, or at any time in the year, you can now go on an overland tour from Georgetown to Kaieteur. You can travel to Mahdia and then go to Pamena Landing, then to Waratuk and Amatuk and then walk up to Kaieteur. You can do that now, anytime you want. Those things have been made possible through the PPP/C Government, *[Applause]* and that is what we mean when we talk about progress; so Mde Speaker, in conclusion, I don't want to go into more schools and health centres, because that is already registered; but I want to say, Mde Speaker, that when you go to Region 1, whether it is Arucamai, or Chinepai, or

Amokokopai, or Taibarupai, or any kind a 'pai' [Laughter] you can see that there is development in the interior, because, those areas ... wherever I turn - Oranapai and all around, you have people living there, and they are benefiting from social services; and that is what the PPP/Civic is all about.

Mde Speaker, let me touch a little on local government. [Laughter] I am quoting 8:41; and I quote:

*“Considerable progress has been made towards establishing a new partnership with local government bodies. This partnership will be characterised by greater flexibility and autonomy in the conduct of affairs of these bodies. Over the next five years the Government will spend approximately \$14B on activities to refine and cement this relationship, as well as upgrade and modernise the infrastructure and institutions of these bodies. We will also embrace activities in human resource development, and systems for improving monitoring and evaluation, accountability, transparency, and people’s participation.”*

Mde Speaker, the future holds good for Guyana under the PPP/Civic Government, and with this Budget, presented so ably by my young colleague, I have no doubt - and the

Guyanese people have no doubt, about the future of Guyana. I want to close by quoting page 63, paragraph 6:

*The policies, plans and programmes contained in this Budget represent a responsible and careful approach to advancing Guyana closer to prosperity. The future looks good, but it will be what we make of it. Let us therefore resolve to make that future a bright and prosperous reality, by promoting Guyana's interest in an atmosphere of peace, understanding, and trust, and by working hard, and by working together.*

Mde Speaker, if with that - the meaning and true spirit of this paragraph, we work together, we can all make Guyana a better place for all to live and enjoy. Thank you.  
[Applause]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, this concludes our sitting for today.

Honourable Prime Minister.

**Hon Samuel Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the House be suspended until Thursday 15 February at 14:00H.

**The Speaker:** It is already Thursday the fifteenth, so this House is suspended until 14:00H.

*Adjourned Accordingly at 24:30H*