

# 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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17th Sitting

14:00h

Thursday 15 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

*Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation*

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

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

*Minister of Health*

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

*(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 B H Robeson 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

*Minister in the Ministry of Education*

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

*Minister in the Ministry of Health*

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 - Essequibo 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

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)*

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*

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

### PRAYERS

*The Clerk Reads the Prayer*

### PUBLIC BUSINESS

#### (i) Government Business

Hon Members, we will now resume the debate on the Budget for the year 2007. The first Speaker today is Hon Member, Ms Gail Teixeira.

**Hon Gail Teixeira:** I wish to thank you for the opportunity to speak in the Budget Debate 2007 reflects a combination of a range of issues, based on the vision of a development path for Guyana. It brings together, into the Budget speech, in the volumes and figures, in its ancillary document a public declaration on the status of the economy, and the projections for the next fiscal year. These are subjective to scrutiny, not only at Parliament, but to the wider public interest groups and external agencies. It is, by its very creation, a form of economic and financial governance, revealing a Government's level of accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to the needs of the people. And, what is governance? This is a term that has received such credence in Guyana, and in the international

language of the donor agencies and international financial institutions. The dictionary meaning of *governance* refers to the Government, control or method of governmental management. The UNDP policy document on good governance, and sustainable human development, reflects, more accurately, the modern use of what is a political term which defines it as:

*... the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels." Good governance is, among other things, participatory, transparent and accountable. It is also effective and equitable, and it promotes the rule of Law. Economic governance includes decision-making processes that affect a country's economic activities and its relationships with other economies. It has major implications to equity, poverty and quality of life. Political governance is the process of decision-making to formulate policy. Administrative governance is the system of policy implementation. Governance, therefore, encompasses the State, but transcends the State by including Private Sector and civil society.*

As an emerging democracy-only fourteen years old, Guyana has made quantum leaps in terms of the restoration, development and construction, as well as the consolidation of the democratic norms

and practices in the various levels in the State and the society at large. In fact, Guyana today is almost unrecognizable - both physically and institutionally, in comparison to twenty years ago. Certainly, this Revolutionary process is not over, and as Guyana develops and faces new challenges over the many decades to come, this process will continue by subsequent generations.

For example, the evolutionary process of Britain, since the eleven hundreds, to develop a system of governance led to war, beheadings, court intrigues that brought Britain to this level of what is considered a democratic state. Even now it is being questioned in relation to human rights violations, and in relation to the war on terror.

The USA also took over two hundred years to develop their democratic system, in which, only forty years ago, Afro-Americans and people of color, as well as native peoples, or indigenous peoples, were considered second class citizens.

That is why I said that Guyana has made quantum leaps in the last fourteen years, in relation to the development in democracy. This Budget is, as I said, a reflection of the Government's democratic governance in its fiscal and financial realm. It reveals a real growth of 4.7%, which is a feat in comparison with many other countries in the development world, and in this hemisphere, and this was after the devastating floods of 2005 and, to a lesser extent, those of 2006, which wreaked havoc on 60% of our economy, as well as the exogenous shocks, such as the price of fuel on the world market, and the ongoing struggle to save the sugar industry on the world market.



In referring to our growth rate, I'll point to an IMF document that makes the following comments:

*That in fact Latin American and Caribbean growth is projected to reach around 4.75% in 2006. The growth pace is expected to recede slightly to about 4.275% in 2007.*

It goes on to point out that we have seen falling levels of poverty and unemployment in most of the Latin American countries, and examples of a number of countries were given. It also points out that, for the future ... and I wish to quote from it. The document is called ***IMF see continued robust growth in Latin America and the Caribbean, page 3:***

*Although making societies more equitable is inherently a slow and difficult process, policy levers exist that could be used more, including fiscal reforms, to make the tax system fair and focus public spending on social programmes for the poorest, labour market policies and other reforms that extend public service and economic opportunity to disadvantaged groups.*

It also points out the raised investment of productivity growth to the levels of the most dynamic emerging market economies.

These reforms need to be matched with greater efforts to make the Latin American economies more open and competitive to those stronger institutions, and to raise the level of human capital in the region.

When we look at the Caribbean region, for example, Guyana's growth rate of 4.7% in 2006 is slightly below the entire Caribbean but, for Latin America, it is actually at a higher rating than a number of Latin American countries, so in terms of the performance of the economy, and in terms of Guyana being in line with the socio- and macro-economic outlook for Latin America, Guyana is in good stead. In fact, with the IMF projecting what is going to be the challenges for the Latin American countries, when we look at our Budget 2007, we will see that we have made provisions for more focused public spending on social programmes for the poorest, as well as extension of the Public Services to disenfranchised groups.

The Budget reflects a level of efficient balance of the management of sometimes limited resources, because we are an emerging developing country, within the choices available to the country, and to us; and to the needs of the people in order to improve the quality of life. When we look at the Budget ... and I think this is something on which we don't pay enough attention, to is that Guyana has been able to reduce the level of debt load that they've been carrying. In fact, between 2001 and 2006, we have been able to get write-offs to the total of US\$330,706,173.33; so certainly Guyana's debt write-off in the last five years is an indication, not only of good fiscal and financial management on the part of the Government, but also we have been able to win the confidence of the international agencies

to be able to keep to our benchmarks, and to be able to keep to some of the indicators that we have committed ourselves to.

One reference, I think, that it is important to note is that, when we were looking at the debt service payments for Guyana, in 1992, for every dollar that we gained, in terms of foreign revenue, we were in fact paying back US\$103.00 for debt-servicing. This was reduced in 2001 to 52.09% and, in fact, in 2006, it was reduced to 22.6% of each dollar that we earned. This is an indication that we have made tremendous amounts of sacrifices and management ... and I wish Mr Murray, who had the chance to speak, would sometimes listen to other people. However, I think I have touched a corn on the Hon Member, but 22.6% - reducing it from US\$103.00 that we had to pay back in debt, versus 22.6%, is in fact an indication of good public management by the State. This is something maybe my friend on the other side of the House, who was a Minister in those days, cannot show to us, because they were not able to do it themselves. They had twenty-eight years to do it. I am just merely, for the elucidation of the House, giving an indication of how this Government, in terms of fiscal and financial governance, has been able to manage what was the debt load, which was killing and stymieing the growth of this country. The actual debt service payment on the percentage of the Central Government revenues was reduced from 75.8% in 1992 to 7.2% in 2006. Again, something that we take for granted that, somehow, there is money out there, and we don't worry about the fact that we have accumulated debt over a long period, which we have been able to not only reduce the amount of money we've actually spent on paying back debts, and therefore freed enough money, in terms of revenue collection - both exports and imports, to be able to feed into our social and safety net

programmes, and the general advancement of the society. We need to be able to look at these factors. Again, when we look at the comparative figures for the Current and Capital Budgets, we will then get a perspective of how the economy has grown, and how the capacity for the Government to be able to gather more revenue, as well as provide better facilities for our people have expanded.

In 1992 the Current and Capital Budget was \$31.9 billion; in 2001 it went up to \$64.6 billion; and in 2006 it has now reached \$102.9 billion, which is the Budget that we are now addressing in this House. If we are not able to manage the country's finances properly, then there will not be enough money to bring improvements to our people. Certainly, the Budget gives a record that can be scrutinized by anybody to show that we were able to reduce these levels of debt write-offs, and to improve the capacity of the State to be able to provide better conditions of life for our people.

The Budget therefore, as I said, reflects this balance. When we look at the Budget speech - Sections 3.2.4 on page 11 and 3.2.5 on page 12 refer to the fact that ... and I wish to quote from it, just to repeat it:

*The Government completed the Paris Club debt relief process when it concluded the agreement with Japan which provided for 100% write-off of principal and accrued interest, etc.*

It goes on to talk about the negotiations that are continuing with members of CARICOM Multilateral Clearing Facility for debt relief of USM\$29.2. We also have to look at... it goes on to talk about, in terms of institutional strengthening activities, the Government developed the National Capacity Building Plan in Aid and Debt Management, and the Plan sets out to arrange a procedure to institute recommendations to improve the functioning of aid and debt management in Guyana, because we certainly have to deal with our abortive capacity as a country to treat with the number of the loans and grants that we wish to have, and where we may not always be able to have the capacity to implement, or to implement as efficiently as we would like.

These features, therefore, show that Guyana has gained the international confidence of the donor community, and the international financial institutions, as more recently shown by our access to the Millennium Challenge Account. But, more than that, Guyana has improved and expanded its negotiations and arrangements with bilateral assistance for loans and grants. China, India and Venezuela rank high in that area with their bilateral assistance that we have been able to get.

Yesterday's discussion was about Cuba, but Cuba's investment in the health sector is a major contributing factor towards the expansion and development of the health sector in Guyana.

The Government's macro-economic policy framework creates an enabling and friendlier environment for greater investment and expansion of the productive sectors of the country. Certainly, we've had to make choices of how to use these limited resources. For example, and I want to give some example, because sometimes we take things for granted and don't even recognise

what are the choices we make, and what if they were different. Health care and education are free in this country in the Public Sector. People can chose to go to the Private Sector, but over 70% of the people of this country, and 100% of the children of Guyana, can go to the Public Health system, and they do in fact go there. The fact is that immunisation is free, and I want to compare it with the Unites States, where each vaccine per child under the HMOs, and Private Medi-care Programmes in the United States - each vaccine costs US\$30-50, whereas in Guyana it is totally free. Over 90% of our children attend public educational systems across the country; this is all supported by the State, using revenue collected from imports and exports; as well as income tax and so on.

The fact that the PPP/C administration had a struggle, in the early years, against tremendous international pressure to introduce cost recovery in these critical areas that impact on the quality of life. We succeeded in that struggle and have continued, unequivocally, to keep these essential areas available and accessible to all Guyanese. Certainly, there is more work to be done on making them more efficient, but the fact is that we remain one of the few countries in the hemisphere that still offer free public education and free health services to our people. This is even more important and significant because of the fact that we are a poor developing country, which is yet able to offer, with these resources, Social Assistance Programmes for the elderly, and for the most vulnerable sections of the population. This is a result of the policies of a Government which is people-oriented and people-centered.

An excellent illustration, again, of this approach, is the housing programme, which is unequal led in any part of this hemisphere

for low income families. I challenge anyone in this House to find which other country in this western hemisphere has a low income housing programme that has been able to access homes to the low income families and poor people in any other part of this hemisphere. This has been done with public funds and low interest rates, as well as low costs for the land itself.

Any sincere scrutiny of the Budget would also reveal an equitable, not equal, distribution of these resources across the regional administration system, based on population needs, location, etc. Certainly the focus of governance will move more and more to empowering the local administrative bodies to manage their resources more effectively and efficiently. This is a process of evolution based on the capacity over time. Transparency and accountability are non-exclusive to the realms of Central Government, but also just as importantly at the level of local Government - at the region's NDCs municipalities, and the Amerindian villages. The discussions between two main Parties to conclude agreement on the electoral system, and fiscal transfers to the local Government bodies, would allow for the holding of local Government elections this year. This matter is critical and high on our agenda and we sincerely hope that the two representatives are able to quickly come to an agreement on these issues. The Government has declared its position, very clearly ... and I believe that in the local government election's debate we had here, that was also publicly announced, a fifty-fifty percent in terms of the composition, and the creation of a hybrid P.R./first past-the-past system at the local government organs and we sincerely hope this can be concluded. We hope that the PNC/R, having gone through the negotiations with us, will give unequivocal support to this when it comes into this House.

Two major IDB-funded Projects for the modernisation of the Public Sector, as well as the Fiscal and Financial Management Project, will also include capacity building of the Public Sector in the regions. This will help to produce a more efficient and effective delivery of services and improve transparency and accountability. Funding for the Community Enhancement Services, which you can find in the Capital Budget under the Ministry of Local Government, allows for fiscal infrastructure improvement and capacity-building. Therefore the future, in terms of the Government's agenda, is going to be focusing more and more on Local Government, and strengthening and empowering those bodies to be able to manage in a more efficient manner.

Certainly, we are still bedeviled by unemployment, and the problem of finding gainful employment for our people, particularly our youths. We cannot also fault the Government in establishing a variety of youth training programmes, in terms of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and Ministry of Education, that will help to provide young people with a greater and broader scope of skills that can be used. However, we are long past the days of the State's control of the economy, and we will be bedeviled for quite a time to attract more investors, as well as to encourage the Private Sector in Guyana to be more risk-taking, to be able to expand and go into some of the fascinating economic opportunities that exist in this country for what may be non-traditional areas of development and economic growth.

As Guyanese, I believe that we have to be much more interested in taking risks and less of our accumulating funds, for many of our persons in the business community, unfortunately, the flight



of capital overseas. I believe that the elections of 2006 has showed, as Guyanese - Government and Opposition Parties, that we can have a free-and-fair-election, a peaceful election, and has laid a good and solid foundation to the maturation of democracy in our country.

Therefore I think that, as a Parliament, and all of us being elected representatives of both sides of the House, we should congratulate ourselves for having achieved this in the 2006 national elections because, certainly, the temperature and the mood is different; and there is greater hope for the future.

This Government established a Cabinet outreach system under the former President Cheddi Jagan. In fact, last was Valentine's night, and some of us were sitting here, and remembering that it was on that night – on Valentines night that Cheddi Jagan took ill and had to be rushed the following day to Washington. I heard a comment about Mr Burnham; but I remember Mr Burnham's Cabinet outreach, and of his being on a horse and being called the Kabaka. I don't know if it was the Cabinet outreach, but the Cabinet outreaches that we have are made of the whole Cabinet and not just the Kabaka on a horse, and I remember well, very well - I'm young enough and old enough to remember well – Hope Estate and the distribution of margarine for Public Servants who had to go to work in the fields to be able to get margarine, and shortage - very short supply of foods. I remember Mr Corbin looking very handsome and dashing himself on a horse. I haven't, for a while, seen him on a horse, but I challenge him. I would like us to go to the Rupununi and let us do an outreach there on some horses, because I can do a good canter on a horse; I am not very good at the gallop, so I would like to challenge Mr Corbin to let us have a race in the Rupununi. This Government - the Cabinet

outreaches which we have, we call it now a system of methodology. It is not just a one-off, but it has become an institutionalised form of governance for our Government. It's an effective tool of hearing the people, of testing the effectiveness of the delivery of services. This system allows Cabinet to be in touch with the people, to be visible, accessible, and answerable. There is no other country in the CARICOM ... and may I say, in the hemisphere, that has established such a systematic approach to meeting the people and rectifying problems. This is a major component of democratic governance, and so, the fact that our ministers have public days, when anybody can walk off the streets and see them, and the fact that, in a number of the Regions, the Regional Democratic Councils have been provided now with facilities for all MPs, of either side of the House, to be able to go and have their public day, [I believe that it is in most Regions, if not all Regions], but therefore it is open for any MP to go to the RDCs, and in fact MPs, who are geographic MPs, can even sit in RDC meetings as observers; and I know my friend across the House, Hon Member Mr Elliot, is well aware of the present [sometimes Ms Edwards] at the RDC meetings as the geographic MPs, and I believe Mr Alexander used to be there in the form an Opposition benches ... unfortunately he's no longer there right now.

The visibility of political leaders is important - ministers, RDC chairmen; and I have had the fortune of also being in many outreaches, and of taking regional chairmen who have not been to certain parts of the regions with, on outreaches when I was a minister. I will not call one of the regional chairmen on the other side of the House, because he was a good man. It's just that he wasn't a politician, as he was not used to going out in the mud,

but he has grown over time. That level of co-operation, at the political level is never talked about. It never wins the press, because it's not sexy enough. They like when we cuss each other in the House. They don't like the fact that, at the Regional Democratic Government's level, despite who is the chairman - that ministers, ministries and officials work with those regions to try to manage some of the problems. We know that we have many inadequacies. There is paucity of many skills that we suffer from, therefore these are the challenges as we go forward - not to be made as millstones around our heads, but as challenges we willing to take on as a people, to overcome them and to move this country forward; but there are those who like to have millstones around your necks, pulling you down, and you're always kissing the floor because you can't see above the floor. *[Interruption]*

This methodology of being available and visible we take for granted in this country: that you can meet the President, and the President going all over the place. We take that for granted; but just next door in Trinidad, if you try to get close to the Ministers - the level of security. I was Minister of Home Affairs and had no bodyguard, and I could have been reached by anybody. I could have been reached by people who wanted to kill me too, but it didn't happen. The point is that our President is accessible, as is our Prime Minister [I don't know how our Prime Minister does it, but he's always all over the place - at wakes, weddings, funerals, and all sorts of things] but he amazes me with the level of energy that he has. We take all of this for granted, but this is part of governance. This is part of democracy. This is part of what is called accountability and responsiveness of political leaders. This is what it's all about. So, we can be criticised of not doing it enough, or effectively enough, but the point is that we're doing it

when most countries aren't doing it. My friend across the way, when we were both at the UK CPA Seminar for parliamentarians my friend, the Hon Member on the other side, behaved very, very well. We provided a united Guyanese front. *[Interruption]*

The point is that we take for granted some of these things, and here we were at one of the seminars where the presenters were talking about the problem in the UK, of low voter turnout, that is about ... you could correct my memory, which was about forty something percent, of which youths were less than 30% of those who turned out vote. It is a critical problem for Europe in particular. So the whole issue came up about how to engage the youths, and the whole issue was for ministers to go out and meet the youths. I thought this was highly amusing, because I know that in Guyana the ministers are always going out and meeting people, whether it be farmers, sugar workers, youths, or women, and so on, so sometimes we take for granted this visibility and accessibility, and responsiveness, but in fact it is a treasure. It is a gem of governance.

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

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

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Hon Member be given fifteen minutes to continue?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Gail Teixeira:** Thank you, thank you Prime Minister. When we look at the comparison of the Ethnic Relations Commission's Multi-Stakeholder Forums, and the Cabinet outreaches, where the ERC met about two thousand people in one hundred-odd meetings, and where the Cabinet met thousands of people over a similar six-week period in similar areas in all ten regions, one comes up with some interesting comments of what are the concerns of those people, and obviously the concerns are to do with the improving of the effectiveness of the delivery of services, and also strengthening the Rule of Law. Those were two major concerns, as well as reducing poverty and improving the quality of life. The last issue they were concerned about, out of the different areas that the ERC was checking, was the concern of reducing violence and enhancing political stability. Therefore, I believe that post-2006 elections had set a temperature, like I said, for changes; so it's not the Cabinet alone coming to conclusions. If you were to take a similar outreach as the ERC, you're coming up with similar kinds of issues that are the concerns of different communities. Certainly, for the people, there are always going to be demands and expectations which have to be delivered. Our people, over a long period of time, got used to Government being the Godfather, and rely on the Government to do everything.

As we move on this democratic path, and developing the economy, more and more the issue of citizens' rights and responsibilities and the role of civil society and Private Sector as contributing forces to the development if the country would become even stronger.

Beyond the Budget some of the greatest changes that have been taking place in the area of political governance are in relation to Parliament and the Constitution. When we look at the Budget, at

the provisions that are made for Parliament, I am sure that over time, this Parliament Budget is going to get bigger and bigger as the committee systems and all these things become much more active and we are able to go through all the enormous tasks we set ourselves. We now have one of the most progressive Constitutions in the hemisphere, especially in relation to the reduction of the powers of the executives, and a Parliament that has established a modern committee system, including sectoral committees, which allow for greater oversight of the performance of Government. It is hoped ... and certainly we are going through what is called a *learning curve* in relation to the establishment of a number of these committees. You cannot expect, in a matter of a few years, what has taken other Parliaments (Australia, India, Great Britain) twenty, thirty and forty years to develop into the level of sophistication that they have.

In a number of Caribbean countries there are no sectoral committees at all in existence. In fact, the Executive - the Head of State, that is, does a lot of the appointments, which have now been passed on to the Parliament to do, as well as a lot of the appointments can only come about with the agreement, or meaningful consultation, with the leading Opposition. If one were to ask a number of Heads of States in the Caribbean if they would want to do such a thing, you will hear a resounding *no*; but they will say that behind the doors and not necessarily at a public forum.

Therefore it is hoped, for example, in this Ninth Parliament, that we can complete the work of the establishment of the Women, Children and Indigenous Peoples Commissions. I use this forum to appeal to the Opposition to not repeat the experience in the last Appointive Committee, where the Report for the Women's

Commission didn't receive the two-thirds majority support required in this House. The fact that the Opposition was asked to document, in writing, what were the areas they had problems with in the Report, but was never done, and it left all of us who were involved at that time, confused as to the reasons for preventing the first Commission ... even though maybe flawed - even 5%, 10% flawed, to be established, so the outstanding women of this country who were named in that Commission could have started to function and over the next two years we could have replaced them; so when we strive for perfection at negotiating, and we quibble over one name or another, we end up getting nowhere, and sometimes we have to live with the fact that half a loaf is better than no loaf at all. Obviously, as I said, this whole experience in political governance, in particular to do with Parliament, is very new, and like I said, we are going through a *learning curve*; but we Guyanese, I firmly believe, are on the right track.

Sometimes I think that, as Guyanese, we are our worst enemies, in that we constantly prefer to badger ourselves instead of seeing the progressive steps we have taken, although not as fast as we want, maybe not as courageously as we want, but we have taken progressive steps in this country; therefore what we need to do is to commit ourselves to move further down the road with progress.

We had the experience of going to the House of Commons on this recent seminar and, in looking back, I looked at this House and thought how fortunate we are, in that we each have tables. We have mikes on our tables. In the House of Commons, with over six hundred seats, and in which less than 400 MPs ever turn up at any session, and most of it is less than 400, and they only have

seats for 400, although there are six hundred and forty something MPs in the House of Commons, there are no tables. When you want to speak you have to go to the Speaker's box, which has been in existence for probably three hundred years, and the mikes drop down in front of you and you have to stand up and jostle to get the attention of the Speaker to allow you to speak.

For our poor developing country, the physical facilities that are provided are amazing for us, and therefore these small things that we take for granted should be lauded. The Rule of Law, including the judicial system, will receive approximately US\$45,000,000.00, over the next five years, through the IDB/Government of Guyana Projects, to improve citizen's security, public safety, and confidence in the criminal justice system and I am sure my colleague Minister Rohee would amplify in these areas. I just want it noted, because Rule of Law, and the issue of Law and Order, is integral parts of governance; and the Budget is dealing with governance, in terms of economic and financial management, but also providing an enabling environment for political and social governance to proceed. The example of the involvement of civil society and Private Sector on both steering committees, including those on a number of donors funded programmes, commissions of enquiries have drawn more people into the governance area than ever before, and there is no doubt that this will continue to be expanded.

The fact that the private sector plays an enormous role, and we want them to play a bigger role, but we would also have to be able to balance all the needs; and that is where Government comes in. Government makes choices based on decisions on availability of resources, etc.



In conclusion, whilst we are evolving as an emerging democratic developing country, because one thing we have to recognize - emerging democracy. I did not go back into the twenty-eight years, I say that we are an emerging democracy - fourteen years, and whether you like it, or you don't like it, that's a fact; and that we're a developing country. Someone made up the term that we are a redeveloping developing country, in a sense that we were on a path ... even under colonialism - on a path of some form of development, when we got sidetracked and railroaded; then we were over a period where we had all sorts of confusion with democracy, and those who now talk about alienation and marginalization had alienated has marginalized a large section of this population.

But we have made our choices as to providing a macro-economic framework which can reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for our people, not only in material things, because it isn't only about the material things people want. People also want to be able to live in a society which has an enabling environment for greater participation and accountability. We don't have a strong culture of volunteerism in this country, and in many countries of the world, including - most particularly, developed countries, the contribution of volunteerism for growth rate, and for improvement in the social well-being of people, is approximately 20% to 30% of the growth development project of most countries.

We must not underestimate the area of volunteerism - whether at a village level, in terms of road safety, or in terms of being able to have community policing groups, or women's groups against violence, or getting programmes to help the elderly who may be now alone and not being taken of by their families. We should be

proud of where we have reached, and be inspired to go forward to make Guyana a model of good democratic governance. Let us think differently outside the narrow confines of the box of the past, and work towards the future, where people will feel connected to the process that can change their lives, and can deal with the differences; because there will always be differences and disagreements, but where we can find answers to our differences in a non-violent and peaceful manner. Thank you very much.

*[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mrs Debra Backer.

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Thank you very much. I want to join with the Members of the House who congratulated Dr Singh. In fact, I want to go further and crave his good Office, and ask him, very respectfully, to allow me to subsume the title of his Budget namely, *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, into the title of my presentation, which I have entitled *Securing our Nation - an absolute prerequisite to Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*. I take his silence for consent, , and I now start my two-hour presentation.

, I am confident that I speak for all Members of this House, and indeed, the wider society, when I say ... and I say so most sincerely, that we, as a people, we together as a people, remain largely unsatisfied and frustrated, indeed worried and alarmed that, despite large sums of money being injected into the task of securing our nation, we seem to be making little or not sufficient inroads, into reversing the grim realities that face us on a daily basis - the grim reality being, of course, that we continue, in Guyana, to have an unenviable high crime rate.

My remit includes the Guyana Police Force, the Prison Service, the Fire Services, the Police Complaints Authority, and the Register General's Office. I will touch, very briefly, on the Judiciary so, with your leave, and I think, showing remarkable constraints and discipline, I will not be tempted to respond to anyone, and I will go immediately to the Guyana Police Force.

, Article 211 of our Constitution, on page 117, provides for the critically important position of Commissioner of Police. In fact I am sorry, it's on page 177. This is Article 211, and it speaks about the Commissioner of Police being appointed, then we go to page 227, which is Article 225, and it speaks about how he, or hopefully someday she, can be removed. So security of tenure is a hallmark of any constitutional officer, and particularly, I would respectfully submit, the Office of the Commissioner of Police. Without security of tenure, it is difficult for one to be independent or difficult for one to appear to be independent.

In recent years, I respectfully submit on behalf of my Party, that we, as a nation, have suffered, due to the lack of independence of our Commissioners of Police. Like many Guyanese, my most vivid memories of former Commissioner Laurie Lewis, when he had passed the constitutional age of retirement, thereby losing his tenure; and former Acting Commissioner McDonald who never, ever had security, because he was always acting – my most vivid memories are of these two rather portly gentlemen embracing their respective paymasters, doing a lively foxtrot, which dance ... because it was not well done, often led to citizens being trampled upon. Giving credit where it is due, both the Head of the Presidential Secretariat, Dr Luncheon, and our own present Minister of Home Affairs, seemed to have recognized the

importance of having a substantive Commissioner, rather than an acting one.

In early November of last year, both of them - both Dr Luncheon and Mr Rohee, the Hon Member, told reporters that Greene's appointment was imminent. according to the *Kaieteur News* ... I have gone with the Government's tradition and I am now going to quote from the *Kaieteur* rather than the *Stabroek*. According to the *Kaieteur News* of Friday 03, our dear Minister told reporters that Greene is expected ... and I quote, according to *Kaieteur*, "*to be confirmed to the substantive post in early November, [that is 2006] when President Jagdeo returns from his trip to the United Kingdom.* Then comes the bombshell, and I quote here with no disrespect, *Jagdeo in no hurry to appoint Top Cop.* This is the *Stabroek News* of Friday January 26. This is what he said, speaking at the press conference: "*He had confidence in Greene.*" So here is His Excellency the President saying that he had confidence in Mr Green, noting that the Acting Commissioner was doing a good job. Then, here is the bombshell, in quote: "*But I am in no hurry to appoint him.*" It is a considered view of all the Members of the PNC/R-1G that is highly unacceptable; it is arrogant; it is quite presumptuous, and against all recognised forms of a functioning democracy, for any Head of State, in any Commonwealth country, in any part of the world, to say that they are not in a hurry to appoint a Commissioner. We condemn it, and we condemn it absolutely.

The further question must then be asked: Who is in charge of the Guyana Police Force? We ask this question because of the plethora of security and quasi security advisors that we have. Topping the list, of course, is Mr Bernard Kerik who, according to President Jagdeo, will be contracted to provide security advice

to him, and the Minister of Home Affairs. It would be interesting to find out how much Mr Kerik is being paid, and in what currency. Other quasi security advisors include former Minister Feroze Mohamed, Laurie Lewis, Floyd McDonald and, according to the *Stabroek News* of January 24, Mr Hyde Ally.

Added to that, is the Peruvian national employed as a Technical Advisor to the Minister of Home Affairs, who was appointed for one year on July 24, 2006. In response to a question submitted by me, the Hon Minister was constrained to tell the House, and by extension the nation, that this goodly gentlemen had been appointed for one year from July, but the Police were only told in August that he had been appointed from July - at a monthly ... because there was a letter, Mr Neend Kumar, you clown, at a monthly salary of US\$8,000.00. , I withdraw the word *clown* unequivocally, and I apologise to my learned friend Mr Neil Kumar; US\$8,000.00 per month; in other words G\$1,600,000.00. *[I didn't ask you]* Let me turn to what I call a select basket of three violent crimes - I am not an economist, but economists always speak about baskets. It sounds kind of attractive - so I want to speak about a basket of three *[it sounds sexy, that's all]* murders. In 2005 we had 125 murders; we had a reduction. What has happened this year, 153; in other words, sorry, last year - 2006? So there was an increase of 22%, you may laugh but murder is not a laughing matter. Robbery under arms: 2005:764. Last year - 2006, according to the Police, 925; according to *Kaieteur* 1,119, if we level it off, 1,000, an increase of 21%, lastly, from the person, 109 in 2005, 82 in 2006, a reduction, according to them, of 25%. These figures were taken from a report given to the Police and published in the *Stabroek News* of Thursday, January 04. I am hesitant to rely on the total accuracy

of these figures because, in fact [*and this is the Police report*] reporting that in 2005 there were 142 murders, and in 2006 153, which only give an increase of 7%.

But if we look at the back of the Budget, and I have greater faith in Dr Singh than the Police on this issue, you will find that the murders in 2005 were 125. Even here the figures are not very accurate. What I also found strange was that in the entire Guyana, larceny from the person was only 82.

I myself did ten matters, in excess of ten ... [*Interruption: We're talking about people who were actually charged, we are not talking about ... who were charged; they said 82*] I have done more than ten, and when I consulted Mr Williams he assured me he had done many, many more ... [*this is Mr Basil Williams*] than ten. I didn't get Mr Nandilall. I think he was recovering from the broad-side he got from the Minister of Legal Affairs, but we'll come to him later.

Even reported figures we cannot take as a true indication of what the level of crime is. The Seventh United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, which was 98/2000, said this about crime statistics, and although it is now seven years old, it is still very relevant. "*Crime statistics*" and I quote:

*Crime statistics are often better indicators of the prevalence of law enforcement, and the willingness to report crime, than the actual prevalence of crime, which is usually much higher.*

The survey went on to say:

*As a result ...*

and I quote again:

*... the most reliable figures relate to murder, as reported figures for this crime are at the highest.*

We understand that somebody is dead, you will report it because you can't hide it, but, many people whose chains may have been snatched in the night, they are so glad they're alive. They're seeing the back of a man, on a black road, in dark clothes, and a black coat, riding away from them; they are happy they're alive, so they're not going to go to the Police to report it.

So when we speak about crimes reported and crime rates, it is really ... *[Interruption: 'I would want to submit, that would scare people, and people could identify with it']* to let us understand that our crime rate is very, very high.

Fatal accidents, I would also submit, would be highly accurate - the number of fatal accidents. We have had some successes in 2006 - and we must commend the Police. The reality is that a lot

of murders remain unsolved, and this trend continues through all serious crimes: Ronald Waddell in January 2006; the eight persons killed in Agricola in February 2006; Sheik Mohamed in April 2006; Maximillan Perreira and Marlys Archer later in the year - not to mention the hundreds of unsolved murders ... *[Interruption: 'I don't want to go back']* but from 2000-2005

Indeed, even when charges are brought on, we would notice - those of us who practice Law, that many times the evidence is quite tenuous. In fact, several months after the brutal killing of Minister Sawh and others, Dr Luncheon, in answering a question about the state of the murder investigation, said, "They might have to depend on some person or persons to confessing."

Dr Luncheon said that, "*We may have to depend on it.*"

And, lo and behold, not too long after, persons were apprehended and they confessed. I am not saying that they are not guilty; I am just saying that many times our evidence is tenuous.

Mde Speaker, let me go to guns and, if I may, with the leave ... *[I don't know who has the copyright]* borrow the rhythm from the Nursery Rhyme *Hot Cross Buns*, and it would go like this - *guns guns guns; guns guns guns; one a-penny two a-penny, guns guns guns*. And that is not a song, it is a rhyme. And, indeed, when you look at it, we have a problem with guns - the Minister and the Commissioner of Police said so. We've all said so, that we have a gun problem, and I do not know if I need any more evidence than this. This is just one - one of the higher profiled ones: *Assault rifles, grenades, cocaine ... over one thousand rounds of ammo seized, cambio dealer wife among six held*, and so on and so on. So what is the position with our guns? As I said, one thousand,



one hundred and nineteen armed robberies ... [*Interruption: 'And this is armed robberies with armed being a gun'*] so the question is what do we do?

The Honourable Minister ... and I should be complimenting him from time to time, and I know that this will take him aback somewhat, speaks of tougher laws to deal with the menace of guns - illegal guns, and the Police said that they were going after the guns. We agreed with the Minister, but the Minister said that we would do this Legislation, but until now we're waiting. Minister Rohee, I urge you, with the help of the learned Attorney General, to hasten the necessary Legislation through Parliament. We know how easily and how quickly the Government can bring Legislation when they want to bring it. Remember how quickly you brought the Casino Bill? Remember how quickly you ran with the last four Acts that had to be passed to make CWC compliance on January 31? The Opposition said "*come and we will accommodate you.*" If you call for Parliament on a Sunday to do with gun laws and amending them, we will come on a Sunday.

I am committing the Party on this issue. Yes, I am committing. I am a Vice Chairman of the Party. I am committing the Party. He is one too, yes. Mr Rohee, I am painfully aware of the problems with the Ministry of Legal Affairs, and I have, at no cost, Minister, already done an amendment; and I am prepared to hand it over to you later, as a belated Valentine gift. [*Applause*] However, refusing bail is not the only intervention that can be made. Intelligence gathering is critical, for as we know, we continue to catch shrimp as the sharks swim away, and nowhere was it more obvious than in the case with the assault rifle ... [*Interruption: 'Sorry, it's not my telephone actually, it's a*

*homing device*'] but, on a serious note, , we continue to catch the shrimp while the sharks swim away. Which one of us believes that the young, twenty-four old Rhonda Gomes was the mastermind of the acquisition of these things? Which one of us believes that? It is not possible. When you look at her she looks more innocent than Minister Rodrigues. This is what she had. Gomes was also charged for unlawful possession of 1,192 rounds of AK-47, 77 rounds of .38 special ammunitions, 245 rounds of 9mm hand grenades, and 14 rounds of .30 and 35 rounds, and it goes on and on. Of course she had in her possession a AK-47 rifle, a Chinese automatic assault rifle, 3 fragmentation grenades, and a concussion grenade. Who would've believed that Rhonda Gomes was the shark? She was the shrimp, and she was caught. I am not saying she shouldn't feel the full brunt of the law, but catching the shrimp, and leaving the sharks out, will not stop the problem, and this is why, in addition, Minister Rohee [*Applause*] to the Legislation, which we support, we have to up our intelligence. We have to up it.

Now, we go to drugs, and thanks, Mde Speaker, thanks to Suriname and United States of America, the upright, astute businessman, Mr Roger Khan, is now in the United States of America as a guest of a maximum security prison - that upright, astute businessman Mr Roger Khan, of whom the Guyana Police and Government knew nothing about. We of the PNC/R-1G await, with great interest, while a few of our friends of our friends on the other side await, with great anxiety, Mr Khan's possible singing. It is our hope that when he does sing - without the *h*, Mr Finance Minister, this is sing without the *h*, when he does sing the Government will be more responsive to his singing than they were to Mr Thomas Carroll's singing a few years ago.

, drugs continue to be found in all sorts of commodities, even inside of people. We have young people from our tertiary institutions swallowing drugs to export it. They can't be doing it because they want to do it. That is a sign of desperation. Nobody is blaming anybody, but we are saying that, together, we have to stop that. We have to give our young people hope that they don't have to ingest pellets of cocaine to make a living in this country, and that is all of our responsibility.

According to the *Kaieteur News* of January 06, 2007, they dumped G\$335,000,000.00 worth of cocaine, which represents seizures between 2004/2005. When we realized how much would have escaped our law enforcers we understand that trafficking in drugs, and its attendant ills, continue to remain a burning issue.

Mde Speaker, I would be failing in my duty as a Member of this Hon House, and indeed, in my duty as a woman, if I did not turn, briefly, to sexual offences and violence against women. I hope Dr Ramsammy does see my speaking on behalf of women as a conflict of interest as he did yesterday with Dr Norton. It is an indictment on all of us - each and every one of us in this House, and in the wider society, that violence against women and children, in all its forms, is now considered internationally not only as a crime, but also as a public health issue. It is both a crime and it is a public health issue.

Child molestation of children under three years, of women over seventy years, people - women and children of both genders - being brutalized; *ex-cop allegedly raped three-year old* (this is January 05) and I don't know if it's true or not, but this makes me almost ashamed to be a human being - not Guyanese, PNC, nor

PPP, but as a human being. This makes me ashamed, and we have to do something about that. [Applause] I find it very distressing that, while the Police could tell us about how many people died, larceny from the person, robbery under arms, they cannot print as yet they may have it - but which makes it worse, because if they don't have it, then it means they're not interested enough to tell us, as we stand here on February 15, how many incidences of domestic violence were reported to the Police Stations throughout the country, and also how many ended, or there was mitigation about it.

The Guyana Human Rights Association must be complimented for their sterling work entitled *Justice for rape victims Reform of Laws and Procedures in Guyana, June 2006 - G\$500.00*, and I recommend it as almost compulsory reading.

Mde Speaker, corruption; plenty, plenty, plenty corruption, in other words, PPP/C, it just happened to be that, it wasn't deliberate. [Laughter] Transparency International ... They took a little time to catch on to that. In their 2006 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index gave Guyana a score of 2.5 out of 10. That is, there is a perception in Guyana of rampant corruption, and this is not corruption with a k. This is corruption with a c - 121 out of 163, and when you recognise that we, and seven others, share the 121<sup>st</sup> position, it doesn't mean that there are forty-something countries below us, because some were tied for 122 they are about seven, and all of that. My colleagues on the other side ... and I am surprised that they haven't yet said it: *bring the evidence, bring the evidence* - some voices shrill, some base-toned, but they all say that: *bring the evidence*. My dear colleagues, perception is more often more concrete than reality and, more importantly, it is often more damaging. One example

being ... and there're many, that a big company looking for business goes to Transparency International when they look at Guyana they say: "*uh-uh – next,*" and Guyana is in the past. Rather than getting hysterical, what my colleagues should do would be to find out from countries like Barbados - not far away: 24 of 163. I'm not going to the developed countries, as they say; little Dominica 53 of 163. You may want to say that everybody knows everybody in Dominica and that's why nobody could thief, but find out why they are high on the index. Jamaica - We've heard so much about Jamaica, and Jamaica is 61 of 163. Yes, the lower you are the higher number you're at, yes. No, no, no, it's corruption. In addition to that, if you want to go to the rainbow, go to Finland, Iceland, and New Zealand, all of who scored 9.6 out of 10. Ask them; find out from them "what is it you have done that has led your citizens to believe that corruption is low?" We would be on our way.

Mde Speaker I at the start, indicated I wouldn't go back, but you know, a woman is allowed to change her mind. I want to go back, marginally, on ... *[Interruption]*

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

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

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Hon Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Thank you very much, Mde Speaker. I just want to go back once. It was an interesting article I saw on Monday, February 20, last year, almost a year ago, on *White Collar Crime*. Many times, when we speak about crime, we speak about the man, or the woman, being held up, robbed, raped, murdered - and that is totally unacceptable; we all understand that, but white collar crime also has a very negative and tragic impact on economies. These are seven little issues ... and what struck me is that I saw two names - neither of who are here, perhaps deliberately: Political Advisor to the President, Mr Kellawan Lall, and also my favourite: Information Liaison to the President, Mr Robert Persaud. They were asked about some corruption ... and there were seven instances. The first of these cases was the infamous milk scam, where Dr Hughley Hanoman was closely then aligned to the PPP/C; if you remember that. I don't want to go into details; but I just want to remind people about these things. The second case was that of the notorious stone scam, remember that? And to all these things ... and this is why the Editorial headed *unconvincing*, the Liaison Officer, as he was then - oh! Here he comes - Mr Liaison Officer, former Liaison Officer [*Applause*] and we applaud him as he enters, but the headline *unconvincing* came about because *Stabroek News* was not convinced about the answers given by the Liaison Officer, as he then was. So the milk scam first, and the second one was the notorious stone scam. The third issue was the \$550,000,000.00 wildlife fraud, and we remember these things. The fourth issue was the Old Age Pension fraud several years ago, when millions were stolen via collusion between staffs of the Human Services Ministry and the Post Office; that was the fourth issue. The fifth one was the remigration scam, so we must remember them, everyone. The sixth one ... I almost don't want

to mention it, but I am duty bound - the sixth case involved Presidential Advisor Odinga Lumumba, which is the dolphin scam. In fact, I used to have dolphin here, and it has gone. Further, I say not, but what is good is what it says here, *“the Head of the Wildlife Unit was dismissed.”*

He was dismissed, so the Liaison Officer did something there, and Mr Lumumba accepted a conflict of interest in his dealings with the wildlife and made a public apology. The seventh case related to drug barons being involved in forestry commissions. So, Mde Speaker, as I said, I didn't want to go back, but then this was a bit juicy, and I would put it here very carefully, and anybody who wants it can come.

The point about it is that white collar crime is very, very serious and, as I said, the negative impact on our economy is unimaginable; and, as Mr Murray said in his presentation which, unfortunately, I was not physically present for, he spoke about the absence of resources to fight corruption and that is true; we are urging the Government to do all that they can, or that they have a duty to do, to make sure that next year, and the next year, we move from 121 on the Corruption Index, and we get into the double figures rather than the triple digits. That is my challenge to them.

Mde Speaker, on road traffic - There has been a slight reduction of carriage on the roads. In 2005 we had 182, and last year we had 163, but the causes of accidents remain, in essence, the same and, to date, this unresponsive Government has done little to curb it. When we recommended it during the Budget debate last year, that music be banned completely in vehicles used for public transport, the then Minister of Home Affairs agreed with us, and

indeed the press reported it as if it was the Government's recommendation. We had no problem with that, but you know what? Even that they haven't done, and that just needs an amendment to a regulation, which can be done very, very easily.

Mde Speaker, just a few words about the Guyana Prison Service. We all know about the jail break of January 12, and that everybody have since been recaptured and that as almost normal, enquiry was held, report was given over, hand shake were exchanged, and then, if it follows the normal procedure ... we're not saying it will, but if it does, very little will happen until there is another jailbreak, or another attempt. I don't want to bore this House about the primitive conditions, about the overcrowding, lack of water and diet. Indeed, our esteemed Minister of Home Affairs saw the importance of food, and I'm sure that, after I tell you this true fairy tale ... *[it's true, but it sounds like a fairy tale]* you will agree with me that Mr Sherlock Holmes has nothing on our Inspector Rohee, and I call this the *callaloo connection*. I said *no, this is not true*. In fact I thought that was why they stopped advertising in the *Stabroek News* but this is what it says - The Callaloo Connection: The *Stabroek News* Editorial of January 31 of this year, so I'm not going back:

*Minister of Home Affairs, Clement Rohee", and I'm quoting, "recently told this newspaper that he had identified a connection between the escape of inmates from the Mazaruni Prison, and a similar escape from the Lusignan Prison in 1999." He goes on say: "In both cases prisoners protested about the quality of their food, in particular, a diet*



*of callaloo.” And I am now Mde Speaker, with your leave, going to quote from Inspector Rohee: “So there seems to be a big issue with this callaloo in prisons and we have to get to the bottom of it. Could someone relieve me of this thing?*

But, on a serious note *[it is difficult to be serious on this issue]* there is this connection, but I want to tell Minister Rohee that there are other connections, and the connections, apart from the callaloo connection ... We can't discard that, because this is a man of some repute; but overcrowding, long delays in trials, frustration, hopelessness, don't care whether I live or die because I'd die in prison anyhow - a lot of those also contribute, along with the callaloo, to people wanting to get out. *[Laughter]*

Mde Speaker, I do not intend to cover the Guyana Fire Service, the Police Complaints Authority, or the General Registrar's Office, save and except to say that we are all acutely aware of the need for all of these agencies to improve, and improve quickly. During the 2006 debate we offered – we, from the PNC/R-1G, offered at least twenty-six concrete and positive recommendations to the Government in the area of crime and security - twenty-six. I can stand here now and say, with all knowledge, that none, zilch, zero, nada, of these twenty-six recommendations was taken on board. As you can see, Madam, I am multi-lingual, and this is despite the fact that several persons of the PPP/C, including the then Minister Gail Teixeira, complimented the PNC/R-1G, and even Minister Rohee was constrained to compliment ... When I looked back at the Hansard I couldn't believe it. He complimented us on some of our positive

recommendations. We, however, are not surprised by the non-responsiveness of the PPP/Civic. I am very happy that my friend, Madam Teixeira, with who I shared several happy days in London, we spoke about responsiveness, and this is what I have written; I didn't write after she spoke, and I quote ... but I can't quote myself, and let me just go on:

*However, as the Honourable Teixeira can tell this House, at a conference we recently attended entitled Restoring Trust in the Political Process; we were all reminded that responsiveness is one of the hallmarks of a modern democracy.*

We were reminded ... and no-one can say that I'm lying, because she said it before me. So we will not be deterred by the arrogance and the unresponsiveness of this Government. Here I am - a year later, on behalf of the PNC/R-1G, bringing more positive recommendations to the Government to add to the twenty-six from 2006.

Before I go to the recommendations, let me quickly say that Mr Rohee will no doubt regale us with what we can expect when he gets up. He would tell us about the fifty traffic lights, and we are happy about that, the roads have been dug up, so we understand they are on the way, and we are happy about that. We hope, Minister Rohee, that maintenance will be timely. He will tell us about the US\$22,000,000.00 Citizen Security Loan inked ... and there is a very nice picture of Dr Singh looking quite dapper,

Minister Rohee looking pensive, about the US\$22,000,000.00 Citizen Security Programme being inked. We know that they are going to introduce the SWAT Team, Lab for DNA testing, bullet catcher ... *[Interruption: 'I myself was a bit confused, because I thought it was a person, but it's not']* a bullet catcher; as I indeed thought a cobra helicopter was a snake, but they are helicopters ... *[it just shows you never know everything]* So, he will tell us about these things. He will tell us about foreign aid and the fight against drugs, the judiciary, the money for the reform, and all of that; and we welcome these things. We congratulate you, Mr Rohee, and your ministers, and your Government, for inking these things, but sometimes we get the feeling ... and notice that this is not a 'however,' this is a 'sometimes.' That sometimes we get the feeling that, as a nation, we're suffering too much from FDS - meaning FOREIGN DEPENDENCY SYNDROME. We seem to only wake up and get excited when a consultant comes, or a loan is given - we get some money, look an expert coming, equipment get donated - and these are good; but what perhaps is more invaluable is that there is so much more that we can do for ourselves, in addition to the help. *[Applause]*

Again, I wondered if Ms Teixeira peeped at my presentation, but Ms Teixeira, if nothing else is an Honourable woman, and she wouldn't do that, because I had what she also said. Ms Teixeira said today - just before me, that we have no faith or little faith in ourselves; and, sometimes we spoke about us with our heads down ... I can't remember what exactly she said, but the point is that we need to have more faith ... *[Interruption: 'I know you'll send here out to again with me; I've converted her; she'll soon be on this side']* so the reality is ... *[Interruption: 'Dr Fox don't look left out, you can come too']* there is so much more we can do for

ourselves - let us get the aid, let us get the this; but for God's sake, do not let us just sit and wait with hands outstretched and take whatever we get. Let us help ourselves.

For ease of reference I've divided my solutions into three: 26 were rejected, but hopefully 3 will fool them a bit and they will sneak in; but I have divided them:

- (i) Solutions internal to the Discipline Services;
- (ii) Solutions which fall under the purview of the Ministry of Legal Affairs; and
- (iii) National Solutions.

Very quickly:

**(i) Solutions internal to the Disciplined Services:**

We need to increase the basic salary, Dr Singh. People cannot live on less than \$30,000.00 a month. It is mathematically impossible. Dr Singh will ask me ... and he wouldn't say "past." He will ask me how we can afford this, and I will ask him how we can not afford this; because if we don't pay our police men and women properly, then we will continue to get the kind of service. Which one of us will go to work in an animated way, work diligently, everything is go, catch criminals, put our lives at risk for G\$30,000.00 a month? Raise your hands if you would do

it. No hands rose! On for an early retirement after perhaps fifteen years, with a reduced pension! Reintroduce the cadet corps to facilitate entrance at the officer level, thereby making our Discipline Forces more attractive to our brightest and best Guyanese: So, rather than ingesting cocaine, some of them from the University of Guyana may be enticed and encouraged to go into the Disciplined Services.

**(ii) Solutions under the purview of the Ministry of Legal Affairs:**

Basically, in essence, bring to this House, all promised legislations and amendments that over the years we have been ... you know they get up glibly and say we'll do this and do that, and they don't - amendment to the Traffic Act, amendment to the Gun Laws, New Sexual Offences Act, to name but a few.

**(iii) National Solutions:**

Mde Speaker, my colleague, Mr Dave Danny ... and I am now speaking about national solutions, with some detail, went through the number of businesses that were robbed of millions of dollars: add these millions to the millions stolen from houses, and we get a very frightening picture: millions upon millions upon millions! We, in Guyana, continue to defy twenty-first century monetary

practices. Why have we stubbornly remained a highly cash-oriented society? Toolsie Persaud ... [*Interruption: 'sorry, I can't say that, because I'm on my feet, and even Madam Teixeira is embarrassed'*] ... Why are we such a heavily cash-oriented society? When you open the papers, you read Toolsie Persaud's safe torched; millions gone for the second time; somebody going to collect a payroll ... They come with a money-bag and then they rob. You look in the papers and see somebody robbed of five millions dollars. Why do we want to keep five million dollars in our homes? I want to suggest, on behalf of my Party, that the Private Sector Commission immediately embark on an aggressive public awareness campaign, in collaboration with our commercial banks, to encourage Guyanese to move more and more towards plastic, and away from cash. This means that, even when they blow torch Toolsie Persaud's safe, they will not get another twenty million there; but they will get very little, so they won't worry to go back again.

Mde Speaker, on a more philosophical level - not the philosophical level that we were regaled with by Mr Lumumba last night, but truly on a philosophical nature, we need to go beyond where are we now. In the aftermath of February 26, 2006 Agricola massacre, His Excellency President Jagdeo said, and I quote and I agree entirely with this quotation: "*Something is wrong with the people we are bringing up in the country. We have failed, and that includes the Government.*" And I have added that it not includes the Government, but it includes all of us. Inspector... sorry Madam, I almost said Inspector Rohee, but Minister Rohee also recognised this. During the casino debate he said that we did not have a national morality - the difference being that he didn't seem to see a problem with it, but I want to

respectfully submit that is one of the most basic problems that we face as a nation. As a medium and long term solution, we must examine truthfully, and fearlessly, the root causes of our high crime. It is a fallacy, an absurdity, and a myopic view for anyone in Guyana to see the present onslaught of violent crime as not being inter-locked with other facets of society.

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

**Hon Robert Corbin:** I beg to move that the Hon Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude her presentation.

**The Speaker:** Motion moved for the Hon Member is given fifteen minutes to conclude?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Mde Speaker, our moral decline is endemic, and it is the attack on this moral decline that would be our first defense against the high crime level that we have in this country. The PNC/R-1G therefore suggests:

- (i) The introduction, or re-introduction, of moral education in schools.
- (ii) Teaching of peaceful resolution methods.
- (iii) Mandatory counseling of violent offenders, and indeed victims ... and I know that Minister Manickhand would agree with me on that.

(iv) An aggressive public campaign, akin to the HIV/AIDS campaign, on what being a responsible citizen means; and the role that we all have a duty - an obligation, to play as good citizens.

We need to launch a good-citizen campaign - perhaps not with all the glitter of Digicel yesterday, but we need to do that, because we need to bring back morality into this country. We need to adopt the PNC/R Youth Empowerment Scheme that was in our manifesto just before elections of August last year - our Y.E.S. Programme. We need to do that. We need to re-introduce the Guyana National Service on a completely voluntary basis, getting our young people off the streets and into something meaningful. *[Applause]* That is what we have to do, at the medium and long-term, to complement the things that we can do with aid from overseas and home-grown things that we can do within the national parameters.

Mde Speaker, I want to turn, very briefly, to the judiciary. We all know that the judiciary is slated for reform as part of the all-encompassing approach to fighting crime. We heard from the Hon Minister of Legal Affairs about the justice sector reform strategy, and while we agree in the main with you, Sir, that much of the improvements need foreign funding, there are some things that we can do, and do now. Of course my colleague, Mr Nandalall, painted a perfect picture of the judiciary, and I was going to take him on, but alas, there is no need as the Hon Minister unwittingly, but effectively, brushed his entire contribution aside. *[Applause]*



The few things that we can do, and do now ... and this is just some, we can appoint a Solicitor General. The Hon Minister said that they advertised, but I am still not satisfied that we're doing all that we can do. This vacancy has existed since 1994 (13 years); appoint a Deputy Solicitor General, because that has been vacant since 1998. We call, unequivocally, on His Excellency President Jagdeo to pay heed to Article 127 of our Constitution, and convene an urgent meeting, or meetings if necessary, with the Leader of the Opposition, so that we can, once again, have a Chancellor and a Chief Justice being two people, rather than one person. *[Applause]* We call for the immediate abolition of preliminary enquiries ... *[Interruption: 'we don't have to wait for justice improvement']* and replace it with paper committals.

On the question of inquest, it is a disgrace. It is a disgrace. Monday January 30, 2006, Chief Justice ... *[Interruption: 'but I'm not sure if he was Chief Justice or Chancellor then, but I think he might be both, but he's speaking as the Chief Justice']* courts to begin hearing backlog of inquests shortly. That was January 30, 2006, and in this article, it speaks about inquests going back since 1985, and this is 2007 - twenty-two years. Remember Donna Mc Clennon, who was shot in an empty plot just next door to PPP Headquarters? And then there are people like Shaka Blair, and many other cases. This doesn't have to wait for justice improvement. We suggest that two magistrates ... we have many, many lawyers, everybody knows that - can be appointed, and two more experienced ones can be taken out of the system for a while to start to deal with the massive backlog of inquests. People deserve to know under what circumstances their beloved died, and we recommend that, and recommend that immediately.

Mde Speaker, in conclusion ... and I will only have one conclusion, like education and health, we cannot even pretend to play politics with crime and security. Crime and security, or the lack of it, is everyone's concern, as we were so shockingly reminded of, when a Minister of the Government was killed - brutally executed, while serving this House. None of us are immune, and my call, in closing, is to say to the People's Progressive Party/Civic, to the Government, to Inspector Rohee, that we stand ready to work with you so that Guyana could be a safer place for us and our children. May God bless us all! Thank You! *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, Dr Jennifer Westford.

**Hon Dr Jennifer Westford:** Thank you very much, . I rise to join my colleagues in supporting this 2007 Budget. Before I continue, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Honourable Minister of Finance and his officials for working hard, and conscientiously, in the recent several weeks of the Budget preparation exercise. I must commend also, that what we have before us, in terms of policies, plans and strategies, have been well thought out, and truly reflects on the Strategic Development Plan for 2007-2011, that is being designed to promote common and shared vision for Guyana's future in close partnership with the Private Sector, and civil society. The theme "*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*" is opportune, especially at this juncture of our development.

Since the announcement of the 2007 Budget, Mde Speaker, we have heard much, both from within this House, and from civil society, on our Government's policies, plans and programmes for the year 2007. Needless to say, open dialogue and debate is vital

for assessing public opinion, and the perceptions of our intentions. To facilitate the developmental thrust of the country, the Government has embarked on a Modernisation Reform Project of the Public Sector. This project comprises three components:

(i) Strengthening of the Public Service Ministry. This component also has several sub-components, which will be looking at:

- (a) Revising of the current Public Service rules
- (b) Capacity building
- (c) Information technology connectivity
- (d) Training of public servants at all levels
- (e) An appraisal system for Permanent Secretaries.

(ii) The semi-autonomous bodies and statutory bodies' modernisation

(iii) The reform co-ordination of the State

I'll specifically be dealing with component (i). Mde Speaker and Members of the House, the standards imposed by our macro-economic strategies require a highly skilled and productive labor force. We need to create a Public Service with the competencies, innovativeness, flexibility, performance orientation, and the motivation to ensure continuous re-generation of the Public Sector. Unfortunately, these levels of skill and productivity do not occur across-the-board in the Public Service. This means that our biggest investment in the medium to long-term will have to focus on training and human resource development. Although standards of service can be dramatically improved, access to services cannot be rapidly expanded overnight. Ideally, improved service delivery would have been attended to, once the process of transforming the means of improved delivery, the Public Service was complete. However, we do not have the luxury of time; hence we have embarked on the transformation of both the Public Sector, and the improved service delivery, simultaneously.

Because of our developmental thrust, Mde Speaker, we must create a Public Service with the competencies and flexibilities, and the motivation to ensure continuous regeneration of the Public Sector. Our goal is to restore the Public Service to a competitive position, and one which would be looked at as a preferred choice of employment from well-qualified candidates. We would continue to identify the competencies required and equipped to service for the new challenges ahead. We have currently constituted a professional cadet scheme, whose recruitment, terms of appointment, training and development, accountability, performance review and reward, will be specially addressed.

Mde Speaker, the Hon Member Mr Basil Williams, in his address ... [*Interruption: 'I was not here but Information Technology is great'*] specifically mentioned about employment of workers on a contractual basis, and he questioned whether the Government had any employment policy, especially of young professionals. This, I must say, is one of our methods. Our Professional Cadet Scheme was originated to ensure that we can meaningfully employ our young professionals. The system, as it exists today, and the reform process, is going to see a change with this system; sees a professional coming out of the university with a degree in engineering, or veterinary medicine doctor, being employed in the Public Service at the level of the band 9, and unfortunately, which carries a salary of \$65,000.00. I don't think any person would want to see a professional being employed at such a level in the Public Service. I am speaking of persons with degrees that study for six, seven and eight years. Thereby, this Cadet Scheme was designed whereby we can bring these professionals into the Public Service on a contractual basis; and also for, once again let me repeat, that employing persons in the Public Service on a contractual basis doesn't mean that they get super salaries. I did explain this last year, and I am going to do so once again, especially for the Hon Member Mr Williams. I would advise you; maybe if you speak with the members of the Public Service Commission, or the Head of the Secretary of the Public Service Commission, you will probably get some better advice on this matter. Persons on contract don't necessarily fall outside of the establishment of the Public Service Commission. Any person within the Public Service can opt to be employed on a contractual basis, which means that they will not be entitled for gratuity, and that's a choice they have. So when the Hon Members are going to say that there is no security of tenure, persons are opting for

that. They see themselves, probably, as not being around in the Public Service: one, to enjoy gratuity; or two, maybe they feel that a dollar today has more value than the dollar tomorrow, so they're opting for their contract gratuity in advance. *[Rambling]* May I also advise the Hon Member that the contract employees are also gratified by the Public Service Commission, and they occupy positions that are there on the establishment?

Mde Speaker, this we are also, in order to improve the services within the Public Service and the services to the public at large, we're currently re-writing job descriptions, again, to facilitate those workers who are coming in, especially our young professionals. Also, we are reclassifying the jobs, and re-training our staff, at all levels, to improve our customer staff service. We feel that our service delivery must be geared to meet the needs of our customers. As it is well-known, the Public Service Ministry has a very vital role in training of our young persons within and without the Public Service.

To date, we have our young qualified members of this society, in more than fifteen countries throughout the world, being trained in several areas. We have persons being trained in the medical field, agricultural, engineering, agronomy, and so forth. Also, Mde Speaker, we also have lots of public servants within the Public Service. Our main aim is to improve the quality of our public servants, and unlike the Hon Member Mr Williams ... I don't share his view when he said that we're wasting valuable funds training public servants; training ... *[Interruption: 'I wasn't quoting you Sir, I was interpreting, I can quote you if you wish']* We feel that training is vital, and that it will equip our public servants to give us that high level of service that we all so desire, and that this country needs, if we are to move forward in this

globalised and competitive world in which we are living. We have also implemented, at the highest level, training of our Permanent Secretaries, because we feel that that's the level at which all accountability begins. These Permanent Secretaries, for the first time, Mde Speaker, will be subjected to performance appraisals - and not only the performance of themselves, it will be the performance of their sector, per se, and to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and know-how. Next Tuesday, that training will be starting, since we currently have employed four consultants, who will be conducting that service, across the Public Service for Permanent Secretaries. This training is also going to be done for all other levels of the Public Service. We have currently completed the training of all of our Human Resource Managers, and all of our secretaries, and this is going to be going down to as low as our labourers, who are the office assistants, and our cleaners, because we see this as training where everyone should be co-coordinating, in one effort, in ensuring that the Public Service becomes the best in this hemisphere.

Mde Speaker and Members of this House, during the diagnostic phase on the transformation of the Public Service, a number of problematic practices have been identified, which can be related directly, or indirectly, to the employment policy framework of the Public Service. The Public Service rules of 1987, which is currently being used, contain highly detailed rules and procedures. These rules and procedures encompass the employment of public servants, the management of their careers incidents and performance, and the termination of their services. Not only are many of these rules and procedures outdated, but they are also over-prescriptive, and they do not focus effectively

on the attainment of key human resource objectives, such as the establishment of employment equity. It was therefore vital for a review of the current Public Service rules. This procedure has commenced with the following consultants at the helm. We have one international legal expert in civil services by the name of Dr Winston Mc Callow, a local Public Service Commission consultant, Mr Marvin St Hill, a local firm specializing in administrative law, which is the firm of Fraser & Housty, and the local union relations consultant on that project, from the Guyana Public Service Union, in the form of Mr Leslie Melville. It is expected that, upon completion of the consultancies in the Public Service and Public Service Commission rules, these will be revised, with stakeholder consensus on the various revisions, as well as Cabinet and Parliamentary approvals. Our aim is to ensure that the Public Service have the modern technology available to make well-informed and timely decisions. We will use information technology to provide the public with greater access to Government information and, progressively, more direct service delivery, which is accurate, timely, and accessible, to improve the quality of decision-making, and apply information communication, and other modern technology, to affect improved delivery to all of our citizens.

International technology has revolutionised the way our people do business, and the way we communicate. It has supported the transfer of information and learning in organizations, and the creation of new services for our customers. The Government of Guyana has a leadership role in building the information management infrastructure to support our e-Government and e-Governance. A number of initiatives in support of this strategy



have already been launched, but we need to explore and expand possibilities for further development.

As I mentioned before, the linkage between the Ministry of Finance Salaries Division, and all Human Resources Department of the ministries of the Government, is in process. Mde Speaker, when one listens to the rhetoric coming from the other side of this House, about the Government's relationship with the Trade Union Movement, it gives the impression that there is some sinister motive of union-busting by the Government. This is far from the truth, especially when one takes into consideration the historic linkage of the PPP/C Party with the Trade Union Movement, coupled with its unwavering support for workers' rights. It is this Government that increased the minimum wage from \$3,137.00 in 1992, and more than doubled it in the first five years, and today that figure stands at \$25,654.00 - more than 1,000% increase.

In spite of the country's economic difficulties, which occurred as a result of the destabilisation agenda of the opposition forces, this Government has never thought of, much less implemented, a wage-freeze as was done by the PNC regime during the years 1979 to 1982. *[Applause]* And, Mde Speaker, after that wage-freeze, there was a 50% increase in salaries, but also with a concomitant 100% inflation rate. What a shame! Instead, this Government, since 1992, has steadfastly implemented annual increases of wages and salaries, and even though there is much harping about the 5% increases, there is protection in real wages, since the inflation rate has been kept below 8%. But in spite of these salary increases, we are cognisant of the fact that there is room for improvement, and I can assure this House that all efforts will be made to do so, once the economic situation permits. But Mde

Speaker, employment benefits don't only relate to salaries. Over the years this Government has increased the categories of Public Servants who benefit from duty-free concessions. I spoke earlier about training, which also gives them additional skills and ultimately makes them more marketable. We have increased the amount of funds that can be accessed by Public Servants as personal loans, and these loans can be used by them for whatever they deem to be their personal needs. We pay educational allowances to persons who attain additional qualifications. These are just some of the mechanisms that this Government either has already implemented, which are all aimed at improving the conditions of the workers in the Public Sector.

Mde Speaker, our intention is to continue our dialogue with the Trade Union bodies, especially the Guyana Public Service Union, and yes, I did say continue our dialogue, since the Government and the GPSU are having dialogue. Our desire is to have a non-contentious relationship with all of the Trade Union representatives of public employees, since this can only translate in to improve the benefits for our workers. We recognise the Guyana Public Service Union as a major stakeholder, and have been involving them at all levels in the reform process. For the union, anyone, to say otherwise would be deviating from the truth. But it must be pellucid that this Government will not allow the non-cooperation, or political grandstanding of any union, to interrupt any programme that will positively enhance the working conditions of our workers since, as their employer, we have their interest at heart. Our Public Servants are intelligent enough to realize that this administration is trying its best to improve their standards of living; and this evident, based on their refusal to respond to the Guyana Public Service Union's constant

politicised call for industrial strikes. *[Applause]* We are witnessing the dawn of a new era in the Public Service. *[Interruption: 'You mean error?']*

Mde Speaker and Honourable Members of this House, rest assured that a holistic, coherent, and co-ordinated approach to the transformation process in the Public Service is being implemented, and will undoubtedly benefit the nation-at-large.

Mde Speaker, this concludes my contribution on the 2007 Budget, and I once again congratulate the Hon Minister of Finance for his good guidance, and his team in the Ministry for working tirelessly, and all those involved in the preparation of the 2007 Budget Estimates. Your hard work should not be allowed to receive criticism, as we all know that we cannot please everyone during this difficult economic time we're going through. The 2007 Budget announced may be unwelcome in some sectors, but such hard financial decisions ought to be made. With this, I give my endorsement and full support; to the Budget before this House; and I urge every Member of this Honourable House to support it. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister Dr Henry Jeffrey.

**Hon Dr Henry Jeffrey:** Thank you very much, Mde Speaker. Let me begin by congratulating you, of course, for taking the Chair, and for so competently executing your mandate, *[Applause]* though reluctantly, and given the long association with the piety, you must now be giving some consideration to the relativistic explanation of things. *[Interruption: 'Say that again, I dare you to say that again']* After all, only thus can there be so many doubts about your attempts at constructive engagements -

previous attempts, and constructive criticisms, and the present one at impartiality. I daresay that, in the era of international trade in which we live, relativism is today dominant. Therefore, Mde Speaker, allow me to say, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation that our activity essentially exists in that era, and in the area of instability. To acquire the necessary level of operational stability, an overarching vision is required, and ours is not unlike that expressed in the Budget. On page 1 it says:

*To build society where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoy greater cohesion and prosperity, a society in which our quality of life compares favorably with our immediate and distant neighbors, and a society that is recognised for the care and attention it places on children, women, youths, the elderly, and the less fortunate.*

Indeed, a society that does its best to include and aid all our people. In previous years, when there were more specific things for me to respond to, I would have taken on Mr Williams, when he just asked a question; of the Honourable Member, Ms Westford Dr Westford. She said that the minimum wage was \$3,127.00 in 1992, and his response was:

*What can that buy, or what could that buy?*

The answer, of course, is that, in 1992 \$3,126.00 represented US\$25.00. Today, the minimum wage is US\$125.00 [*Applause*] and I want ... I am not saying that it is sufficient. I am saying no such thing, but I want to say to him that even he can not sit there and try to tell me that US\$25.00 would buy similar to US\$125.00 today, not even he would say that. But, more specifically, and relating directly to the Ministry of International and Trade, and the Budget states that Guyana maintains its position that a fair multilateral trading system that takes account of the special circumstances of economies like ours can boost world trade and help the entire world economy to re-bow and benefit all.

It is important, therefore, that we recognise that the Budget before us has within it an international dimension. Mr Norton, on the first day of his presentation stated, or lamented, in fact, that the Budget did not have a chapter on international relations, or foreign affairs. I spoke to him after, of course, and pointed out to him that I have seen many Budgets from very progressive countries that simply do not have chapters on international affairs. What is required, of course, particularly in our times, is not a chapter on international affairs, but a clear understanding of the pervasive nature of international interventions. All facets of society today appear to be affected, in some fashion, by international activities. We've just heard from the Honourable Member Backer, speaking about the issue of corruption, and the attempt to use international leverages - Transparency International, to reduce corruption in the world today - a very good thing, and corruption is terribly bad, but I think we can have a better explanation of corruption in Guyana if we take into consideration our poverty, and the nature of our social stratification, because I believe we are talking about the

perception of corruption. No, perception is reality if, and only if, where or when people will act upon it; and you again, went on to argue that, in terms of investment, people will walk away where they find corrupt regimes. I am afraid that link between corruption and investment is very tenuous and if you look around the world you'll see it. All I am saying to you is that it may not be a good reason to state that point, but we must look for the real reasons behind any social event, and not create them.

Hon Members, the world before us is not simply changing, it has changed. The trade regimes that have served us faithfully in the past, of course, are speedily being dismantled by the very people who created them. Both preferential treatment and domestic trade protections are declining as a result of the global move towards reciprocal trading arrangements. As the Budget argues, these changes present numerous challenges, particularly for small, developing countries such as ours. For instance, after decades of non-reciprocal trade performance, and domestic trade protection Guyana, and many other Caribbean countries, can no longer, if they ever were, be competitive in the traditional crops they produce. However, these challenges are quite familiar. What is more important for us - what is more germane, is the nature of our response to this dynamic process. Firstly, we must understand that trade is vital to Guyana's survival; indeed I think we must re-understand how vital it is to Guyana. It may be important to all countries, but it is very, very important to Guyana. For example, an IMF study revealed that, for the average CARICOM Member country, exports and imports of goods and non-vat services amounted to 116.9% of GDP in 1994 to 1998. For Guyana, that number was 211% of GDP. Of course trade is important; but, for Guyana, it is extraordinarily important

if we are to survive and of course, the situation is just the same today. Therefore, Guyana can ill-afford to neglect either the opportunities being offered by openness, or the risk presented by this openness. As I said, what are our responses? Perhaps our primary policy response is our participation in the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, and we are moving forward with our treaty obligations intending to deepen and expanding integration process. At the risk of being trite, let me restate that this word *inter alia* allows us to better take advantage of investment and the marketing opportunities.

The CARICOM Single Market has taken off and, for the first time, of course, the free movement of goods [*with problems of course*] goods, services, capitals, skilled labour, can move across borders. This includes the right of establishment also, for business people in Guyana. The Single Market is expected to come on stream by 2008. This would require a further integration of the production and financial sectors, and the harmonisation of macro-economic and monetary policies. It is as a member, of course, of the Caribbean Community, that Guyana is negotiating in the numerous arenas, including the World Trade Organisation – the Doha Round, the African, Caribbean and Pacific/ European Union Economic Partnership Agreement, the Free Trade areas of the America ... Of course this has stalled somewhat, and many bilateral. Mde Speaker, it has become commonplace for us to, after the fact, complain that fundamental changes, which affect our lives, had been made without our knowledge and/or participation.

In 2007, the focus will be on facilitating the work for the completion of the Single Market, and important decisions affecting the lives of all of us have been taken, and are soon to be

institutionalised. To avoid the abovementioned contention, I will spend much of the remainder of my presentation in providing brief insights into two of these decisions; the decision to institutionalise a single CARICOM development vision, and a new governance mechanism. The former is based on a Paper towards a single economy and a single developmental vision presented by Professor Norman Durval. The new governance mechanism has been suggested by a working group under the chairmanship of Professor Vaughn Lewis. Both of these documents were prepared after much regional consultation, and also took into consideration the numerous documentations around the region. They will be widely circulated for further discourse, and I am advising all concerned, all Parties in the National Assembly that they should attempt to acquire this documentation; and they should attempt to have discourse around these issues, because these issues will affect their lives in fundamental ways.

As I said, I will attempt to give an outline, a brief outline, of what is contained in these documents. The Single Developmental Vision: The framers argued that there is a broad regional consensus that a single vision for sustainable development should be holistic, encompassing developments in all its dimensions. They singled out and government dimensions, which they grouped into six broad areas.

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

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

**Motion put and agreed to.**



**Motion carried.**

**The Speaker:** I had Dr Jeffrey as starting at 4:10, yes; Dr Westford from 2:45-4:10. Nothing is wrong with the timing. *[Interruption]* Sorry, Dr Jeffrey, I am thinking of fifteen minutes instead of half an hour, my apologies. You can go on. You have not used your half hour, sorry.

**Hon Dr Henry Jeffrey:** Thank you very much, Mde Speaker. They singled out the economic, social, environmental and government dimensions, which they grouped into six broad areas:

- (i) Self-sustaining economic growth, based on strong international competitiveness, innovation, productivity, and flexibility of resource use;
- (ii) A full employment economy that provides a decent standard of living and quality of life for all citizens;
- (iii) Elimination of poverty;
- (iv) The provision of adequate opportunities for young people, constituting an alternative to immigration;
- (v) Equitable economic growth within the community, having regard to the high growth potentials of some member states with a relatively low per capital income, and large resources of under-utilised land and labor;
- (vi) Social equity, social justice, social cohesion, and personal security, environmental protection and ecological

sustainability, democratic, transparent and participatory governance.

On the economic dimension they identified the following features:

- (i) A goal of accelerated economic growth through advancement and transformation of regional economies. The goal is for economies with the lowest per capita incomes to grow at the highest rates, so that there will be some movement towards convergence. The main drivers of this economic growth and transformation are clusters of goods and service industries, centered on energy, production, agriculture, forestry and fishing, sustainable tourism, and other export sectors.
- (ii) Member states will prioritize the upgrading of human and social capital, and the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture at all levels of society.
- (iii) The Private Sector will play the leading role in investment, and in the ownership and management of economic activities.

At the social level, there has been legal entrenchment of the CARICOM charter for civil society, with regular reports on its

implementation by an independent body, involving civil society's stakeholders.

(iv) Adoption of a regional human rights convention, now in draft.

(v) Adoption of a decent minimum wage and conditions of work as a common standard applied throughout the region.

(vi) Adoption of a model of corporate social responsibility as a common standard applied by law throughout the community; and

(vii) Designating the Caribbean Diaspora as a fifth social partner and, on that basis, developing and adopting the principle of a community Diaspora policy.

Two steps are proposed under the environmental dimension:

(i) Adoption of a common environmental regulatory regime, which protects, preserves, enhances and manages the productive potential of the natural environment to ensure sustainable development; and

(ii) Sponsoring the preparation and publication of regular state of CARICOM environment reports.

The governance dimension will need to be addressed. The community identified three issues:

(i) The automatic application of decisions of the Conference of Heads of Government at the national level in certain defined areas;

(ii) The creating of a new governance mechanism, which I will go through; and

(iii) The attempt to address the community implementation deficit and the related need to strengthen the popular involvement in the integration process.

There is a new governance mechanism, and some of this, of course, has already been published. In relation to the suggested governance mechanism, the contention here is that, if the integration process is to be advanced, suitable structures of regional governance must be devised to manage an integrated economic space. This must be based on a pragmatic approach to regional decision-making, since the promotion of the goals of economic integration presupposes an increasing degree of political consensus in facilitating the achievement of agreed objectives.

The first recommendation is for the establishment of a CARICOM Commission, comprising, of course, of three persons and a president, to exercise a full-time executive responsibility for the implementation of decisions relating to the CSME, and any other areas of integration process as their Heads of Government may from time to time determine, and to initiate

proposals for community actions in such areas. It further recommended that, in the exercise of responsibilities, the Commission will be accountable to the Heads of Government and will also be responsive to the authority of the various organs of the community, with their respective areas of competence.

In addition, it was proposed that the Commission, in collaboration with Member states, would seek to promote a system of community laws on which the basis of provision would be of the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, and legislative enactments by the Parliaments of Member states. It is also proposed that, in order to fund the increased number of institutions envisaged under the CSME, it would be necessary to identify reliable streams of resources that could be allocated for this purpose. It was recommended that a percentage allocation from import duties by each Member state of the community, proportionately, according to the GDP of that country, would generate the necessary resources.

Finally, it was recommended that:

*The Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians should be strengthened by the adoption of Revised Standing Orders designed to ensure that it functions as an authentic regional Body, and also that it should continue to function as a deliberative and consultative Body, rather than a legislative one.*

There should be an explicit recognition of its membership, which should comprise of government, opposition and there should be civil society representatives as observers. These recommendations were in response to criticisms that say that CARICOM institutions were not sufficiently attentive to the needs of CARICOM populations. Though in principle, accepting the need for better governance mechanisms, the Government of Guyana has several reservations, based on what it perceives to be the technocratic nature of the proposed commission. These reservations are to be addressed during the consultation process, and again - again, best decisions be made, and Members and their parties contend that they were not informed, I again call on all stakeholders, including all political Parties, to acquire the requisite documentation and become part of what is a very important process - a process that is likely to lead to the change of governance that will affect all of us in the Caribbean Community.

I would certainly attempt to bring such documentations that are available. The vision is available in print, and I suppose copies can be made available to you. Mde Speaker, let me return to the normal, and provide us some indication of the status of the present negotiating environment.

Mde Speaker, on external negotiations, Guyana continues to lead the region as Ministerial Spokesperson on WTO issues, as well as Spokesperson on sugar in the context of the European Union negotiations. As mentioned earlier, Guyana, as a member of CARICOM, is involved in several negotiating theatres. The negotiations with the European Union to establish an economic partnership agreement is to be concluded at the end of this year.

Further, the recent resumption of negotiations on the WTO would certainly put further strain on the system.

**The Speaker:** Now is your time, Honourable Minister.

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

**The Speaker:** Motion is that the Hon Minister be given another fifteen minutes to conclude.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Dr Henry Jeffrey:** Mde Speaker, in the area of bilateral talks, there is a mandate, on the CARICOM side, to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement with Canada to replace the current Preferential Agreements (CARICAN). Discussions with the Canadians have been ongoing since 2001. However, they are still awaiting a mandate from their side before negotiations can properly continue. Canada, however, has recently secured an extension of the CARICAN waiver until 2011 which, to some extent, has taken the pressure off, but it would still be better to complete the negotiations.

Regarding our trading relations with the United States, at present there is no legal coverage for the Caribbean Basin Initiative, due to Paraguay's reluctance to join the consensus on the extension of that waiver. In this regard, and given the increasing difficulty of securing waivers, it is important that we put our relationship with the United States on a more legal and sound footing. How that is

to be done is quite another matter. As such, exploratory talks are taking place vis-à-vis what would be the best course of action. One would have, of course, to take into consideration that the US Trade Promotion Authority, which gives the President the right to negotiate and make deals and take the complete deals to Congress, will expire in June 2007.

Mde Speaker, in keeping with the mandate on external negotiations, we will continue to build strategic alliances with like-minded countries, and group of countries, particularly in relation to the Doha negotiations. We will continue to play our role in the G-33, ACP G-19. Issues germane to us such special products, special safeguard mechanisms, long-standing preferences, special differential treatment for small states; small and vulnerable states, will be given special treatment.

In June 2006, the Ministry hosted a meeting, in Georgetown, between Caribbean and South America Trade Ministers to discuss ways of narrowing the differences between the sides on the WTO matters. A similar meeting with Central American Trade Ministers is scheduled next week in Belize. Members, negotiations, and in particular, trade negotiations, seldom take place in a vacuum. Effective trade negotiations depend upon a co-operative and collegial approach. In other words, effective trade negotiation is a function of internal consultation - the internal consultation process. The Private Sector is the ultimate beneficiary of trade policy. As such, while it is incumbent upon the Government to ensure that the Sector is involved in the development and execution of trade policy, it is also obligatory for the Private Sector to be more proactive in its approach, with respect to these matters. Consequently, we will continue to make



Private Sector and public stakeholder co-operation the cornerstone of our activities.

Mde Speaker, in his address to the opening of this Parliament, President Jagdeo committed his Government as follows:

*My Government is committed to the principle of CARICOM, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the United Nations, and will work with these Bodies to enhance our economic and social well-being, as well as to secure global peace and development. Both at the WTO and the level of ACP en-relations, my Government will spare no effort in defending our fundamental economic interests on which the livelihood and survival of thousands of Guyanese depend.*

The Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation remains faithful to that vision and mandate. Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Raphael Trotman.

**Hon Raphael Trotman:** Thank you, Mde Speaker and Hon Members. I am proud to rise this afternoon, on behalf of the Alliance for Change, to make my contribution to this debate. If I may say, this year's Budget is no different to those of the past, except in one material particular; and that to which I refer - that one exception, is the presence of the Honourable Minister of

Finance, the Hon Member Dr Ashni Kumar Singh, who added his characteristic flair and aplomb to make that which was pedantic and repetitive seem more exciting, or if I may use a word that was used already for the afternoon - sexy, as Mrs Backer described it. This Budget is being presented by a young, intelligent, and rising star with nice sounding words and platitudes. It comes in the wake of a recently concluded election, the result of which mystified many, disappointed many, but won the respect of most for the matured and dignified manner in which the process unfolded.

At the outset, allow me, therefore, to congratulate the new Minister of Finance on his inaugural Budget speech, and to say that he has properly represented his peers, and those of us who know him well, and have been impressed by his abilities elsewhere. I say, Mde that the Hon Minister brings a breath of fresh air to the otherwise putrid political air permeating the corridors of power in this country, and therefore, the PPP/Civic Government ought to consider itself fortunate to have attracted a man of his skills and character. I urge him, however, to let caution continue to be his watch word, as he commingles with those who would want to sully his reputation, and ride on his goodwill, to further their narrow personal and partisan gains. Mde, every nation needs a vision to chart its course of development. Short of having a national development strategy implemented, and having an annual State of the Nation address by His Excellency the President, it is to the annual Budget that one looks towards for an insight, or to grasp the mechanics and fundamentals of the nation's progress, or lack thereof. In this sense, therefore, it is apposite to note that this Budget is Guyana's Budget, not just the PPP/C's Budget. It is therefore in all of our

interest to ensure that it is properly and carefully scrutinised and refined. We are here, not discussing the PPP's progress, but Guyana's progress and growth. So, apart from isolated cases and instances of crassness and unprofessionalism displayed over the last few days by some Members of this House, I wish to say that this, being my ninth Budget debate, has been the best so far that I have participated in.

It is said, Mde, that all politics is local, and so, for me, it is a particular pleasure to have listened, not only to the Minister and my colleagues from the Alliance for Change, and to my colleagues - parliamentarians, ministers, Members Murray, Norton, McAllister, Backer, but also Hon Member Whittaker who, up until the time he spoke, I was worried that the Minister would be left standing alone, but since the Hon Member Whittaker's speech, we've had other fine speeches by regional representatives: Mde Kissoon, Fernandes, Members of the other Side - Atkinson, and my brother Persaud last night; so I wish to commend them all.

Mde, as I said, we are not here to discuss just the PPP's progress, but Guyana's progress. It is said ... did I leave anyone out? *[Yes]* It was not intended, but those who would not commend themselves know themselves. In a similar vein, I wish to unequivocally state that there are many worthy aspects of this Budget, which must be given our unmitigated support - youth, job creation, sports, health, education and culture, just to name a few. To the Minister of Sports and Culture, I wish him well. I say to him, as well, that we can do far more, such as re-establishing a national orchestra in Guyana, introducing ... as Hon Member Kissoon asked for earlier, introducing modern and strong copyright legislation to protect our local artistes, who are gaining

world recognition, and by establishing what I feel is particularly important - a national museum which celebrates the history and culture of the peoples of Guyana, housed in one building, rather than having buildings for different ethnic groups, scattered around the city, giving the false impression to visitors, especially from abroad, that we are a divided people. It's time we have a national museum housed in one institution, one building.  
*[Applause]*

We argue and criticize, on this side of the House, , to make that which is before us better, and to ensure that taxpayers' money and borrowed funds are not wasted or siphoned off through graft and corruption. I would be disingenuous, and downright dishonest, if I were to deny that there has been some success under the PPP/Civic administration. No-one can deny that there has been an upsurge, for example, in construction. There has been a renewed sense of purposefulness within the populace, coupled with a sense of optimism which, one year ago, was markedly absent. Today I believe that I can say, with a clear conscience, that we have seen improvements. One year ago there was the grave and gathering threat of elections-associated violence, vicious crime, phantoms and freedom fighters. Today, while these continue, no doubt, to exist in one form or the other, I daresay that they appear less dark and threatening and dangerous, as they did last year. This peace, this tranquility, Mde, I believe is owed to several factors, and with your permission, I would like to single His Excellency the President, and some of his Ministers and colleagues ... I can't say all, for the responsible manner in which they behaved during and after the electoral process, the Leader of the Opposition and my erstwhile colleagues in the PNC/R-1G, for the manner in which they handled the elections

and its results, to the AFC ... and I have to single us out, for introducing into the political construct a new and different dynamic, which made politics less of a zero-some game, and more issues-based than it has ever been in our modern history. [Applause] Above all else, to the people of Guyana, who sent a resounding message that they were tired of the fighting and backward politics that was keeping them chained and enslaved to the past. Mde Speaker, we can war philosophically about Guyana's progress, exchange facts and figures on real growth and GDP, and on means-testing, poverty reduction, and poverty lines. This Budget, which is entitled *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, I submit, speaks only to one aspect, one dimension of the problems we set in Guyana. In this regard, it falls far below the minimum standard required of a Budget presentation for a diverse, complex, and divided country such as ours, and belies the true picture.

Telling us about gold and bauxite production alone, and about factories and taxes, just do not suffice to address the real problems of Guyana. Personally, I was disappointed that the presentation fell short in not acknowledging obvious ills and shortcomings in Guyana. Every year Members of that side of the House, Mde, cite, with much excitement, statements made by the Minister of Finance in 1992, the Honourable Carl Greenidge; but in my view Mr Greenidge, at that time, were honest when he summed up the state of the economy of Guyana. I wish that one day I could hear a Minister of Finance acknowledge that, in Guyana, the economy is struggling but that he could also tell us - or she, hopefully one day, what it is he, or she, is doing to make it better. It is time that we get the truth. I need to say to the Minister of Finance therefore, Mde, because I know he

understands. I believe that I can speak as well to the Honourable Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs and International Cooperation, former Minister of Home Affairs Mde Teixeira, Minister Rodrigues, and others of the enlightened few within the Government I don't know whether Mr ... sorry, I meant to say Mr Kumar, but I really meant to single out the Attorney General as one of the enlightened few - that a significant section of the Guyanese community, the PPP/Civic Government will never be able to effectively govern and provide for their well-being, and I daresay that, if the shoe were on the other foot, that a significant section of the society - no opposition force would be able to provide for them, and that is the reality of this country. This is unfortunate, but true; and it has to be acknowledged. Because we are unique; this Government needs, as well, to understand that the standard prescriptions for achieving a healthy democracy do not apply to Guyana. Merely holding elections and having regular meetings of the National Assembly will not suffice. We can't continue to pretend, lie, or be in denial by trying to win each other's side across; or, we can quickly, and rather easily, I suggest, put in place mechanisms that provide for the effective governance of the other side, regardless of which Party wins or loses the elections. This is the inclusive democracy and governance that was intended by Article 13 of the Constitution. From a purely economic point of view, I am sure the Honourable Minister of Finance will agree with me that we will find it a far better way to go to try to put mechanisms in place to ensure that everyone feels secure and involved, rather than ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, complete your sentence; then this will be a good time for us to take the suspension.

**Hon Randolph Trotman:** I was completing that sentence by saying, Madam, that money would be better spent by the Minister of Finance in ensuring that there are mechanisms put in place for inclusive governance, rather than coming every year to have to take us through this worn-out tradition, this mantra of pretending that we are loved universally, and pretending that all is well. If only we could make provisions to ensure that all of us can share in the economic and political pie, this country would be much better. *[Applause]* May I end there? *[Yes]* Thanks.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension, and so the sitting is suspended for half an hour, but may I remind Members of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply of the meeting in the Speaker's Office during the break?

## **17:00H SUSPENSION OF SITTING**

## **17:45H RESUMPTION OF SITTING**

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, Mr Raphael Trotman.

**Hon Raphael Trotman:** Thank you, Mde Speaker. At the time we took the adjournment, I was making the point that I am sure that the Honourable Minister of Finance will have to agree that money would be better spent re-engineering the Constitution to provide for our differences, our insecurities, our fears, and for proper sharing and distribution of the economic and political pie, rather than simply trying to present a Budget every year, and

succeeding, and I urge him to dedicate his energies over the next five years to doing just that - ensuring that the Constitution is changed and adapted. If I may proceed Madam, I wish to say that the manner, in which the Budget debate - this debate, is conducted, is yet another bad example of bad prescriptions being applied to fix our democracy. We believe that, every year, those on the Opposition side are supposed to come and pretend that there is nothing worthy of comment coming from the Government, and on the Government side, it is expected that they say that all is good, and that there is nothing bad happening. But, I again state that in a country that is as diverse and divided and fractured as ours, that prescription which perhaps can apply quite easily in Barbados, Jamaica, London, Toronto, Quebec, cannot succeed in a country such as ours, where we have Government and simply loyal Opposition; it cannot, Madam, with respect, be the prescription to apply for fixing this country.

Therefore, the notion of consultation and inclusively would make this exercise truly meaningful and, in this regard, we are disappointed that there were insufficient consultations and, in many respects, none of all, leading up to the presentation of this Budget. I believe that the Honourable Member Vieira made some mention of that. In the past the business community was consulted, some Members of the Opposition had some sense of what was coming; and in many divided communities and societies abroad I know that there are Committees which actually go through the Budget, prior to the debate, so when it is debated, matters of principle are debated, rather than the minutiae, and some of the ridiculousness which comes out in our debate. Again I urge that this be something to be considered for the future.



To the extent, therefore, that this year's Budget contains, largely, a repeat of statements of the past, makes it pedestrian, and I am sure that I speak for everyone when I say that we all yearn for the day, for the time, when a Minister delivers a jaw-dropping presentation that is truly revolutionary and visionary. Alas, this is not to be the case again this year. I believe, and this is my belief that this Government is afraid to venture out; afraid of criticism, afraid of change and, in some regards Madam, afraid of even itself.

Incidentally, I hope that the Minister ... and I am sorry that he's not here, and I need to make the point about VAT. I hope he could reconsider the applications, and the incidence, and the impact of VAT because, from his own estimates, 24.8 billion dollars ... At page 50 of the Budget speech as recorded: It is so stated, 24.8 billion dollars is expected to be reaped, or brought in this year from VAT collections, making the notion, or the statement that VAT is a neutral tax ... making the statement that VAT is revenue- neutral a nonsense, and it also supports the contention made by many, many stakeholders that the economy would be strong enough to survive a reduction, a downward change in the rate from 16% to perhaps 8% or 10%, as has been suggested, without collapsing; because, you say to us that 16% is what it should be and you are reaping 24%, then it means that the economy can sustain some adjustment downwards, thereby not only relieving the burden on the very poor, but ensuring that business is conducted a little better. So I had hoped he would be here, but we on this Side, at this Side, at the rear of the House, support all the calls made by the PNC/R-1G, and other stakeholders - business, trade unions and others, for a re-visit of this tax - whether it be by a committee of this House, whether it

be by the GRA itself and Government, but certainly the figures show that the tax can be ameliorated. I am, Madam, and the AFC is, particularly concerned about the framework for governance, through which all of the Budget's expenditures and the promises will flow. This Budget, therefore, has to be read in conjunction with the presentation made by the President, His Excellency, to this House, on September 28, and the words stated by His Excellency, at page 6 of his presentation - I believe are worthy of repeat and emphasis - and I quote:

*Mr Speaker, central to our vision in the fashioning of an inclusive democracy - one where the rule of law is paramount, where the rights of our people are respected, and where all stakeholders feel involved, valued and respected. Our economy must be one capable of generating wealth, leading to a higher standard of living for our people; one that ensures that every home has access to potable water, electricity and telephones; guarantee first-rate public health care, secures educational, sporting and recreational opportunities for our children that would allow them to fulfill their potentials, and one that provides greater personal security and assures that our elderly and indigent are treated with dignity and fairness.*

So the Budget, therefore, must be seen in the context of those pronouncements made on September 28. Therefore, in analyzing

it from that point of view, I must say that I have found it to be wanting, and I wish, with your permission, to cite a few examples.

I start, Madam, with something that has already been mentioned in passing, and that is, the vexing issue on the non-appointment of important commissions - constitutional and statutory. I refer, for example, to the functioning of the office of the Ombudsman - a constitutional office in this country, the Procurement commission, the Human Rights Commissions, the Rights of the Child and Indigenous People's Commissions, the Public Service Appellate Tribunal, to name a few, which are not functioning properly, or not functioning at all. I refer, as well, Madam, your attention to the non-consultation with stakeholders, with the introduction of recent legislations to this House. I refer particularly to the Casino Gambling Legislation and the Health Facilities Licensing Bill, both of which incurred the wrath of major stakeholders, because it was felt that the Government proceeded without consultation, and without the need to reach out, to explain, and to find this new kind of democracy and inclusively that the President spoke about on 28<sup>th</sup>. Another example where governance is lacking is the very issue of the withdrawal of ads to the *Stabroek News*, something which I believe we all have to admit and accept was a wrong decision, and I hope a face-saver could be provided to the Government in the not-too-distant future, and that they will find a way to restore those ads and exercise good sense. Another example of bad governance is the abandonment of the National Development Strategy process. I was appalled – shocked, to know that one year ago Members of that side spoke in favor of the implementation of the NDS, and almost to the date one year after,

the same persons who spoke in its favor and for its implementation, bored holes in it, trying to prove that it was not worthy of implementation, and I am equally disappointed and appalled Madam, that this Honourable Minister of Finance failed to mention the NDS at all, or in any way indicate that part or aspects of it will be implemented in the Budget of 2007, another disappointment that worries us.

I continue, Madam, with something that is also worrisome, and that is the continued incarceration, without trial, of Mark Benschop which, in my view, can now be regarded as cruel and inhumane punishment, and I hope that his wife's counsel would do something about it later this year. I refer as well, as I continue my examples of governance in the context of this Budget to the handling of lotto funds. For years, both the Auditor General, as he then was, Mr Goolsaran, and Honourable Member Murray, as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, spoke about the unconstitutionality of the handling of those funds. This is another bad example that continues, year after year, and I hope we don't have to repeat it next year.

Example number 7: the failure for the fifth running year to announce national awards in this country. National awards, Madam, are not the property of any Government; but them the people's expression of their thanks and faith in other citizens, and to tell us that there are no people in this country worthy of a national award for five years are shameful. What is even more shameful is that one person had to return his award. Never before in the history of this country have we seen a person returning a national award - not as far as I am aware, but I am prepared to be enlightened and elucidated about that: Another example of bad governance. It is time that we reward those who deserve; and I

am sure that, on both sides of this House, there are enough people who could fill the Cultural Center, or wherever those awards are to be handed out.

I go on, Madam, to another example, and that is the irregular and extraordinary functioning of senior legal and constitutional officers - referring to the situation with the Chancellor (acting) and Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions (acting) for many years, and her predecessor was acting for an equal number, the Police Commissioner ... the Honourable Member Backer spoke about that, and I believe nine Judges of the High Court; although I am told by one person that that situation is about to be remedied. These things don't tell us that we're living in a healthy, functioning democracy.

Another example, which is going to hurt some, is the mishandling and manhandling of the Region 10 issue, and because the subjoined would not go on, but I believe we know the truth about the way the results were calculated.

I refer as well, Madam, to the suspension of the process of inter-party dialogue; and again I refer to the President's address to this House on September 28, at page 25, in which he set out the parameters, and the modalities, for the way in which we will meet and conduct our business. If I may quote from page 25 of his speech, Madam, he says:

*In addition, I have already signaled my intention to join forces with the political Opposition and find innovative ways to work together to solve our*

*problems. This will be pursued within an enhanced framework for political co-operation, encompassing the principles of increased meaningful contacts, the identification and implementation of an agreed Agenda of national issues, and greater scope for the participation of civil society in the decision-making process. I would hope to soon meet with all the parliamentary parties so that we can hammer out the modalities of this framework of co-operation.*

Thankfully, we have met once; disappointingly, we have not met again, and we are still awaiting word from the Office of the President.

Perhaps the greatest infraction of all, Mde Speaker is the non-assent, or refusal, or failure of the President to ascent to twelve Bills, which lapsed after the dissolution of Parliament in May of last year. What is even more troubling is the response from His Excellency and, in a manner Madam, I am not disappointed in him, as I am in Members of the other side who are lawyers, and who know better. I can count at least six persons who are legally trained and eminently qualified to counsel the President as to what are his rights, obligations, and duties, and I'm disappointed that not one of them has been able to correct the President's obvious misinterpretation and, if I may, Madam, quote from *Stabroek News* of Thursday February 08, 2007, which is entitled *President cites different reasons for not attending to Bills*. He said:

*The President of the United States has veto powers: Here we seem to want to emasculate the presidency and I am not going to allow that. I will exercise the authority given to me by the Constitution.*

He declared. The President did not go on to explain why he has not complied. Madam, those of who know something about constitutional law, know that the system, as set out in the United States Constitution, is one premises on the notion of the separation of powers, in which each section - judiciary, legislature, executive - have checks and balances over the other; and it is in that regard that the President of America is given certain powers, or was given certain veto powers, by the founding fathers in 1776, to deal and to use them when faced with an opposition to his policies, or her policies; but to know that in this country, where we have a hybrid situation where President is both Head of Government and of State, and is vetoing Bills that come from his own office, is the most preposterous legal interpretation I've ever come across, and I am disappointed, as I said, that no lawyer on the other side has seen it fit to point out to him that the power is reposed on him when, for example, there is an Opposition controlled - Parliament, which sends Bills to him which he is not in favour with, or if he has fallen out of favour with his own colleagues in the House and refuses to assent to Bills; but to know that Bills come out of the Cabinet office, come to this House, are passed, and then sent back to him, based on his instructions ... because under our Constitution ministers are

appointed by the President. For him to say that he is using powers, as in the hands of the US President, is preposterous; to say the least: But as I said, I'm more disappointed in my legal colleagues than I am in the President for that interpretation. This, I believe is something that should be corrected immediately.

Madam, in the time remaining, I would like to say a few words about crime and security in the legal sector, and something about international affairs. I start by saying that we, in the Alliance For Change believe that, for the first time in more than two or three years, the crime situation seems to be managed; and I had, on a previous occasion, complimented the Minister, if in any way he had anything to do with it; his predecessor, Ms Teixeira, who demitted Office recently, and I can say that, as a citizen, especially around Christmas, there was a sense of relief, and people moved around and did their business rather freely and I believe that both the Minister and the Security Forces must be complimented again for bringing to us this level of stability. *[Applause]* However Madam, the barbarity of offences seen in Agricola and elsewhere, and the murder of Minister Sawh, which was referred to earlier, the relative youthfulness of the perpetrators, and perhaps what is most disturbing, the searing indifference, as reflected in their eyes, as they go to court - and their attitude to the concept of what is right and wrong, these I consider to be very frightening indicators of our decline, and I believe these should be addressed as a matter of urgency - not simply to be seen through the prisms of either guns or boots, or more salaries, or more uniforms, but by trying to understand the inter-logical or root causes of crime in society, using the university, and using other institutions of learning to understand what is happening in society, twinning - for example, the



Ministry headed by my learned friend and colleague, Minister Manickchand, to understand why Bare Root is restless, why Agricola is restless, why there is a prevalence of sexual offences in Corentyne; what is happening in our society: Not us meeting them - those crimes, as I said ... guns and boots. We therefore, Madam, urge that the work that has begun in the Disciplined Forces Commission be continued ... I believe that Mr DeSantos, the Honourable Member, chaired a committee, but that committee lapsed and there has been not a word about its resuscitation, and the recommendations which came in that report at the cost of millions - many man-hours spent on that. We support the work of the Government and the Security Forces for the preparation of World Cup Cricket, and the work of Impacts, the CARICOM Implementation Agency. We believe that we are well on our way. I have had the good fortune of meeting some of its members based in Trinidad with whom I had gone to school, and they assured me that Guyana is doing well, and we should compliment ourselves for that. My colleague, Mrs Backer, referred to the dealings with drugs. I believe that we must admit that drugs and its incidents, and attendant ills, continue to pose a problem for Guyana. We are concerned that the big fish appear to be getting away, and it troubles me whenever I read in the newspaper that a person is jailed for three years for having 2grams or 4grams of marijuana and family is separated whilst, as I said elsewhere, those with the suitcases and the containers, lift it up and boast of having friendly relations with senior people. It is time that we either release, Madam, and I say this now, the burden on the very poor who perhaps, in the privacy of their homes, want to indulge in a little cannabis ... *[Interruption: 'I am not in any way saying, nor suggesting, that I agree that is their right']* but certainly, certainly, certainly, it is a waste, from an economic point of view,

which I tested here. It costs, base on answers provided by the Minister, in excess of \$40,000.00 to prosecute one case for the possession of marijuana. If we were not to prosecute ten, and pool that money together, I am sure we can catch a big fish - at least one, and prosecute one of them. *[Applause]*

I am saying that it is time, I believe, we either as ... I believe when Mr Jagan was President, the Law was revised to raise the threshold ... *[Interruption]*

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

**Hon Sheila Holder:** Mde Speaker, I ask that my colleague be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Raphael Trotman:** Thank you Honourable Members, Madam. As I said, from a purely economic point of view, and perhaps in keeping with societal changes elsewhere, it is something that we may want to revisit, even as we revise the laws and have our Law Reform Commission, as told to us yesterday by the Honourable Attorney General, but certainly it is not proving effective - that is, our interdiction activities and policies, to go

after persons in their homes for some cannabis sativa, whilst the persons with the heroin and cocaine go free.

I refer, Madam, to the failure, in my view, to implement the Drug Strategy Master Plan, 2005-2009. We're now into February of 2007, and we are not, in any way assured, or being told, what progress, if any, has been made in implementing this Master Plan. I know that, under the measures to come in a few weeks, the Citizens Security Programme, a copy of which I have, that is mentioned ... and the House has the AFC's support in implementing it if, in fact, there is the will on the Government's side ... *[Interruption: 'I see the Minister smiling; I don't know whether he is surprised that I have a copy of the Security Programme, but I do']* I refer to what I believe are obvious weaknesses in the security architecture itself, most glaring example of this is the continued incidents of the missing AK-47s and, more importantly for me, the fact that they were moved in the first case - in the first instance, tells of a very, very troubling situation within the security sector, within the security architecture and, despite every so often a report in the *Kaieteur News*, and I noticed one in the *Stabroek News*, that somebody is likely to be court-martialed, or charged, the nation continues to be threatened. I remember the days in National Service, Madam, when we were on the ranges, one round not being accounted for; we were told that the life of the President could be at stake. We have to find and account for every round and every shell and, in this instance, we have thirty ... *[Interruption: 'I am told that some may have been recovered']* but thirty AK-47s are most dangerous in the hands of misguided persons. So we ask that this Government be firm. I had asked questions about this matter. At the end of the year last year - we were told that they are now

studying the report and more action will be forthcoming; we're now into a new year. The nation was led to believe that one section of society had these weapons then, all of a sudden, the needle moved to another section. At the end of the day we need to have an account as to what happened, and who is responsible, and we would expect that decisive action is taken whenever that is discovered. *[Applause]*

I move, Madam, to the appointment of security consultant Bernard Kerik. I had asked, in this House, just two weeks ago, about Mr Kerik's appointment, asked of the Minister of Home Affairs, and he, quite diligently, I should add, responded to my questions and informed me that he had no knowledge of Mr Kerik's imminent appointment, and if Mr Kerik was to be appointed he would inform the House of the details. Lo and behold, within two weeks there's another announcement in the papers that says: "*Kerik appointed,*" and it leaves me to wonder that it is either one of either two situations. It is that the Minister is not being taken into confidence by the President, or that there's some attempt to mislead this House, but whichever way it is, Madam, it is something that should not be tolerated and accepted. We need to know, and I believe you have seen the draft questions that I submitted last week ... some questions about Mr Kerik's appointment, because I was told, two weeks ago, that there was no such appointment about to take place, and now that there is an appointment, I've put in new questions. We need to know what the terms of reference, salary, are whether he has any privileges and immunities - himself and colleagues, to operate; and to what extent they will operate within this country. There have been many reports over the last few months, Madam, of people being arrested ... and I am speaking about people with white skin doing

interrogations, those that come up repeatedly ... I'm not accusing Mr Kerik or this Government, but there have been many reports. I remember when Buffy Millard was arrested, in his statements he said that he was interrogated by foreigners. When there was a raid on a certain house in Eccles, the neighbours reported that there were people who were not Guyanese, with bullet-proof vests, taking part in those raids. Those are the reports, and I can tell you, uncategorically, that Minister that there are, in Guyana, foreign agents at work. I can tell you that. Ask Roger Khan who knew a few because he is claiming that he was abducted by some of them and, in Eccles, the police were accompanied by foreigners. We need to know whether any foreigner coming into Guyana would be given rights, privileges, and immunities. I know that, under the Ship Rider Agreement, for example, foreign agents working in tandem with our security forces are given immunities from arrests, if they shoot anyone, or anything such. So, we just need to know if it is that the President has decided to hire Mr Kerik, and he can afford him; if he comes well-recommended, then so be it; but I believe that the nation needs to know some of these things.

I move on, Madam, to continuous weaknesses in the prison system. Again I have put in a series of questions, which the Honourable Minister promised he will respond to shortly, about the report on the recent prison break. I hope it does not fall only into a callaloo patch, but it's more than that. I've asked him as well ... and I'm expecting the answers, as to what recommendations of past commissions following past prison breaks have been implemented. I've also asked the question, to which I hope to get an answer shortly, whether or not, in light of this most recent prison break, the Government is willing to

reconsider its decision not to construct a new maximum security prison outside of the city of Georgetown. I look forward to the answers to those questions.

Madam, with your permission, I would like to say a few words on our international affairs. Unfortunately, I do not see, in the House, the substantive Minister of Foreign Affairs. No reason has been given, but I am told that he has personal difficulties, which we appreciate, and I know someone is acting for him, but it would've been good to speak to him, but if I may quote from the edition of *an Economist*, which came at the end of the year, entitled *The World in 2007*, and it said the context in which of course Guyana will find itself ... and I'll quote from some aspects of it:

*What will be the agenda for leaders in this year?"*  
*One Madam, "climate change will be an un-ignorable item for all of them. Scientific reports on the force of public opinion will ensure that concern over global warming and related matters, such as the search for alternatives to oil, acquire critical mass. The issue will be pervasive, which is why there's going to be much dedicated to global warming.*

Another concern, Madam, is the preoccupation with managing shifts in global power. A third has to do with the way Europe is unfolding trade liberalisation and threats to trade after the Doha

Round. We have not heard, in my view, sufficient to deal with some of these things. What I need to say is that we need to do more in terms of international affairs. For example, what is happening with the treatment of our citizens at the ports-of-entry, in countries of our CARICOM sister countries? I've asked a series of questions, and the answers were not satisfactory. We need to know why it is that there has been an increase in applications for refugee status outside of Guyana, Canada in particular.

I'm concerned, Madam, about the continuous, if I may term it, non-solving of the incident in the Cuyuni River in October last, where a resident and citizen of Guyana was shot in Guyana's territory, and I make that statement without fear of contradiction - Parsram Persaud. We're told, all the time, that investigations are continuing, and there are recent reports that the perpetrators may have been sent back to active duty. At the end of the day, Mr Persaud's family is without compensation and without explanations. This is a matter on which I hope this Government continues to work on. We believe, as well, that we're falling down in the area of protecting our Indigenous People's rights. I'm told that the Honourable Minister made a statement yesterday that the AFC was moving to close her Ministry. I would assure her that we have no such intention. I've known her for a number of years and I'm disappointed that she would propagate such an untruth without seeking an explanation, or enquiring from me about it, but what I believe we did say - I remember when I happened on Minister Nadir at Moruca, when he was mouthing off about me - some bad things, I did say that we will see Indigenous People's matters not just as an affair Madam, but that we will wish to elevate their status at the Ministry to not only

being an *Affair*, and that, it would be renamed, but not gotten rid of; but that we would like to see the term *development* attached, so that you're not just dealing with Amerindian *Affairs*, but we're looking at it in a more holistic manner. While we're on this subject Madam, and again there seems to be some disconnect between what is happening with one arm of the State and another.

In November of last year, a most terrible thing happened at the United Nations General Assembly: That is, when the Indigenous People's Universal Declaration of Rights came up for approval ... the Universal Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People, a document which has been in the making for the last twenty-two years, certain countries sought to have it deferred, including the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and one need not wonder why. What is atrocious is that Guyana supported them for the deferment of the adoption of that document, and when the Honourable Member comes and speaks, it is ridiculous that the rest of the world, the rest of South America, supported and stood on the side of the Indigenous people, we chose to defer the introduction of this Universal Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People, much to the shock - and this is among the documentation sent to me from the United Nations - and if I may quote from a letter received:

*I am enclosing, Mr Trotman, updated reading material on the UN Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Third Committee of the UN General Assembly voted to defer adopting in November. Guyana joined other states in that vote. This is very disappointing for*



*Guyana, which has a history of fighting for, and supporting human rights.*

We, Madam, were not even told about this. We had not a clue that we had taken that decision, and we have been lowered, if I may say so, in the eyes ... our esteem has been lowered in the eyes of other right-thinking nations of the world. I therefore urge my friend and colleague, Madam Rodrigues, to do something about it, and to get about to see if you can get the Prime Minister, or the President, to ensure that, when this comes up again, it would be adopted forthwith. After twenty-two years it is time that we accept the Rights of the Indigenous People's and the AFC wants, Madam, as the rest of the world does this declaration to be adopted, and not have us support those countries which refuse to recognise the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

Madam, I turn lastly to the issue of the administration of justice. I have a copy of the Annual Report of the Supreme Court, prepared by the Registrar, in which she repeated some of the very complaints ... *[Interrupting]*

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

**Hon Desrey Fox:** Mde Speaker, just on a point of elucidation on the Standing Order 40:2; the Honourable Member is misleading this House on Guyana's position. I think he should be aware that Guyana indicated that we're going to support the Declaration, with reservations, and it was the majority of countries that voted for it to be deferred, for some of the other things in the Declaration that they needed to be considered.

**Hon Raphael Trotman:** Madam, I have, for the benefit of this House, the actual minutes of the proceedings, which will show that Guyana ... Oh! I'm sorry, I'm told that time ...

**Hon Khemraj Ramjattan:** Mde Speaker, I ask that the Honourable Member be given ten minutes to conclude.

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Raphael Trotman:** Thank you. Madam, I will share with the Honourable Member, and with the House, the actual minutes of the proceedings in which Guyana ... I notice that Guyana is being coupled here with a country which is known as *Miamar Burma*, and the minutes are available to see what position Guyana took, and why it is not true that we have a deferment with reservation. We voted for its deferment when the matter became ripe, and everything had congealed at a point where it could have been adopted after twenty-two years of laborious work, and I hope, Madam that the time will come, very shortly, when we will revisit that decision and ensure that our rights are protected.

In closing, Madam, I move, as I was attempting to do before that interjection, to the administration of justice, and I was going to refer to the Supreme Court Registry, and the Supreme Court Report, which was enthroned by the Registrar ... and if I may quickly quote two aspects - two paragraphs on page 6 of that report, the Registrar says, Madam: "*The number of cases awaiting trial in the court continues to escalate.*" So we have a

problem with case management, which we know, as practitioners. She writes that another problem that needs to be addressed is the number of cases completed, but for the delivery of decisions by judges. This is a grave problem for the litigants, the High Court, and the Court of Appeal, as these matters cannot be taken off the list as the High Court has completed; nor can the record of those, for which oral decisions were given, and which are now on appeal, be prepared for hearing at the Court of Appeal.

Madam, we heard yesterday, from the Honourable Attorney General, what I would call a lament, or plea, for help, and it saddens me, as a practitioner, to hear the Leader of the Bar ... because the Attorney General is known to be the Leader of the Practising Bar, appeal to this House, rather than to his subject ministers, or to his boss, so to speak - the President, for assistance, and I could not help but think that what I was listening to was a farewell speech. Again, I'm sorry he is not present, but I would've liked to thank him, if indeed it is he is leaving, but nonetheless, to congratulate him for being frank and forthright in letting us know what those problems are, rather than being served up a diatribe of untruths and misrepresentations.

But we would like to suggest, Madam, a few things that would help, if the Government will be willing to listen, and those include:

- (i) That court proceedings are speeded up – that ways he found to do so, if we're to try to restore some confidence, or to strengthen the confidence in the judiciary and legal system;

- (ii) That we establish reasonable deadlines for resolution of matters, including the constitutional fixing of the time when within which judges are to render their decisions, and the Registrar is asking that perhaps the Constitution Reform Committee should address this;
- (iii) That we provide adequate funds for the protection of judicial officers;
- (iv) that we improve the Registry to better track cases;
- (v) That we strengthen the investigatory capability of corruption allegations within the system;
- (vi) that we end the influence, or perception of influence, of judges and magistrates by politicians;
- (vii) That we get more Government land, Madam, into private hands; and
- (viii) that we make it easier for citizens to own land within - and this is important, in transparent, democratically-elected and developed zoning regulations and bodies.

The AFC, Madam, is particularly interested in change along the following lines ... and we invite all Members present to work with us, and to have us work with them to do so, and to strengthen this democracy. In that regard, we would like to put before this House, and ask for a common understanding, an effort on the implementation of a Freedom of Information legislation which has been brought ... Madam, I will say this now publicly, that it is more important that we have that legislation, than it is important who has brought it to this House, and if it is that there

is commitment that the Government will bring it, I'll be prepared to withdraw my Bill so that the greater good be achieved. At the end of the day, it is important that the PPP keeps its commitment, which it has given in the past, to have Freedom of Information legislation. All I was doing, and am trying to do, is speed that process up; that we work on Constitution Reform in the committee, to continue to engage and, in some cases, to begin the discussion on inclusive governance; that we be brave enough to introduce, Madam, an affirmative action programme - not based, or cut along ethnic lines, but along regional lines.

If it is one thing I discovered, as I traversed the country over the last year, is how many people are jobless, and the complaint has been, and continues to be, that whenever works are undertaken - be it a school, hospital, or road, that more than half, or two-thirds; and perhaps, in some instances, all of the workforce is brought out of the region to work in another region, while the skilled labour sits, with arms folded, and with their tools and skills, without work to do; so we propose that a system be introduced that mandates that at least 50% of the workforce comes from the region in which the work is being executed. In that way work is guaranteed for at least 50% of the workforce in those Regions that badly need work.

We recommend as well, Madam, a suggestion, which has taken root in many countries, particularly in the Scandinavian countries, and that is that there be a parliamentary committee of the future - bi-partisan, non-political in a sense, involving civil society, to study evolving trends, threats, and challenges, and ensuring that successive Governments and people are equipped and better prepared to meet them, be it in crime, economy, societal ills, anything that we can conceive. I know that in

Finland and Denmark this committee has been very successful, because it moves beyond partisan politics, and gets down to the work of preparing for the future.

We ask, as well, that we consider the very issue of the re-sitting of our capital city to meet what I believe is a growing threat coming, or posed by global warming. We believe, as well, that it is time we forge a path away from this debt burden that we have and, at some time, I hope the Honourable Minister answers the question as to how much money we have really borrowed and have to pay back - that is, the people of Guyana, since 1992 to present. I'm not including grants here but just strictly loans. It is time ... [*Interruption: 'I'm not including grants and this is what I am saying'*] So Madam, I was marginally disappointed when I heard the Prime Minister say hat let us forget this talk about doing away with the World Bank when he spoke. We must have a strategy that takes us out of the clutches of the IFIs Madam, it is time, and we are ... and I am sure that I can speak for all the Opposition, that we are prepared to sit down and work on that strategy to get us out of those clutches.

We believe that we need to complete the work of the Davies and Bradford Reports, and to implement them before the term of this Parliament is over, and we urge, as well, that another bi-partisan, perhaps ad hoc committee be established to enquire into, strictly, the impacts of global warming and its effects on Guyana - not just for now, but for the future.

In closing, Madam, I'll say that this year happenings ... I believe that the year's begun on a good way. I don't know whether it has anything to do with the *Golden Pig* that the Chinese will celebrate in a few days. These happenings present a rare and

uncommon convergence, which can rebound to the benefit of all Guyana ... and I say *can*, and not *will*, because it depends, largely, on our political will - Government and Opposition. It is worth repeating that there can be no development in Guyana without inclusivity, no peace without justice, and no future without co-operation. Guyana cannot afford to experiment further with dogmatic and standard forms of governance and democracy, where there is a Government, simply, and a loyal Opposition; because we are not like other countries; and the pretence that we are is perhaps Guyana's greatest threat. We need to accept our differences, and prepare for them; we need to build trust and share the economic and political pie, as it were; and that, Madam, is the only way, I believe, in which we will progress. With those words, I thank you.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, Clement Rohee.

**Hon Clement Rohee:** Thank you Mde Speaker. I would like to join with my colleagues, on this side of the House, in congratulating my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for an excellent presentation, as befitting a Finance Minister that holds the Office of the nature that he holds in the PPP/Civic administration. Having listened to many of the speeches emanating from the Opposition benches, one gets the impression that they are stuck in a rut. The criticisms have been repetitious, and even if we were to allow for some creativity in the criticisms of the Government's policies, those criticisms were nevertheless jaded, save and except for the caricatures in respect of *Mother Blair and Mr & Mrs King* who, no doubt, are like those phantom voters who voted in the 1968 and 1973 elections, and I wish to add that both the Blair and King families are reminiscent of those in the documentary, *The trail of the vanishing voters*. Mde

Speaker, if, as they claim, Guyana is in such a terrible mess, the question is, how come many on the other side of the House are prospering, and improving their livelihoods, under the very administration they seek to condemn and admonish? To my mind, these presentations were more for Nation watch, rather than to convince us about the correctness of Government policies. I wish to humbly submit that these contributions, in sum, were unconvincing, uninspiring, and demotivating, to say the least. *[Applause]* A most amazing, if not amusing feature of this debate so far, is that the PNC/R-1G came to this Honourable House, once again, pretending that nothing has changed - either electorally, or transformationally. Year after year, debate after debate, we hear the same hollow and hackneyed arguments, the same worn - out clichés, and the same stale and unpalatable admonitions. One wonders how the PNC/R-1G is able to accomplish this feat - that is, to make believe that the *status quo*, and the balance of forces in Guyana, is one that favours the Opposition, as was the case in the 60s and the 70s. How they're able to maintain this *ostrich head in the sand* posture for so many years is a feat unparalleled in domestic Parliamentary history, and worthy of entry into the Guinness Book of Records. How the Opposition is able to pretend that a new and socio- political reality has not emerged, making a significant shift in the *bodypoliticin* Guyana is anybody's guess. Mde Speaker, how they can ignore the new electoral reality, which emerged a mere six months ago, as exemplified in the fact that the PPP/Civic now has Parliamentary representation in this House from all ten administrative regions in our country. *[Applause]*

The arguments raised in this Honourable House by the Opposition to advance a case against the Government clearly do



not resonate, nor connect, with the socio-economic realities in our society. We only have to look at the elections results every five years since 1992 to see how these results translate in the expanded representation of the PPP/Civic in this House after those elections. The saddest aspect of this debate, save and except in a few cases, is the lack of objectivity, fairness, a sense of balance, and reasonableness by almost all Members of the Opposition who contributed to the debate. The case by the Opposition cannot ... and I believe those who are more seasoned in the political hosting on the Opposition benches must know that the case cannot be won by emphasising only the negatives.

Mde Speaker, it appears as though the Opposition has been afflicted by the conspiracy theory. They see a conspiracy in each and every project initiated by the Government- whether it is the Berbice River Bridge, the allocation of pension books, the provision of electricity, the decision to establish casino gambling, the building of roads in Sophia, or the allocation of contracts; in all these projects the conspiracy theory dominates. They come and tell us that the country is in a mess, the country is worse off, the economy is controlled by drug lords, that there is bad governance, and let corruption is rampant; but, at the end of the day, it is all about politicking and propagandising through Nation watch - nothing more, nothing less.

How does this Budget touch the lives of people, how does this Budget touch the lives of the Guyanese people? Everywhere you go people have certain basic complaints. They complain about drainage and irrigation, electricity supply, education and health services, housing, water and sanitation. The Government of Guyana's response with respect to the social and economic programmes, has been targeted and focused, as is reflected in this

Budget; and this is exemplified in its Budgetary allocations and, as a consequence, its holistic approach to crime fighting and crime prevention. *[Applause]* It is not only a matter of how much money is allocated, but this is important - equally important, however, is to get value for money and to, above all, touch the lives of every Guyanese.

Take for example, Mde Speaker, complaints by people about flooding. Under Drainage and Irrigation in 2006, \$1.5b was allocated; in 2007 \$2.3b has been allocated. If these sums are translated, in terms of the people's lives being touched, what do we have? Less floods, better controls, better drainage and irrigation, increased agricultural production, cheaper agricultural products and, only recently, three thousand persons employed in poor and depressed areas. Take electricity, Government's policy with respect to electricity supply. In 2006, 21,500 household connections were made under the UAEP, SIMAP and Government of Guyana, respectively. This is very important, because we recognise electricity as a basic necessity - a service that is always in great demand. Our children need to study and do their homework at nights. Last year, distribution of energy-saving bulbs: 449,796 energy-saving bulbs were distributed to people in this country. This is the policy of the Government touches the lives of 103,365 households.

Mde Speaker, on housing, another area where Government's policy touches the lives of people through its allocations, more people have house lots and the housing drive continues. People now own something, and we are gradually putting an end to squatting.

Water and sanitation: another important aspect which people are always constantly demanding, and to which the Government is constantly responding. \$1.9B in 2006; \$2.9B in 2007, people need to have hygienic, clean drinking water from the ground to floor level. This is a basic need. If they don't have this, they complain - and quite understandably so. We need, in this connection, a healthy population.

What about poverty reduction? Another area where the Budget allocation touches the lives of people; seven poverty reduction sectors amounted to \$2.6M, last year five hundred households benefited from the provision of loans. Education - \$3.1B in 2006, \$15.6B in 2007! Every parent wants his children to be educated. They want them to study under comfortable and improved conditions, and we are making education more and more accessible to all.

We need not to speak about the Budget in isolation, but to make the connection between the Budget and the allocations, and the lives of the Guyanese people. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, in the Budget speech, my colleague, at page 44, had this to say about the fight against crime:

*Today crime is more sophisticated and vicious. In Guyana any solution to this challenge must therefore embrace a holistic outlook, and utilise modern techniques and strategies.*

It is precisely on this issue that I would like to place emphasis and that is to say, embracing a holistic approach to fighting crime. How do we translate this concept of a holistic approach in the fight against crime? We first of all, in providing security, must refer, not only about security from the police perspective, but from the perspective of human, social and economic security. The bottom line, and the ultimate objective, must be improving the lives of our people.

The Honourable Minister of Finance, in his speech, also said: *“We want to move towards a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours.”* I heard a lot of talk about *vision*; that the Budget lacks vision. This is vision - talk about vision, this is vision. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, from a security perspective, we have to work assiduously to ensure that our people enjoy freedom from fear, danger, and want. This is how we are capturing the holistic approach to the fight against crime; the holistic approach to fighting against crime embraces thirteen areas.

First is the confidence expressed by the business community in our country, and this is a confidence that continues to grow. Second is the increasing employment opportunity in our country; last year alone 10,691 jobs were created in this country. The third area is the Poverty Reduction Programmes, where \$23,000,000.00 was spent in reducing poverty. Fourthly is growth in the economy - from 4.7% to 4.9% projected for 2007, fifthly, the diversification of agriculture, for which \$12B has been allocated, sixth, the increased investment flows, seventh, the Justice Sector Reform Strategy, eighth, housing and water. Ninth, increase in the allocation for health. Tenth, promoting the growth areas; and in this respect, when we refer to the growth

areas in the economy, we have never said that we are continuing with the dependency of primary products. We are aggressively pursuing these growth areas in non-traditional crops – aquaculture timber processing, tourism, information technology, which is out-sourcing, prospecting and mining, services such as transportation, telecommunications, and construction, not forgetting light manufacturing. These are the new areas that are growing, significantly, in our economy and will certainly, over the next ten years, be a major contributor to our GDP, Mde Speaker. *[Applause]*

Another area that must be an important, and is an important component to the holistic approach to fighting crime is, the creation of partnerships between the police and the community, and in this respect we refer to the creation of neighborhood police - over three hundred such neighborhood police had since been accredited as rural constables; the Community Policing Groups - one hundred and forty groups across the country, particularly on the coastland, with over two thousand members. These, Mde Speaker, are the areas that must be seen in a total context of the fight against crime. The Government of Guyana's response to the fight against crime has been to constantly allocate more and more funds to the justice and security areas. The role of the police in controlling and preventing violence and crime is a highly-charged debate that is supported by very little data at best. At the two extremes - one view is that the police should control crime through effective law enforcement that removes criminals from the streets and increases the potential cost of committing crime, thus deterring potential offenders. The other view posits that the police actions operate at the margins, rather than at the root cause of the crime, and so have little impact on the broad

trends in crime rates, which are fundamentally driven by economic, demographic, social and cultural factors.

We therefore have two key approaches to policing: Community Policing, and problem-oriented policing, exemplified by the British and Europeans, British and European models and, secondly, quality-of-life policing, and zero-tolerance policing, exemplified by many of the systems in the USA, particularly in New York. Our approach, Mde Speaker, is to have a hybrid model, which embraces positive elements of both approaches adapted to our own social, psychological, demographic, and cultural realities.

The Government's anti-crime efforts, during 2006, have brought tangible results. Government's support to the Police Force; the deployment of armed, mobile and foot police patrols in the city; the stop-and-search activities on the highways; an increased presence of police in high crime areas and areas, of high traffic accidents, have all combined to form deterrents to crime, especially during the latter part of 2006. All would admit, reasonably, that a feeling of safety and security is indent in most areas of Guyana. An overview of the crime situation in 2006 shows a decrease of 7% of total crime reports in 2006, against total crime reports in 2005. During 2006, several aggressive initiatives were implemented to stem the tide of criminal activities in Guyana. Many of these were conducted in circumstances which require the physical presence of law enforcement officers, and the visibility of the police and army personnel, especially in high crime areas, which gave a feeling of security to the citizens. By day and by night increased numbers of armed patrols can be seen in cars, on motor cycles, on foot, in

plainclothes, keeping our people, and their properties, safe from the activities of the criminals. *[Applause]*

One of the main areas of concern, Mde Speaker, is the question of criminal deportees. This is an area where the Government of Guyana has grave concern about. Some of these deportees have joined the local criminal community and have introduced into our society the types of criminality hitherto alien to the Guyanese experience, and Guyana is not exceptional in this respect. This problem is shared by, and is also being addressed by other Caribbean countries.

Immigration: As was promised during the 2006 Budget debate, the Government of Guyana has entered into a contract with Canadian Bank mate to produce our first ever machine readable passports, *[Applause]* the first batch of which should be available by August this year. This initiative will bring Guyana into compliance with the safety and security standards of International Civil Aviation Organisation. The Guyana passport will protect, or will be protected against forgery, and will therefore be accepted, with greater confidence, at ports of entry around the world.

Mde Speaker, the Citizen Security Programme, as was mentioned in the Budget debate, will be an important component in 2007, in respect to the fight against crime. Among the objectives of this Citizen Security Programme is the modernisation and reform of the Guyana Police Force, the intention being to refocus the Police, using a policing model that we adapted from best practices around the world. As such, elements from both approaches that are referred to would be used. The areas of priority of this reform will be the establishment of a crime

fighting unit, a SWAT team, a state-of-the-art forensic laboratory, a modern training facility, and remodeling and enhancing police stations around the country.

At the recent conference of police officers, held in Georgetown, in addressing that conference I made a number of recommendations, which could be implemented by the police in the short, medium and long term. In this regard I recommended the following:

- (i) establishment of a victim specialist unit to treat with domestic violence victims [*Applause*];
- (ii) establishment of a sexual assault unit to treat with the increase in the rape and carnal knowledge cases;
- (iii) establishment of a family liaison specialist unit to treat with family instability and disruptions;
- (iv) establishment of a youth investigation branch to treat with problems affecting the youths;
- (v) establishment of a witness protection scheme, which we have longed talked about; and
- (vi) The creation of a threat detection and analysis unit.

Mde Speaker, what is the way forward? Cricket World Cup has served as a catalyst in many ways, and has forced decisions and actions on many fronts, and on the regional level, to co-ordinate



security, activities and share information, using information technology. We need ... *[Interruption]*

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

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

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Clement Rohee:** Thank you, Mde Speaker. We need to build on the momentum and the legacies that will be left from Cricket World Cup. We need to work at improving work processes, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness, to monitor and evaluate our performances, to protect gains and to guard against backsliding. Good policing requires public co-operation to find out about crimes. Working alone, as I told the Police Force - the Police discovered only 5% to 10% of all recorded crimes, according to researchers. The key to solving crimes is information or intelligence - information supported by detective work and technological methods; and we, in the Government, will provide the support to build the capacity to fight crime, and to ensure that proper investigative and forensic investigations are conducted.

Mde Speaker, mention was made about the need to enact new laws. The Government will soon be bringing, to this House, the Firearms Act, Chapter 16:05, which will be to increase penalties

for persons who are found in possession of unlicensed firearms, and the use thereof. *[Applause]*

With respect to motor vehicles and road safety: The activities that we intend to undertake in this year will be increase in penalties and the issuance of a new set of traffic tickets, banning of music in public transportation, *[Applause]* breathalysers for the traffic police to operate a breath-analysing instrument on a driver suspected of consuming alcohol, the demerit point system to provide for the procedure for assignment of points on conviction of certain traffic offences. We'll also be bringing a Bill to this House to strengthen the legislation, and to strengthen the court to refuse bail to persons charged with the possession of illegal firearms. A Bill will also be brought to this House to facilitate the establishment of a holding center for juveniles in a Juvenile Offender's Bill.

Mde Speaker, reference was made to corruption. Corruption is an issue that all Opposition Parties around the world use. The argument of corruption is used to taint the Government of the day - and this is not strange to us here in Guyana. It is important to recall several of the policy interventions by the Government to stamp out corruption at all levels in the public sector by the following actions:

- (i) re-introduction of the Annual Auditor General's Report;
- (ii) giving effect to the Integrity Commission;
- (iii) strengthening the Guyana Police Force's White-collar Crime Unit;

- (iv) becoming a signatory to various international anti-corruption conventions;
- (v) the National Assembly now has greater input in Public policy and programme reviews;
- (vi) revising the Fiscal Management Laws of Guyana;
- (vii) Re-introduction of an open tendering system;
- (viii) passage of, and giving implemental effect to the Procurement Act, including removal of Cabinet Award Contracts;
- (ix) establishment of a Money Laundering Unit;
- (x) revamping the Inland Revenue and Customs Departments, which led to the creation of the Guyana Revenue Authority;
- (xi) Constant custom public information, and updates on Government's policies, plans and projects.  
*[Applause]*

This is our road map to fighting corruption. So when Members of this House come and glibly use the charge of corruption, and refuse to look at this road map which the Government has adopted, then I can only say that it is either lack of education, or refusal to accept the policies of the Government.

Mde Speaker, let me talk about the Guyana Prison Service. In August 2006, there were two disorderly incidents at the Georgetown Prison, which were put down, in the first instance,

with the intervention of the Joint Services. The concerns of the aggrieved prisoners were addressed, and a system for the free flow of information between the prison population, on the one hand, and the prison administration on the other, was created. Measures were taken to improve the security of the various prisons, including the provision of surveillance, and the communication systems, the establishment of an operations room, watch towers, and total areas network for the Mazaruni Prison.

Mde Speaker, reference was made to this *callaloo connection*. Let me...I want to be very clear on this ... because it is obvious to those who may have read that editorial, and including the architects of that editorial, did not have the information that I had when I made that statement, after examining the report of the jail break at Lusignan, in examining the report of the jail break at the Georgetown Prisons, and examining the report of the jail break at the Mazaruni Prison's. A careful reading of that report will see ... *[Interruption: 'Cde Speaker, this is the behavior that we have to endure in this place']* in examining the reports that were written with respect to those incidents, what I found was that the inmates - the prisoners, were using coded language among themselves to plan, at every stage of the escape, what action should be taken, and the word *callaloo* was a coded word that was to be uttered at a particular time of the scenario so that the would-be jail breakers would resort to certain action to achieve their objectives. That was what was meant. You see, you won't understand this thing if you won't talk to me, *talk to me*. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, with due respects to my colleague parliamentarians, don't just follow what is written by these so-called specialists and experts in the editorials of a newspaper and begin parroting it. Pick up the phone and call *your* Minister of Home Affairs *[Applause]* and

seek to get clarification or assistance on any matter that is of national importance [*Applause*].

Mention has been made, inside and outside of this Honourable House, about building a new prison. This has developed into a kind of a mantra, about building a new prison. Mde Speaker, we already have five prison locations in this country, and I want to say that we cannot build our way outside of the overcrowding situation. This is not the way to solve overcrowding in prisons - by building yourself out of the situation. We cannot pretend that, if we only add another few prison cells, a few hundred cells that we will somehow have a prison system that will work. It is not going to happen. Therefore, we must not adopt the approach that use of prisons ... and we don't want to use prisons to warehouse people for a few months or a few years; that is not the idea. Mde Speaker, those who advocate more prisons never answered the question: where do we stop, where do we stop? The only way to solve the problem is to take concerted action to cut re-offenders, and develop smarter ways to punish and to rehabilitate offenders. Instead of prison expansion, we should expand and build specialised secure facilities where the problems could be solved, and more of these difficulties tackled. In this respect, it is timely that the Justice Sector Reform Strategy, which is aimed at improving the criminal justice system, will help us address this problem. We are assiduously working to rehabilitate prisoners.

During the debate, some time ago ... and I think the Supplementary, the Honourable Member Mr Murray sought to be funny by asking a rather peculiar question, and that peculiar question was "*How many scholarships are we offering to prisoners?*" We do not offer scholarships to prisoners; what we do is offer rehabilitation programmes ... [*Interrupting*]

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

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

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given another fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Clement Rohee:** We are pursuing an aggressive programme of prison literacy, skills, craft and agriculture, religious and recreational activities within the prison environs. Our projection for 2007 is to continue developing the capabilities of some prisoners, and in this respect, the Guyana Prison Service will focus on the following:

- (i) effective training of rounds to deal with the multi-dimensional challenges in the prison environment;
- (ii) developing the security capabilities of each prison location;
- (iii) Reducing dietary expenditure through self-sufficiency.

In this respect, this is a very important area for our focus in the next year. Every prisoner cost the State approximately \$19,000.00 per month, and we have approximately 1,900 prisoners spread across the country, and one of the areas that we need to be creative and innovative is to use the prison estate to cultivate and rear livestock, produce, more food, so that we'll be able to ease the budgetary allocation for dietary for the prisons and, in that way, use those resources for other activities to enhance the security of the prison.

Mde Speaker, the Guyana Fire Service: Lots of talk outside and inside of this House has been about the ability of the Guyana Fire Service to respond, quickly, to fire. Apparently the Honourable Member Mrs Backer wasn't here when a question was raised about the fire station at Bartica; a question was raised about that, and I need to clarify what is the position. Provision has been made for commencement of the establishment of fire stations at Bartica; a new fire station has already been completed at Linden and one at Fort Wellington and, in the not too distant future, providing that resources are available, we will be looking at the establishment of fire stations in other parts of the country. A Fire Advisory Board has been established. This Board was inactive for over thirty-five years, and now this Board is actively working in the field of fire prevention.

Letters in the press have been referring, from time to time, to the office of the General Registrar. I would like to inform the Honourable House that, for the year 2006, births, deaths, and all forms of certification - in 2005, 208,705 certificates were issued, and in 2006, 254,705 certificates - either of death and birth, were issued by the Office of the General Registrar. I know that this is what they're supposed to do, but the point is that not very often

people recognise the efforts which the officers who are working in this office are exerting in order to provide a quality service to the people of this country. *[Applause]*

The Police Complaints Authority has also been very active in 2006 and, in 2005, many complaints were received. The figures are too many to mention - that is to say, complaints by the public against the police. Actions have been taken in this respect. Many of these matters have been referred to the Office of Professional Responsibility and the DPP for advice, and I believe that this Authority has proven to be a useful institution in ensuring checks and balances in the force, and in its interaction with the public.

Mde Speaker, narcotic drugs is mentioned ad magnesium.

The National Drug Strategy Master Plan for 2005: A journalist recently interviewed me about the extent to which we have implemented many of the commitment we made in the National Drug Strategy Master plan and in responding to the question, Mde Speaker, in terms of the rate of implementation of the recommendations in this National Drug Strategy Master Plan, it appeared, clearly, that more than 90% of those recommendations have either been implemented, partially implemented, with very few not implemented. The most aspect of this Master Plan has to do with the establishment of a secretariat, and a co-coordinator, and I believe that, in the course of this year, we will fulfill that obligation.

The National Commission on Law and Order has been very active, and I have to extend my congratulations and gratitude to all those Guyanese who are sitting on this National Commission on Law and Order, including Members from this side of the



House and the Opposition as well. [Applause] We are now working assiduously to establish Crime Stoppers Guyana. Only today the steering committee, which has been established to launch the Crime Stoppers Guyana, met and continued the discussion on the constitution of the Crime Stoppers Programme, and to examine the merits and criteria for persons to serve on the Board of the Crime Stoppers Programme. It is hoped that, by August of this year, we would launch the Crime Stoppers Programme in Guyana. [Applause] I would like to conclude by saying that the Honourable Member, Mr Murray, in opening the debate on the Opposition side, said, or made reference once again, to the external dependence on foreign funding to the tune of 37% of the Budget. I would not wish to elucidate too much on this matter, Mde Speaker, because I believe that the Honourable Minister Fernandes will do that, but I am taking note of it for future reference. What was even more telling was the statement Mr Murray made when he said: "*I will never defend wrongdoing.*" Mr Murray is a very good friend of mine, but I believe that, in representing the Party that he represents, there is a disconnection between that statement, and the performance and history of the Party in which he holds office. Therefore, if we are to talk about never defending wrongdoing, it is incumbent upon all those who are associated with wrongdoings of that Party, of that administration over those years, to recognise those wrongdoings, and to publicly state what their position was, and who was responsible.

The Honourable Opposition Leader, in a media interview on the Budget, after the Minister had presented it, said that the Budget lacks vision. He said that most of the issues in the Budget are platitudes that the Budget does not provide answers; and he also,

at another time, said that where there is no vision a people perishes. I would say that these were basically rhetorical issues that were raised, and I would want to recognize, and pre-empt, the Honourable Opposition Leader, because I believe that, having seen a sneak preview of his presentation, these are the issues he will focus on in his presentation.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member Dr Norton claimed that the Government of Guyana is providing the Cuban authorities with Guyanese patients as guinea pigs. This is a most unfortunate statement, and it demonstrates a high degree of ungratefulness to a Government of a third world country.

**The Speaker:** Yes Dr Norton.

**Hon Dr George Norton:** Mde Speaker, on a point of elucidation. I said that, as the Minister did say, talk to me. I said that, unless information is provided, there are rumors around, and those rumors are saying that the Guyanese patients could have been used as guinea pigs for practicing ophthalmology.

**Hon Clement Rohee:** Mde Speaker, I believe the Honourable Member is vainly attempting damage control. This is what he is seeking to do. He is seeking to do some damage control, because I have said ... and I am always making copious notes of when Opposition Members speak. I always make copious notes of what they say, but I believe, in the final analysis the Honourable Minority Leader has said the answer will prove ... *[Interruption]* Mde Speaker, this is a most unfortunate statement, and it demonstrates a high degree of ungratefulness to a Government of a third world country, whose contribution to human development in the third world far outstrips the contribution made by some

industrialised states. The PNC is no stranger to such solidarity, since they themselves were very chummy, with the Cuban Government, and gained quite a lot of benefits which, regrettably, many in the new PNC know little about. Mde Speaker, in and out of Government, the PPP/C has never shown ingratitude to its friends, even though some have sought to paint us as surrogates, satellites and puppets of those countries with which we had, and maintain friendly relations. Today that friendship is bearing fruit with the establishment of comprehensive diagnostic and treatment centers across the country - with the assistance of the Cuban Government, as well as with large scale investments by Russian trans-nationals like Rusa; and in the case of the People's Republic of China, Bosai - a massive Chinese company.

We listen keenly to the cries of those who have been victims of crime, and have initiated several programmes to reduce crime and, where possible, prevent its occurrence, because we are for the welfare of our citizens - whether she is a young member of our Indigenous community exploited by a shop keeper; whether he is a teenager who is initiated in the habit of drug abuse; whether he or she is a business person who has been savagely beaten and robbed of cash and jewellery; whether he or she is a victim of execution-style murder; or whether they relive the traumatic experiences of rape and other sexual assaults.

My Ministry, Mde Speaker, seeks to make Guyana safe and secure for the individual, the family, the community, and the growth and development of our country. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, it's 7:30PM and we will take the second suspension for half an hour.

**19:32 SUSPENSION OF SITTING**

**20:05 RESUMPTION OF SITTING**

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister Mr Sheik Baksh.

**Hon Dr Shaik Baksh:** Thank you, Mde Speaker. The theme of the 2007 Budget is: *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.*” The Budget, if it properly perused, you will find it details a lot of the plans, programmes, for the modernisation of the economy, and the modernization of Guyana. So when I heard the Honourable Member on the other Side, Mr. McAllister, stating that when we are talking about modernization, we are talking about traditional sectors because a lot of emphasis is being placed on the traditional sectors of sugar, rice and bauxite, I don’t know to what extent he has really studied this Budget to analyze the number of measures which are inherent in the Budget to lead us to this modernization path. The 2007 Budget is the continuation of our modernization programme, which was commenced several years ago, but the one-year Budget plans, accelerates the measures which are inherent here; and accelerates the modernisation of our country. I’ll not deal with the traditional sectors, because measures are already there, for example, the \$169,000,000.00 Skeldon modernisation project, which will lead to the refining of sugar, co-generation of electricity, and production of bio-ethanol - a modern factory indeed. For the Bauxite industry, we have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding on both sides to construct an aluminum plant by

2009. If that is not modernising the Bauxite industry, what else is? And \$3B will be spent in the rice industry to promote the rice competitiveness project with the objective of doubling the rice yields in the years ahead.

In the manufacturing sector, here we need to intensify the modernisation programme, and \$3.6B will be spent over three years to modernise the sector, and to strengthen the institutional framework for competitiveness for investments and export. And so it can be said about the tourism sector; the information and communications technology also; and I want to quote here from the Budget: *“The information and communication technology is to unlock the potential of the ITC sector as a means of building a modern Guyana.”* A lot of emphasis will be placed on that this year with the coming into being of the national ITC strategic plan. Of course, we’ve already moved in the area of modernising the telecommunication sector, and with the coming into our country of Digicel, we can see what the competition can do. So it goes on with the other sectors: livestock, seafood, aquaculture and forestry; these entire things can only redound to the benefit of the economy, our country, and our people. In infrastructure, the list is very long, and I won’t go into all of them, but just to mention the one with the Ogle Airport Development Project - the modernisation of air transport, which can be the hub of the transport sector; and we know about the Lethem to Linden road and so on. Of importance is the MOU with Synergy Holdings for a hydropower project at Amelia’s Falls; and we’re hoping that it can come into being.

Mde Speaker, there are several other areas where modernisation is taking place, the most important of them all, for the financial sector, is the modernisation of the tax system and the coming into

being of VAT and, of course, all Parties in this House supported., the VAT initiative, with some reservations on the implementation modalities and so on. It is as though we have left those sectors untouched. We're modernising the judicial administration also: \$5M will be spent in this area and Minister Jennifer Westford talked about the modernisation programme for the Public Service and she has gone into some details in that area. The other two areas in the social sector are the health sector, which was dealt with extensively: \$4B for the construction of modern hospital throughout Guyana, and all the other health facilities which will be coming into being.

In the housing and water sector ... and here I want to elaborate a bit more, because of the mis-representations which have been put forward by the Honourable Member, Mr Keith Scott, as though he was not living nor residing in Guyana for a number of years, and I think he was on another planet, because he has stated a number things here - that there is no progressive housing programme in Guyana. He questioned the role of the Private Sector; and stated that new squatting areas are already coming into being, and he asked some questions ... I can't use the term on what is the present position with infra-structure, and he went into all kinds of things like discrimination in the allocation of house lots, and marginalisation, non-provision of mortgages, and that allottees were forced to go to the commercial banks at high interest rates. Well, I want to deal with that one, because it is this Government that has freed up the mortgage sector and the housing loan markets in this country here. All of the banks are now granting housing loans - all of the banks, every one of them. *[Applause]* More important than that, Mde Speaker ... and I want to quote here ... because there has been virtually a housing

revolution in this country, which the Honourable Member has failed to see, and let me give him the statistics from the New Building Society, to show what is taking place in this country. In 1990 the interest rate was 18%, in 1991 for housing loans I'm talking about, it was 18% also. In 1990, loans approved in that year were one hundred and sixty-five (165); in 1991 two hundred and fourteen (214) loans; and in 2006 the New Building Society approved one thousand, two hundred and thirty-three (1,233) loans in this country. *[Applause]* The interest rate has gone down. Never before in the history of this country are we benefiting from such low interests rates for housing construction: 5.5% for low income loans, and 7.5% for middle income loans in this country. In 1990 \$27.4M was disbursed as housing loans by the New Building Society; in 1991 this rose to \$41.1M for housing loans. In 2006, the New Building Society disbursed \$3.186B in housing loans; so you can see what is taking place in this country, Honourable Speaker, and it goes on and on. He calls for the re-establishment of the Guyana Mortgage Finance Bank - what a retrograde step when we have freed up the loan market here with all the banks and competition. That bank was closed in 1998 because it was bankrupt: The liabilities were more than even the loan portfolio; so why bring back an institution like that, and State control in that sector - like Globe Trust, of course? We can go on and on here, but what strikes me, most of all, is that they have gone back into the past. We must look forward. We don't want to go back into the past, because we want to move forward. They want to glorify the days when the PNC was in Office and what they have done; but they've done next to nothing in terms of the housing sector in this country - next to nothing, and this Government, since 1992 has modernised the housing sector, and what have we done? We have, in fact, distributed

70,000 house lots, and we have established 115 housing schemes - by the Government - one hundred and fifteen all over this country; and in terms of the squatting settlement; let me correct him here: Bare Root was a squatting settlement before 1992. There were squatters in Bare Root – you had better check it out. Bare Root had squatters ... and in Plastic City there were a lot of squatters, but it accelerated over the years; but that is not the point. The point is that this Government has put, under the Regularisation Programme, one hundred and sixty-five squatting settlements, and we're delivering Titles. For example, in Sophia alone, just under 2,000 titles have been given to the people of the former Sophia squatting area - 2,000 titles, and we can go on and on. Every squatting settlement in this country has benefited from infrastructural works: roads, water supply, drainage systems, and so on; and we are moving ahead, because the Budget has made provisions. He said that the sums voted were not enough, but that is a continuation of what was already spent over the years - which amounted to \$10B in the housing sector as at the end of the year 2006. We are continuing to complete the works in the housing areas, which include the squatting settlements in this country. I hope this puts the records very clear, but I would not end on the housing sector unless I quote here from the *Stabroek News* editorial - way back in April 1998:

*The Government must be commended for its efforts to tackle the housing problem. As is well known, it inherited, in 1992, an absolutely disastrous situation, in which there had been no large-scale housing development for very, many*



*years. There was no longer even a Ministry of Housing, reflecting the low priority that portfolio enjoyed, and there was a huge unsatisfied demand for housing at every level.*

Mde Speaker, that tells us many things, and I hope that settles the matter once and for all.

I now come to the education sector ... and the first thing I want to say is that the Honourable Member, Amna Alli - if there's one good thing she said in her whole presentation, was to state that the Government had a good plan: its implementation plan, so I must credit her, because this is our five-year Strategic Plan, which ends this year; and I recognise from her presentation that she read this Strategic Plan, and we're already beginning to review and evaluate the Strategic Plan, and to get a new Plan in place before the end of this year - a new strategic plan for the next five years: So we do have a plan, but for her to say that we don't have a vision, that our vision is *blurred* - to use her word. The vision is here in the plan, and it is very clear that we know what we're about, and what we want to achieve. We've set up systems, procedures, and we have a whole range of programmes in place to assist in the implementation of the Plan, and we have some good people - good educational managers in the Ministry; and in the regions also, to implement this plan: So I want to tell her that we're moving rapidly. One of the main ingredients of this plan here is the delivery of quality education in Guyana, quality education, what I call the quality imperative in education, and there is no denying that. She touched on the issue of literacy, and ... not so much on innumeracy; I didn't hear her mention

innumeracy, but literacy, and the Budget has stated that the Government will be working to ensure that there is a 100% literacy in Guyana; and so we intend to do; although we haven't reached there as yet: But for her to come and say she doubts whether we can achieve that 100% literacy, and to say that the PNC has already conducted a survey on literacy, and that they have already established a learning centre in Sophia. Well, if that is the case, it's commendable, because I have already called for a partnership in education at all levels; but I have enquired, and enquired from all of my officers in the Ministry, and not one of them can tell me that there was a survey on literacy conducted by the PNC, or that there is a learning centre in Sophia; because they're supposed to know if there is a learning centre in Sophia. I want to put the ball in your court, because if you ended up your presentation by calling for involvement; then why is it you never made this known to the Ministry - that you're involved, so that we can support you? We want to do that. Many NGOs are active in this ... *[Interruption: "Because you're a Minister; you're part of the education sector at a high level. You call me and say "look, my school needs staff," and I'll try to respond to that, alright? We're responding to that but you call me and say, 'Well look Minister, we're helping the Government here to ensure' ... no, the country as a whole will benefit; when you help the Government you help the people also, because this is a people's Government, a Government for the people"]* *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Human Development Report 2007 has clearly stated that the literacy rate in Guyana is 96.5% *[Applause]* and I want to comment on that ... *[Interruption: 'The Human Development Index came out recently; you don't read the Human Development Reports?']* Okay, the methodology that is used ...

and they were very frank about it, is that it is based on growth enrolment ratios and census data, but it may not have taken into account attendance rates. This would, if it does not take it into account ... and we know that we have a problem, and I'm the first to say this, on the attendance rates in the school system, and the Minister mentioned about truancy and so on, and I'll tell you what we plan to do about that - the Honourable Member, so the HDI Index is based on gross enrolments ... and you have to base it on some instrument, some measuring instrument, but even the UNDP has stated that they are looking at other measurements, like the schooling of the population to determine literacy rates. Whenever, or whatever you do or say, we do have a high literacy rate in this country. We do have a high literacy rate; and it goes back even to the PNC days, because, when I look at 1991 at pro-literacy enrolment ... because it is based on enrolment, enrolment for the primary school was 82% under the PNC in 1991, but under this Government we have increased it to 100% enrolment, *[Applause]* which means ... this is the literacy rates, the enrolment rate; the enrolment means that we have satisfied the MDG's goals now, in the year 2007; we've already satisfied the MDG's goals; and also the whole question of gender disparity, we've already satisfied that also in Guyana. In terms of our ... *[Interruption: 'No, no, we have satisfied the MDG's goals, national enrolment']*

Mde Speaker, we have a whole range of initiatives, in the education sector, to ensure that we continue in the upward trend. It will take a number of years, and we recognise this. It will take, in terms of 100% literacy rate, and improving all the other levels of education, including secondary, technical, vocation levels, and so on, and we have the BEAMs Project, for which, in Phase I, we

have already spent over \$1B, and the Budget states that in the year 2007, \$850M will be spent under the BEAM project. This Project is geared toward ensuring that we achieve that goal of 100% literacy rate - literacy and numeracy enhancement is a fundamental part of the BEAMs Project. We've already sent out materials to all of the primary schools in our country. We're now training people in the new literacy methodology, and we're being assisted here by international consultants. We have master trainers at the Cyril Potter College of Education; these master trainers have responsibility for each region. We have eleven master trainers, and we're training the teachers and head teachers how to roll on this literacy programme, with the new methodology in our country. We already have the IRI radio programme for innumeracy, and this has already shown results: that is, inter-active radio instruction programme. It has already shown results in that area. We're training our teachers in Regions 8 and 9. We have the fast track initiative; \$500M will be spent this year to continue the training, and let me tell you something about that: We've already trained, under the GBET Programme - which comes to an end this year- Guyana Basic Education and Teacher Training Programme - we've already been training over five hundred teachers in the hinterland areas, and on the coastal Belt. Thirteen centres have been opened up: five in the coastal areas, and eight in the hinterland areas, so we have been going across this country through the distance education mode of teaching, and training our teachers - upgrading unqualified teachers in the hinterland areas under the fast track initiative, and we've been offering incentives in the remote areas, whereby eight hundred and sixty-three teachers are benefiting under this programme and receiving incentives.

More than that, the Honourable Member talked about the text books provisions. If she had asked me I would've told her. We have distributed, across all the regions of Guyana, over one million text books at a cost of G\$1B. [Applause] This is what we have done and Mde Speaker ... [Interruption: 'You'll get a website soon on that'] we want to ensure that we have quality teachers in our system, and this is one of the goals ... we'll talk about the payment system just now, but this is one. Importantly also, we want to ensure that we have what we now call *effective schools, child friendly schools*, and this Government, since 1992, has moved to build and rehabilitate hundreds of schools. This is not to say that the PNC, in its last days, did not make a contribution. Under the PEIP programme - yes, you put out a plan to build some schools. I want to bring the numbers, because we must have numbers. Under that programme, the plan was to build eight new schools and rehabilitate twenty-seven and I recall the Honourable Member, Mr Franklyn, making the point, in his presentation, that we should look at the designs of our schools to ensure that we have savings, which can accrue to the benefit of the population as a whole, and this is precisely, Honourable Member Franklyn, what was done by this Government. We reviewed the PEIP, and what have we done? Using the same amount of money that was provided by the donors, we were able to build thirty-eight new schools and rehabilitate sixty-five schools, because we changed the design. [Applause]

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

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

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Dr Shaik Baksh:** This Government has always been careful in the way it is spending the taxpayers' money, and this is a classic example, where we reviewed the designs ... because you know what the PEIP wanted to do under the PNC? They wanted to build a car park at Hosororo Secondary School; that was how they wanted to spend the money, by building a car park. Look how many schools we have built and rehabilitated. More than that, I want to assure the Honourable Member that the Ministry will continue to look at our designs ... a very good point you've made, and ensure that, on behalf of the people of Guyana, we get value for our money; and we'll do this.

The point that the Honourable Member had made, which struck me ... I didn't want to go back again in the past, I don't like it, but she talked about what the PNC did - the Honourable Member, I said before, about what the PNC did, and what a successful education programme they had, and so on. I want to make the point, and to show what we've been doing since 1992 in the education Sector, under several of the PPP/Civic Ministers ... because we understand the priority which is to be given to the education sector. This Government, from day one, from 1992, recognised that, to modernise this country, the key is the

education sector and the education programmes. We're done that, and more and more monies have been going into this sector so that in 2007, this year's Budget, is the highest as a percentage of the budgetary allocation over the last five years - \$15.6B for the education sector [*Applause*] because we know that it is only through education that we can modernise, grow, and develop this country; and also provide for the true potential of the human resources, the self-realisation of the Guyanese people through education. It has paid off, and let me give you some more information to show that what we have done is bearing fruit, which is not to say ... and I don't want to be misunderstood, because we have a long way to go, and that's why I called at several forums across Guyana for a partnership. The Government will provide that leadership you're talking about - the said strong leadership that is lacking, we will provide that leadership, I want to assure this House, in partnership with all levels of society - from the parents, teachers, school administrators, regional officials and the education managers, and the political parties. We already have the main political party representative in the task force, which has been set up to review the Education Act. They're playing a very active role in that, and that will be highly participative, I can assure you. They're due to report later this year, perhaps by August. We gave them a mandate and we hope they can complete their work by August so that we can have unanimous agreements in this House, on the new Education Act to guide the country over the next decade or so. When I said that it's beginning to improve, I want to give you some data - and this is at the secondary school level. We talked about the primary school, the functional literacy, trying to improve it through several programmes, and not to forget. We have changed from the SSEE, to Grades 2, 4 and 6 assessments. That is an important

component of the literacy programme because, at Grade 2, when we look at how the students are performing, we can take remedial action to improve literacy and innumeracy; then at Grade 4, then at Grade 6, so that is an integral part, and I want to announce that everything seems smooth so far for the running of that Grade 6 assessment in April of this year. Now, at the secondary level ... and we've been making advances through our various programmes ... because our goal, at the secondary level, is universal secondary level education. We're moving in that direction, and the new Strategic Plan will tell us the timeframe, because there'll be a cost involved; but in the meantime, we have been building schools all over this country – state-of-the-art secondary schools. I just opened one at Aurora on the Essequibo Coast. We have one at Wisburg in Region 10, due to be completed in March. We have one at Bartica – Bartica Secondary: State-of-the-art, even in the hinterland areas. We have one at Diamond, which will accommodate a student population of one thousand, and we have another one: The Honourable Member talked about the Swami Purnanda School, and that there is no mention in the Budget, and he is right; but I want to tell you that we're completing the designs now; which should be completed by the end of March, for a new secondary school at Hope on the East Coast Demerara. *[Applause]*

Let me go back to the secondary stream ... and I want to give you some data here. For the five years: 1986-1990, when the PNC was in office ... You must listen, because we are building quality in the education sector, the performance, in terms of percentage at the CXC for English 'A,' for the five years the average was 15.2%; under the PPP/Civic Government, for the five year period 2002-2006, the average was 39.3%. In mathematics, the average



was 16% under the PNC for the five years. Under the PPP/Civic it is 35.8%: in social studies of all subject areas ... what has to account for this paramount of the Party, an average of 14.8%, under the PPP/C Government 73.8%; and in integrated science - the last one. Under the PNC - five years 33%, and under the PPP/Civic Government 75.7%, the quality sources here are the Ministry of Education and your own Budget - the 1991 Budget. You're not reading your own Budget. Go back to the 1991 Budget and you'll see the data. Further, I say not. You have a library right here in Parliament Buildings. Go there and you'll see it. But, Mde Speaker, we're not satisfied. We have to upgrade this education system to its former glory, as the leader of education in the whole of the CARICOM area. This is our golden objective - our vision, to get it there, so what are we doing? In English and mathematics, the Minister of Finance has mentioned that \$30M will be spent this year to upgrade the teaching of English and mathematics - \$30M. Through the distance education modes we'll be doing that, and also to run a certificate programme for teachers of English and mathematics; and we hope that this will bear fruit in the coming years, so we have a programme for that. Also, I want to tell you that, in order to further improve performance in the education Sector, that we want to embark on this year, funds will have to be made available for this, because the programme has now been worked out and make a special request - to run a remedial education programme across this country - at least one centre in each region. When we do the assessments at Grades 2 and 4 at that level, we can send people, during the summer, to be upgraded in remedial education work. So we have that, and we're moving. I'm saying that we're trying to move the education sector to higher standards of achievement, and it'll take some time, and it will call for the

support of all stakeholders. That is not a phenomenon of Guyana alone. It's a global world we're living in - a global world. When we come to the teacher migration issue, it's not only Guyana alone, in the CARICOM countries, and even in the African countries. I met some African Ministers of Education and they said that places like Nigeria, South Africa, they're having problems. You cannot stop the flow of people across Continents anymore, or you would be living in the past. There is what is known as the *Commonwealth Protocol for Teacher Recruitment*, whereby the mandate ... and the ILO has accepted this, it has given the mandate for each country to negotiate bilaterally, with other donor countries on a bilateral basis, on the question of teacher migration/recruitment and so on, which will, of course, lead to funding for teaching training facilities in this country here. We have been recipients of monies of donor funds for this purpose under the GBET programme: the Canadian Government has given us US\$6.2M, and we hope to extend that programme for another two years, so we're moving.

In the technical and vocational education we are offering alternatives, an alternative path; as my colleague here on my right would say the alternative path of secondary education, but this is a phenomenon - Caribbean-wise. The whole of CARICOM is looking now at the 'Techvoc' system of education, to ensure that when people leave the school system, that they can find a job; that they're marketable, and so on and so forth. We in Guyana have been moving in that direction, and we have now what is known as the Basic Competency Certificate Programme, which gives you academic subjects like English and mathematics, but also electives - a large number of electives in technical subjects, and we're moving with CARICOM in this area, because already

there've been changes in the CSEC - Caribbean Exams Council - CSEC Secondary Certificate Examination, to offer a third-year certificate in technical education. They will not wait until the five years have expired. So Guyana is hoping to offer that examination in the year 2008; and we're working hard on this.

There have been curriculum changes to accommodate those persons who cannot succeed in the purely academic stream. The Honourable Member made the point that we're taking the low achievers ... and she referred to the SSEE, and dumping them into secondary schools with no teachers, no equipment, and a few curricula; but that is not so. There are in general secondary schools ... and we now have all schools as general secondary schools, with common curricula up to the ninth grade, and they have teachers in those schools, so we have to ... Those low achievers, in quest of our objective of universal secondary education, we are streaming them into those areas - in the 'TECHVOC' stream. That's what we're doing.

Mde Speaker, I do not want to end without talking about the university, the tertiary level because, at the university level, we are concerned ... the Honourable Member Franklyn made the point, about the relevance of the courses and the programmes ...  
*[Interruption]*

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

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

**The Speaker:** Motion is moved that the Honourable Minister be given fifteen minutes to conclude?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Dr Shaik Baksh:** The University has been mandated to develop a five-year strategic plan, which is to be submitted to the Government by the end of February of this year, and that will be the basis for us to start making changes at the University, so that the University can become relevant to the development needs of Guyana. So we will be looking at that, and especially at the balancing of the courses and programmes across faculties because, as we know, it is now pre-ponderingly for the social sciences and the arts and so on, and we would like to see a re-balancing of that towards Science and technology; so we will be working with the University to ensure that that is done.

Mde Speaker, much has been said about the package for teachers; much has been said about the package that teachers have received, but it must not be taken in isolation, because what the Members have been talking about is the wages - the 5% or 6% increase in wages, without studying the non-salary issues, which we have attached to the salary increase. We have placed a premium for teachers to be trained, and to obtain certification. If a teacher obtains a Certificate in Education, he/she will be given a monthly payment, an additional payment of \$3,000.00; for Diploma, \$5,000.00; so we are attaching an incentive towards improvement of qualifications; and we also have a large number of other measures here. That is not to say that we would not be doing more in the future because, since 1992, we have been increasing, and increasing - not only the salaries of teachers ... it's a relative term, it's not an absolute, it's a relative term ... we have been increasing and improving on this, and we will continue

to do this as we modernise the economy, and as more monies become available; and I know that this is a commitment of the Government. We have given them uniform allowances, duty-free concessions - all teachers will be getting uniform allowances. Remember, uniforms are not going to attract VAT: remember that. It is VAT-free: remember that - VAT-free. I like the term VAT-free; and also duty-free concessions. One hundred teachers will benefit ... *[Interruption: 'Okay, this is the beginning, this is the beginning, and it is a package. Do you want to send the economy bankrupt now, Honourable Member?']* We will also have a housing programme for them; because this is one way I feel ... and let me tell you that thousands of teachers have benefited from house lot allocation, thousands of teachers - and rightly so. We are giving them low-interest loans so that they can build their houses, low interest loans, and so on and so forth. We have two hundred million dollars. We started with forty million dollars - it's a housing loan fund and we have increased that to two hundred million dollars, so it's a revolving fund ... *[Interruption: 'that depends: you have to put up the request, and we have to work this out with the union. We can't do this unilaterally; so we're going to work this out with the union, okay?']* A low income loan in this country attracts, as I said before, 5.5% interest. You can build a low income house - a two-bedroom house, for about \$2.5M - a reasonable house, even granted the increase the prices. I've done the calculation. The prices have increased. I did not tell you that some prices did not go up, but others have gone down, so it's a balancing: Some prices have gone up and some have gone down: this is what we have said.

Mde Speaker, we have seen the entire modernisation programme that we have for this country; and I have outlined what we'd be doing in the education sector, and I'm quite sure that success in this sector will be a success for all Guyana. Thank you very much! *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Donald Ramotar.

**Hon Donald Ramotar:** Thank you Mde Speaker. I would like to join with the Members who spoke before me in congratulating the Minister for his Budget. I must say that he started with an advantage, in a sense that the economy grew by 4.7% in 2006, and therefore he had much more that he can distribute to the various sectors of our economy. I would like also to take this opportunity, before I proceed ... I understand it's the birthday of the Leader of the Opposition, and I would like to wish him a very happy birthday, *[Applause]* and hopefully we can 'hook up' later on.

Mde Speaker, the 2007 Budget, in my view, marks a turning point in the social and economic development of our country. The theme of the Budget "*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*" captures the real intention and direction that the Government is taking. It also reflects how far we have travelled since the PPP/Civic assumed office in 1992. You will recall then, Mde Speaker, that our slogan, at in that time, was "*A time for change, and a time to rebuild*". We are not saying that the reconstructing, or rebuilding process has been completed. There is, indeed, still much to be done. However, I believe that we have reached a stage now where we can really begin speaking - while speaking about rebuilding, simultaneously, we can speak about modernising our country. If we look objectively at what is

happening in Guyana, you will see that this modernisation process has started already. If we look at the economy, for instance, we will see that it is going through some structural changes, some structural adjustment. I remember, when the Honourable Member Mr McAllister, spoke ... I think he is making better economic speeches than engineering speeches these days ... but when he spoke, he did point out that the modern economy has, in it, a growing role of the servicing sector within the economy; and I agree with him, because he's correct; he's right; but where I think he made his mistake is he did not look at the statistics that are available all over: in the Bank of Guyana reports that in the statistical bulletins of the Bank of Guyana, to try to examine to see if we were having this structural change that he spoke about. Indeed, Madam, the economy has been going through these changes. If you look at the contribution of the services towards GDP, using the 1988 factor prices, you will see that it grew; the social services grew from \$1.8B of 40% of GDP in 1995, to \$2.4B in 2005, or 45% of the GDP. Therefore, using the Honourable Member's own indicator, I think that we will be on safe grounds to say that our economy is in transition. If he had done so, also, he would have seen that other sectors of the economy, a part from the traditional sectors, have also moved. We have construction for instance ... and I believe that we don't only have to rely on figures when we talk about construction, but if we look around, using our own observation - our eyes, all around this country if you go, you can see new structures going up, either by Government, or the Private Sector, or individuals constructing their own homes, and so forth; and that is fairly widespread.

Construction too has been playing a growing role in our country. Again, if we take the 1988 factor price, we will see that construction has grown from 7% of GDP in 1995, to 10% of GDP in 2005. Clearly, the economy is broadening, and it is becoming less ... while it is still heavily dependent on the traditional sectors, the indicators ... the signs are that it is broadening and moving to different positions.

If we look at transportation and communication, another very important indicator I believe, using the same statistics, using the same basis, you will find it grew, again, from 8% of GDP in 1995, to 12% of GDP in 2005 - a 50% increase. Mde Speaker, this is not surprising, because many of the new sectors that we are now beginning to focus attention to, are now coming on stream. For instance, you have tourism. The tourism sector - we have moved quite a lot in that regard. Several speakers before me, from the Opposition benches, zeroed in on the \$65M that is allocated in the estimates; but that is not all that that sector is having. If you go further into different aspects of the estimate you will see another \$33M going to things like the cultural centre, office equipment, seawall Development; several areas like that, and you'll see a growing sum for this sector in different parts of the economy. Mde Speaker ... *[Interruption: 'you got to understand the thing is in process, you know Chief']* if we use again, the Honourable Member's indicators that he is using himself, I think we can all safely say that we're on the move. Even in the financial sector we're seeing transformation taking place; that it is becoming more and more modernised at this point in time.

Mde Speaker, the modernisation process is not only confined to the servicing sector, and the new Sectors that are coming about,



and sectors that are being focussed on; but it is also within the traditional sectors. Some mention was made of it here earlier in the Debate, and I want to add to that, and I want, particularly ... I'm sorry the Honourable Member, Mr Vieira, is not here, or he disappeared, because he probably is afraid ... For instance, in the sugar sector, as one of the most important contributors to the revenues of this country, a big modernisation process has taken place. Mr Vieira will want to say, or he implied in his presentation, as if the Government woke up one morning without any proper studies and decided to build a new factory at Skeldon, but I am reminded, when I listened to him ... like many other Opposition speakers, but more particularly when I heard Mr Vieira, I am reminded of what Tony Blair said at his last Party conference, when he was under fire: but it also captures a lot of what the Opposition speakers ... and let me make a quote from the Guardian Weekly of February 02-08, 2007 ... *[Interruption: 'Naw, I contribute to it ']* Blair said that:

*The world was divided into optimists and pessimists - those who believe that seemingly attractable problems can be solved" like we believe on this side of the House and those who would come up with a brilliant analysis of all that was wrong with the world and took a view that everything was dark and hopeless.*

That is what the Opposition's contribution to this Budget reminds me of, particularly that of Mr Vieira. I want, Mde Speaker, to

quote one of Mr Vieira's own commentary. In 2005, before he became a Member of Parliament ... and here is his first sentence in his commentary, aired on May 19, 2005: "*I have been saying that the Skeldon Expansion Project is just a pipe dream.*" Now I think we could excuse him when he made this statement in 2005, but when he repeats that statement now, at a time when the whole construction of the factory is going on, one would say, in the old country style, that *he must be suffering from ratowine: that he 'gat' dark-eye.* But the modernisation of Skeldon was conceptualised by the PPP/Civic Government a long time ago. They had charged the Board of Guysuco to come up with a strategic plan in the 1990s because they were anticipating that the price cuts that we are now facing - they were anticipating that they were definitely coming. All the signs and the trends were there. There were some among us who didn't believe that it would come, but we, however, were preparing; and the first Strategic Plan ... which you have a copy of, Honourable Member McAllister, because the Guysuco people came at our Economic Service Commission and gave you stacks of books that you started to call for experts to study to give you ... You got so much information that you couldn't manage to deal with it yourself ... The thing is, Mde Speaker, since 1998 Guysuco brought their first strategic plan to modernise the sugar industry; and I want to say to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, that his Member of Parliament Tony Vieira's position varies somewhat from your manifesto on sugar because, when I read the PNC's manifesto on sugar, it coincides completely with the direction in which we are going here. That is why I was a bit surprised that the Honourable Member Winston Murray, whom I suppose had a very big hand in drafting this manifesto, particularly its economics side, would have gotten up here and

spoken about closing down of the West Demerara Estates. I do not think making those statements from this National Assembly will do any of us any good, because it is sending a wrong signal: even after the Minister of Agriculture, a few days ago, made a public statement in the media that there will be no closure of estates. After, over and over again, the Government has been saying that there will be no closure; after the Guysuco Board itself has come out, on more than one occasion, to say that there will be no closure, I don't think it serves our national interest, from this high forum of our land, to try to send negative signals, to cast doubts in the minds of the people. You heard it said, and I'll say it again, that there'll be no closure \*n estates. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, further, I want to crave your indulgence, just to say that I have been hearing, since I was a boy ... and that was quite a long time ago; you can judge it from the colour of my hair ... I was hearing about the need to modernise the sugar industry, and for us to stop being only producer of raw sugar, since I was very young, or younger. This dream is coming time, because Skeldon was not envisaged to produce only raw sugar, but it was mentioned here before that we will have co-generation of electricity ... and you know that electricity is extremely important; energy is extremely important in any type of development that can take place in the country. In our time, when the price of fuel kept shooting through the roof; you remember in 1974, when we had the first oil crisis in Guyana, we were lucky, at that point in time, that the price of sugar was very high, and that helped to cushion the effects of the first oil crisis, but by the time the second oil crisis came, in 1978, the price of sugar went down, and that was the first major shock this economy faced in 1978, and the price of fuel, of oil, has risen far more that

it had risen in 1978 - very much more than it did in 1978. Mde Speaker, that is very, very ... [*Interruption: 'Yes, you can find the facts; I don't have it here with me now, but I know that it was more that thirty dollars per barrel in 1978; it is now eighty dollars a barrel'*] Mde Speaker, not only is it going to help us to cushion some of these high price, as far as fuel is concerned, but it can offer us possibilities of even making alternative fuel. The Brazilians have mastered the technology in producing ethanol, and right now the United States is producing a lot of ethanol from corn, and that is why the price of corn has gone up so high in international markets; and this has nothing to do with VAT. When you go into the store to buy corn in the tins the price is high because a lot of the corn that is being produced in the United States is now being turned into ethanol at this point in time. Mde Speaker, I'm getting a lot of "husk" from the other side here, but it is more than that. We envisage that we will also have refining of our sugar, that we'll refine sugar in our country. We used to use a plantation white at Uitvlugt, but that one was not really refining; that was washing out the colour of the sugar; but this is really going to be refining. We are also looking at refining the sugar, and surely there will be difficulties. No-one is saying that life is so perfect that there will be no problems: There will be problems along the way; and some of the problems that Mr Vieira, the Honourable Member, pointed out, are true, but he got it from the report ... He said himself - from the Audit Report of the Skeldon factory, but what he has not done, which I think he owes to us, is congratulate the Board for establishing a separate audit unit to audit the fields, so they can report directly to the Board, so that the Board can have an independent assessment of what is taking place in the fields, to try to solve many of these problems, as is done in Finance, and as we're going to do, very

soon, as far as the factories are concerned ... [*Interruption: 'Nobody is hiding it. Why did you have to steal it? You could have asked me; I would've gotten it for you'*] Mde Speaker, yes there will be difficulties; because it is a huge project. It's a huge enterprise, and I don't think that we can envisage that there will not be any problems in a project of this magnitude; but we should not be discouraged by this, but we should look and see how we can tackle the problems.

More than that, Guysuco is also looking to put down a modern packaging facility at Enmore in order to package sugar, and already that is catching on very, very well in the Caribbean market. So, instead of seeing only the gloom, we are modernising that industry. The other colleagues spoke about the modernisation of rice and bauxite that is now taking place, and the possibility ... another dream I had as a youngster, hearing Dr Jagan speaking, over and over, about sugar, and that modernising bauxite, and smelting aluminium; and he himself had gone so far as to put pressure to have the aluminium plant established at Linden. Now, again, we're moving in that direction for alumina and moving in the direction to have aluminium - our bauxite eventually processed right here in our country. [*Applause*] Therefore, Mde Speaker, I think we have been going in the modernising process in an all-sided fashion; modernising our traditional sectors, while moving towards bringing in new sectors to the in his economy and I am sure, on hindsight now, many Members of the Opposition ... I noticed that, in his speech, the Honourable Member, Mr Trotman, said that he has to admit that he's seen changes and progress within our society. That is refreshing; coming from the Honourable Member, who has come out of the bowels of the PNC, and it seems to me that you have to

come out of the PNC before you see progress; [*Laughter and Applause*] but the progress that has been made can be seen. I'm sure Members of the other side will now be seeing that, given a total monopoly of our telecommunication Sector has held us back to some extent; and I believe that there are great changes that are taking place, as far as ... What I want to say, Mde Speaker, is that we have been making these changes, and by what we've seen today - with Digicel and the Blue Power, I think that we can expect that the competition we will bring will assist us greatly in having better services in that regard.

At the same time, while we're modernising, we're still keeping our focus, very firmly, very firmly, on ensuring that, whatever we develop, that our ordinary people will have a stake, and a share of what is produced in this country. I know that the Honourable Member ... She just walked in, my good friend, Honourable Member Judith David-Blair, did criticise the size of the income tax, the tax-free pay that is now being held, and she said that we shouldn't talk about threshold, but that we should talk about stress hole [*laughter*]. Well, either the Honourable Member is too young to remember that, in 1991, the tax-free money that a worker used to get was \$4,000.00 a month, which amounted to \$48,000.00 a year. We now have a tax-free pay threshold of \$28,000.00 a month, or \$336,000.00 a year, which has taken out a lot of people from paying tax, generally ... [*Interruption: 'I always paid tax - throughout the whole of my working life, but I really regret that some of my tax is paying you'*] Mde Speaker, I don't think ... The Honourable Member was probably too young to remember those days, and she didn't have the *stresses* of that time, and that is why she probably looks so lovely.

Also, in our social sector, we have been modernising them ourselves. Who would imagine, ten years ago ... I don't want to go back too far ... that we would have been speaking, in this country, that we'd be speaking here about the possibility of doing open-heart surgery - about stents, about treating cancer, and these things are now a reality in our country, and we can offer, now in Guyana, a tertiary type of service in our country.

Mde Speaker, I want to come back to what I was saying - about the other sectors of our economy. If you look, again, at these very statistics that I showed you, you will see that there is a greater amount of disposable income in people's pockets, and what are they doing with it? They're saving! If you look at saving rates ... saving at our banks, you will see that, in 1996, in the savings accounts, there was \$32B; in 2005 it went to \$85B, which is 166%. If there was a sudden jump in the trend, then your argument would have had some merit, but if you look at the statistics, year to year, you would see that there has been a progressive increase. And more than that let me tell you from where the money is coming. Government ... let me make this point to you too ... Government and Guysuco, alone, put more than \$20B in the pockets of workers each year, apart from other areas of our country, so this talk about money laundering, Mde Speaker, is obviously a lot of hot air. It has no basis in reality in our country. And then again you can see the fixed ... and to also show you the confidence that people now have in our economy; you will have to see how the fixed deposits have moved from \$19.4B in 1996, to \$32.2B in 2006. We can go on to call a lot of these things here to rebut a lot of what has been said and talked about - making all these wild accusations, without any type of

remedy, any type of basis, and showing no evidence of these things.

Mde Speaker, let me turn, very quickly, to ... also again, in the economy itself, you will see that there is a growing investment, and there is more and more foreign direct investment in our economy. There are two types of investments. I know that our friends on the other side always say, in every Budget Debate, that they brought Omai, and they brought Barama, and that is true, and I don't disagree that having large investments ... I'm not saying [*Interruption: 'No, but I've always said ... no, they're always heckling me when I say this'*] that big investments are not good. They're very good sometimes at pull factor, but one of the fastest growing economies in the world ... and it has been growing very rapidly for the last thirteen years or so, or even before that ... in the 1950s, is the Hong Kong economy, even before it merged into the mainline China economy: And what these figures show is the importance of small and medium businesses, as well, to sustain economic development and growth. Let me just give you some quick figures from a World Bank article. Let me read it, Mde Speaker. In 1950, they had 1,478 establishments; in employing 81,718 persons, with an average employment of 55 persons per enterprise: in 1960 the average was 41, and of course it grew - the amount that was employed in the companies: in 1970 in moved to 33 per enterprise: in 1980, it grew to 20 per enterprise: in 1990, 15 per enterprise, and yet, at this same period of time, when you're looking ... [*Interrupting*]

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

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



**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Donald Ramotar:** ... and yet, Mde Speaker, the interesting thing about these figures is that the highest growth rate in the Hong Kong economy was the period of time when the average employment in the companies was smallest and that is a very interesting phenomena to look at. I'm looking at an article by Leung Chung Chang; and it's a lesson of "*East Asia, Hong Kong, a unique case of Development.*" that's the name of the article ... I'll lend it you, my friend. So I think we have to look, too, at what has been taking place in our economy in the investment of small industries - small enterprises - both investments by foreign capital, and by local capital itself, which again shows that we are broadening the economy and trying to make it immune from the shocks, when one industry gets a problem like we had in the sugar industry in 2005 and 2006. I know the Honourable Member Mr Vieira talked about 2006 - that we didn't have flooding; that in 2005 we had a lot of rains; but in 2005 we had no floods. He obviously doesn't go out of Georgetown. If you look at the rainfall figures in Berbice, at that point in time ... *[Interruption: 'No, no, no, the floods in 2006 that affected sugar was in the Berbice estates, where there was a high rise of ... The flood that you're speaking about was in the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary, and nothing affected the sugar estates there in 2006; but it affected the sugar estates in Berbice at that point in time, so I'll have to take you out of town a little bit, you know']*

Mde Speaker, I also want to quickly point out, in passing ... because I want to give the birthday boy a chance to speak quickly. I want to look at how infrastructure has been developing very rapidly. We have a lot of infrastructural development, and included in this infrastructural development, as part of the modernisation process, is the Berbice Bridge, which our friends on the other side tried to stop under the guise of delaying for studies and so forth, but the Bridge will also help in the modernisation - The modern economy, a modern sector, a modern society will need modern type of infrastructure, and we see that taking place in air services at Ogle - more air services at Ogle; the bridge across the Berbice River ... *[Interruption: 'I don't know, Mac, if you have anything against Berbice because, in 2005, the PNC voted against the Berbice Education Budget; you put a ruse about the bridge; you want to put a ruse about the campus; but you have supporters there too, you know, and they will benefit as well. The hospital is the main problem. We are trying, also, in many areas, like the electricity and other areas, to improve the quality of our infrastructure']*

Let us talk a little bit about the modernisation of our politics, which is also very important because, as you know, there is a direct connection between politics and economics and politics and social services, and there is an inter-relation - a connection between these different services in our society, and therefore they're very important. All I wanted to say, from the beginning, that we're not perfect. We do not have a perfect system; and we do have problems. Some of you pointed out some of those problems and some of those difficulties; but let's take what the Honourable Member, Mr Trotman said earlier about the separation of powers. I think, despite what you're talking about -

the positions and appointments that have to be made ... and I agree with you that they should be made and made as fast as possible; but the important thing to note is that I do not think you can find any official in the judiciary who could say that they had any political direction from this Administration. *[Applause]* That is what, in the final analysis, is important for us; and I believe that, if you can find that for me, then your argument will hold some water; but until you can, you're just making propaganda - to put it in a nice way.

Look at how our Parliament, with all its shortcomings, Mde Speaker, you can point out how it is improving governance in the society. I myself worked in the Public Accounts Committee under the chairmanship of Mr Winston Murray, and it was indeed a pleasure working in the Public Accounts Committee with him, because I think there ... I don't know, maybe he wouldn't want to say it publicly, but I will say what I felt working there. I felt that we were having a genuine partnership to uproot and fight corruption within the Governmental structure of our country. *[Applause]* We've developed, not only between the two of us, but all of us who served on that Committee ... Mde Speaker, what we can say about the Lotto funds is that it is being audited. I used to feel that if I am busy, I did not feel that I had to break my neck to attend those meetings, unless they wanted a quorum, because I felt that my colleagues on the other side, who are working with that commission, were also working to root out the same things that we wanted to do. He will tell you - and not only him, all the Members of the other side, not to point him out individually, because I don't want him to be discriminated against in his Party, but the other Members who served on that committee will tell you that sometimes we, in the PPP, were probably more

tenacious than our colleagues on the other side, in trying to deal with this corruption issue, and we have it in our society; we can't say that we don't have it; but I want to say that some of the colleagues on this side were telling you what we were putting in place; and probably you on the other side can help us, if you will, and also make your declarations to the Integrity Commission as well; [*Applause*] because that will offer a powerful signal to our community; that will offer a powerful signal to the rest of this country that we, the Government and the Opposition, are united on something as important as this.

I want, quickly, because some of my colleagues dealt with it; but I want, particularly ... because I heard a young colleague from the other side, Honourable Africo, Ms Selmen, also making the same statement as some of her older colleagues ... talking about discrimination. She is not right. Mde Speaker ... What I was saying is that she also made the same charges without offering one single example; not a case. I want to show ... Let me make this point that, in 1992, shortly after the PPP came into Government, one of the first actions of this Government was to sign the Optional Protocol of the United Nations Human Rights Accord, and that Optional Protocol gave the Opposition the right to take any charge of discrimination - either by race, religion, sex, whatever ... by gender, thank you, to take them to the United Nations. Not a single case was taken. Why? Why was it not taken? I want to also say that we had here in our country, a few years ago, probably three years ago - a delegation from the United Nations, headed by a Seneyalese, who came to investigate racial problems in this country, and his report, spoke about it being more or less skin-deep in Guyana, and they know what is going on. These are the United Nations statements on racial

discrimination in many, many countries, including Guyana; and if you read them, they have absolutely nothing as to what is taking place here. I want to particularly address the Honourable Member Ms Selman because, not only are you sending a wrong signal outside, but I believe that you can eventually start damaging yourself if you start believing those things yourself.

Let me go, very quickly, to Local Government. I think that this is another area where we badly need modernisation, and I think we all recognised that, way back in 2001, when we were all working together to write a new Constitution for our country; and we recognised that we need to modernise the Local Government system; so therefore we agreed that we should have Local Government elections with a new system in place. Unfortunately, the colleagues who worked on the Constitution Commission did not put that system in place; and then we had a lot of discussion on putting that issue in place. We didn't always succeed, and sometimes the going was a bit slow, and we had several ... but I believe that now we're almost at a point of closing these things, and then we'll have elections. But then I heard my colleagues on the other side saying that before we have Local Government elections, we must have a new list, but I believe ...

*[Interruption: 'No, no, no, I read the OAS report and it did say that, so you must look again; you're a lawyer, you look at all those fine prints and split hairs and so forth, and you hook up after dark and all kinds of things with people to see these things']*

Mde Speaker, I believe that those of us who work on the ground, many of the colleagues on the other side ... I heard Mr Mervin speaking about some of the great problems in Region 3, and I know that he's right on many of these issues; but what is badly needed is to have a renewal of local democracy sooner rather than

later, and therefore I think that we should put in the safe guards, have the elections, and let us have a house-to-house registration for the new general elections, when the stakes would be much higher; but that is just a suggestion.

I want to touch on one other issue. A lot of people - a lot of my colleagues on the other side have been speaking about the need to work together, and no-one will want that more than us in Government, because it will make Government more pleasurable to work under. But, Mde Speaker, we talk about the question of trust in our country; and I do not see any of this, except for those of us who work in committees within the National Assembly. I do not see this trust developing anymore, anywhere. We even had the last experience of what happened in Regions 7 and 8; which does not engender trust, but it creates even more suspicions. We have to be more principled with each other, and we have to work together. It does more harm than good, and if you're really, really serious about working together, then we have to create the foundations for these things to happen; it cannot happen just like that, overnight. Finally, I want to give the birthday boy his full due, because I don't want to harass him for his birthday. I think that, if the Honourable Members of the other side are serious, we have a lot of grounds on which we can co-operate. I didn't get a chance to see the AFC manifesto, because he probably hid it from me. I don't know if it is because the policies might not be exactly straight, but you can send a copy for me. When I look at these two manifestos ... I don't know why you allowed Dick Powis to write your manifesto, but send a copy for. When I look at these two manifestos, I find a lot of things in common that we can work together with. Therefore, I think that we have a lot of basis to work together to build the trust that you talked about so that we

can, together, move this country forward, and for us to have a better life in Guyana. Thank you very much for your attention.

*[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon Robert Corbin:** Thank you very much, Mde Speaker. Let me; first of all, acknowledge the greetings from my colleague on the other side of the House ... *[Interruption]*

**Hon Samuel Hinds:** Excuse me, Leader of the Opposition. May I ask, at this time, that we agree to extend the sitting to facilitate the two remaining speakers to complete their presentations?

**The Speaker:** Motion is that the House continues until all the speakers have concluded their presentations. Continue Mr Corbin.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Robert Corbin:** Yes Mde Speaker, I was just acknowledging the kindly greetings from the Honourable Member Mr Ramotar, all be it I cannot agree with everything else that he said after that; but I want to, in this debate on the 2007 Budget, under the theme "*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana,*" that this 2007 Budget acknowledges that the various objectives stated in the previous PPP Budget, and other policy statements, have fallen woefully short of their objectives. Indeed, the Minister of Finance admitted ... and I must say it is a good admission, almost like the one done by the Honourable Minister

of Legal Affairs, admitted that, after fourteen years of Government, the PPP was, according to page 22 of this Budget speech - Vision 2011, Agenda for 2007: and I would like to look at that page, which says:

*We are embarking on a process of modernising the economy, utilising the tools and techniques that are best suited and adaptable to our situation.*

This begs the question, Mde Speaker, on what happened to the alleged previous initiatives and programmes, and all the alleged successes that Members on the other Side of this House have been beating their chests and breasts about, over the last five years. I've had the chance to peruse some of the previous Budgets, and I have quite a lot of them, because this is probably nearly my thirtieth Budget debate; and when I look at all of them - in the last few years, I looked at 1993, the disclosures associated with the present administration ... I think it was entitled *Reconstruction for Human Development*. Well, 1994 and 1995 there was some difficulty in putting a title- not much of a title to it, the Budget but by 1996 we were unleashing Guyana's potential. By 1997 we were *Strengthening Partnerships for the Future*. Well, 1998 was very strange, because it just had *Our Guyana*. By 1999 we were *Serving Guyana's Future as we Move into the New Millennium*; and by 2000 - we were *Working Together for Improved standard of Living*; and by 1999 ... by



2001 we had a ... Yes Mde Speaker, by 2001 the Minister then - Kowlessar, had this to say, and he stated:

*Government has developed a comprehensive economic development strategy for implementation over the next five years. By 2006 we will have a very robust, diversified economy that is both capable of withstanding adverse external shocks, and competing, effectively, with the new globalise environment.*

This is what he said in 2001. In 2002 the Budget read *Promoting Economic Growth: Accelerating Social Gains,*” and by 2003, Mde Speaker, we were:

*Confronting the Challenges, Staying on course for a Prosperous Guyana, investing in Sustained Economic Growth and Enhanced Social Development;* and by 2005, not so long ago, we were *Confronting Challenges; Sustaining Growth and Development.* I don't want to go into all that was stated in the debate, and the contributions of the various Members of the then PPP Parliament - on the lofty plans they had for taking this country into the new millennium and accelerating it in a manner unprecedented in any part of the world – which is how it sounded when we had those presentations, so I have to ask the Honourable Minister, in view of his plan, in this Budget Debate, of now, as he puts it, now embarking on a process of modernising the economy, what happened to the reconstruction of 1993, or the unleashing of

potential in 1996, or securing the future for the millennium? What about promoting economic growth in 2002, or staying on course for a prosperous Guyana in 2003? What about this robust diversified economy, capable of withstanding adverse economic shocks? Are these noble objectives ended in abysmal failure, causing the Minister to now be embarking on a process of modernising the economy? I am not being mischievous here, Mde Speaker. These are no dialectics, but let's look at the statistics. Page 48 of the Budget speech; I think its paragraph. 5 (ii). This is what the Budget states - not my figures. The Minister reveals, at paragraph. 5(ii) in *the real GDP growth*, he says Mde Speaker, "*continuing the recovery last year, real GDP projected at 4.9% in 2007.*" That is what the Minister said. It is noteworthy that the Minister states that this will be viewed ... and I quote him again:

*By stronger growth in sugar, the recovers of the mining and quarrying sector, as well as activities in connection with the Cricket World Cup (CWC); and other major events to be held later this year.*

I will come back to that a little later.

Mde Speaker, the Minister reported real growth of 4.7%, and inflation of 4.2% for 2006, though as Christopher Ram, in Ram and McRae's report points out ... and I do have a copy of that

here with me, in his focus on the Budget 2007 - at page 6, it stated:

*This Projection of what actually occurred in 2006 is a surprisingly good, and perhaps questionable, performance, given the reported first half because of 0.4% and 3.4%, respectively.*

I am not *Doubling Thomas*, like Ram and McRae; I am accepting the Minister of Finance's figures as quite accurate - that indeed, in 2006, that we had 4.7% real GDP growth. In 1993, the Government reported an 8.3% real GDP growth, in 1994 - 8.5%, 1995 - 5.1%, 1996 -7.9%, 1997 - 6.2%, 1998 - 1.8%, 1999 - .3%, 2000 - 0%, 2001 - .8%. These are not figures that I'm inventing Mde Speaker, but these figures came from the Honourable Prime Minister himself, in this very Parliament, in his Budget speech of 2001; I have it here - right here; I'm looking at the Hansard of Monday June 25, 2001. He was reporting these figures at page 07/21 of the Hansard - part 1 of Monday June 25, 2001; and the official report is saying exactly what I read there, because I was reading exactly what is stated here from the Prime Minister.

Mde Speaker, the PM was very proud, in 2001, to report those statistics, praising the PPP Administration, and not even graciously, then, to acknowledge the tail-wind which they inherited from the Hoyte's Economic Recovery Programme, at that time, which caused them to move at that high rate of real GDP growth when they took over in 1992. *[Applause]*

Of course, I want to point to the facts, which the PM said in 2001 ... and we were now starting the Economic Recovery Programme and you're doubting that we were re-starting; and I'm told that this tailspin, or this tail-wind which you inherited, would've taken us flying to the stars very quickly; and so the Prime Minister, enjoying the benefits of the PNC's administration, felt proud to make this big speech in the year 2001. But, Mde Speaker, the Prime Minister made a remarkable revelation in that Budget speech, which I would like to quote now, too, for him; and this is what the Prime Minister said, and I'm not bringing extraneous material, because this is in the same Budget speech of Monday June 25 - at page 07/23 of Hansard of the same date (June 25, 2001); and this is what he said, Mde Speaker:

*Our country needs three to four decades of steady growth rates of 7%, and more, for our children and grandchildren to come abreast of other people in the world, but this can only happen if the Nation's slate is clean with social and political questions being settled enough that our preoccupation can be turned to our work - to the way we make our living, striving to do well so as to be successful and to make profits, creating wealth for our prosperity, the prosperity of our Nation, and our neighbours.*

I think he deserves a round of applause for such a great presentation and revelation. That was the Prime Minister in 2001. But, having told us about the four decades at 7% which,

according to the Prime Minister's estimation, if you were to make any progress, you have to have four decades at 7% minimum, let's see what happened after 2001 and this historic speech of the Prime Minister. In 2002, we had 1.1%, 2003 – 0.6%, 2004 – 1.6%, 2005 – 1.9%, and of course, we're now hearing from the Minister ... and that is why Ram and McRae find it so difficult to accept those figures, but I accept the Minister of Finance's figures, which say that we've moved to 4.7%. But, this 4.7%, if one makes an aggregate of the previous year; and therefore one

wonders, when we look at what was happening before, whether we have really made any significant strides in that period, in the indicators that would really tell us if we're really moving forward. Not when we have construction going, Honourable Ramotar. These are the real statistics we've tried to judge but using the Honourable Prime Minister's formula, Mde Speaker, this very formula of four decades at 7%, we're not talking of vision 2011 at all, with those real rates of GDP. I think we're really talking of vision 2110. There's a mix up in the figures. We couldn't talk of vision 2011 on the Prime Minister's formula of 7% per annum, for four decades, than look at this vision for 2011 being really achieved, having regard to the trend which has been demonstrated in the performance of our economy, and the projections ... which I will come to in a minute, that have been made in this present Budget. I have read similar words, in this present Budget - similar to the ones uttered by Minister Kowlessar in 2001. At page 25, paragraph 4 of the 2007 Budget; this is what the Honourable Minister of Finance has to say this time:

*Mde Speaker, the traditional pillars alone cannot support an economy that will need to create thousands of jobs over the next five years and rapidly increase per capita income, as we keep the MDGs in our sight, and make a determined onslaught on poverty. Nor will they be sufficient to reduce our vulnerability to external shocks. We need to set firm foundations for more economic pillars, some of which need to grow, and some still to be established.*

The big question, therefore, is not *why*, the big question is *how*? How are we going to, as the Prime Minister indicated in 2001, clean our slate? Although I would've put it differently; I would've asked how we would have avoided blotting in our copybook. And, for the present Minister, the question is, how do we create thousands of jobs, over the next five years, and rapidly increase per capita income, based on the projections which we have in the 2007 Budget? I think that is the real question. In this context, therefore, Mde Speaker, I would like to commend the new Minister on his attempt to deal with the situation, by naming the Budget, correctly, *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*. The Minister must be congratulated for an excellent presentation. His objectives cannot be faulted and we, in the PNC/R, agree with many of those broad objectives stated in the Budget. Indeed, Mr Ramotar only a few moments ago ... I'm glad he has carefully read the PNC/R's manifesto; and I hope that he will take the advice from the Honourable Member here, Ms Selman, whom he was seeking to scold, when she pointed out

that you should implement the Youth Empowerment Scheme that is in that manifesto, and if you do that then it will show that there is reciprocal acceptance of ideas. I am glad you have quoted from that manifesto, which points out, very clearly, that we could not, in principle, object to the broad objectives outlined by the Honourable Minister of Finance in his Budget.

We in the PNC, Mde Speaker, welcome, and would be in support of any programme that will bring development to Guyana. It is in our interest as a people, and will benefit all constituencies - whether you're PNC, PPP, or any other political party, if the economy of this country takes off, there are sufficient jobs for all, unemployment is removed; I think we, on both sides of this House, will be in a much better position to satisfy the aspirations of our people. So we in the PNC/R do not have any quarrel with the broad objectives outlined in the Minister's speech. Who will quarrel, Mde Speaker, with the successful completion of the Skeldon Modern Project, and the expenditure of US\$169M in 2008? None of us will object to it ... *[Interruption: 'He didn't object to that; what he pointed to you is that, while that is a noble objective, there are serious challenges to making that a reality, in terms of the cultivation of the land, the dependence on cane farmers, the productivity of the lands to be used, the availability of those lands in the drainage; and he pointed out the cost of production at the end of the day. He was questioning those things; and if you were concerned about it you would go and check it, rather than think that he is just criticising it. Who wouldn't want the sugar industry to be revived and be in a position that we can market sugar at a world competitive price? I think everybody in Guyana - the cane farmers, and all the beneficiaries of the foreign exchange to be earned from it, and*

*the country as a whole will be better off*] Mde Speaker, if, however, we speak about the Skeldon project, then it's because we recognise that there are serious challenges, which, you are perhaps not addressing, and it is our duty here to tell you that. Who'd quarrel with increased quantities and better yields in varieties of Price? In fact I would applaud the Honourable Minister ... I don't see him here, when he reaches forty bags an acre. I recognised that, although he said he grew up in a rice farming community ... I admire how we've all been able to transform ourselves to all kinds of occupations and backgrounds when we get into Parliament: some become Evangelists, some become very well-quotes of the Bible, and all of that; and the goodly Minister of Agriculture said that he was most familiar, having grow up in a farming family, and again, I accept the Minister's word, but if he grew up in a farming family, then he should not be amazed at forty bags per acre, because it is something that we have actually reached in this country, and that NARI, for more than three decades, was trying to work and experiment on improving yields. That is a constant quest of all agricultural departments. I recall, when I was Minister of Agriculture, we had varieties like blue bell, and a number of others. They were trying to experiment to see whether we could sustain ... the problems we've had with land preparation, certain sections of the country – rainfall, and all of that affected that quest, so I would be happy if, instead of just a few farmers on the Essequibo Coast producing at a rate of forty bags an acre, we can do a universal sweep, and that really becomes the average of production, that would be a good thing. What we're saying ... and we need to be listened to is that the policies that are being put in place are unlikely to be able to give those results because - where is the Burma Research Station now? I don't want to go



into the remits of other people at this time, but I am saying that no-one, on the PNC side here, would be objecting to any noble objectives of increasing quantities and better yields varieties of rice in this country. We would be happy, as the Minister projects, if investors will continue to show interest in our oil potential; as he states on page 25, paragraph. 4:11. we also agree, on this side of the House - at least the PNC/R-1G, that we need a diversified and globally competitive manufacturing sector. I cannot disagree with the Minister. I commend him for having these noble objectives. We support the promotion of micro-enterprise in the small businesses. In fact we have stated that is one of the things we need to do, and we support the goal for the tourism sector to fulfil its potential, although as my good friend, Mansoor, has gone to sleep, I have not seen anything about the casinos. I haven't seen anything about the casinos mentioned in this plan. We support the goal, therefore, for the tourism sector, but we note that there are no projections for the mammoth economic windfall that will follow the introduction of casinos. Obviously, that is not something for this year, so I'll look forward, if God spares life, to see what the Budget will predict and project next year, when the licenses are issued, and so on and so forth. But we congratulate the Minister, again, for recognising the importance of information and communication technology, as stated on page 27 of the Budget, paragraph 4:16; and, Mde Speaker, we support the development of additional pillars, as I have already quoted. So I congratulate the Minister on his presentation, and I think ... I have been here, and I have seen many ministers' present Budget speeches over the years that I have been here, and I think he did a very excellent job on his very first presentation here. *[Applause]* I've seen some change, some worried about the presentation and so on, but he did a very competent job, but I want the Minister

and the others on that side of the House to understand that our job here, however, Mde Speaker, is not only to share kudos, as Minister Rohee appears to want us to do - share kudos, but to critically examine what is said in this Parliament, in the interest of the people of Guyana; that's our function here. In fact, Mde Speaker, the President, in his address to this Assembly on September 28 urged, as far as I could remember, that there should be robust debate in this Parliament but, unfortunately, it appears that Members on that side are offended when the facts are exposed. Instead, you should have your notebooks and record what we say, to see whether the criticisms are meritorious or not. If they're not, then discard them; but I believe that if they are of merit, then your job, when we criticise, is to take notes, then go back and check your ministries, check and see whether the suggestions have any merit, because our job is not to come here and butter you up; so Mr Rohee, don't be worried when we criticise you. We know that certain things are right, but that's not our function. The people will know the truth in due course. I, however, as you begin to get that vibration there that once, the suggestion comes from any other source outside of the PPP, it is promptly discarded; *[Applause]* that is my impression over the years in this Parliament, since you've gotten into office. We see that kind of reaction from Members in this very Parliament during debates! How else, Mde Speaker, would one explain to me that not a single one of Ms Backer's twenty-six recommendations in the last Budget debate was even considered by the Honourable Minister for implementation? Then you want to come here and say that we don't share out any bouquets. If you want me to share out bouquets then you have to come to Parliament the next Budget debate and say that, *at the last Budget debate, the Honourable Member Ms Backer said so, so, so, and I*

*want to report that I found four of those recommendations worthwhile and we have put them into practice, then you will practise what you preach. That is what we expect you to say. Don't come here asking for bouquets in this debate, because that's not we're here to do. The Honourable Member Mr McAllister ... Only yesterday, in this House, the Honourable Member, Dr Norton made some objective criticisms of the health sector. Instead of promising to investigate ... I'm advised; I wasn't here, but I am advised that the response from the Honourable Minister alleged that amounted to a threat, and a clear and present danger to their good Doctor, but I'd be monitoring the situation to see whether these reported vibrations are accurate. That is the kind of reaction we get when we expose and indulge in robust debate, which your President said we should do, because our job is to expose those weaknesses so that you will know everything is not right.*

The Honourable Member Mr McAllister, Mde Speaker, a few days ago ... I can't remember what date during this debate, exposed why there was need for an investigation in the Berbice River Bridge. Instead of examining the issue ... and I don't think he did it then, so let me put it in proper perspective. There was a special motion in this matter. He spent a long time explaining ... quoting from all kinds of reports, as to why something was fishy, and to which the Government had nothing to lose, even if they wanted to amend the motion so that construction of the bridge wouldn't stop while investigation was going on. They could've done that. In fact, I remember bringing a motion here once, which the Government amended so badly, that we decided it didn't make sense, because they amended a motion that the Opposition brought, using their authority, and amended it to

actually change the real intent of the Opposition. So they are not without experience, Mde Speaker, in manipulating motions before the House to suit their objectives so, if indeed they want to claim that the real reason they didn't want to investigate is because they didn't want work on the bridge to stop, then they could've amended the motion, or have consultations to say *Well, these things and these points make some sense, but what will happen is that we will compromise* - the same compromise Mr Ramotar, the Honourable Member, was speaking about: behind the closed doors and say: *Well look, boy, these things are points of some import, but let us compromise. Don't let us stop the work and we'll check on these matters you're concerned about.* But what did we hear, Mde Speaker? As soon as that debate ... In fact, while the debate was in progress, up comes the Minister of Agriculture, who runs to Berbice during the week-end before with some other PPP activists, stirs up the people in Berbice, and it has turned into a political issue - telling the people, *look, the PNC is bringing a motion next week to stop all works on the Berbice river bridge because the PNC doesn't want any progress in Berbice*: so they turn the whole story of investigating what is a possible fraud into a political issue, and one must wonder why they went to that extent ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition be granted fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition be given fifteen minutes to continue?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Robert Corbin:** Yes Mde Speaker, so one must wonder why is it that they went to that serious effort, when they engaged in some serious efforts to confuse and propagandise an issue in Berbice - the PPP; and they can deny that it is true ... and the Honourable Minister of Agriculture could come here to boast ... Apparently he forgot that he was no longer Information Liaison Officer to the President, or Activist at Freedom House, so he comes to this House and beats his chest and says: *“Well, you all know what you’re doing, but right now they’re picketing your office - your Party office in New Amsterdam,”* as if that was a feather in his cap. This is what he said in this Parliament, and when I checked the photograph, twenty-five people, who’re being paid by D&I Works so ... and who should have been doing Government work, moved out from Freedom House in New Amsterdam to walk around and say that they’re picketing for this seizure, or stoppage of work on the bridge by the PNC’s terrible cadres in Georgetown. This is what my investigation revealed. It’s true. They said that Minister went up, and when I did certain checks, Mde Speaker, I thought that this was a real regional response, until my intelligence sources told me that this was a powerful central directive from the PPP, because they saw it as a political opportunity to divert the attention of the people of Berbice from the effects of the Value Added Tax that they were about to complain about. That was their real plan. *[Applause]* Diversion any tactics, so instead of looking at the issues which were raised in the debate, that are affecting the people of Berbice, because what ... It was very wicked to have done that, because

what the Honourable Member McAllister was trying to do ...  
[Interrupting]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, the word *wicked* is a no-no.

**Hon Robert Corbin:** Mde Speaker, I do apologise, most profusely, for using such a word, and I withdraw it ... Yes Mde Speaker, the fact that a motion is brought here in the interest of the people of Berbice ... because what the Honourable Member was trying to tell the Government ... If you look in that very manifesto, Honourable Member Mr Ramotar, you will see, in that very manifesto, that you said there are several things that we have in common, you will see that we have a bridge across the Berbice River, and if you look in the manifesto - not of only 2006, but also of 2001, you will see that we have it as a top priority - bridging the Berbice River, so for you to go and tell the people of Berbice that the PNC is deliberately stalling their work, I'm saying it's unacceptable ... I wouldn't repeat the word I used before, but it's unacceptable for responsible citizens, who are calling for co-operation, having been exposed to a reality, to seek to use it for political mileage: and what was the motion seeking to do? To say to you - look, something is fishy with this report. Who do you think is going to pay for this bridge if the cost escalates? We have the experiences, similar to those other countries that the Honourable Member quoted in this debate. Who is going to pay for it? Is it the PPP? All of us, as citizens of this country, will have to pay for those mistakes and, more than that, the very people whom you're telling that we're stopping the bridge from building, they'll have to pay in their toll, because it is a company that is doing commercial operations, and they're not going to absorb the cost as a subsidy, unless you, the Minister of Finance, has plans, in his Budget of 2008, or whenever the bridge

finishes, to subsidise this new company. So the fact that we are exposing these matters here are ... The facts are very clear, and you should take out your notebooks, copy them down, and start to act on them, and when you begin to do that, then we'll begin to believe that this Chamber means something. But my dear comrades, Honourable Members of this House, my experience has been, I repeat, that there appears to be a phobia - once the suggestion, or idea, does not emanate from Freedom House, or from the benches of that side, there is always suspicion that there is some trick. There is always a fear, and therefore it doesn't go anywhere.

The Honourable Member, Mr McAllister, in this debate ... I'm saying these things because the Honourable Member, Mr Rohee, has said that we have said nothing constructive. This is what he was basically saying, that the Members on this side were not ... so I'm reminding him of some of the things.

The Honourable Member, Mr McAllister, suggested to the Honourable Minister of Works that it is not sufficient for him to come and tell us that has spending so many millions on roads. What he needs to do is show that you have value for money, and he gave a specific suggestion ... and what was the response? He said *look, if you're to get value for your roads, as indeed I'll tell you, you have to look at weight management and weight control*, and the year before you had \$60M and you didn't spend it on it; you come back and tell me you're spending \$300M odd, but that if you do not have weight control, you're wasting money. I think we all here have heard of the voodoo engineer; but no response to the specific question, and I am still, at this time, at a loss to know whether the Minister will seriously have a proper programme for weight control.

The Minister Rodrigues became an economic analyst. Yes, she knows that Mr Murray has nothing to criticise in the Budget; according to her. So, Mde Speaker, I waited with bated breath to see the economic arguments that would be advanced to undermine, and show all the flaws in his presentation, but I waited after one hour and not a word more about economics. It was clearly an unmitigated personal attack - nothing else it was because, if you start off and argue by saying that this man has no economic basis, then you should be proceeding, as your next point, to explain how this is flawed; but not a word: So if it is the Minister of Finance is going to speak to Mr Murray, then leave that point for him, when he comes to speak, but not a word more about economics.

The point I wish to make, Mde Speaker, is that we, in this House, particularly in the benches of the Opposition, have a job to do; and I want you to know that, no matter how you get ruffled, we're going to continue to do the job we're expected to do to expose the incompetence of the PPP: And so I want to say to the Minister that, since it is my job, and our job, to point to weaknesses and concerns, and ask him to elaborate, I want to, in congratulating, to say to him that I am yet to be convinced that this vision, which he has outlined for 2011, will become a reality, based on these objections. It will be like an elusive dream, in my opinion, and therefore ... I am not going to be easily convinced that that will be so, as the Honourable Member Murray once coined the word this, without more, based on the track record, that we may have, and we've seen, and I just pointed out, is like creating false expectations on the basis of past poor performance.

*[Applause]*



Many Members in this House sought, in their presentations, to use all kinds of Biblical examples. One even sounded like an Evangelist that came to Guyana, not too long ago - Reverend Angley, I think was his name - Angley and according to the Minister of Health he was misleading the people on Aids cures. The Minister enthroned a big statement, interfering with the goodly gentleman's attendance at his revival at the Park, but we had certain Members here even emulating the manner in which these Evangelists were carrying on their work ... and I think it was very good, because it added some light to the debate, but I want to tell them that not all who say *yeah, yeah Lord* shall enter into the Kingdom. *[Laughing]* When I reviewed the presentation I wanted to remind my goodly comrades that I am more inclined to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians:13 *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if I have not charity, I an become like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.* *[Applause]* The Budget speech sounded well, and it woke us up; but I'm saying that if there is no follow-up action, if there're no programmes that can convince us that those things will become a reality, it will be like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. So I have to confess, Mde Speaker that I agree with Ram and McRae's assessment. I have to agree with them - that assessment, at page 6 which focussed on the Budget; and this is what he had to say about this Budget and I endorse - at page 6 he said:

*This is the legacy term for President Jagdeo, and many might have expected bold initiatives by the new Minister. They might have expected, too, an*

*honest assessment of the problems that confronted Dr Singh on his assumption of Office.*

Like how the Attorney General, Mr Doonauth Singh, lamented his problems: this is what Ram is saying. He expected the new Minister to come and lament some of the things he had, and he would be able to deal with it, but let me go back:

*They might have expected, too an honest assessment of the problems that confronted Dr Singh on his assumption of Office, and the Government, with its renewed mandate. In both regards, the presentation disappointed, and similar to earlier Budgets, some of which I hinted to, there were no bold ideas, new initiatives, or any significant cause for hope.*

*[Interruption: 'Who said that again?']* I have already quoted, you can read the Hansard- 'Ram and McRae' - The point I'm making is that the reasons why there is no cause for hope have been elaborated by speakers on this side of the House, while Mr Rohee was thinking that they were being unusually critical and was looking forward to bouquets, and if he said that he was making notes, if he'd been making notes over all that we've been saying, by now Minister Rohee, and the Honourable Minister, should have a full dossier on all the suggestions, which have been

made in the course of this debate, on matters which the Government should seriously examine if they're to convince us; and when they reply we would like to hear what it is they're going to do to address those important issues in the Budget.

The economic arguments have generally been made by Mr Murray earlier, and I would just like to deal with a few matters, which I think go to the core of whether we will succeed in this vision 2011, or 2110 because, as I said, based on the Prime Minister's formula, it couldn't be 2011. Let me explain the mathematics. If you need four decades at 7%, and I am showing you that your rate went to 1.8%. 0%, 5.5%, then you can't do it in forty years anymore, because you have gone over a century. This is what I'm trying to tell you. *[Laughter]* So based on your formula we're a long way from that. None of us will be here to evaluate it, and I would like these things to happen in my lifetime, even if I am in a rocking chair. I would like to see this vision 2011 achieved, and that is why I want you to go back.

So I go back to the very Budget speech, Mde Speaker, of 2001, because it's very prophetic. This is what the Honourable Prime Minister had to say, again. He already spoke about ... I want to remind you of what he said:

*But this can only happen if the nation's slate is clean. We do need the PNC to participate in reducing tension in this country, and it is with such an awareness, and with such hopes, and hopes for a steady growth rate of 7% and 8%," we're stuck on this 7% and 8%, "of this 7% and 8% that we, of the PPP/C, and we want to believe the Opposition*

*too, and the nation at large, have approached the dialogue between our President and our Leader of the Opposition, looking to the dialogue to find common ground, and establish areas of truth in the need for living. Social and political stability are so essential for steady economic growth in development. We must all be ready to bear and forebear, always ready to turn to a new, clean page and try again.*

Well, that is what I believe, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Ramotar, was trying to tell us tonight. But I wonder, if you really do some self-examination, and you're talking about building confidence, trust, whether you can seriously look at your copybook, or your book of performance, and say that the PPP Government has since then behaved in a manner as though they wanted those tensions to be reduced in this country so that we can have an atmosphere free from conflict, to be able to move this country forward. That really is the question, and there are such speeches in this Parliament ... sure I accept what Mr Ramotar tells me, because we get along fine. We laugh and we talk; and I'll even buy him a drink tonight if we leave here early, but that doesn't solve the problem of this country, because what is needed is concrete action, and not just words.

Let me move from the Prime Minister's speech ... and I'm going to come back to it; because he was very prophetic. I have in my hand, Mde Speaker, this book called the *National Development*

*Strategy 2001-2010*. Well, we've gone to vision 2011, so this is a year ahead, past this National Development Strategy - and we do not know, in this document, what is valid and what is not valid, what is still acceptable, and what is not acceptable because, on a motion ... I think someone has already dealt with this matter and I don't want to repeat what has already been said, that when the motion came here for us to jointly review this document, this very Government, Mr Ramotar, that you're asking for co-operation and participation said:

*We don't want you to be in this National Development Strategy revision. We'll do it on our own, and when we are finished, and then we're going to tell you.*

Well, I don't know if the Honourable Member who is grunting out there understood, Mde Speaker, but the Minister of Finance is here, and I would not misquote him, he can speak for himself; but I recall being told, in this House, that the motion, which we brought to have a joint team review this National Development Strategy, was totally rejected ... and I think that someone, on this side of the House, pointed out that a year ago we passed a motion in this Parliament saying that we'll do it together. So the question must be asked whether, after the elections of 2006, one has gotten so over-confident of the alleged victory that this arrogance has stepped in, and the tone of dictatorship, and dictatorial behaviour, has begun to creep into the administration; and I am saying this seriously, and there has been sufficient

evidence pointed out in this Debate – of indications of that dictatorial tendency, in this debate, by all speakers. Mr Trotman spoke, not so long ago about some of it, and other speakers spoke about a number of things that are happening, and so ...  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon Deborah Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Leader of the Opposition be given fifteen minutes to continue his debate.

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition be given fifteen minutes to continue?

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Robert Corbin:** Let me try to expedite the issues which I want to raise. This very document, Mde Speaker, was not prepared by the Government alone, I think the background is known, and I spoke on it before. This is a civil society document, involving all stakeholders – yes. Chapter 3, I quoted it to my colleagues so many times, speaks on the question of governance, and they're analysing the current situation and, looking at page 8 of this document ... and they're analysing the current situation, at paragraph. 3(ii), (iii); and it's saying here *participatory democracy* ... and I think the Honourable Member Manickchand should pay attention to this book, because she was quoting from Reverend Morrison; but I want to suggest to you, just as how your colleague was disregarding the analysis of Ram and McRae, I discard that as partisan too, but this done by Guyanese who had

no axe to grind, and I suggest you read what they say about the political ... and this is what they say about participatory democracy:

*Given the nature of the country's history, and its current Constitution, it should not be surprising to learn that there is little participation by Guyanese non-governmental groups, and other sections of civil society, in the formulation of public policies and in their implementation. Opposition Parties, as always in the country's political history, are not routinely, or formally consulted on legislative matters, nor are the trade unions and private sector. It seems that the rule that such organisations are asked to participate in the decision-making process only in times of crisis, particularly when there is industrial strife and political violence.*

So I have to ask myself if the Prime Minister's words, in 2001, about wanting to work with the PNC and reduce tension were only inspired by the concern about the potential marchers on the streets, and not out of a genuine belief that such co-operation is essential if this country is to move forward, because no sooner, had we come out from that protest, accepting the Prime Minister's advice, then we had to walk out of this Parliament. We boycotted this Parliament, and we had to engage in a series of

political actions outside of the Parliament to bring reality to the things we'd all agreed - in the Hermandton Accord, St Lucia Statement, Constitutional Reform ... that's the point, you see how long it was? And it took up to 2003 May before a communiqué was signed, between now, the successor to Hoyte, and the present administration. You happen to illustrate the point, that it started since Hoyte, and the point that I'm illustrating to the Honourable Member, who speaks easily of working together in trust, that these words could easily be said: they were said since 2001; but the track record has not substantiated that there is genuine effort to move in this direction. I have had some recent experiences ... I don't want to go into all of that, but I am concerned about one particular one.

Were talking about Local Government Elections, we've had difficulties with the task force, which I don't want to elaborate on. I think, in the last Parliament, Mr Alexander elaborated on some of them and, more recently, I think they have been elaborated on here, but we've had a task force, and the fact is that that task force should never have taken so long to bring to bring recommendations to us. I don't want, at this stage, to cast any aspersions - because it's going to get into a different kind of issue, but I am pointing to the fact that, all of us together, have failed, even in an initiative that we both agreed was essential to be able to promote local democracy in this country. The point is, we hear today that, having wasted two years ... I'm not blaming anybody, but the fact is that for two years this task force messed around, couldn't give us a report, couldn't agree on an electoral system and fiscal transfer and on other laws, because the way they're speaking is as though only issues concerning Local Government reform are issues related to fiscal transfers and



electoral system. I want to state, for the record, those were only the issues that caused the greatest difficulty for agreement. Local Government reform encompasses a number of other law reforms. Now, the Honourable Member is grumbling about what this has to do with the Budget. He doesn't seem to understand the point that both the Honourable Prime Minister and the National Development Strategy are making - that unless you settle certain crucial issues you will always have friction and diversion, so you're not going to get the maximum participation of the people, so that we can unleash their energies, and get about and make development in this country. We've been there long seeking for Local Government reform and now the time is clicking, all we've been hearing from the PPP administration, *Local Government election, Local Government elections*, as though somebody was holding back that train to cause that reform to take place more than a year ago; and the issues are many. We had to have draft laws. The laws haven't been drafted yet. When those fiscal formulas have been settled, when those matters have been settled, you have to job of educating the people to understand what this new electoral system is all about, and we have ... I have difficulty even in our executive ... I'll be frank with you. I don't know what you have with your executive. When our team explained this new electoral system on Local Government, we had to have a special session for several hours so that we could grasp the concept of what this new system will really be, because it was a mixture of Constituency representation, not first - past-the-post. You see, that is one of the mistakes that they made, and that's why we have to do a lot of education. It is still the system of proportional representation, but we're dividing the Local Government areas into constituencies, so you have the top-up list, like you have in the National Parliament, as we understand it, and

you have single- Member constituencies in those areas and so on. So you have to re-educate to the people and the Parties so that they'll understand what this system is all about. You glibly talk about rushing into elections, when you haven't even addressed the law. We have seen no draft legislation, then we may even be haggling over finalising this, because we've had these experiences with the constitutional reform, even when we agree, by the time the law comes, we spend weeks and months haggling on what are the words that should included or excluded.

I am suggesting, the question of the registration of electors, which the Honourable Member attempted to dismiss ... and you can't blow hot and cold. I recall, prior to the elections, your very Honourable Member was saying, *let us get on with the elections, National and Regional Elections and, when the elections are over we'll deal with registration.* Now he is saying the same thing. Don't worry about this thing now, but *let us get on with the Local Government election.* Now, if you want to remove tension, here is a beautiful opportunity, because all the technical recommendations suggest that such an exercise will take no more than six months. Why delay? Instead of trying to resist the change that must take place when the OAS Task Force, the Commonwealth Task Force that came here to observe the elections, they all recommended in the report, get this problem solved as soon as the elections are over, get the list out, remove the issues of contention, we're going to start off moving into a new electoral process, leaving unsolved, issues that you know will cause conflict.

The Local Government laws, Mde Speaker, need to be adjusted right now. We talk about calling the Centre. The Regional Democratic Councils are sometimes accused, by this very PPP

administration, of not spending money allocated to them. A certain writer, every week, at one time when he occupied that noble post, every week you read his article in the paper - it was about Region 10 not spending allocations out to them, and this was the response: this was because of the incompetence of the PNC regional administration. We've had articles written about the Regional Democratic Council, Region 4, which is under the PNC Council and therefore it is incompetent, the Council is responsible. *[Interruption: 'That's true']* That's what I wanted to hear, because that is a former Councillor speaking, and let him tell this Parliament, when he has the opportunity to speak, or if allowed to, when the regional council ever had the authority to decide on whom the REO is their region. Second, when that regional council could make decisions and influence the REO to do what the council wants to do if he or the Minister feels it should not be done. And I could give several examples; the Honourable Member Mr Ramotar is aware of one, His Excellency, the President is aware of the recent one at Linden, and so is the Minister of Local Government. I spoke to him personally. I wrote to His Excellency the President in December; I wrote and copied to the Honourable Minister of Local Government in an effort to follow what Mr Ramotar is convincing this House that we need to do. I didn't go to the press. I didn't make a press statement or go on Nation Watch. I wrote to the President and said: *"Look, this is a new Council just elected; there are serious problems of accountability and management in Region 10."* The REO's doing his own thing. The council, at a resolution, said that they don't want him there. Granted the things they may ask there the Constitution doesn't permit, but the Constitution directs a lot of things that are not happening, including paying the money from the lottery fund into

the Consolidated Fund too, including following a certain procedure for the appointment of an Integrity Commission that somebody is inviting us to send submissions to, and there is a whole history of correspondence between the Leader of the Opposition ... not Mr Hoyte this time, Mr Rohee, but the present Leader of the Opposition, in the last Parliament, and the President, pointing out the breach of the Constitution in the appointment of the Integrity Commission. Now it is before the court, because I have been forced. Instead of a settlement being proposed in this matter and the Constitution being observed ...

*[Interruption: 'No, what I am speaking about was not a ... I am not speaking on the merits of the case. You have to understand the fineries of these things']* I am stating on the facts that the Constitution was breached, in our opinion, and we had to go to the court to try to find a resolution to a matter that is essentially political, and you come here telling us, trying to score a political point, as though the only issue is that people are, from this side, not submitting the returns to the Integrity Commission without explaining that, in our opinion, it is unconstitutional, and appointed without consultation, as is required by the Constitution. So the point I'm making is, that here is a council that was elected in Region 10, writing to the Minister and saying *look, we have a serious problem*. When I spoke to the Minister he said: "*Look, I'm going to have an investigation into this matter.*" The people said they were not going to participate in any more meetings because they're wasting their time, having faced the electorate, and having been elected to serve the region, they are seeking to investigate a serious matter of children in a dormitory, and what are supposed to be some alleged malpractices. The REO refused to co-operate, because he said he that was taking instructions from Georgetown, and he's covered. We then called the police,

the Auditor General, was written to - ask the Minister. All of that was done, but the point I'm making is that I read in the paper last week that, notwithstanding all these recommendations of the council, that the same REO is now re-appointed by the President, without a single investigation taking place in Region 10. And then you're going to turn next month, when it politically suits you, and you have no expenditure, or you have corruption or some mismanagement of funds, or some project is behind, or money is not spent, and then it will be convenient to say: "*But it is the PNC Council that is not performing.*"

It is a fact that the Minister of Local Government, and the Government, centrally controls all the ten Regional Democratic Councils and the work of the Regional administration. The Local Government Reform is intended to bring about a change in all of this, so I want to say to the Honourable Members, particularly Mr Ramotar who urged the invitation, that the PNC/R-1G has never been reluctant to discharge its responsibilities. I don't want to nitpick about Region 7 and all of that, but I think the Honourable Member is aware ... [*Interruption: 'you were too small to get involved on those discussions, but the Honourable Member was in deep discussions with the General Secretary of the two Parties'*] General Secretary of the two Parties were involved in serious discussions on this matter, and I don't want, as I said, to use this forum to exacerbate matters that I think could be resolved. The point is, Mde Speaker, when we're speaking about regional and local Government reform we're not just talking about who is chairman and who is not chairman, and I think Mr Ramotar knows our position: we have a long list of issues, including one of them since then; we didn't know Region 10 problem would've arisen, but even before the new Region 10

problem arose, we said that we needed to discuss how do we approach these regions being held more accountable, because to the extent that you making them creatures at the centre, they will also use that as an excuse, and when they don't perform they will say, well, the Central Government is harassing them.

I've been here for a long time. I want to say that many suggestions have been made about good governance; they're already on the table. We have invited, since 2003 that we look at the issue of inclusive and shared governance in a meaningful way, if we are serious about taking this country forward. What is so frightening about the Parties sitting down and talking about shared governance - whether you want executive power sharing or inclusive governance? I invite you to join us in this matter, and we in the PNC/R-1G undertake in this National Assembly that we will not be reluctant to proceed expeditiously with those matters on shared governance in this country. [Applause]

When we think about the Budget 2007, I want to conclude, Mde Speaker, by saying that the objectives are lofty: vision 2011 - very good; we have to dream a bit, but if you have dreams, and you don't put in place the mechanisms to make those dreams a reality we will, instead of building, as the Budget claims, *a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, we might be building the foundation for a very deficit country which has a history of easily falling back into that conflict, and I don't want to go into the lessons of history, which some people want to do, but I think we should do a serious analysis of this. We have responsibilities, as Parties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to look back at history and see what caused some of those problems, and we have come out of these elections acting responsibly, as, one Member said, but the point is that we have a constituency out there. The people of this country

cannot be taken for granted. They will arrive at conclusions of their own if they feel that the representatives who they have elected are failing to discharge a mandate that they have given them, and it is in that context that the PNC-R-IG has approached discussions in the past, and we support the objectives of the Budget, but do not believe that the Budget can achieve it. We would still be happy if those objectives are achieved. We would do nothing to thwart the achievement of those objectives as we did in the World Cup. Everybody is beating their chests for the World Cup; and there is no grace to acknowledge the support and participation of the PNC, but we're not complaining. From the beginning we had a representative on the local organising committee, giving full support all along, but when you see the propaganda ... and the publicity, I've never heard the Minister, or anyone in the Governmental side, acknowledge the support and co-operation of ... I could be wrong and if I'm corrected, I apologise. I am quick to apologise, I am saying that I have never heard, but if the Minister had said so then I am pleased that they have acknowledged it, but the point I'm making is that we have demonstrated, in the World Cup, even coming back to get the legislation passed so that we could meet.

VAT is another useful example. The Government had the full support, in principle, of the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana in the VAT legislation. You had the full support, in principle. We said take this thing to a select committee and we made recommendations, but imagine you blew such a great initiative. You had the whole Opposition that would give you a hard time supporting in principle, and saying to you all along, *look, there are certain things which you should do with this thing before you implement it.* But, having got our support in principle,

so you took it for granted and decided you were not listening to any more recommendations; you bulldozed your way and implemented it, and that's why you ran into trouble; that's why you ran into trouble so people had to start talking about marching on the streets, and when I told you the citizens of this country may have to shut this country down, you said that the Leader of the Opposition is irresponsible. But why is this irresponsibility, as you call it, being encouraged? Because we have said to you the forum that our Constitution provides for settlement of issues that are very clear. And I want to say that, in that VAT that the comrade wants me to speak about we recommended, in the select committee, that a lot more items be zero rated, and you took a long time, till close to December, before you finally decided the few items that you were going to put. Then we told you to look at the businessmen; nothing was done until the last minute, we told you to postpone the start – but as I said in my earlier presentation, once the suggestion comes from outside of the Government, it is discarded, and so you went full speed ahead, notwithstanding those recommendations, and when you saw that it looked as if people are going to march on the streets again with World Cup coming, we suddenly got a list of forty items. Why it couldn't have been done in the first place so that all the unnecessary friction could have been avoided?

So I conclude, Mde Speaker, to say that we have demonstrated, in this Parliament, on this side of the House, by tangible actions, that we are prepared to work, positively, for the development of this country, and I call on the Government to act in accordance with their words, and I believe that if we do so, then the only beneficiaries can be the people of this country. Thank you very much! *[Applause]*



**The Speaker:** Honourable Member Dr Ashni Singh.

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** Mde Speaker, it is indeed for me a great pleasure to rise this evening ... and I turn to the clock because I'm not sure whether I should say *this morning*. It is my pleasure to rise this evening to conclude the debate on the policies and programmes outlined in Budget 2007 and, in so doing, to respond to the various comments and observations that were made during the course of this debate. Let me say, of course, at the onset, that I would like to join my other colleagues in wishing the Honourable Leader of the Opposition a *Happy Birthday*; *[Applause]* And let me apologise, in advance, for detaining him. I cannot necessarily promise that this drink would be had on his birthday, but perhaps the morning after might have to suffice.

Let me also say how pleased I was to hear the Leader of the Opposition say, without equivocation, his agreement with the objectives stated in the Budget 2007: He said that unequivocally. *[Applause]* And let me say how pleased I was, also, to hear the Leader of the Opposition give an unequivocal commitment, a clear and explicit commitment, to do nothing to thwart the achievement of those objectives. *[Applause]* This, a Speaker, I believe, is a good and auspicious note on which this debate would be concluded and indeed angers well for the future of Guyana.

In rising to wrap up this Debate, Mde Speaker, I hasten to acknowledge the many kind congratulatory words that were offered to me during the course of this debate - from both sides of the House: comments to support the Budget 2007, but congratulatory comments that I hasten to emphasise that I accept, not only on my own behalf, but more importantly, on behalf of the many young hard-working professionals at the Ministry of

Finance, [*Applause*] and many of them are here this evening; they're accustomed to long hours Mde Speaker. Also, on behalf of my colleague ministers and their staff, whom I believe it is well-known, and if it isn't well-known, then it should be well-known, expend tremendous efforts in preparing sectoral strategies and plans, preparing annual budgets within the context of those sectoral strategies, participate in the process that leads to the preparation of the Annual Budget, and during the course of the year, worked very hard in implementing, monitoring, and managing these Budgets, with a view to achieving the stated objectives. On all of their behalf, Mde Speaker, I accept, as graciously as I can, and with every humility, the kind words of congratulations which were extended during the course of this debate. Like so many of the Honourable Members of this House who spoke before me, I remain convinced that Budget 2007 is based on a realistic and honest assessment of where we are as a country, a practical view of where we need, and would like to be, and indeed, a clear articulation of the best possible way to get there. Mde Speaker, it articulates the policies and programmes that can enable us to get there - that is to say, to achieve the modern and prosperous Guyana that we would all like to live in. Mde Speaker, I am equally convinced that this Budget does so in a responsible way - perhaps not in a flamboyant way, but in a responsible way.

If I were to take away one statement or two statements from this Budget Debate, that struck a special chord of my heart, Mde Speaker, they will be the statement made by the Honourable Prime Minister in his presentation during the course of this debate, when he said that this Budget was presented without guile. On the second statement, Mde Speaker, that I would take

away and keep with me for a long time, was that made by the Honourable Member, Minister Robeson Benn, when he said this Budget was not about adventurism. Those are words that I believe captured, in essence, my own thinking about this Budget. It was crafted soberly and sincerely, and it is without gimmick gadgets, and hoodwink. Mde Speaker, it is about sound policies, hard work, [*Applause*] openness with the people of Guyana; and it is about a better Guyana, and I feel confident, presenting a Budget crafted in this mould, Mde Speaker, because of the immense respect that I have for the Guyanese people, for their ability to see, understand, and analyse the issues; so much so that I would not insult them with flamboyant gimmicks, catch-phrases, and fancy sound-bytes: that is not what this Budget is about, Mde Speaker. Notwithstanding the soundness of Budget 2007, notwithstanding my conviction as to the soundness of the Budget 2007; and notwithstanding my relative newness to the job, I would not have been naïve enough to expect that absolutely every speaker would have been unquestioning and overwhelming in his support. Nothing could have been further from my expectations: I certainly would not have expected that and indeed, I would be the first to defend the importance of the role of debate and the role of discussion, and indeed, the role of criticism, as important parts of the democratic process. Over the course of the last five days I have listened carefully, as I am sure all other Members have. Occasionally, Mde Speaker - admittedly very occasionally, I detected a criticism with merit. There were some, and I will take them away with me, and I am sure that we all will take them away with us. What I find, however, somewhat regrettable, is that, far too often, when my colleagues on the other side of the House offered a comment - a critical comment that might have had some validity, that had the potential to be taken

seriously, and to be listened to, Mde Speaker, regrettably, all too often, these comments were negated and nullified by severe fundamental flaws in some of the arguments that were offered. In some cases these flaws included misleading or mistaken use of facts; some cases involved distortion of numbers; in some cases they reflected a puzzling ... a revelation of puzzling vacillation on issues; in some cases they reflected a resort to broad and unverifiable innuendos; in some cases they reflected overused and previously rejected arguments. Mde Speaker, just as I would borrow the Honourable Prime Minister's words, and the Honourable Member Minister Robeson Benn's words, in describing this Budget - *without guile, without adventurism*, modest words, words that encapsulate modesty and honesty. Just as I would borrow their words in describing this Budget, I would borrow a word used by the Honourable Member, Senior Counsel Mr Bernard DeSantos, in describing the majority of the criticisms of the Budget, saying that, regrettably, they comprised of vacuous hysterics and histrionics. 'Histrionics' I believe was the word used by the Honourable Member Mr DeSantos. Perhaps Mde Speaker, the difficulty in identifying criticisms of the Budget can best be said to have been captured by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who spent a substantial part, I think perhaps it might have been ten minutes of his presentation - the opening ten minutes of his time of the wicket - valuable time at the wicket, tumbling through past Budget speeches; and as if to enable him to use up a little bit more of his time, the Honourable Member Mr Winston Murray ... I saw him shuffling some of the Budget speeches so that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition could start again and go through the names and, Mde Speaker, in my mind that captured the efforts - the floundering efforts, at identifying legitimate criticism of the Budget 2007. [Applause]

Let me elaborate, Mde Speaker, on a few of the difficulties that I had with the criticisms made of Budget 2007: let me give a few examples. I'll elaborate on them. Let us address, for example, the mistaken use of facts and figures. To his credit, and no doubt in testimony to the relationship, a working relationship, a good working relationship that we shared, the Honourable Member Mr Winston Murray, who opened this debate, and did so very well, informed me before the start of the Debate that he was having some difficulty in interpreting some numbers in the budget speech; and I thank him for bringing this to my attention. I was happy to make myself available, to explain from where the numbers came, and to identify the relevant tables - and to clarify the doubts that he had in relation to those particular matters. Nevertheless, Mde Speaker, at the very start of the debate, the Honourable Member and my good friend, Mr Winston Murray, spoke with his customary effective, dramatic style, which the Honourable Member, Minister Carolyn Rodrigues, confessed to admiring; and which I would readily say I quite like myself. Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, spoke, with this greatly dramatic effect, about elements of the Budget that he claimed were missing. He regaled us with sections of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. He spoke of the requirements of projections for future years - projections for the next three years; and he read all of the sections. Perhaps he was trying to use up some of his time too. Mde Speaker, I know that the Honourable Member was out of the country shortly before the Budget debate started, so perhaps I can attribute his comments to a lack of time in preparing for the Budget, because I would like to turn his attention to the first pages of Volume II of the Estimates. The first ten pages of Volume II of the Estimates are entitled "*Medium-term Projections*," fulfilling the requirements of those

very sections of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act that the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, spoke of with such great aplomb. Admittedly, Mde Speaker, these Estimates are only indicative: they're preliminary. They're preliminary indicative Estimates based on certain assumptions - done very diligently; I have to say, by the staff of the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the staff of other ministries. I would not have had a difficulty with us debating those assumptions. I would not have a difficulty with somebody saying, *I don't agree with some of these assumptions, or you know, I have a difficulty with some of these numbers.* Mde Speaker, perhaps I have some difficulties with some of those numbers, but where I have a difficulty is where the impression is created in this Honourable House ... when we are being listened to, we have been recorded - as somebody said, we're being broadcasted to the length and breadth of this country: where I have a difficulty is where the mistaken impression is created that the numbers are not there, when in fact they are there. *[Applause]* Knowing the Honourable Member Mr Murray as I do, Mde Speaker, I can only assume that it was an oversight on his part, and not a deliberate attempt to mislead either this Honourable House, or the Guyanese public at large.

Secondly, Mde Speaker, the same Honourable Member, my good friend Mr Winston Murray, engaged in another superficially-impressive excursion. Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member engaged in another dramatic excursion on the issue of the measurement of the deficit; and he attempted to make much mileage, and to create a great hullabaloo, in relation to the fact that loans and grant disbursements were classified in a particular way, that it was computed, in this particular manner that was

misleading. Mde Speaker, I don't have the advantage of Mr Murray's distinguished years, but I searched my memory, and I could not identify an instance where the classification of loans and grant disbursements was any different from any previous years' Estimates but, not wanting to place sole reliance on my own modest powers of recollection, I sought refuge in the archives. I only went back to 1970, but I checked every year – my staff checked every year. As I said, I only went back to the Estimates for 1970, and the Estimates for 1970, which show Actuals going back to 1967, indicate that the manner of presenting loans and grant disbursements, and the manner of computing the deficit was no different - way back in 1967, as it is done in the 2007 Estimates. So once again, Mde Speaker, one can only wonder, given the ... and I hear the Honourable Member now saying that doesn't mean that it is right, and I agree with him, that that does not necessarily mean that it is right; but I do believe that it is right, because the Estimates also have other tables that deal with accounting and economic classifications, computation of the deficit, computation of the accounting deficit, intros minus outros for the purpose of appropriation accounts; and then, like I say, consolidated fiscal accounts. The estimates have always been presented in this fashion. I take his point that that doesn't mean it is right, but to suggest that there was some skulduggery in coming up with this presentation is where I have the difficulty. That is where I have the difficulty.

Mde Speaker, once again, I know that the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, knows his way around these Estimates. I know that the Honourable Member ... In fact I am very sure that he knows his way around the Estimates better than I do; and so, Mde Speaker, one can only wonder as to the intent of these

criticisms; and if one were to reach the conclusion that they constituted mere oversight, perhaps, then I would venture to suggest that they call into of everything else that would have been said in question the seriousness.

Criticism of the Budget to give a few other examples, Mde Speaker, to give just a few other examples - I listened to one of my very good friends, the Honourable Member Mr Basil Williams, sitting right opposite me; and I would be interested in having a look at the Hansard to confirm that my hearing has not started to fail me, because I believe I heard the Honourable Member say, very clearly, that a sum of \$1.961B was budgeted for revision of wages and salaries, of which a sum of \$1.828B was spent; and the Honourable Member then made the quantum leap to arrive at the conclusion that that spent \$1.3B. Mde Speaker, once again the Honourable Member said \$360M; and I would ask the Honourable Member how do you subtract 1.828 from 1.961 and get 360, or 1.3M, or whatever other number? *[Laughter and Applause]* Whether it is \$1.3B dollars, or three hundred and something, or the third option that the Lotto machine might spin up, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member is understandably getting a bit excited and agitated, but I make the point, because it calls into question how can one take seriously everything else that the Honourable Member would have said, when the Honourable Member would have taken such a cavalier approach, and bandying around numbers in a random and irresponsible fashion? Of course we have, but nothing remotely close to the magnitude - nothing remotely close to the magnitude of the numbers that the Honourable Member attempted to suggest, and there from, attempted to draw conclusions. This is



employment cost. Mde Speaker, with your permission I continue. The right is not as young as any of us would like it to be.

In like manner, the same Honourable Member, my good friend Mr Basil ... He knows exactly what I'm coming with. Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member declared boldly, saying that VAT will collect \$24.8B, generating a windfall of \$8B. If we turn to Table VI of the Estimates, we see that the actual collections from the taxes that were abolished with the introduction of VAT, generated a total revenue of \$24.3B last year, and so, if the actual collections for these taxes were \$24.3B for last year, and the projected collection for VAT is \$24.8B - an increase of \$2.2B, or \$500M, I have great difficulty in understanding where, Mde Speaker, is the windfall? These are the facts of the matter.

Thirdly, Mde Speaker, once again, by way of simple example, my other friend, the Honourable Member Mr Anthony Vieira - my good friend ... has he put on his glasses - hopefully to hear me better; and hopefully, having put on his glasses, he might see better this time, because I'll tell you what he said during the course of the debate. He looked at the Estimates, Mde Speaker, and he made a bold pronouncement. He said: "*Budget 2007 is a photocopy of Budget 2006,*" and to substantiate that argument he cited some statistics. He said: "*It's a photocopy, you're projecting to collect 60.8 instead of 54.8; you're projecting a deficit of this figure instead of that figure.*" Mde Speaker, by way of examples, I've brought two examples of the World Bank Annual Report - two examples, and if we go through the contents, the format is the same. If we go through two Annual Reports of the World Bank, or if we go through two Annual Budgets of any large company, the presentation would be very much the same,

the format of the presentation would be very much the same, but every number has a story behind it - a story of policy, a story of developments; and Mde Speaker, you cannot, simply look at a number because it is there, and it is there again; and because it is only different by this number from that, you cannot make bizarre quantum leaps to conclude that one is a photocopy of the other. And so, Mde Speaker, I only gave a few examples. *[Interruption: 'I will give you a couple more, as you insist; I will give you a couple more']* Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, once again another one of my very good friends, the Honourable Member Mr Keith Scott ... the Honourable Member, Mr Keith Scott, regaled us with a series of pronouncements on issues such as borrowing and spending. He spoke of a destiny of perpetual debt. He spoke of the difficulties faced by the small man. He spoke of perpetual debt, and he spoke of the difficulties faced by the small man, and then the P.S. to his thoughts: Forget the technical rhythm, or not be aware of everything else he had said. He then made the bold pronouncement that none of these problems existed during the PNC's rule. Mde Speaker, I would venture to suggest that nobody, on this side of the House, will say that there are no problems. I would equally say that, not even the Honourable Leader of the Opposition would make a statement - a blanket unqualified statement such as that because he knows that, it would damage and undermine the credibility of everything else that he would have said. So I gave these examples, just to illustrate the point, that I had great difficulty sifting through the comments and the criticisms made by the Opposition to identify where substantial comments were being made, and where the comments that could be taken seriously were. The dilemma that was faced ... and I know that it was faced by a number of my colleagues on this side of the House: the dilemma that was faced

was how does one take, seriously, these attempts to criticise? How does one take them seriously? That is the difficulty that I have.

Mde Speaker, I mentioned the issue of vacillation on policy issues. I mentioned the issue of vacillation. I hear talk of personal attacks; but the Honourable Member, Mr Everall Franklyn said, very boldly, that we must not be sensitive to criticism, that we must be thick-skinned; and I don't believe that applied to only people on this side of the House [*Applause*] I don't believe that when the Honourable Member, Mr Franklyn said that we must not be sensitive to criticism that he was only speaking to Members on this side of the House, Mde Speaker.

The Honourable Member ... I mentioned rather, Mde Speaker, examples of vacillation on policy issues ... and this is an important issue: this is a very important issue. Let me give an example - one example: let us speak of VAT first, Value Added. Once again, I was happy to hear the Honourable Leader of the Opposition clearly articulate a position with respect to support of Value Added Tax, and this, Mde Speaker, has always been my understanding of the position of the Opposition, and indeed, this position has found no more an eloquent champion than the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray. Indeed, in recent debate in this Honourable House, the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, extended full and wholehearted support in certain legislative amendments that were brought to this House. He did, and for which we thanked him. Yet, Mde Speaker, during the course of this Budget Debate, one heard statements from my friend, the Honourable Member James McAllister ... I don't know if he is here; I can't see around this gentleman here, but one heard statements like: "*You would not have brought VAT if you*

*were concerned about cost-of-living.*” We heard the Honourable Member, Dr John Austin, with his fantasy ramblings on the Blair family. Mde Speaker, we heard the Honourable Member, Mr Basil Williams, describe the VAT as a retrogressive TAX, and as punitive. We heard the Honourable Member, Volda Lawrence, speaking of VAT tantamount to squeezing blood from stone. Time and posterity are recording what we say in this House; and the people of Guyana are listening also, and if we send mixed signals - mixed and unclear signals. If, on the one hand, we say ... particularly the leadership, that VAT is good for Guyana, although we have some issues about the manner of implementation, but VAT is good for Guyana. Like I’m saying, if on the one hand we make the statement, unequivocally saying that we think *VAT is good for Guyana*, but we have some issues about particular issues related to implementation; but on the other hand, Mde Speaker, among our Membership there is chaos and confusion saying: “*squeezing blood from stone, squeezing blood from stone.*” I would urge the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, and in particular, his spokesperson on Finance, the esteemed and Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, to clarify the position of the Opposition on VAT. [Applause] Mde Speaker, I was the first to say, and I would continue to say, that Government appreciated the clear stand taken by the Honourable Member Mr Murray, and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; but when one gets these signals here, and one hears, today, that *we think the rate should be reduced by 1%*, tomorrow *we say we would like an 8% tax as an interim tax*: What is going on here? What is going on here? Is this policy consistency, Mde Speaker? I can understand the chaos and confusion into which the Opposition has been thrown. It is reflective of their particular style. [Applause] And so, Mde Speaker, I would say, very

clearly, that on the issue of VAT, Government remains committed to ensuring that Government continues to believe ... that, everybody here continues to believe that VAT is good for Guyana. We continue to believe that VAT is good for Guyana. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition speaks about arrogance, and yet I said myself, at the Guyana Manufacturer's Association, that we don't anticipate that we would do it perfectly, but we will do it. We will listen. We will consult, and we will adjust; and we will make sure that the feedback received is incorporated, and we will take appropriate actions to ensure that this is implemented. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, the Leader of the Opposition said that if an idea does not come from this side of the House it is rejected out of hand. The Honourable ... and I feel I must respond to this because I am on the issue of VAT, and I feel that I must respond to it. Let me quote, like the Honourable Leader of the Opposition ... Let me follow the good example of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and go to the 1993 Budget, and I will quote from the then Honourable Member, Professor Clive Thomas:

*"I also reiterate the WPA's call for an immediate revamping of the Consumption Tax, basing it on far lower rates and including services. This would broaden the area of compliance and make for greater revenue collection, with less of a burden falling on any individual company or activity. We*

*also call ... We also call, as we have done before during the past PNC administration, for the introduction of a Value Added Tax."*

And he goes on. Mde Speaker, I'll tell you what my point is; my point is, when we accepted this recommendation, we were told: *"You didn't accept VAT because you wanted to accept VAT." The IMF made you accept VAT.* I didn't accuse anybody in particular, Mde Speaker, but whoever the hat fits, let them wear it! Whoever the hat fits let them wear it! Not the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray - whoever the hat fits. So I gave an example where ... It's only one example. Perhaps we can fault it for taking a long time to make the decision, but it cannot be said that when a decision comes from outside of the ranks of this side of the House, it cannot be said that those decisions are cast aside. *[Applause]*

I wish, equally, Mde Speaker, to return to the 2001 speech. I will quote from the 2001 Budget speech:

*"For the purpose of clarification, I want to indicate to the speakers on the other side of the House, that indeed one of the basis for that mechanism - philosophical basis - is that this Government has introduced, (and that is this Government) and will continue to utilise the mechanism of the free-market, and if, perchance, that could not have been seen through this Budget*

*speech, like the ones in the past eight years, it is because you're not looking hard enough."*

Mde Speaker, the speech goes on, and I'm quoting from the Hansard dated June 27, 2001, and I'll clarify in a minute. The speech goes on:

*"I wish to inform this House that what is entailed in relation to gathering as much investment in this country, as far as possible, this administration of the last eight years has done. You cannot deny that the landscape of Guyana today is a far cry from what it was prior to 1992. It is a far more attractive landscape. It is far more welcoming, at least to the investors' eye."*

This speech was not presented by the Honourable Member, Mr Donald Ramotar; it wasn't presented by the Honourable Member, Mr Sasenarine Kowlessar; it wasn't presented by the Honourable Prime Minister. Mde Speaker, it was presented by the Honourable Member...

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, your time is up. Your forty-five minutes to reply to this motion is up.

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

**The Speaker:** Motion moved that the Honourable Member be given another fifteen minutes to continue

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** Mde Speaker, the speech that I just quoted from, was made by the Honourable Member, Mr Khemraj Ramjattan. I quote from the speech to make a point. The Honourable Member, Mr Raphael Trotman, my good friend and brother, said to me, said in this Honourable House, that the only thing new about the Budget was the person who presented it, that nothing has changed from previous Budgets, yet his colleague, who sang great praises of this identical previous Budget, had great difficulty doing likewise, with respect to this current Budget, and this puzzles me, because if the Budgets were the same, and the commentator was the same, I wonder then how the commentary could've been so different, I wonder, therefore, how the commentary could've been so different but, more importantly, he spoke of the investment climate, and he quoted statistics obtained from a report that he very triumphantly announced that he had obtained from the World Bank, and he spoke of Guyana being the worst country in a number of areas, or close to being the worst country. He said 113 out of 117 ... well; he quoted from a report that said Guyana is 113 out of 117 etcetera. Mde Speaker, I have this Report, and once again I would say - just as nobody on this side of the House would say that Guyana is a land



of milk and honey, and that all is well, and that all is perfect, if we are to present a credible argument, then we cannot only select one section of the report and leave the others. Mde Speaker, I wish to quote from the same report. Mde Speaker, I have some difficulty in actually identifying which report it was, because the Honourable Member ... I don't recall - maybe my attention lapsed a bit, but I don't recall an explicit reference to the type of the report; but with the aid of the Honourable Member, Mr Raphael Trotman, who confirmed the actual report; I'll refer to it. It is: "*The Guyana Investment Climate Assessment Draft Report issued by the World Bank.*" Putting aside the fact that it is a draft Report - putting that aside because I'm not making an issue out of that, Mde Speaker, but I wish just to share ... I've marked off several quotations, several pages; but I wish only to share a few with this Parliament. Mde Speaker, paragraph 1:28 of the same report; and I'm not saying that this report is to be accepted wholeheartedly and wholesomely but paragraph 1:28 stated thus: "*A lower share of Guyanese firms report investment climate-related constraints to their operations, compared to surveyed firms in Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala, which incidentally, are the countries that Guyana is being compared to, I suppose because of similar circumstances.*"

*For example, the share of Guyanese surveyed firms, which ranked crime, theft and disorder as a major or severe obstacle to doing business, is a half of that in Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. A lower share of Guyanese firms complained about macro-economic uncertainty and access to finance, as obstacles to doing*

*business, compared to surveyed firms in the three Central American countries.”*

Just to give another example; Paragraph 1:3:

*“Within governance-related constraints, crime was mentioned by 30% of Guyanese firms, whilst corruption was regarded as a constraint by 18% of interviewed firms. These results suggest that governance constraints are perceived as less of a problem in Guyana, compared to Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala, where the percentage of firms reporting crime and corruption as a constraint, is 61% and 70%, respectively.”*

Mde Speaker, I quote further: “According to the doing ...” paragraph 2:1: Mde Speaker, it is the same report that was quoted from previously and received so warmly by some Members of this House. Paragraph 2:1: “According to the doing business in Guyana in 2006...” [Noisy Interruption]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, please allow him!

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** “...According to the doing business in 2006 data, Guyana has a faster but costlier business registration system than other comparative countries in and out of Latin America and the Caribbean region.” Mde Speaker, I quote

*again, paragraph 2:3: “Guyanese managers of manufacturing firms spend, on average, 3.4% of their time during a typical week to deal with requirements imposed by government regulations. This is substantially lower than in Central American countries, etc, etc.”*

Mde Speaker, I quote from paragraph 2:5:

*“Taxes did not emerge as a major problem in the survey of Guyanese manufacturing firms and neither does tax administration.”*

There are several more, but I will not detain this House further *[Applause]* except to make the point that, if we're interested in a holistic view - to borrow a word the Honourable Member, Minister Clement Rohee, if we're interested in an objective and comprehensive view, we cannot select two paragraphs from the back of the report and expect to draw conclusions from them. I would equally not say that I would take one paragraph in front of all and say that all is well in Guyana. Mde Speaker, none of us, on this side of this Honourable House, none of us, would dare to insult the intelligence of the Guyanese people by saying all is well; but equally none of us would say that all is so bad in Guyana, and that Guyana is the worst country in the world.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members on this side of the House, I'm tired talking to you all the time. Please! Mrs Backer, please! You lead this side of the House, so please!

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** Mde Speaker, I simply make the point that, if one looks at a comprehensive view of the situation, it is

clear that, on a number of issues and indicators, when it comes to doing business in Guyana: when it comes to the business environment, Guyana is making progress. There remains of course, much work to be done, and we remain committed to doing that work, but it is important to make the point, because a misleading impression was created in this House.

I wish, Mde Speaker, to address the issue of debt relief. The Honourable Member, Mr James McAllister, spoke of debt relief; and he spoke of debt relief in terms that distressed me. I heard the use of the phrase *the African gravy Train*. Like the Honourable Member, Dave Danny, I too had resorted to a dictionary, and just in case I was in doubt, I checked what *gravy Train* meant. The Oxford English dictionary defines *gravy Train* as *a source of easy financial benefits* - the Oxford English dictionary. I was distressed because, had the Honourable Member acquainted himself with issues pertaining to debt and, in particular, the debate of growing currency on the issue of odious debt, the Honourable Member would not have insulted Africa in the manner that he did. [Applause] I will quote, Mde Speaker, from Mr Joseph Tiglis ... I think his name is well-known to all of us in this House - winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize for Economics, and a former Chief Economist of the World Bank. I will quote from an article written in November 2003, in the *Atlantic Monthly*:

*“The problem is that Iraq today is encumbered by huge debts with estimates totalling anywhere from \$60B to the hundreds of billions which include expirations imposed on the country after the 1991*

*Gulf war, etc, etc.” The article goes on: “Iraq needs a fresh start, and the only way to give it one, would be to free the country from what some call “its odious debts”, debts incurred by a regime without political legitimacy from creditors who should have known better, with the monies often spent to oppress the very people who are then asked to repay those debts. Of course, Iraq is not the only country that would like to see its debts forgiven. Why should the Congolese be forced to pay cold war loans made by Western countries to buy Mubuto’s favour, especially since the lenders knew fully well that the money was not going to the people of the country, but to his Swiss bank account? Why should Ethiopians have to repay the loans made to the Red Terror Regime - loans that made it possible to buy the arms used to kill the very people whose friends and relatives must now repay the loan?”*

And the article goes on; and so, Mde Speaker, when we speak of debt relief for Africa, it is insulting to describe that debt relief as a *gravy Train*.

In relation to Guyana, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member ... I made that point because the Honourable Member spoke of debt relief as if it is something that happens automatically, as if there is some *gravy Train* that is being distributed. I wish to quote from a press release dated December 23, 2005; a press release issued by the International Monetary Fund; and it said the

following. It is issued under the caption: *IMF to extend 100% debt relief to Guyana under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative; and I quote:*

*“Guyana has qualified for IMF debt relief because of its overall satisfactory recent macro-economic performance, progress in poverty reduction, and improvements in public expenditure. [Applause] In particular, since reaching the completion point under the HIPIC Initiative, Guyana has maintained macro-economic stability in the face of an adverse external environment...”*

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

**Hon Samuel Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation. *[Noisy Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, I wish to stop right now and to read, for your benefit, what I had prepared a little earlier, and I think I will do it now, because its late in the night and we're becoming a ramble, like we did last evening. Let me just find my papers, because I'm tired of asking you all, and pleading with you all to ... alright.

Honourable Members, yesterday I was very tolerant with those Members who heckled and interrupted several speakers during the debate; both sides of this House guilty of this. I must remind

you that under the Standing Orders there are rules for Member and so who are not speaking, who are not on their feet, I wish to draw your attention to Standing Order 45, which states:

*“A Member present in the Assembly during the debate shall enter and leave the Assembly with decorum, shall not read books, newspapers, letters or other documents save such as relate to the business before the Assembly, shall maintain silence while an other Member is speaking, shall not interrupt, except in accordance with the Standing Orders, and shall otherwise conduct himself, or herself, in a fit and proper manner.”*

Further the 21<sup>st</sup> Edition of May is what I extracted this, and it has the following other things to say about Members not speaking:

*Members must not disturb a Member who is speaking, by hissing, chanting, clapping, booing, exclamations, or other interruptions. Since 1693 it was resolved that the Speaker shall call upon a Member, by name, making such disturbance, and that every such person shall incur the displeasure and censure of the House.*

And it goes on - there're a whole lot more, but I just want, at this very late time, to ask you all to please, let us resolve ... we still have another stage to go. It is after the midnight hour, and if you find you cannot sit and tolerate, then you can always exit and let the business of the House proceed. Honourable Minister, you may proceed.

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** Mde Speaker, as I was saying, the press release goes on, and it states very clearly ... I am not going to read the whole press release, which I see the Honourable Member James McAllister has it there and he has the one that was issued a few days before too. The press release goes on and the press release makes it very clear that, as in the case of Guyana and a number of other countries, debt relief, in this instance, was granted, as it is in most other instances, on the basis of strong policies and strong Norco-economic performance. No creditor was granted dept-relief irresponsibly. Let us address, very briefly, accountability. Let us address the issue of public accountability. Much has been said about public accountability, and much has been said, on this side of the House, about what Government has done to improve public accountability; and Mde Speaker we've spoken, for example, of strengthening of the Auditor General's Office; we've spoken about re-introducing audited accounts into the National Assembly. I wish; very briefly, to touch on this issue, very briefly, because I can see Members on the other side getting a bit restless. Mde Speaker, let us speak about public accountability, and the accountability cited. Every year Government produces accounts. Government submits these accounts to the Auditor General: the Auditor General submits the report to the Parliament. The Public Accounts Committee then deliberates on these reports and issues a report of its own. The



Public Accounts Committee brings this report of the Parliament, and then moves a motion requesting this House to adopt that report and to refer the report to the Government for appropriate action. Let us examine, Mde Speaker, what transpired in the case of the 1999 accounts, because we've been working, progressively, to improve public accountability. There is still work to be done; but we've been working.

Mde Speaker, the 1999 audited accounts of the Government of Guyana were laid in the National Assembly in May 2001. The law requires, of course ... The law imposes a deadline. The law says that the audited accounts are required to be submitted within nine months, so these audited accounts should have come by the end of September 2000. They came in May 2001 - somewhat late: I admit they were late, but the PAC, Mde Speaker, has no time limit for considering these reports. The PAC commenced its deliberation ... and we've heard much said about the good collaboration between the two sides of the House at the PAC, so let us examine when the PAC reported on the 1999 Accounts. The PAC received this report in 2001, then took three years - Mde Speaker, three years - until March 2004, under the chairmanship of the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, it took three years - until March 15, 2004, accounts that are prepared in nine months, in this case a little bit more than nine months. The PAC took three years to pronounce on these accounts and, having tabled these accounts in the PAC report, in the National Assembly, on March 15, 2004, and being required to move a motion to adopt this PAC Report, Mde Speaker, the report languished on the table of this House until July 2005 - more than one year before the motion for adopting the report was moved. The same happened in 2000-2001. In the case of the

2000 accounts, which came to Parliament in May 2002 ... In the PAC report, the PAC took from May 2002 to March 2004 - four years. The essence in the value of information such as this is timeliness. Four years, Mde Speaker, four years after these accounts were tabled in the National Assembly; the PAC report was tabled in Parliament.

So I make that point to say that there is a collective responsibility for accountability, a collective responsibility. *[Applause]* And Government is doing its part but, equally, I would urge the Honourable Member ... The Honourable Member has now given up the chairmanship of the PAC, and I believe if I am correctly informed, that the Honourable Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence, is now the chairman, I would urge the PAC, which is under the chairmanship of the Opposition, to deal a bit more expeditiously with these matters, if they take them seriously.

Anyway, Mde Speaker, the question we must ask ourselves in Guyana is, are we moving in the right direction? That is the question we must ask ourselves. If we investigate every single major indicator: if we investigate every single major macro-economic indicator, we will see that the resounding answer to this question is that we are moving in the right direction. *[Applause]* We can argue about whether we would like to move more quickly, and that is an argument which I think would be a valid one; but the unequivocal answer to the question, Mde Speaker, is that we are moving in the right direction.

The Honourable Member ... I believe more than one Member of the Opposition, Mde Speaker, referred to the surveys by a popular firm in Guyana. I wish to refer to the Guyana Business Outlook

Survey 2007 which, somehow, was conveniently ignored throughout this debate. I wish to quote from this report:

*“Confidence in economic prospects, the surveyed group was asked to state how confident they were that the economy would improve in 2007. Respondents expressed the highest level of confidence for 2007 over the past five years. [Applause] Not surprisingly, therefore, more than 50% of the respondents are planning to increase the scale of their operations in 2007, with no one planning to scale down operations. [Applause] When asked whether economic conditions for privately-owned businesses would be more favourable in 2007, versus 2006, optimism increased over that recorded in the 2006 survey.”*

This is the Guyana Business Outlook Survey done by Ram and McRae.

Mde Speaker, I believe the point has been made. We could speak at length about every macro-economic indicator. We could speak about growth, about inflation, domestic credits, foreign direct investment. Let me just give an illustration. Let us just turn to yesterday's *Kaieteur News*. Much ado is made about foreign direct investment; let us turn to yesterday's *Kaieteur News*: *“Digicel hooks up in Guyana, Company to invest US\$60M [Applause] Mde Speaker, I will quote from the Kaieteur News ... the Honourable Member, Mr James McAllister, will note that I am quoting from the newspapers; I'm not attesting to, or*

conducting a verification, but I'm quoting from the newspapers: *"Communications giant, Digicel, will be investing a whopping US\$60M here in establishing a new state-of-the-art network, offering exciting firsts ..., etc, etc."* So evidently the author of this article is differently informed from the Honourable Member, Mr James McAllister, as to the geographical spread of this investment. The article goes on, the CEO as quoted: *"The CEO further pointed out that the establishment of the Company here will result in the direct creation of jobs for more than two hundred persons."* and the article goes on: *"Another eighteen thousand will also benefit from direct..."* It's a direct quote, Mde Speaker. The newspaper actually has unemployment here, but I have to assume that the context means employment, and if were to substitute the word, the article goes on though: *"Another eighteen thousand will also benefit from direct employment by way of becoming stretched-cord dealers."* And so on. That is Mr Tim Bahrani, the CEO of Digicel.

Mde Speaker, I will not go on more, but simply to say, although there is much more to be said, and I'd be happy to continue but it is now morning and I, Mde Speaker, am as tired as the Members on the other side of the House, but I'd be happy to continue, because there are many, many more facts to be shared with this Honourable House. Mde Speaker, I'd simply say that there is no need, or reason, for triumphalism here. There is none. We are committed to putting our heads down, and to working hard. No one individual, or no one side has a monopoly on ideas; but I made the points that I made today ... and I can see some sensitivity, because I sat here in this Honourable House, on the receiving end of a barrage of unkind comments, biased and prejudice comments about Budget 2007, and I bore them with in

quiet dignity. *[Applause]* I bore them quietly, and as dignified as I know how, Mde Speaker, because I recognise that there is much room for discussion, but this evening's experience has been illustrative, because sometimes it appears that the criticisms and the flaws must only flow in one direction, sometimes it appears thus and, the Honourable Member, Br. Everall Franklyn would do well to take note of our experience this evening, because it seems quite fine for criticisms to flow in one direction, but when it flows in the other direction, we hear all sorts of sensitivities. Mde Speaker, I will say that there is no need for triumphalism, the task of building Guyana is one to be carried by all of us - all of us, *[Applause]* on all sides of this House, and the Leader of the Opposition has already expressed his commitment to working to achieve the objectives of this Budget. I receive his hand in friendship, and I say that I look forward to us working together to make Guyana the better place that we know that it can be. *[Applause]*

I'm reminded of a quotation from George Bernard Shaw who said, in 1893, that people are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, then they make them. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, your time is up.

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** ... Mde Speaker, in conclusion, I thank all of the Honourable Members. I thank this entire House - on both sides, for their comments, their inputs, their insightful comments, their useful contributions to this House, and I also commend, and I thank you, in particular, for presiding over what has been

sometimes animated debate, and you presided over it, Mde Speaker, with great dignity and aplomb. For that I thank you, *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, and I commend this Budget to this Honourable House. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, this completes the general debate on the Budget. Before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the report of the Business Sub-Committee, of the Committee of Supply and the allocation of time to the consideration of the 2007 Estimates of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply. We will have to go into a Committee of Supply for this purpose.

## IN COMMITTEE

Honourable Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met today, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2007, to consider the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2007 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed a resolution on the matter, and copies of the sub-committee's minutes, resolution and schedule have been circulated. Will the Honourable Minister of Finance kindly move the necessary motion?

**Hon Dr Ashni Singh:** Madam Chairperson, I now move that the Committee of Supply agree with the Business Sub-Committee in its resolution.

**Motion put and agreed to.**

**Motion carried.**

Honourable Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated three days for the consideration of the Estimates; consideration will begin tomorrow, 16<sup>th</sup> February, and we will, in accordance with the resolution of the sub-committee, have it circulated. I heard Mr Trotman, you have it there - the resolution and everything. Let the Assembly now resume. Honourable Prime Minister!

**Hon Samuel Hinds:** Mde Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned until 2pm, on Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> February.

**The Speaker:** The House is now adjourned until 2pm on Friday.

*Adjourned Accordingly At 24:33H*