

# National Assembly Debates

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF  
THE FIRST SESSION (2001-2002) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF  
GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE  
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

## Part I

23rd

26TH SITTING

2.00 PM

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

### *MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (68)*

#### *Speaker (1)*

The Hon. Hari N. Ramkarran, S. C., M. P. - *Speaker of the National Assembly*

#### **Members of the Government - People's Progressive Party/Civic (34)**

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| The Hon. Samuel A.A. Hinds, M.P.               | - <i>Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications</i>          |
| The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P. | - <i>Minister of Parliamentary Affairs</i>                                       |
| The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P.                | - <i>Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation</i>                |
| The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.              | - <i>Minister of Local Government and Regional Development (Abs)</i>             |
| The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.                   | - <i>Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport</i>                                    |
| The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.            | - <i>Minister of Education</i>   |
| The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.            | - <i>Minister of Finance</i>   |
| The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.                | - <i>Minister of Housing and Water</i>   |
| The Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal, M.P.     | - <i>Minister of Agriculture (Region No. 4-Demerara/Mahaica)</i>                 |
| The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P.                | - <i>Minister of Home Affairs (Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)</i> |
| The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P. | - <i>Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security</i>                  |
| The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.            | - <i>Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development</i>   |

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

- The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P. - *Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock (Region No. 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*
- \*The Hon. S. Rudolph Insanally, O.R., C.C.H., M.P. - *Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs*
- \*The Hon. Doodnauth Singh, S.C., M.P. - *Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*
- The Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P. - *Minister of the Public Service (Absent)*
- The Hon. C. Anthony Xavier, M.P. - *Minister of Transport and Hydraulics*
- The Hon. Bibi S. Shadick, M.P. - *Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara) (Absent)*
- \*\*The Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P. - *Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce (AOL)*
- The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P. - *Minister of Amerindian Affairs (Absent)*
- The Hon. Dr. Leslie S. Ramsammy, M.P. - *Minister of Health*
- Mr S. Feroze Mohamed, M.P. - *Chief Whip*
- Mr Cyril C. Belgrave, C.C.H., J.P., M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica) (Abs)*
- Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P. - *(Abs)*
- Mr Husman Alli, M.P. - *(Region No. 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)*
- Mr. Komal Chand, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.
- Mrs Indranie Chandarpal, M.P.
- Mr Bernard C. DeSantos, S.C., M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica) (AOL)*
- Mrs Shirley V. Edwards, J.P. M.P.
- Mr Odinga N. Lumumba, M.P.
- Mr Heeralall Mohan, M.P. - *(Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)*
- Mr Ramesh C. Rajkumar, M.P. - *(Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)*
- Mr Kumkaran Ramdas, M.P.
- Mr Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P. - *(Region No. 6 - East Berbice/ Corentyne)*
- Dr Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.D., M.P.
- Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury, C.C.H., J.P., M.P. - *Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Water*
- Mrs Pauline R. Sukhai, M.P. - *(Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini)*

\* *Non-Elected Minister*

\*\* *Elected Member from The United Force*

**Members of the Opposition (30)**

**(i) People's National Congress/Reform (27)**

- Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, S.C., M.P. - *Leader of the Opposition (Absent- On leave)*  
Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P. - *(Absent- on leave)(AOL)*  
Mr. Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P. - *Deputy Speaker of the N.A -(AOL)*  
Mr E. Lance Carberry, M.P. - *Chief Whip - (AOL)*  
Mr Ivor Allen, M.P. - *(Region No.2-Pomeroon/Supenaam)-(AOL)*  
Mrs. Deborah J. Backer, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mr. C. Stanley Ming, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mr. Raphael G. C. Trotman, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mr Vincent L. Alexander, M.P. - *(Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)-(AOL)*  
Mr. Andy Goveia, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Dr Dalglish Joseph, M.D.,M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Miss Amna Ally, M.P. - *(Region No.5-Mahaica/Berbice)-(AOL)*  
Miss Sandra M. Adams, M.P. - *(Region No.10-Upper Demerara Berbice)  
(AOL)*  
Mr. Jerome Khan, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Dr George A. Norton, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Miss Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P. - *(Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)-(AOL)*  
Mr. James K. McAllister, M.P. - *(Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands  
West Demerara - (AOL)*  
Miss Lurline A. Nestor, M.P. - *(Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica) -(AOL)*  
Mr Abdul Kadir, J.P., M.P. - *(Region No.10-Upper Demerara/Berbice) - (AOL)*  
Mr Ricky Khan, M.P. - *(Region No.1-Bartima/Waini) - (AOL)*  
Mrs. R. Bancroft, M.P. - *(Region No.8 - Potaro/Siparuni)-( AOL)*  
Mr Nasir Ally, J.P., M.P. - *(Region No.6-East Berbice/Corentyne) -(AOL)*  
Miss Judith David, M.P. - *(Region No.7-Cuyuni/Mazaruni) -(AOL)*  
Miss Genevieve Allen, M.P. - *(Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)-(AOL)*

**(ii) Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance Party (2)**

- Mrs Sheila V.A. Holder, M.P. - *(AOL)*  
Mrs Shirley J. Melville, M.P. - *(Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)*

**(iii) Rise, Organise and Rebuild Party (1)**

- Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

**OFFICERS**

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, *Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly  
(Performing the functions of Clerk of the National Assembly)*

Mrs Lilawtie Coonjah, *Principal Assistant Secretary (Finance)  
(Performing the functions of Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly.)*

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

## **PRAYER**

**The Clerk** read the Prayer

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

#### **Leave**

Hon. Members, Leave has been granted from today's sitting to the Hon. Members Mr Desmond Hoyte and Mr Deryck Bernard.

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

#### **Presentation and First Reading**

*By the Minister of Housing and Water:*

*WATER AND SEWERAGE BILL 2002 - Bill No. 4/2002*

**14:05H**

[As the Minister of Housing and Water rose, the Members of the People's National Congress/Reform and Mrs Sheila Holder of the Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance withdrew from the Chamber] [Noisy interruption]

**The Speaker:** Hon. Minister, have you presented the Bill?

**Hon. Shaik Baksh:** Yes.

**The Speaker:** Will you do so again? As a result of the noise of the Hon. Members leaving the Chamber, I could not hear you.

**Hon. Shaik Baksh:** Mr Speaker, I now present the Water and Sewerage Bill 2002 - Bill No. 4/2002 and asked that it be read a first time.

**The Speaker:** Let the Bill be read a first time.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

*[Bill No. 4/2002 read the First time]*

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **MOTIONS**

#### **1. BUDGET 2002 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2002**

Assembly resumes the debate on the Motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2002.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate on the Budget for the year 2002.

The Hon. Member Mr Ravi Dev.

**Mr Ravindra Dev:** Mr Speaker, I rise to join the Debate on this 2002 Budget. It has been said that anyone who practices economics without considering politics is practicing poor economics. I am pleased that the Hon. Minister did not commit to that folly, because in his introduction and in the body of his Budget Speech, he alluded to some of the political realities being faced in Guyana today.

I would like to begin my presentation by discussing what the Minister has brought up in his Speech here. He mentioned, of course, that the March 19 elections were followed by violence in this country and he talked about the process of dialogue which came out of that. He said that this process, this dialogue, offers the best hope for resolving differences.

Mr Speaker, I would like to say that the Minister is not looking deep enough into that which hails this country, and the walk-out by the PNC/R and the WPA, I think, has to be put within the ambit of what the dialogue is not delivering.

First and foremost, the dialogue is not institutionalised. It is not a

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

process that is part and parcel of the political system in Guyana. It is an ad hoc measure which came up from the violence following March 19. We would be doing ourselves a dis-service if we were to feel that we can leave the future of our country unto that process.

The Hon. Minister refers on page 42 of his Speech to a statement that, at the legislative level, and I quote:

There is now strengthened legislative scrutiny and oversight of the Executive Branch as there are four new Sectoral Committees. Also five Commissions for Gender and Equity, Indigenous People, Children, Human Rights and Ethnic Relations were created.

Again, this is not really stating the facts as they are, because we know, for a fact, that these Committees are not functioning. There is a gap between what might have been passed by the legislators and what is the reality. We know, for a fact, that there is no functioning Management Committee for Parliament and the four Sectoral Committees, for sure, have not been constituted and they are not functioning. To say that we now have strengthened legislative scrutiny, an oversight of the Executive Branch, is to over-reach by quite a good sum.

What I would like to say, in terms of what the Hon. Minister has raised, is that we have to address the fundamental problems of this country if this Budget or any other budgets will accomplish what it seeks to accomplish, and that is first and foremost. We have to address the actual interests of the groups for which they speak. So when we talk about inclusiveness by enlarging the functioning of Parliament, what we are attempting to do, somehow, given the intent of the Constitutional Reform process, is to give the Opposition some input into the decision-making process of governance, and to stymie that process is not really to carry out the intent of the Constitutional Reform process. The People's Progressive Party/Reform has agreed to that process, is a signatory to that process, and to now drag its feet is to almost ensure that the politics that will be played out, is not one which will lead to stability in this country; and the PPP/C will have to be prepared to stand by the consequences

of where that can lead to.

I now turn to the Budget proper, so to speak and I refer back to the words of the Hon. Minister last year, the first time I sat in this Honourable House. He then said, and I quote:

the Budget was the first step towards the realisation of a comprehensive development strategy for implementation over the next five years.

In this particular Budget, he was very specific, or a bit more specific, as to the goals of that development strategy when he said that it is intended to transform Guyana from a low income agro-dependent country to middle income semi-industrial one and more concretely to have higher per capita income for us, the people of Guyana.

Now, when we look at the process that is thrown out by this Budget in terms of what the Budget is intended to do, we can only say that this Budget (to use a word which I learnt in Berbice) is a pukadee Budget. The word *pukadee*, I would like to explain to this Honourable House is a word that refers to a kind of wood found in Guyana, which looks like greenheart, smells like greenheart, but it is not greenheart, it doesn't have the qualities of greenheart, so when you use it, it rots. That's what this Budget is, because by the goals which it has set itself, it fails.

I would like to adumbrate my statement and my claim. First and foremost, in terms of the function of all governments to ensure the allocation of resources in a country, to carry out its developmental goals, the Budget fails, because the Budget says again and again that the Private Sector will be the engine of growth, but when we look to the specifics, it falls remarkably short.

For one, I was very pleased by the candidness of the Minister of Tourism and Industry yesterday, when he stated that in terms of industrial estates, not one square inch has been created and that is a remarkable piece of candour for him to say, because last year \$225 million were allocated for the construction of industrial estates at various and sundry

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

places in Guyana including Anna Regina, New Amsterdam and Lethem. The Minister is honest because in none of these places, was an industrial estate put down and that's the fact. This year again, we hear of another \$200 million allocated for industrial estates, this time the list has been cut down, we don't hear about Belvedere anymore, that has been abandoned. We hear about New Amsterdam and Lethem.

Now, this is where we have to put our money, where our mouth is, that if we want business to come to Guyana, if we accept that business will be the engine that will pull us out of where we are today, in terms of our economic condition, that we have to be prepared to set the infrastructural pre-conditions in place so business will come.

In this modern world, in this globalised world, every country understands what has to be done and every other country around this globe is putting their monies where there mouths are, which is to create the infrastructure where business will come in and invest.

When we look at other allocative decisions by the Government, why would business come to a country? Well, first and foremost, it must be assured that it will be able to make profits. You know this word *profits* is seen as something obscene by the governing party coming, I guess from their Marxist roots, but the point is, profits are what drive initiatives when people take risks, when people will put out their money, when they will put out their resources in order to get something. Profits must be included in the factor - in the equation.

So when we talk about what an investor looks at... well, what is that country prepared to do? In a word, where is the investment code? A document was laid in Parliament, during the last sitting - one of the three sittings that we had - and to this day, it seems to be an orphan, no one has claimed ownership of it and I am not so sure where the Government is going with that document. As it is the document itself deals at a level of generality, that foreign investors or domestic investors certainly will not be satisfied with.



*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Now, coming back to another function of Government, that is, stabilisation. We must commend the Government for having a stabilisation policy which on the surface appears to be working in terms of inflationary rate, in terms of money supply, in terms of inflation, but we have to look beyond that function, because the World Bank and the IMF and these bodies that are today controlling our destiny, they insist on this aspect of a government's role in terms of stabilisation. But you know, you can have a patient that is in a coma, but you have put on all these machines unto him and the patient can be very stable, but the patient is in a coma. Stability does not imply life, and in terms of a country, stability certainly does not imply growth, and as the Minister says in this document, economic growth is that which we seek for our country. So I would like to say that we have to look beyond the dictates of the Washington Consensus and do what is right for our country. That, yes, stability by those macro economic indicators is important, but governments, we have seen throughout the world, in those countries that were able to come out of what is called the lesser developed countries stage into the developing or developed stage, those countries all have governments that were prepared to take a more activist role in terms of guiding the economy out of the lesser developed role and into a developed role. I would like to say that the whole criteria for judging what kind of governmental role is proper, in this modern word, is one where the government works to increase the efficient functioning of the market and under that rubric a tremendous amount of Government's intervention is applicable and justified by countries across the globe. We cannot be tied into the straight jacket delineated by the World Bank and IMF and the other multilaterals. We have to have a much more interventionist role by the government.

We talk, therefore, when we look into what areas we can get into - and we, our party, ROAR, like to be specific, not just to make generalities. We looked at the structural re-adjustment that the Government is making in terms of sugar and we noted the allocation of over \$110 million investment in sugar in the Berbice Region, which will bring down the cost of the production of sugar into somewhere around twelve cents and, I guess, less depreciation and interest costs.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Be it as it may, the present position on the sugar industry is that the Demerara Estates are getting no investments and the conditions here are pretty much status quo. We can, therefore, very confidently extrapolate that the cost of production on the Demerara Estates will not go down significantly, they have not gone down significantly since the introduction of the strategic plan. Berbice has already witnessed a reduction of their costs. What we are saying from this side of the House is that this is an area, therefore, where government should take a role because GUYSUCO is a government corporation and we have called for a diversification of the operations of GUYSUCO in the Demerara Estates.

Here is an opportunity for us to look at the GUYSUCO Sugar Plantations in Demerara and to acknowledge that they have management, you have individuals who are trained, you have individuals who are well qualified for medium level technology manufacturing.

The Government, in another part of this Budget, talks about us getting into agro-processing. Well, since we have not been able to attract those industries, and I am sure the Government will say that it has diligently tried to do so, we feel the Government can take that lead and begin to diversify GUYSUCO into certain agro-based industries. The land is there, the management is there, it is just that the hope, the commitment and vision ought to be there. There are many models across the globe where this has been done, it can be done through joint venture partnerships. One could invite, for example, a company like Del Monte not Del Conte, that is a different one, you wouldn't want to get back to that and work out some kind of partnership arrangements where crops can be grown, can be processed, but can be marketed on the world market.

In terms of the rice industry, to continue with our recommendations in terms of agriculture, since we are in that area, we feel that here again, the Government has to have a strategic vision for rice. The Government cannot say that it is a private industry and therefore we wash our hands off. That might be what the World Bank, the IMF and the multilaterals may be telling us, but that is not how any of the developed countries

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

operate, and is certainly not how those countries were able to pull themselves out of poverty.

In America today, we see that President Bush has had to intervene massively in the economy, where it was felt that industries were on the verge of collapsing. So there is no hard and fast rule that says, in a free-enterprise economy the Government cannot intervene. The point, again, as was shown by places like Thailand, Indonesia and other countries, is that where they intervened in the rice sector by providing cheap money to that sector they forced that sector not to become dependent on subsidies, but to subject the sector to the discipline of the world market. So in that sense, the infant-industry argument did not hold forever. Those industries have to ship a certain amount of their production overseas and therefore they have to be efficient. So those who criticize Government's intervention into industries like rice are mis-guided if, again I say, if it is seen as a strategic sector for our country and we believe it is. Many countries that use rice, they are developing, they are going into manufacturing and they will move away from industries such as rice. Guyana, due to her large land space and our pool of farmers, who are willing to go to the land, we feel have the ability to increase our rice production. ROAR says we would like to at least encourage our industry to go to one million tonnes of rice per annum, where we can be a player in the industry - either we are in something or we are not, with our present production. We are just a big player where we are forced to be price-takers and in some industry or the other, we have to take control of our destiny where our size should begin to matter and we can control some of what we want to do.

Now, if we want to go back, some of the other institutional changes that the Government acknowledges, that the Government says need to be put into place - we talked about the strengthening of regulatory bodies, the strengthening of bodies that are autonomous, that are supposed to be overlooking our national patrimony. This is another area where the Government has been lacking. The Government seems to have some kind of compulsion towards control and dictating. This, in the long run, does not do us well. We have to take a risk, if we see it as a risk, to

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

ensure that institutions be set up, whether it be the Bank of Guyana, whether it be the Insurance Commission, whether it be the Forestry Commission, we have to ensure that these bodies begin to function in an independent manner. We have seen right now in America that when regulatory bodies do not function impartially, what is going to happen. In Guyana, the Government has to take the lead in ensuring that these bodies function effectively.

Just today, I was handed a set of letters and memoranda detailing a very serious circumstance here. The case of Dexter Cummings, where the Forestry Commission made a decision in terms of an employee and the Head of the Presidential Secretariat intervened on this matter against the laws of Guyana, against the laws of the Forestry Commission and insisted that a certain action takes place, which is that this man, Dexter Cummings, be given a sum of almost \$1 million when it was not his place to do so. These are matters, from the information we get, of common occurrence. We cannot close our eyes to them no matter which side of the House we are, we have to be cognisant of the reality, that if our own Officers that we have put in there, feel that just because someone is in a political position, that someone can override professional judgement. Then it is the beginning of a demoralising process that will certainly not get us to the promised land of this medium level of semi-industrial state that the Minister tells us that we want to get to. I am pleased that there is no sugar levy this year, but I just want to point out the irony that in those years when sugar was making a profit, then the levy was declared and huge portions were kept ensuring, therefore, that no profits were declared and, of course, that sugar workers did not have profit-sharing. Now that the industry is not going to be making profits, we are hearing of the levy being taken away. It doesn't do much for those people who are carrying this country literally on their heads through the tremendous labour that they perform in the fields of Guyana, as was done during slavery and indentureship.

We come again to the income tax threshold, because one of the complaints of the ordinary worker is that the amount of taxes that he/she has to pay, and we know that we have to be in an anomalous situation

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

when the minimum wage in our country is above this threshold. It means that the Government has to look at this again. This, I was glad to say, was even raised by the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union sometime ago in the newspapers and I hope that the Hon. Member of the House, who is the Head of that Union will raise that point in his presentation.

Now, when we look at the macro factors, some of which have contributed to our stabilisation, I wish to point out, again, the real cost that is being borne by the people of Guyana for us achieving what the World Bank wants, which is this stabilisation.

We note again that the Government's liquidity sopping up measure has to be in full gear even now where over \$40 billion have been sterilised and simply sits there because in common parlance, this is what it is. We are taking money out of the banking system through the issuance of T-Bills and letting the money sit there. Why? Because we are told by the multilaterals that if the Banks have that kind of money, it will lead to easy lending, cheaper interest which will then fuel inflation.

Well, this is an anomaly. You know, it is like when I was a child, you learnt the story of the Ancient Mariner - water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink. So we have a situation of money, money everywhere, yet we hear that we can't borrow money unless it's at 18 to 21 percent. We have to acknowledge that a prime reason for this is the fact that the Government is sopping up so much of the excess liquidity. Why is it excess? Because it is a self-defeating cycle. The Government sops it up, therefore, the Bank does not have an incentive to lower their rates because the Banks have a fail-safe guaranteed return on their money. So when the Banks look at their cost of lending, it doesn't start from zero, it starts from where the T-Bills are, (whether it is 7 percent or 9 percent that is not the point) because the T-Bills, rate now becomes the base, because that is a sure fine way of that bank having its money safe.

What is the cost to us? We are spending \$5 billion dollars a year just to service that account. Now, that's a lot of money whichever way you want to cut it and whichever exchange rate you want to use, \$5

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

billion of interest to accomplish what the World Bank is telling us in terms of stabilisation is, I think, too much.

Again, what ROAR is saying is that the Government, if it feels that the system is too liquid, that banks are not lending, it means that the banks are saying that the risk that they should take in lending is too high. Well, this is where the Government's vision comes into place. If for instance, we feel that agro-processing is one of the strategic sectors we should encourage, then the Government can give incentive to the bank to lend to the development of that sector and the Government can do it in a myriad of ways. I am sure our Minister of Finance understands so many of the financial instruments that can be backed by Government through which such money can be intermediated. *[Interruption]*

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

**Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud:** I wish to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his speech.

*[Motion put and agreed to]*

**Mr Ravindra Dev:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do not want to go on much longer, but what I want to simply reiterate that the bottom line of us as a country, as a very poor country, of getting us out from this perilous state into the state which the Minister says we ought to be, is that we have to be able to generate new businesses. When we look at what it takes to accomplish that, we come back to the generation of electricity. This is an area where even the Government has been forthright enough to say that the electricity sector is simply not performing. Well, if the Government, the Opposition and the people of Guyana understand this to be so, it then boggles the mind as to why we can't change this state of affair. Again we come back to the fact that there has to be a plan by the Government for the transformation of this sector, because this is a key area for any industry.

I was in Trinidad just a week or so ago and apart from the discussion that it prompted as to why I missed the first sitting, I was in Trinidad at

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

that time. Be that as it may, in Trinidad, I discussed with an individual who has a canning and bottling facility that was not in use and when I asked, well why can't we get that into Guyana, where Guyana has a tremendous amount of land, where we can produce the fruits and vegetables for you to be able to use your machinery, the individual replied that first of all the cost of power generation - in Trinidad, they can get it down to US 2 cents per kilowatt hour and in Guyana it is US 12 cents per kilowatt hour. That is a spread that is very hard to beat.

The second one is that the individual acknowledged that in shipping perishables to the short distance between here and Trinidad, that you are talking about a large amount of wastage. Therefore, he might be able to look at it, but still he will need a very sure and reliable source of electricity.

Therefore, I say to the Hon. Minister and to the Government that we have to take charge of our electricity and our power generating sector. The Government, after all, is not an uninterested bystander, it is a fifty percent owner of GPL, and we have to correct that.

Another area, that we feel that the Government can assist in is the rice sector and other products. The Government has to take a more pro-active role in terms of securing our interest in CARICOM.

When I was in Trinidad, I was at the office of the distributor, who had bought sugar directly from GUYSUCO. CARONI, the Trinidad Company had an injunction against that sugar being released. The point we are making is that in Trinidad the institutions there are on top of their game, that CARONI is trying to invoke a clause to say that this sugar is not processed. The importer was in touch with the Minister of Agriculture. I hope the matter has been resolved. But the point is, institutions have to utilise whatever rules there are in the game to ensure that they have a level playing field.

On the contrary to what was happening to our rice or the work of the Trinidadians on our sugar, rice was flooding the Trinidadian market

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

from all over the world including Thailand and other parts of the far east and these were very low quality, sub-standard rice so the objections that the Trinidadians had about the quality of our rice is nonsensical. No Guyanese would buy the kind of rice they were buying. This is what we call *khudi*, this is all broken rice, the percentage of broken was so high - yes, pukadee rice.

The point, though, is that our Government, I have been told, has not been able to ensure that the common external tariff is applied to this rice that is flooding our market. Now, this is something that we ought to look into.

Another point, it might appear small, but it is where we need to go. Honey, I found out (and we produce honey in Berbice) cannot be imported into Trinidad. There is a total ban on that. We ought to find out why and overcome that, because the honey on the Trinidadian market is very, very expensive and there is a sure input that we could make into that market through honey.

The bottom line that I would like to make in terms of the development of small industries, agro-based industries is to discover markets and to make sure that our individuals can reach those markets. It is for those reasons that ROAR, a couple of years ago, had said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ought to have a very strong trade component, which would seek to market our goods based on the description of the re-allocation of duties where we do have a trade component. I am a bit unclear as to how much actual trade promotion rather than negotiations with these Regional bodies is contemplated with this. I would like to encourage that this is a component that we must really encourage. There was one manufacturer, for example, that I spoke to who wants to import, something we call *dye* in Guyana, *turmeric* is its proper name, they call it *saffron* in Trinidad. This is a crop that grows in Guyana. We used to grow it when I was a boy. In fact Ricks and Sari used to grow it at Rosignol, but for some reason we have gone out of this. Here is a niche market. The point I am making is that with diligent searching for markets, there are niches out there to be found, where Guyanese small farmers



*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

and small manufacturers can play a very, very important role in the economy.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, I would like to, again, caution our Government for engaging in a higher level of deficit spending than which it set itself as target, which is 3 percent. This year, I understand it is somewhere around 7 ½ percent. This is a road where we can't afford to go especially if we are engaged in the deficit spending and not putting it into real production. If we engage in deficit spending merely to fuel consumption, then, I think, we are defeating our own goals. We need, therefore, to focus more on public savings, to look at our fiscal allocations, and we would like to propose that we ought to head towards the notion of a balanced budget, where we are in charge of our own destiny, where we are in charge of how and where we can spend our money because it comes out of our own profits.

Debt, I would like to remind all of us, is a postponed tax liability and the interest paid is the cost of postponing that liability and for this reason, if no other, we ought to be very skeptical of the growing of our debt.

Yes, as the Minister said, if we look around Guyana, we cannot pretend that there is not improvement, one would have to be blind to say so, but I think we have to acknowledge that much of that improvement has come out of borrowing. We have borrowed over US \$700 million and we have to ask ourselves if we have generated the kind of structure of our economy, if we have re-aligned the structure of our economy, where we can service that debt. We blame and criticize the People's National Congress, as we all have, for encouraging a quantum of debt that they were not able to service. That ought to give us cause that we don't go down that same road.

In conclusion, I wish, once again, to call upon the Government of Guyana to take its responsibility seriously because the Budget is only one sub-set out of this totality that is called governance, where the Government has to be concerned with the stability of the society. I call

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

upon the Government, once again, to move toward a more inclusive form of Government where all Guyanese can feel that they have a role in making decisions that impinge upon them.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture

**Hon Navindranauth O. Chandarpal:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I rise to lend support to the Motion moved by the Hon. Minister of Finance and to say that in his presentation, he has given to us a very in-depth consideration of the state of our economy and the measures that we have attempted and intend to carry out within the context of what has been taking place globally and what we have to deal with at home, factors, which in one way or another influenced the rate at which our own development would be taking place.

Mr Speaker, very often we hear views that the budget has not said enough, that the budget is not put in a context of what the development plans are, and I would like to repeat because, towards the end of the budget last year, we heard those views and, once again, we are saying that there is a view that much more has to be said in that particular budget.

But I want to point out that for the PPP/Civic, we do not operate in a vacuum from year to year. We have a history, as a party, dating back to the first election in which the party participated in 1953, of presenting a manifesto to the people and on being elected of fulfilling what we promised in that manifesto. *[Applause]*

Indeed, Mr Speaker, the Constitution was suspended in 1953, because the PPP did what no other Government of those days would have dared to do and that is to do what it promised to the people before it got elected. *[Applause]*

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

Mr Speaker, on that basis, I would like to put in context the way we approach the development of this dear land of ours and I refer to the introduction of the PPP/Civic's Manifesto for the 2001 general elections, an introduction which was indeed a message from His Excellency the President, but written in his capacity as the Presidential Candidate for that election and I would like to quote from what he said here:

*Guyana is a magnificent land, endowed with abundant resources and an enterprising and resilient people. There are boundless possibilities for myriad economic activities, including industrial development, land cultivation, food processing and a host of traditional and emerging activities.*

The economic development strategy which we will embark on will position the country to attract more investment, further stimulate our peoples entrepreneurial spirit and establish the economic base for sustainable improvement of our living conditions. by focusing on maintaining a sound

economic framework, effective policy formulation, co-ordination and implementation. We have managed to tame and control inflation, generate new jobs, expand opportunities for employment, stimulate self employment and increase exports in the traditional and new sectors. Thus we have created an environment that would allow great economic and social gains to accrue to the Guyanese people.

Mr Speaker, this was partly repeated by the Hon. Minister of Finance, but in that manifesto the proposals to carry out such a plan were elaborated and every sector of Government is guided by those proposals which we placed in our Manifesto.

Mr Speaker, the Budget this year, in its review of what took place last year, pointed to the role of the agricultural sector and in his presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance said:

Mr Speaker, the growth in the domestic economy was partly due

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

to the performance of the Agricultural Sector especially sugar and rice.

I would like, Mr Speaker, to point to a few of the issues related to these two major commodities, products and, indeed, aspects of life and development in our country.

## **Sugar**

During last year, sugar contributed sixteen percent to the overall GDP, which reflected 53.5 per cent of all Agricultural GDP, recorded a four percent growth in GDP terms. There was an actual increase of 4.1 percent and not only have we produced that sugar, but Guyana continues to meet all of its marketing commitments and to maintain its reputation as a reliable supplier of sugar to international markets.

We have had, however, mixed fortunes with individual markets. In some cases, we have had less being requested by one country and more to another, but in CARICOM we have an increase of 6.3 percent. We would have liked to have more and we have targetted for more, but there were a few difficulties. The package of sugar which we have targetted to put on the market did not go into the market last year, but would be doing so this year. Bulk sales to Trinidad were reduced following negotiations with CARONI and in the case of Jamaica, we had a reduction because Jamaica itself had a better crop than they had planned for. Yet inspite of that, our overall sales to CARICOM increased.

GUYSUCO also went into the direct sales of molasses and as a result of going directly rather than through an Agent, the sales in molasses increased from \$272 million in the previous year to \$1,336,000,000 during last year.

Mr Speaker, sugar is indeed facing a great challenge and this is reflected very much in the fact that inspite of that increase in production, inspite of our moving to other markets in other areas, nevertheless the profit or the profitability was reduced. In actual financial consideration the Corporation showed a loss. The major events that surround such a situation have been under consideration by the Government and all the

players in the sugar industry as well as in the area of trade.

We have already indicated that at the level of the European Union, the Everything But Arms Initiative will be having a severe impact in terms of preferential sugar reducing in quota every year.

What has happened here is that what was intended to be a positive move aimed at helping the least developed countries was in fact turned around and the quotas that are to be given to the least developed countries by European Union Countries are to be met from the quotas presently being filled by the ACP group of countries.

Guyana is part of a team that is continuing to lobby the Members of the European Union to get them to shift this position and to have the allocation to the LDCs made in addition to what we currently have for the ACP countries. It is not an easy fight or issue, but we are pursuing it and we intend to continue to do so with increased vigour.

Mr Speaker, because of such difficulties the sugar industry is being developed, according to a strategic plan which places emphasis on seeking to reduce the overall cost of production of our sugar. At the centre of that strategic plan is the investment of US \$110 million for a new factory at Skeldon and for new areas of cultivation, to expand the acreage in that area.

We are already working on the details of the expansion of Skeldon. We have obtained support from the World Bank, Caribbean Development Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom. The factory is expected to come on stream in 2005, and production would then be expected to increase overall to 450 tonnes per annum. At that stage the expected overall cost of production is targetted to be US 11 cents per pound.

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr Dev, referred to the Demerara Estates. I think, I had cause in our last budget debate to refer to the fact that there were strong pressures by bodies such as the World Bank to put as a condition for their support for the expansion of production in

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Berbice Estates, that the Demerara Estates should be closed.

We are on record and I am happy to state that the Government held a very firm line. As a result of that, we were able to obtain the support for the Berbice Estates without having to make a commitment to close any of the Demerara Estates. That, Mr Speaker, was done because the Government recognises the role that sugar plays not only in terms of what it contributes to the GDP, but because of its social impact and the fact that in many communities, sugar is indeed a way of life.

But, Mr Speaker, we are nevertheless aware of the reality that if in these estates the cost of production is higher then we will be affecting our overall cost of production and therefore simultaneously with the development in Skeldon, for the expansion of the Skeldon Estate and subsequently we hope the Albion Estate, that we are taking several steps which are aimed at rationalising the operations in the Demerara Estates. What this would mean is that there would be a consideration of all the factors that are affecting cost and to seek ways in which we would reduce, but at the same time, I think, that the point raised by the Hon. Member, Mr Dev in relation to the Demerara Estates, is that we cannot move too drastically to switch from sugarcane cultivation to produce sugar, to these alternatives, though, when the Hon. Member, Minister Sawh will make his presentation, he will point to the several initiatives that we have already taken and steps have been put in place for diversification, for agro-processing and generally for the development of organic agriculture, which are all booked and intended to be carried out outside of present cultivation as well as the replacement of some areas already prepared for cultivation.

So, Mr Speaker, we are seeking all avenues, and those points that were made reflected in our plans in these areas. I just want to say also that in terms of new development directly in sugar, that a package and sachet sugar unit were installed at Blairmont towards the end of last year. Full launching of the product on the regional market awaits the commissioning of the sugar dryer in April of this year (next month). GUYSUOCO will be seeking to market these products directly, to retain markets in the Region and elsewhere under the genuine *Demerara Sugar*

brand name.

Also, Mr Speaker, a 124-hectare organic sugarcane farm was established at Uitvlugt and the Corporation is expected to market approximately 500 tonnes of organic sugar this year.

The Soil Association, an Organisation which advises on and certifies organic production has been asked to certify the crop and based on a favourable report by its representative who observed the project, has issued a licence to GUYSUCO to produce organic sugar for certification and we have great confidence that organic sugar production will begin this year and will generally be increased in the years to come.

For this year, 2002, we expect a production of approximately 315,000 tonnes of sugar, the Development at Skeldon to begin and also to make greater in-roads into Regional Markets for package sugar.

## **Rice**

In the rice sector, Mr Speaker, rice contributed four percent (4.0%) to the GDP, twelve percent (12%) to overall agricultural GDP and recorded an eleven percent (11%) growth in terms of what it produced the year before. There was an increased acreage of 7.5 percent. Paddy production increased by eleven percent, yield increased by 3.6 percent, bags per acre, and we were able to have our total exports increased by 1.2 percent, although the price we received was less than in the previous year. This again points to the difficulties and challenges that rice also was facing, similar to sugar in certain respects.

## **Strategic Plan for Rice**

Also we have developed a strategic plan for the development of the rice industry. In May, 2001, Guyana Rice Industry launched this strategic plan. Stakeholders representing the millers, farmers, other areas

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

of Government and business were involved. We were able also to obtain the services of some experts with some experience through the IDB. The intention of the plan is to develop an integrated, sustainable and profitable industry and the areas of action that we are highlighting had to do with research, processing, marketing and support services. An action plan has been developed out of the strategic plan and already some of these are being executed.

But, Mr Speaker, while we are looking for the strategic plan, there were some problems which rice farmers faced. I think we are all familiar with the fact that thousands of rice farmers were in a state of indebtedness to the banking sector and as a result many of them were finding it difficult to be able to enter into production. They could not do so because they had no possible source of income or funding other than to do their land preparation, and even if they were able to start, to maintain the related expenses for instance the purchasing of fuel as well as to be able to buy fertilizer.

Government's concern for this sector led to a prolonged period of negotiations with the banking sector. It was not an easy road because there were distinct groupings among those farmers in terms of their levels and nature of that indebtedness, but we were able to approach this issue in stages and on January, 31, we reached an agreement, the first step in this direction covering farmers whose principal debt was lower than \$10 million at August, last year. The Government has granted the opportunity through the Financial Institutions Act for these producers to have their loans restructured over ten years at ten percent interest rate, with all their interests and a significant portion - twenty-five percent of the principal - written off.

Mr Speaker, this is an important development. Prior to this agreement, I received every week farmers from all parts of the country who came in tears sometimes because their houses, their homes, the place where they live were at risk, because of their indebtedness. I must say that subsequently in moving around the country, in the rice farming areas, that there was evident relief in their faces. *[Applause]* This was



because the Government has the interest of these farmers at heart, the Government recognises that rice farmers are making their contribution to the economy, and at the same time, there is a large number of others, who also are dependent on what takes place in the rice industry.

Mr Speaker, internally we are also trying to find solutions to some of the difficulties that have to do with the relationship between different players in the rice industry. Rice Millers have complained about being fleeced by those who purchased their rice for export. In turn, rice farmers have complaints about how they are treated by some millers and we have been taking steps both in terms of enforcing some of the measures related to grading, weighing, condition of scales, checking of them and overall in terms of measures so that farmers can receive their just rewards for the paddy they produce.

In turn, also, we have been working together with all of the players in the industry in order to ensure that they put their act together so that in selling rice to overseas market they are not under-cutting each other and causing or creating the opportunity where they can be short-changed.

So, Mr Speaker, we are looking forward to an increase in production, we are looking forward to greater benefits coming to farmers. But, Mr Speaker, we recognise that the rice industry would have to significantly improve in terms of the cost of production, the quality of what is produced. We have spent significant effort in research and last year four new lines with characteristics of greater resistance to blast, higher yields and better economic adaptabilities were developed. They are all linked to the rustic variety, but with these characteristics that will help us to have greater yields and to bring down the cost of production. We are giving greater support in the other areas of need, including assistance in sourcing fertiliser and getting it to farmers at lower prices.

In terms of support with seed paddy, in terms of advice in the way they go about carrying out their cultivation, in terms of the application of pesticides and other ways of controller pests and disease,

we have also been giving support in terms of the rehabilitation of

wharfs and hopefully, Mr Speaker, these will lead to greater results in the rice industry.

Unlike, Mr Speaker, what the Hon. Member Mr Dev has said, government is not unaware of the high cost at which farmers have to obtain their loans for rice. For other areas of manufacturing, other areas of development, government has consistently been pursuing with the banking sector the development or the creation of a development bank and, I am sure, Mr Speaker, that those results would be forthcoming very shortly.

### **Drainage and Irrigation**

Mr Speaker, very critical to the Agricultural Sector is the area of drainage and irrigation and here Government has continued the rehabilitation of several areas across the country. In every Region, in every area we can point to significant improvement in drainage and irrigation. We are continuing that programme and I have a list here, not only of those areas that have been rehabilitated, but also those that are under consideration for 2002, which, again, will be covering all of the major areas of agricultural production.

Mr Speaker, drainage and irrigation, as I said, is very critical to the Agricultural Sector and not only are we giving attention to the physical rehabilitation to these structures. We are giving recognition to the fact that operations and maintenance of the system are very difficult and complex. We have been working with organisations such as the Rice Producers Association, the farmers in their own areas, the NDCs and RDCs, other related bodies such as GUYSUCO, in order to develop localised control and improvement in the management of drainage and irrigation of the areas. Success might not have been as fast as we would have liked, but I must say, Mr Speaker, that we have seen very positive signs and in this year we have continued that exercise and will be intensifying it. Because we recognise that there are persons in the system

who have not been putting their full effort, many through neglect, through lack of concern have not been doing what is necessary and causing tremendous pressure to the system, causing damage when there are periods of floods or dry weather. We have moved against many of them, but the only solution lies in having systems in place in which the farmers are the ones who will have the most to lose when things are not properly done; they will have a greater say in the management of these areas.

Mr Speaker, apart from what is allocated directly to the Drainage and Irrigation Board, we have a number of different programmes which are giving such support. Again, we have a long list of places where we have done dams, fair weather and all weather roads, draining and shaping of dams in order to assist farmers with getting machinery to their cultivations. In these aspects of work, we spent \$293 million in additional support to what we have done to drainage and irrigation in our central programme. Also we have a programme, the PRSSP, which is giving support to farmers to poor rural communities in order to move and to support them in areas where they are seeking either to develop other crops or would like to have improvements in their cultivations. In this way many, many small farmers are being assisted.

Mr Speaker, in the MMA area, we have introduced during last year some significant changes. I think, we are aware of the fact that the Headquarters of the MMA was destroyed by fire last year, and that subsequent to that, the re-organisation of the staffing at MMA was put in place.

What we did was to reduce in the area of Administration and to place greater emphasis in areas where the MMA staff will give support such as in control of drainage and irrigation structures and agri support and land development.

## **Weather Conditions**

Mr Speaker, I think we are all aware of the way in which weather conditions have fluctuated, the way in which we have had, over the last few years, tremendous problems under El Nino or La Nina. Just a few months ago and the beginning of the present rice crop for instance, there was hardly any rain and we had to put additional services, pumping water from the conservancy, introducing additional pumps in the Canje Creek to service Region 6, but with that, Mr Speaker, we are not satisfied that it is the way that we have to respond.

We need to have a better service so that we can be better advised of these developments. Our own local Hydromet Service has to be further developed. We have a difficulty in attracting the type of staff with the skills to undergo training and we are currently to improve in that. We had set up equipment to help to improve our ability to forecast. We are looking for a radar system to be set up shortly and at the same time we are working closely with Regional and International Institutions that can give support to our own efforts. But, Mr Speaker, the Hydromet Department which is working closely with the Environmental Protection Agency, is also very much involved in seeking to treat with climate change in a much more fundamental manner. As we are aware and was reported previously under the Caribbean Programme for adaptation to Climate Change, we have developed a Coastal Zone Management Programme and an action plan for its development. We have also been working towards the involvement of other Agencies in seeking to carrying out the adaptation that is necessary in view of the way in which the weather patterns have been changing, and more especially in terms of the internationally recognised need to pay attention to issues of global warming and rising sea level.

Mr Speaker, the Agricultural Sector, both in terms of traditional crops and other crops have continued to do our country well. In spite of the difficulties, we have been working in a way to make sure that production is improved.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

But, Mr Speaker, as we improve production, as we seek to expand our economy, we find that we are not achieving as much as we could. Mr Speaker, what is worrying in this situation, is that while we are trying to fight international difficulties, difficulties arise out of the way that globalisation is developing and affecting developing countries. We have the agents of destruction at home who are making that productive process very difficult.

These are the same ones who have asked for dialogue, but where are they? When a Government has gone to the extent that this government has gone to put in place measures by which the Opposition can be meaningfully engaged in all the areas that affect our economy and national development, the fact that today that they are not here is a crying shame and an exposure to their hypocrisy. *[Applause]* They have no intention to build in this country, their history when in Government has been one of destruction of the national fabric, one in which in twenty-eight years of dictatorship, they ruined the physical and human infrastructure in this country. Today, when they are out of government, when there is a Government which has been working since 1992 to undo all the rascality that they have put in place, when there is a Government that has introduced governance to measures beyond what any other country in the Region has developed, they cannot take it, they are ashamed to come here and debate. Let them come and face the facts and speak of the realities that we have had over the last few months and years. *[Applause]*  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** As you pause for breadth, Hon. Member, maybe you can get some more time.

**Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud:** I wish to move that the Hon. Minister be given fifteen minutes to conclude his speech.

*[Motion put and agreed to]*

**Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal:** Mr Speaker, what we have seen is a situation where the totality of the development process has to take into account, not just these physical factors. We know and the

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Hon. Member, Mr Dev recognised this, when he said that he was happy that the Minister of Finance linked the economics and politics of what we are looking at, because, Mr Speaker, as was pointed out in the extract, I read from the President, our country is one which is richly endowed with natural resources. We know and we recognise that our colonial past fashioned us in a certain direction. We know that we were made to remain producers of raw material for those who were our colonial masters.

But, Mr Speaker, we were further victims on the achievement of our independence of being ruled by a regime which only had its own personal self interest at heart, a regime, which used electoral fraud, repression, victimisation and harassment and every means at its disposal to crush what is described as enemies of the State.

But, Mr Speaker, what they crushed was not the enemies of the State, what they did was to destroy the hopes and aspirations of the people of this country as we move to achieve our political independence and move on. They replaced colonial rule by rule of a military bureaucracy, a group which in their self interest ruined the very basis on which development should take place and, therefore, when they come into this House, when they come here or whether in the streets or elsewhere and try to tell this Government how the economy should be run, we say to them, you have had enough of your destructive influence. This Government wants to proceed with development and whether you come in this House intend to proceed with the plans that we have set in place and when this Budget is approved, we will continue the development of this land of ours.

Mr Speaker, their excuses are extremely flimsy. They are claiming that they are not able to move along with the process of dialogue, but I don't want to get into those details except to say that the opportunities which have been provided for them, they are turning away from them. When they were in government, not one single member of the opposition was being called to serve on the Board of any Government or State Agency. Today, they have representatives on Boards - fifty-one Boards - across the nation.

*Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2002*

Mr Speaker, I think that what is being offered to us here is a smoke-screen. What they are doing there is a cover up for the fact that having been provided with so many opportunities by this Government to be constructive, they are caught up in their internal process of self-destruction that is taking place in the People's National Congress at this time. They want a new leader, they have to fill a vacancy which there is some reluctance to create, but Congress is coming, Mr Speaker, and the fight has started. There are all these many contenders seeking to get the crown, though the crown is firmly implanted where it is. But in that process of seeking to come up-front, what we are seeing is an exercise of many of the contenders who appear to be the most militant among them. That is why we are seeing here a boycott of the discussions at this time, because among themselves they cannot agree on how to treat with this situation. Their coming in and going out is a compromise which is aimed at satisfying some different sides in how they should treat with this debate.

Mr Speaker, if that attitude was merely impacting on their internal politics, I don't think it would have been of any concern to the nation. But in certain a atmosphere, what they do, reaches into the process of development, because we have seen the pattern, we have seen the results, we have seen how their approach to the loss of elections in 1997 and 2001 resulted not only with the declaration to make the country ungovernable, but also by their actions in the streets in the scaring away of investors. It is good for us to speak and to listen to them and to others saying that the Government is not doing enough to attract investors. Minister Nadir pointed out to some of the things we have been doing.

The Minister of Finance in his presentation listed some of the incentives that we have given but the Hon. Member Mr Ravi Dev said that we have not spelt out, or the Minister did not spell out enough of these incentives in the investment code. Investment Code is an overall guide with a statement of a number of principles and on the basis of which we are attracting investment. There are details which cannot be stated in specific number or terms because as we need to adjust, we have to vary some of those figures, but in principle a lot has been done. What is the cause of the investments not coming as fast as they should is

the continuation

of that policy by those who created the destruction in the first place, a policy of slow fire and more fire which today has still resulted in many potential investors holding their breath. But, Mr Speaker, we have to go on, we have to continue with that development process and that is why the reference by the Hon. Member, Mr Ravi Dev to what Mr Nadir said yesterday, I think, can itself be described as pukadee, because, Mr Speaker, Hon. Minister Nadir did not say that not a square inch of industrial estate were developed. He was referring to new estates not being put in place, but in the existing estates, he said that better utilisation of the existing ones, including Belvedere, yet the Hon. Member is claiming that we seem to be shelving Belvedere .

Mr Speaker, we have examples of this boosting, Mr Sue-Young with fourteen acres of prime estate at No. 19 has been provided the opportunity with the creation of an industrial park. *[Applause]* So, Mr Speaker, what we are finding is that many people are unable to come to grips with the reality of what is taking place. Government's achievement is taking place in very difficult international circumstances. Globalisation is itself proceeding in a manner that is creating serious disadvantages for developing countries. The fact that Guyana is able to attain a growth of 1.9 percent is indeed a very encouraging and remarkable achievement in the face of all the difficulties that are taking place.

Of course, Mr Speaker, we are not satisfied, we would have liked it to be much more, we have all these circumstances that are being created, deliberately in some cases, by the enemies of development who are envious of what is taking place. Therefore, Mr Speaker, it is true that we need to find ways and means in which these difficulties can be overcome. But it is difficult to remove barriers, when there is not a willingness on the part of those who put them there to be reasonable and to take advantage of the opportunities that have been provided.

If we look at the whole process of Constitutional change, if we look at the way in which this Government has advanced the rights of the people of Guyana, look at what we have in place today against that



Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2002

Constitution of 1980, and who made that Constitution, Mr Speaker? It was made by a group of people who then occupied this side of the House, converted this House into a Constituent Assembly and did not listen, and did not accept the words of the General Secretary of the TUC, not one iota of the recommendations that anyone else made. Yet, they found it convenient and necessary when they were removed through free and fair elections in 1992, to claim that the Constitution was irrelevant and had no bearing on the reality of the Guyanese society.

But in spite of that fact, Mr Speaker, this Government with the best of intentions engaged the entire Guyanese community in several working groups, involved them to develop proposals and, in spite of the early sabotage of that process by the PNC, we were able, prior to the last elections, to put in place several measures aimed at giving back to the people of Guyana many of the rights which the PNC removed both in the Constitution of 1980 and also by their practices over the twenty-eight years that they ruined this country.

So, Mr Speaker, this Government has been creating the environment in which all of our people fall into the process of making this country one of progress.

Since the presentation of the Budget by the Hon. Minister of Finance a few days ago and before the start of this debate, we observed in this country, the birthdays of two great sons of this land. On March 22, it was the eighty-fourth birthday of the father of this nation, Dr Cheddi Jagan. On March 23, it was the sixtieth birthday of another great son, Dr Walter Rodney.

But, Mr Speaker, both of these leaders had development foremost on their minds and I would like to quote first from Dr Walter Rodney in his epic work how Europe under-developed Africa, and he said there:

*More often than not, the term development is used in an exclusive economic sense. The justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features.*

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

*What then is economic development? A society develops economically as its members increased jointly in capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature, science; on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools, technology and on the manner in which work is organised. Taking a long term view it can be said that there has been constant economic development within human society since the origins of man because man has multiplied enormously his capacity to win a living from nature. The magnitude of man's achievement is best understood by reflecting on the early history of human society and noting the following: Firstly, the progress from crude stone tools to the use of metals. Secondly, the change over from hunting and gathering wild food to the domestication of animals and the growing of food crops; and Thirdly, the improvement of organisation of work from being an individualistic activity towards being an activity which assumes a social character through the participation of men.*

His final words there, Mr Speaker ... *the improvement of organisation of work from being an individualistic activity towards being an activity which assumes a social character through the participation of men.*

Mr Speaker, a few days from now we will have one of the occasional linkages that take place in our society. We will be observing on the same day, Good Friday and Phagwah. One is an occasion that is observed mainly by the Christian community, the other is an occasion that is observed mainly by the Hindu community. But generally over the years, there has been a growing awareness, an involvement of a wider section of the community respecting these occasions and in some ways participating in them.

Just a few weeks ago, we had another co-incidence in which we had Eid and Mash coming on the same day. Again we are very diverse on what we observe, but I think when we put these together, there is a message that is saying to us that *unity in diversity* is not just a slogan, it is a reality which is what will make us great.

Mr Speaker, I would like to call on all who have any intent on improving the welfare of the Guyanese people to recognise that we will not be able to move forward unless we decide to work together as these events and their coincidence to us, and as Dr Walter Rodney so aptly pointed out.

Mr Speaker, in once again supporting the proposals by the Hon Minister of Finance, I would like to close by quoting from the greatest person who has walked our country, the father of our nation, Dr Cheddi Jagan, when he said in the last Congress of the People's Progressive Party that he addressed in 1994. He had this to say:

The type of development to which we aspire is a harmonious mix of developed physical infrastructure, adequate production, just distribution of the national wealth and genuine social and cultural upliftment within a growing political economic and social democracy. The rebuilding of Guyana requires that all the human resources within the country be allowed to flourish and make their varied contributions.

To attain our objectives we will provide heavy investment in education and training, and in plant and machinery especially to support small businesses.

*We have a country to rebuild, for this we must strive for national unity as the vehicle towards national democracy.*

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member.

The Hon. Member, Mrs Shirley Melville.

**Mrs Shirley J. Melville:** Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on the Budget 2002.

Once again, it was heartening to hear the Hon. Minister of Finance when he spoke about good governance.

### **Administration**

Once again, I would like to report to this Honourable House, that the weakness of the Regional System does not allow the much needed and scarce financial resources to be dispersed in the best interest of the people of Region 9 and the hinterland in general.

There is a gap between the Regional Executive Officer and the Regional Chairman and this I propose could be remedied as evenly as possible to accommodate the flow of development in a unified way. Presently the Regional Executive Officer in charge of the finances of the Region continues to head the Tender Board, Secretary to the Finance Committee, purchases and signs store ledgers. This is not working in the best interest of the people. For example, at this moment because of the absence of the Regional Executive Officer and the Deputy in the Region, there is a standstill whereby no authorisation could go ahead to allow the repairs of a septic tank which exposes babies and other patients at the Lethem hospital to high risk infection.

Mr Speaker, before I move off from administration, I would like to touch a bit on village government.

The issue of Amerindian Village Government and Amerindian leaders also need to be looked at and this can only happen effectively if funds are made available for this. Village leaders must be trained in the governance of their villages so that they can make informed decisions on behalf of the community they represent. They also need to know how to effectively manage their offices for good accountability purposes. Party politics must not play a role in the election of the leadership of community

and government officials must not attempt to influence the outcome of village elections. The Village Captains and Councillors should be used as vessels that can work for the communities. These positions are full time jobs and leaders cannot effectively carry out their jobs if they have to struggle to maintain their families and still serve their communities in an efficient manner.

## **Agriculture**

Mr Speaker, more than ninety percent of the people in Region 9 are involved in the activity of Agriculture, yet little interest has been shown in this area for Region 9. There is great potential in other cash crops, for example, cashew nuts and sorrel. However, should markets be identified, the demand would certainly be greater than the supply. One of the requirements is financial support. Therefore, Mr Speaker, providing jobs for poverty alleviation is fine, but we must not overlook the need for creating opportunities for gainful self-employment. Mention has been made about promoting craft work, but it must be pointed out that self-employment in agriculture creates a far greater impact on the society.

On page 13 of the *Periodical Communique*, Issue No. 14 of the year 2000, we are told that for every dollar increase in agricultural output, the result is four additional dollars for the general economy. Since sugar and rice have fallen upon hard times, for significant development we must turn to increase production of what our Hon. Minister of Finance stated on Page 27, Paragraph 4.19 of the Government's publication, Budget 2002 of 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2002, where referral was made to Other Crops. The promotion of other crops is the small man's enterprise. The most suitable financial institution to help the small man to produce other crops is an Agri Bank, but throughout the discussions no mention has been made about the re-establishment of such an institution.

Mr Speaker, the residents from the Rupununi are also interested in modern methods for agricultural activities and to this I recommend more

outreach programmes to the villages by technical personnel who can work closely with the village councils.

Mr Speaker, we feel strongly that this is the way forward in becoming independent and looking at long term solutions and not quick-fixes, like accepting donations such as a bag of rice or sugar.

Mr Speaker, these are the people who have bestowed the responsibility on us to make meaningful representation on their behalf.

At this point, I would like to thank IICA and Rotary International (Rotary Demerara) for the input into this area.

## **Education**

Once again, we have had an increase in education and education, indeed, is extremely important to the present state of our country, therefore, new schools are welcomed, but what about the teachers? In Region 9, many classes are without teachers and it is almost impossible for one teacher to manage four different classes. Education will not serve its full purpose unless it is fully equipped and would include trained teachers and resources to assist them in teaching. Of course it is the challenge and we know that more teachers are being trained, but I would like to suggest the re-assignment of teachers that are presently in the Region. Also the Regional Education Officer is in dire need of a vehicle in order to enable him to do his job more effectively.

Mr Speaker, we should also encourage teachers who have been working without a salary for over two years and have still not given up.

## **Health**

Apart from malaria, HIV/AIDS is another serious issue in this Region.

Shortage of drugs continues to be a problem. On this, I would suggest that more educational programmes be introduced for HIV/AIDS. I thank the Brazilian Government who has continued to render assistance to the people of Region 9 and Remote Areas Medical who are doing a fantastic job. RAMSs presence have led to many lives being saved.

## **Roads**

Once again monies have been located for Lethem roads. Poor quality of work and the waste of funds continue to be a major problem. Right now in Central Lethem a part of the road has been done for quite a large sum of money, it is not six months as yet and the road has started to deteriorate.

Mr Speaker, I suggest that capable contractors be sent to the Region or be employed and priorities be given to the roads in front of the hospital. That an environmental impact assessment also be done for the roads from Toka to Karasabai, because once again that has appeared in the Budget. Management plans need to be put in place also for Lethem/ Kurupukari Road with the full involvement of our interest groups.

## **Water**

According to our GUYWA personnel more than ninety-five percent of the water project has been completed. At the moment people are being affected by the water supplied by one of the wells. Tests are being carried out. Some interests are being shown, yes, but we need to have the test return to the Region as soon as possible.

## **Security**

Mr Speaker, this has become quite a major problem in Region 9.

As to the border location, there is definitely not sufficient security for the residents. It is a known fact that Guyana does not have the manpower to secure our borders.

In addition, there is an alarming rise in crime in Region 9 in relation to rustling, motorbike thefts and drugs. There is need for a security guard to be paid on a monthly basis. With the development of roads, we need to be more vigilant on our national security. I propose that more local people become involved and work along to assist the few policemen who are present there. That a system of payment needs to be put in place also for the government's guards who sometimes have to wait for two months before they are paid.

### **Tourism**

Mr Speaker, it was very heartening to hear the comments made by our Hon. Minister Nadir yesterday about tourism. The hinterland of Guyana is the destination of the majority of foreign visitors. Our Guyanese are also interested in visiting the hinterland of our country, but the cost of air fare is beyond what they can afford. This results in Guyanese visiting other countries.

Creating jobs has been mentioned frequently in this Budget and one way of creating jobs with tourism so high on our agenda is to be able to introduce Portuguese in the school curriculum, thereby providing jobs for young people in Region 4, as well as in Region 9.

There needs to be more programmes also in eco-tourism, hospitality, just to name a few with regard to tourism.

### **Amerindian Lands**

Mr Speaker, once again I bring up the burning issue of our people, Amerindian Lands. Amerindian rights to lands need to be dealt with in a



comprehensive way. Demarcation of titled lands have been taking place for some communities which have given the Government the go-ahead, but this exercise has revealed a number of problems as some communities are finding themselves in contention with others as to where their boundaries stand. This was not a problem before the demarcation. The Government has said that only after demarcation will they look at new titles or extension of new titles. What then would happen with communities that have accepted demarcation because they have issues to clarify? What will happen to communities that have no titles, but where miners are seeking to remove them from lands where they have established communities? Is the Government going to spend money on demarcation and then spend another set of funds to demarcate the same area, should the boundaries change?

### **Amerindian Act**

Mr Speaker, I would like to comment on the revision of the Amerindian Act and indeed it is known that the Government has said that it will move forward on the revision of the Amerindian Act. This is a welcomed gesture, but steps must be taken to ensure that there is a transparent process whereby Amerindians can effectively make recommendations for the revision of the Act. The process must also be guided and implemented by the chosen representatives of the Amerindian communities and other persons who have the confidence of the communities. Amerindians will have to live with the changes made to the Act and they are the ones who must ensure that it is an Act that will serve the needs of the communities.

### **Indigenous People's Commission**

Mr Speaker, as mentioned before the Indigenous People's Commission has become now a Constitutional Commission. There is definitely need to set up this Commission as soon as possible and to have it adequately equipped and staffed. It is also expected that persons who are knowledgeable about Amerindian issues and Indigenous Rights in general will be able to sit on this Committee, thereby they will be able

to promote the interest of Amerindian rights.

Mr Speaker, before I close, I would like to remind each and everyone of us in this Honourable House that the development of our country in unity is the priority and the responsibility of each and everyone of us here and we look forward to being able to work together to move our country forward. May God bless us all and Guyana.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member.

The Hon. Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation

**Hon. Clement J. Rohee:** Mr Speaker, I rise to join with my colleagues in extending congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance for presenting a Budget for the fiscal year 2002.

Mr Speaker, every budget has a political as well as a economic and financial dimension and context. It is obvious or it should be obvious to all and sundry that the political dimension as well as the fiscal and economic are influenced by external factors as well as domestic factors operating within the country. Before I deal with what I consider to be the essence or the essential features of the Budget, Mr Speaker, I would wish to crave this Honourable House's indulgence as well as yourself, to address an issue which I believe has become a pivotal one ever since the presentation of the Budget by the Hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, there has been a hue and cry from the Opposition benches that issues pertaining to governance, democracy and inclusiveness have either been scuttled or honoured in the breach by the Government and the Administration of the day. This attitude has manifested itself in the voluntary absence of the Members of the other side of the House from the debate.

One of the linchpins or one of the arguments that are being used is that the dialogue process and the Committees that flowed from the

dialogue process have either not been functioning or been functioning in a rather lethargic manner and in-so-far as what was expected of them in terms of their mandate, leaves much to be desired. The Hon. Member Mr Ravi Dev also threw in his two bits and said that dialogue is not working because it is not being institutionalised.

Mr Speaker, the PNC/R is accusing the PPP/Civic of acting in bad faith, but when one examines the facts, it is precisely that that accusation ought to be turned in the opposition direction, because I will demonstrate to this Honourable House and your good self how the PNC/R or the Hon. Members on the other side of the House, the party which they represent, is in fact the party that is indeed acting in bad faith. This is reflected in a decision that was taken by the Central Executive of that party to put the dialogue process on what they described as a pause.

Mr Speaker, I would like to spend some time to deal with this matter because I believe that it is important for the Guyanese people to be kept abreast with the actual facts notwithstanding that from time to time and within recent times, His Excellency the President has had cause to address this matter in a rather detailed fashion.

Mr Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. Having received notice to the effect that the dialogue process had been put on pause, pending the completion of a number of issues which the People's National Congress/Reform deemed outstanding, His Excellency the President had cause to respond for the purpose of clarification and probably the edification of those who were not aware or of what was happening or because the PNC/R in their attempt to obfuscate the facts, were putting out what I would describe as a number of distortions to mislead the public.

Mr Speaker, a number of Committees were established arising out of the dialogue between the President and the Opposition Leader and one of these Committees dealt with the question of borders and national security. In the conversations between the Opposition Leader and the President it was agreed that the report from this Committee should be

*Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2002*

tabled in the National Assembly for the consideration of the Sectoral Committee on Foreign Affairs. But as we all know none of these Sectoral Committees could have been established as a result of disagreements on the composition and the leadership component of these Sectoral Committees. Consequently that report could not have been tabled on the Sectoral Committee precisely because of the reasons I explained.

In the meanwhile, however, it was agreed that some vetting would be done of the contents for a number of reasons which I would not wish to go into at this point in time.

But the point I wish to emphasize, Mr Speaker is that in respect of this particular Committee or Sectoral Committee, it is not correct to say that progress was not made, because a report had been compiled, a decision was taken to submit a report to the Sectoral Commission or Sub-Commission of the House, but that ran into a problem precisely because there were disagreements on how this body ought to be constituted.

Mr Speaker, there was another Committee on the question of land and houselots and after several exchanges of views on this subject, it was agreed that following the rejection of the report both by the Opposition Leader and the President, because it was felt that the report went beyond, it terms of reference, it was agreed that as a substitute of that report, a White Paper would have been prepared and tabled in the National Assembly sometime before the end of March.

Again, Mr Speaker, here is another example to give the light to the claim that this Committee was either not functioning or was acting in a rather dilatory manner.

Mr Speaker, there was a Committee that was also established on the question of Radio Monopoly Representation on Committees or body dealing with Radio Monopoly.

Mr Speaker, I should emphasize, however, in relation to the Committee dealing with Depressed Communities, that the Government

*Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2002*

had allocated \$60 million to deal with problems which had been identified in these depressed communities; and after it was agreed that these depressed communities were basically squatter settlements and that they would require an exercise to regularise these squatter settlements before the request for electricity could be implemented. That was generally agreed to. I am made to understand, Mr Speaker, that an additional \$60 million (in addition to the original \$60 million) was allocated to treating with problems in the depressed communities.

So, again, in this third Committee, Mr Speaker, it is not true by any stretch of imagination, for anyone to say that, the Committee on Depressed Communities did not accomplish its said objectives.

I refer to the Committee dealing with the question of Radio Monopoly and as a result of an agreement that was reached, in respect of the activities of this Committee, that is to say to proceed with drafting of legislation based on the report that came out of the Committee, which was to be done by the Attorney General Chambers. But, in the meantime, the two individuals, that is to say, His Excellency the President and the Opposition Leader agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding, which calls for the establishment of an Interim Committee comprised of nominees from the President, the Opposition Leader as well as the Private Sector. It is my understanding that this Committee has already gotten off the ground. The President has named his nominee, the Private Sector has named its nominee and the Opposition Leader has named his nominee.

In addition to that, a sum of G \$24 million have been allocated as a budget for this Committee's activities, equipment has already been bought as well for the Interim Committee to continue or to begin its work pending the drafting of the legislation, which has to be presented to the House for consideration.

Mr Speaker, again I emphasized these details to stress that the allegation to the effect that there is a lethargic approach in relation to the work of these Committees has no foundation whatsoever. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, another Committee which I would like to refer to is a

*Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2002*

Committee treating with the Bauxite Industry. The Committee having presented a report agreed that its main focus would be on the LINMINE issue and it was agreed that names would be submitted by the Leader of the Opposition, who eventually did submit the name, and by His Excellency the President, who also did submit the name as well. These persons were to have constituted what I understand to be somewhat of a negotiating team to discuss the situation pertaining to LINMINE. Again, this is another manifestation which demonstrates in no uncertain manner that progress has also been made in respect of the Bauxite Committee.

Mr Speaker, there is also an Ethnic Relations Committee for the Ethnic Relations Commission. This is a rather interesting saga of events associated with the non-functioning of the Ethnic Relations Commission. My understanding, Mr Speaker, is that instructions were issued for invitations to be sent out to various Committees and Organisations or soliciting of them names of persons to serve on the Ethnic Relations Commission. As events turned out, these instructions to have these invitations issued were not issued and inquiries had to be made of the Clerk of the National Assembly as to why these letters were not issued and I have with me, Mr Speaker, a copy of letter the which was written by the Clerk of the National Assembly to his Excellency the President, explaining why this task had not been undertaken. Mr Speaker, I am sure that you have personal knowledge of this matter, but, I believe, in the interest of transparency and full disclosure it is apposite to make the facts known.

In the letter to the President dated 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2002, the Clerk of the National Assembly informed the President that due to mental tiredness with a state of lethargy and a lack of enthusiasm, coupled with the fact that he tends to be irritable and have become disorganised and not performing efficiently, and that he neither had the will nor the desire to, as well as, I quote:

mentally tired, has been unable to fulfill this duty of sending these letters out inviting people from Organisations to be part of the Ethnic Relations Committee.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

He therefore appealed to the President saying that he needed to be urgently relieved, he needed a break and a vacation and that there was a list of names of 150 entities to be written to, a task which he could not undertake.

When the President brought this matter to the Leader of the Opposition, he said he was surprised that work had not been pursued in respect of inviting persons to serve on the Committee and to get the Commission off the ground.

It goes without saying, Mr Speaker, that it had nothing to do with the Government, not one thing to take the process forward in respect of the establishment of the Ethnic Relations Commission. I am not aware of what had transpired afterwards, Mr Speaker. I believe that your staff would be in a better position to explain that.

Mr Speaker, when it comes to the question of the participation on Boards, I dare say that this has nothing to do with the dialogue. This was a matter that was raised in the course of the dialogue between the Leader of the Opposition and the President himself. The problem that arose is that it was generally agreed that the PNC/R would have representation on a number of Boards and as the Hon. Member, Minister Chandarpal mentioned earlier, the fact is that today, PNC/R has representations on fifty Boards already. *[Applause]* The noise that is being created is about the automaticity of the appointment of six names which were submitted by the PNC/R, which they feel should not be given any due consideration by the Government.

Mr Speaker, the public ought to know that the question is not about PNC/R's representation on Boards, that matter has already been settled as a matter of principle and in addition to that, they have representation on an enormous amount of Boards already. So why this big hue and cry? Why this storm in the teacup over six other members who needs to be appointed by the PNC/R without scrutiny by the Government on these Boards?

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Mr Speaker, it is obvious that progress had also being made and incidentally when we talk and hear talk about inclusiveness, we have to refer to situations like this to demonstrate and to show how this Government is committed to the question of inclusiveness, thus the representations of PNC/R represented on these fifty Boards. There is no precedent, I dare say, Mr Speaker, for situations like this in the past - the first time in the living history of this country that we have a situation like this.

Mr Speaker, I drew attention to the difficulties that have arisen in respect of the establishment of the Parliamentary Committees as a result of the fact that no agreement could have been reached precisely because the PNC/R was demanding to have a majority on the Committees as well as the Chairmen of the Committees, or equal numbers.

Mr Speaker, when we talk about good governance and democracy, we have to look at countries that have gone past that decades ago to learn from their experiences and we have to link these experiences with the fact that economic and social development have taken place because of this type of building institution that help to serve the national interest as a whole.

Mr Speaker, in the United States of America, in the House of Representatives, you have twenty House Committees and let me quickly name them for the records, because I want to dwell a little bit on this simply because I feel that it is important for the public to understand where we are coming from. You have twenty House Committees in America in the House of Representatives:

- Ways and Means Committee
- House Administration Committee
- Agriculture Committee
- Appropriations Committee



*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

- Arms Services Committee
- Budget Committee
- Education and Workforce Committee
- Energy and Commerce Committee
- Ethics Committee
- Financial Services Committee
- Government Reform Committee
- International Relations Committee
- Intelligence Committee
- Judiciary Committee
- Resources Committee
- Rules Committee
- Science Committee
- Small Business Committee
- Transport and Infrastructure Committee; and
- Veteran's Affairs Committee.

What is interesting is the composition of these Committees. After George Bush, the current President won the elections in the United States, the Republican Party gained the dominant position in the House of Representatives as well as in the Senate. As a result of that, given practices in the United States Congressional Arrangements, each of these Committees, the majority on these Committees were Republicans and the Chairmen of these twenty Committees were Republicans as well.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

I understand from reading a magazine that was published in the Commonwealth that this is the usual practice in many countries. I think the *PARLIAMENTARIAN* is the name of the Magazine.

Here you have a democracy, a lot of people tends to look at the United States as a model of democracy for different reasons and on different occasions and on different times, twenty House Committees chaired by the Republicans, who are the ruling party and who have the majority of the representatives on these House Committees, the same apply in relation to the Senate Committees of which there are twenty as well. Not so long ago, one Senator defected and went over to the Democrats and as a result to that, the entire composition of many of these Committees re-adjusted in favour of the Democrats.

So, we have to take this as a logical conclusion, and try to interpret how this ought to be translated in Guyana's context. I want to submit, Mr Speaker, with all due respect to the shenanigan of the PNC/R (I hope that is a word that is accepted in this Honourable House) that their position is rather unreasonable. The President has said that he is prepared to continue sitting and discussing this matter - rotating the Chairmanships - he has even put forward the formula to break the dead-lock, jam, but what was the response of the PNC/R, to call a meeting of the General Council or the Central Executive of the Party and to deem that the talks or the dialogue has now been put on pause.

Mr Speaker, never in the history of this country, even in the times of colonialism have we had the type of democratic governance that we have in this country as we have now under the PPP/C's Administration. Never in the history of this country, even during the times of colonialism for those of us who have read the history books, is there any precedence whatsoever for this type of parliamentary inclusiveness or democratic and societal inclusiveness in this country ever since the PPP/Civic was elected to Office. *[Applause]* It is very sad, Mr Speaker, that the PNC/R is seeking to hold the democratic process hostage to its own political designs and this is entirely unacceptable.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

What the PNC/R wants, Mr Speaker, is to get out of the dialogue as much as they could, but not to put anything into it to make it successful. Mr Speaker, they are attempting to send a signal internationally and locally to create the impression that Guyana is a country in crises and that the Opposition is not participating in the national debate pertaining to this Budget, thinking that the International Community will give them some comfort zone, but I believe that misdemeanor of this type, many of the more developed democracies are quite aware of and are not in my view, as far as the information reveals, that they are not prepared to condone this type of behaviour especially in a country where the International Financial Institutions as well as the International Donor Community, as a whole, recognised the effort of Guyana as a small developing economy is making to pull itself up by its boots-strap and to turn an economy around that was like a sinking ship twenty-eight years ago. That is why there is still so much, tremendous goodwill for Guyana externally.

Mr Speaker, as I said I wanted to deal extensively with this matter because I believe it is necessary for the sun to shine through this dark passage which the PNC/R wants to take this nation, using boycotts and walk-outs and other undemocratic means to thwart the destiny of this nation.

Mr Speaker, listening to the presentation of the Budget, it is clear that there are certain contextual frameworks that have been established in drawing up the Budget which we are now currently debating. The question of the context on which the Budget was drafted, I don't think anyone would deny the fact and it has been said by many of my colleagues that the global recession is a fundamental factor that is not only impacting not only on Guyana's desire to move forward, but even on industrialised countries, not to mention the developing countries. Mention was made, for example, about the low prices for our exports. Guyana is still a price taker for basic commodities which it exports to other global market places over which it has very little control.

Mr Speaker, apart from the context in which the Budget was drawn up, reference was also being made by the Hon. Minister to ensuring

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

macro economic stability. I think this is one of the most critical aspects of this Budget, or any budget for that matter, because if you do not put in place certain measures to ensure stability at the macro economic level, I think we are heading for trouble. Clearly, this is not the case in the presentation of the Budget 2002. *[Interruption]*

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

**Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud:** Mr Speaker, I wish to move that the Hon. Member be given an additional fifteen minutes to conclude his speech.

*[Motion put and agreed to]*

**Hon. Clement J. Rohee:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, under macro economic stability which is one of the critical factors in relation to the current budget, we have to look at the question of the fiscal policy, the expenditure side, what are the main elements within the expenditure side and the monetary policy. In relation to the fiscal policy, those dimensions or those areas where certain measures have been identified to be pursued there are certain areas of emphasis on the expenditure side as well as new areas of focus - about four areas of focus - on the monetary side.

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr Dev, spoke of attracting investments. What is our record for 2001 and 2002?

Mr Speaker, of new projects and expansion of existing projects for 2001, we have a total of forty-five new projects and expanding projects to a value of US \$74.3 million. In 2002. There are twenty-two new and ongoing expanding projects to the tune of US \$28.5 million, bringing this to a total of US \$102.8 million accounting for approximately 3,447 jobs. *[Applause]* This is happening in a situation where a small developing country like Guyana, confronted with a hostile international environment and domestic political situation that is not giving the necessary elbow-room, economically and socially for the country to move forward.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Mr Speaker, I would wish to submit, and I am not prone to enter into the realm of speculation, but I would want to submit that given this trend that we are seeing here already in 2002, that were we to maintain a stable macro economic environment as well as political stability, I have no doubt that we will find more investments coming to Guyana. *[Applause]* Incidentally, Mr Speaker, from talking about investments, sometimes people tend to believe that to have growth, you have to have huge investments, that is not necessarily true and in fact getting competitive because one has to link investment with being competitive in terms of the products you want to sell on the global market.

Mr Speaker, experience has shown within recent times that innovative measures - by being innovative - in existing industries with even small sums of money, invested in small and medium sized enterprises that you can still ensure economic prosperity as well as be competitive on the global market.

Mr Speaker, reference is also made to the question of security concerns. I don't think we need to enter into a long debate on this subject, because in today's world if you are going to be putting emphasis on attracting investors either in goods, manufacturing or services in the case, for example, in tourism, you need to have the necessary measures in place to ensure that these industries or these sectors have the necessary built-in security measures that are consistent with what is being demanded now internationally. This has to do also with the whole question of our infrastructure as well.

Mr Speaker, this Budget like previous budgets has also placed a tremendous amount of emphasis on investing in human capital. Everyone recognises that the country cannot move forward if you do not continue to invest in human capital and investment in human capital is reflected in the increasing allocation being made in the health and education sectors - in the social sectors. I think, the record speaks for itself, Mr Speaker. At no time in the history of this country have so many resources being allocated to the social sector to ensure that we have a healthy and a well-educated population.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

On the question of no new taxes, this seems to be a matter that people are now taking for granted. In many countries around the world, new and additional forms of taxation are being levied against the population of the countries as a whole. In this case, we have had a number of years running consecutively without any taxation being levied against the population and we must not take this for granted because in a sense it is depriving the Government of revenues which are badly needed. But the Government, being a caring Government, has taken a decision not to levy any more additional taxes on the population.

Finally, Mr Speaker, there is a new mantra that one hears almost every year at the time of budget presentation and this is the question of the threshold. What about the question of the threshold?

Mr Speaker, there is a very interesting paragraph in this Speech of the Hon. Minister, where it states the following on page 23, Paragraph 4.5:

Fiscal policy will aim to support growth, reduce poverty and increase public sector savings. In the area of revenue generation, the Government will undertake a comprehensive review of the tax system. This will explore reform of the tax system, with a view to supporting growth and improving transparency and administration, and this is an important part taking into consideration Guyana's international current and emerging international trade obligations.

What does this mean, Mr Speaker? From time to time we would hear people talking about the financial architecture of the global economy and at the domestic level. With increasing trade liberalisation and the erosion of preferences as well as the removal of duties and taxes of goods coming in the country which is a phenomenon we will face in a few years down the road, Government has to begin looking down the road as to what measures it should put in place to cushion the effects of the loss of revenues that would have come from taxation of goods, imported goods, into the country, because with trade liberalisation, we are not supposed to impose or impute duties for goods coming into the

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

country. So the question is, when you remove those duties and the revenues that accrue from those duties, one will have to find another means of dealing with this vacuum that will be created and it would seem to me, Mr Speaker, that this is a question of looking ahead and seeking to put the necessary measures in place to deal with this matter in a rather futuristic manner.

Mr Speaker, foreign trade is one of the largest contributors to the GDP of this country. In last year, 2001, the total exports accounted for seventy-one percent or US \$508 million of GDP and total imports accounted for eighty-two percent or US \$585 million of the GDP, so this is a very important aspect of our economic activity which influences our balance of payments situation.

One of the largest problems we have, Mr Speaker, is with respect to our oil bill, which is still a colossal amount and places a heavy burden on our revenue earning and we have to find ways and means of bringing this down. The recently signed Caracas Energy Agreement, between the Government of Guyana and Venezuela will impact on the need to bring down our oil bill as well.

Mr Speaker, we are currently confronting four tiers of external negotiations which will have a serious impact on the future of this country and I refer specifically to the negotiations which are to begin in May in respect of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, negotiations which are supposed to begin in September for a new economic partnership agreement between ACP Countries, which Guyana is part of, and European Union and the negotiations in the World Trade Organisation which will begin in July, not to mention the CARICOM Single Market and Economy which is expected to come into fruition by the year 2005. We face therefore, a scenario where between 2005 and 2008, Guyana like many other countries in this hemisphere and outside of the hemisphere will be faced with some major challenges not to mention possibly opportunities as well. We have to ensure that this country is positioned, what is called global re-positioning to ensure that to overcome these challenges and be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

that will present themselves. To do so, however, we need to have the capacity technically as a country, we have to have the expertise in place as well. We are pursuing this very aggressively to try to build the capacity and strengthen the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation institutionally so that it can serve the nation effectively and efficiently.

We are also working to diversify our trade. Much of our trade is with North America and CARICOM, very little of our trade is with Latin America. We expect that with inauguration of a number of trade agreements with Cuba, Columbia, the Dominican Republic and possibly the other Latin American Countries that are currently under consideration that this will help Guyana diversify its exports, but we have to bear in mind that it is always the question of the linkage between the ability to export and the ability to produce the goods and services on a competitive basis with the required standards, with the required quality and so on to keep those markets for ourselves.

The recent agreement which we signed between ourselves and the People's Republic of China, we have already began to see benefits from this also.

Mr Speaker, I would like to conclude my presentation by saying that for decades even ever since we were a colony, our trading policy had been based on preferential market access. We have been benefitting from preferential markets in many parts of the world. Preferential markets are coming to an end and it means that we have to make adjustments in our trade policy to deal with a situation where preferential markets no longer exists. We are working very closely with the Private Sector to let them become more and more conscious of the challenges which Guyana will face with the removal of these preferences and with the need to engage in a period of transition from having access over the years to preferential markets and now trading on an open and a global economy.

Mr Speaker, we have to create, as I said, diversify our exports, broaden our export base and broaden our industrial base as well, and



*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

we also have to stimulate import displacement, because the task must be to be able to displace, not necessarily ban or prohibit, but to displace gradually those products which are being imported on the local market with products that are being produced locally.

Mr Speaker, I believe that the task ahead is one that appears to be enormous, but Guyana is like many developing countries having faced so many challenges, slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and so forth and we have survived these challenges. We need not take the position that we are being overwhelmed by these challenges, we have to seize the moment, seize the time, make sure that we position strategically, domestically and globally to take advantage of these opportunities and in that sense take the country forward to more and more success. Thank you, Mr Speaker. [*Applause*]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member.

The time is appropriate for us to take the suspension now for half an hour.

*Suspension of Sitting taken at 17:03H*

*Resumption of Sitting at 15:35H*

**The Speaker:** The Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

**Hon. Clinton C. Collymore:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

First, let me congratulate the Minister of Finance for doing a splendid job in presenting to us a Budget for the year 2002.

It is a Budget which gives something to everyone. Anybody who can say that they have not received anything from the Budget doesn't want anything, most likely they don't deserve to have anything from the Budget.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Mr Speaker, I want to say, it is the third budget of the PPP/Civic in ten years and it is also chuck-full of goodies. There are social gains which have been referred to and which have been achieved. The Theme of the Budget is *PROMOTING ECONOMIC GROWTH: ACCELERATING SOCIAL GAINS*. I want to say that a lot of social gains have been achieved and distributed in a fair, impartial and transparent manner. Social gains have gone to workers, farmers, entrepreneurs, hoteliers, cinema owners, home owners, investors, the tourism industry, exporters and the construction industry. These are a few on the short-list that I have put together.

Mr Speaker, a central theme of the Budget is good governance and without there having been good governance, we would not have been able in 2002 to present a Budget of the magnitude of G \$68 billion. I want to read from the Budget Speech, Page 49,

Paragraph 6.1. This is what the Minister of Finance has to say and this is what I wholeheartedly endorse:

Mr Speaker, for the fourth consecutive year I am pleased to announce that there are **no new taxes, fees and fines in this Budget**. Many may wonder how this is possible with a 6.5 percent increase in the size of the Budget. I say that it is a testimony of our unceasing efforts to win debt relief for our country and prudent management of our resources.

***Win debt relief and prudent management.*** Many of those who sat on the opposite side until recently used to scoff at Dr Jagan when he was talking about debt relief. Now it is a reality and it is gaining white currency throughout the world. Many third world countries are clambering for debt relief testimony to the vision of Dr Jagan. *[Applause]* Prudent Management, nobody can dare say that we haven't prudence in our management. Mr Speaker, one of the reasons why our friends on the opposite side are not here is because they do not have an answer to the budget, they don't have any answer. Many of the things that we have achieved, they don't know how to respond to, so they have decided to vacate their positions and to just posture in the media.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

I just want to give some examples of our good governance. Growth in the GDP 1.9 percent. After all that we have had in 2001, with the more fire and slow fire and these kind of things, we have 1.9 percent growth and telling people to fade away and don't come to Guyana - 1.9 percent growth - had we got collaboration and co-operation from the opposite side Guyana would have had a greater degree of achievement in 2001. But we managed to get 1.9 percent, thanks to the prudence of the Government and thanks to the efficiency of the Minister of Finance.  
*[Applause]*

They are saying that we can't attract investors, we can't attract foreign capital, but every year the amount of foreign capital attracted into the country goes up. Last year, we attracted US \$115.5 million, this is a sign of confidence in the administration. Out of that US \$115.5 million, the Private Sector accounted for US \$56 million, this is confidence particularly in the area where we say that it is the engine of our growth and development thrust.

Credit in Private Sector reached \$59.3 billion, these private sector entrepreneurs did not pocket these monies, they did not make off with \$59 billion in their pockets, they invested these sums of monies and this is why we are able to say that the economy generated movement and growth because the private sector co-operated with the administration and invested. That is why they went into the banking system and they got \$59.3 billion. Business men don't consume all these sums of money - they invest and they could turn over. Then our inflation rate of 2.6% as against 5.9% in the year 2000 is also testimony to our efficiency. In many parts of the world this is a figure never achieved. This was not even achieved in the United States of America last year, and for this year they will not even achieve it. 2.6 percent inflation in mighty United States of America. Then, we have foreign currency transactions which are the indicators of how much trade we have done, and what we have done to finance this kind of trade. US\$1.8 billion, an increase by 2.6 percent.

The Cambio was very vibrant, with US \$848.7 million, much bigger turnover than the Central Bank transactions US \$285.7 million. Foreign

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

debts were \$1.1 billion as against \$2.1 billion in 1992, it shows that there has been movements and that we have been able to free up vast resources to meet domestic expenditures of various types, and where social gains are concerned, we can prove this by statistics and by looking on the ground because Social Services were 14.7 percent of GDP, as against only 8 percent in 1992, when we inherited the Government.

Mr Speaker, these are statistical proofs, that we have governed the country well, and that we have been prudent.

Much talk was made about Treasury Bills. Treasury Bills are not something new, for many years I have been in this National Assembly, before I became a Minister in 1992, I was a Member of Parliament from 1973, and prior to that I sat at that table as a journalist, so I know all that went on in this House. Treasury Bills had a life span since the days of the Founder Leader of the PNC, wherever he is now, and they used Treasury Bills for a specific purpose. In those days there was also liquidity, Mr Hoyte, Mr Greenidge, Mr. Hope, all those Finance Ministers, used to refer to these things as the liquidity overhang, that was their terminology - *liquidity overhang*. They were trying to deal with it, but the more they dealt with the overhang, the more the overhang overhung. So, one of the persons who spoke on the opposite side, made some critical remarks about the Treasury Bills.

Mr Speaker, it is true that Government has been mopping up the excess liquidity, through this method, we have been doing this, because we want to keep the cost of living down, which is inflation, and by extension, the exchange rate.

It is a deliberate policy to keep the cost of living down, and we have succeeded in doing so. Inflation rate in 2001 was 2.6 percent. We believe that the Banking System is perfectly capable of accessing opportunities and risks, and striking a balance between risk and return. It demonstrates sound and prudent monetary policy being implemented by the PPP/Civic Government.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

During the PNC's regime, Mr Speaker, there was run-away inflation, because they were unable to deal with the liquidity overhang, and you know what caused the inflation? Lack of good governance, lack of prudence. I have a short list, of some of the things that caused the overhang, and I am sure you will agree with me:

- Wild squandermania
- spending money like they are crazy
- endemic corruption from one point of Guyana to another.
- For ten years no Report was Tabled in this House by the Auditor General
- systemic mal-administration, all over the place.

They are talking that we are incompetent, they were the ones who were incompetent [*Applause*]

- mal-administration, massive incompetence, in massive, gigantic proportions.

Mr Speaker, they are talking about colossal revenue leaks of gargantuan proportions, revenue leaks, my good friend plugged the leaks, that is why they are bawling, plugged the leaks, stopped all the corruptions, blocked all the revenue leaks, so they are not pleased, and this is why we were able to increase the revenue of the State.

Then, Mr Speaker, the final item on the shortlist, shameless pork-barreling. Shameless pork-barreling used to go on in this House, when we were in the Opposition.

All these things have been replaced by lean and clean Government, so we are proud of our achievements, and we know that we can finance the massive Budget of \$68 billion.

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

## Local Government Reform Process.

The Minister referred to this on Page 43 Paragraph 4 .68: of his Budget Statement and I want to quote his words:

The government hopes that local government elections that are based on the recommendations of the public consultations, can be conducted soon. We will complete the revaluation of immovable properties, in the six municipalities and start preparation of property registers. In addition, we will develop a formula-based system for providing subventions to local government bodies and will create a permanent Local Government Commission to address local government issues

I happen to be one of the Co-Chairmen on the Joint Task Force for Local Government Reform, set up by His Excellency, The President and Opposition Leader, Mr Desmond Hoyte. If you note there has been a lot of criticisms about the Committees, but my Committee is not being criticised, because from the very beginning, I laid down the law. Although there was another Co-Chairman, I laid down the law. I said, listen, there is a Constitutional Amendment, several amendments, I am sticking to the letter of the Amendments . Talk to me about the specific letter, I am going with the letter, so I have been able to pilot that ship fairly good, up to now.

Nobody has promulgated against us, but don't let me talk to quickly, because these people are very unpredictable.

The Task Force normally meets on Tuesday afternoons. At this time, I am supposed to be at the Task Force, I cannot be there, 5.30 every Tuesday afternoon. The meeting will have to be called off, because without me, it cannot go on, *[Laughter]* it cannot move an inch without Clinton Collymore.

Mr Speaker, we are on the verge of presenting a Consolidated Report to His Excellency and I dare say that His Excellency will provide the Opposition Leader with a copy of that Report. When that Report is

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

presented, we will start to move on various fronts at the same time, and one of which is to bring the Elections Commission on Board. At the moment, we have a legal draftsman, who has been identified and he has attended the last meeting, he knows what he has to do, because he is a very knowledgeable person. I do not think it will be amiss to call his name, he is Mr Keith Massiah, he once sat in this House as an Attorney General and he was Chief Justice, he has wide legal knowledge and he was the consensus choice of the Task Force. *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** He was the Chancellor, not the Chief Justice.

**Hon. Clinton Collymore:** Yes. So he is the person who has been detailed to do the preliminary drafting, and as you know, after his preliminary drafting is done, it has to go through several stages and it ends up in the Attorney General's Chambers before it proceeds through other processes to the National Assembly. So Mr Massiah will be doing preliminary drafting, and I dare say and hope, that his fees would be met by a foreign agency.

We have also decided on two foreign experts, one to deal with the Electoral System and the other to deal with the Garnering of Resources. Some people have been saying that why should we bring in foreign experts, we could do the things ourselves. You know, *you're damned if you do, and you're doubly damned if you don't*. It is best if you do, and let them damn you once.

So, Dr Benjamin Riley from Australia, would be coming in the first week of April, to assist us in the Task Force for the Electoral System, and the reason is that the system now has to cater for an individual. Formerly there were no individuals contesting for Proportional Representation Elections in Guyana, particularly for the Local Government scenario. So this will be a factor which the expert will have to deal with and give us his recommendations, and for the Garnering of Resources, a gentleman by the name of Dr Paul Smoke of the USA, has been identified.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

I must tell the House that last Wednesday I had a meeting with the Elections Commission who came to my office to discuss a problem. There was a team from the Elections Commission, I should say, which included the Chairman, Dr Steve Surujbally, the Chief Elections Officer (Ag), Mr Gocool Budhoo, and the Deputy Chief Elections Officer, Mr Calvin Benn. We discussed the entire gamut of the Local Government Reform and how GECOM can get on stream. We exchanged views, and everybody knows exactly where they stand, and how the system can move forward. I want to say that meeting was very fruitful, because it had been in the pipeline for quite some time. Dr Surujbally is insisting that he needs to get on board very early.

Mr Speaker, in that meeting I stressed to Dr Surujbally that the Ministry of Local Government and PPP/Civic's Administration want to have free and fair elections, and elections must be transparent, in other words, transparency must be guaranteed, and there should be a consensus approach. In fact there is a consensus approach in the Task Force where this is concerned, the transparency and the freedom of election and the fairness.

Several acts pertaining to the Local Government system will have to be amended, and with your permission Sir, let me say what Acts will have to be amended:

- (i) The Local Democratic Organs Act No.12 which deals with the Regional Democratic Organs
- (ii) The Local Government Act, Chapter 2802, which deals with the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils
- (iii) The Municipal and District Councils Act, Chapter 2801, which deals with the Municipal Councils, including the City Council.
- (iv) The Amerindian Act, Chapter 2901, which deals with Amerindians Councils under the Amerindian Act
- (v) The Local Authorities Elections Act, Chapter 2803, which deals



*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

## with the Electoral System.

At the moment, the Government has taken steps to have the Amerindian Act revised, but in the process of the reform and the consultations, we have received a mandate for certain changes throughout the Local Government Systems. Those changes will impinge on the Amerindian Councils. So even before the Amerindian Act is completely revised, it will be amended by the process of reforming a Local Government System. I should tell the House that the Amerindian Councils come under a specific Act that is the Amerindian Act and the other acts pertain to other areas, but all these Local Government Acts are administered by the Minister of Local Government.

We have received assistance and plenty of assistance from the National Democratic Institute and also from IFES, that is, the International Foundation for Electoral System. They have proposed to give us some monetary and other assistance and we are holding them to their word.

Training by NDI is on going throughout the length and breadth of Guyana and it is invoking a lot of interest. I want to say that the assistance from NDI and IFES is welcomed by the PPP/Civic Government.

Mr Speaker, I just want to give some more indications of the good governance of the PPP/Civic's Administration. We are being targeted almost everyday in the Press - in the media, electronic and otherwise, - claiming that:

- we do not know what we are doing
- we are incompetent,
- we did this and that.

I do not have to repeat their propaganda, but you know what they are saying. I just want to compare our stewardship with the stewardship of the previous administration prior to ours.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

We came into office in October 1992. You can say therefore, we started to govern this country independently with our own budget of 1993. I therefore give you figures pertaining to 1993 onto 2001 inclusive.

We have had Gross Domestic Product increasing rapidly, between 1993 and 2001, the aggregate was 46.5 percent as a target. We set targets consistently in our budget statements and the target amounted to 46.5 percent. We achieved 38.2 percent of these targets. This averaged out to 4.2 percent positive growth per year between 1993 and 2001.

What about our friends on the opposite side who are fulminating, and who are not here. Between 1985 and 1992, when Mr Hoyte held the reigns of power in the State, the target was 29.9 percent, GDP growth, he achieved 3.3 percent, the average per year 0.4 percent. These are the people who call us inefficient, they are the incompetent ones, they are mal-administrators, the squandermaniacs, over there (yes, and pork-barreling all over the place).

Mr Speaker, then they have been talking about wages and salaries - how the income of the workers is supposed to be increased. We want to increase the income of the workers. Only yesterday, Mr Manzoor Nadir, delivered some fatal blows to this propaganda that the PPP/C Government is not interested in workers, when he pointed out that on three consecutive occasions the Government intervened into the economy - let Mr ROAR take note - the Government intervened in the economy on three occasions, Mr ROAR . . . *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon., Mr ROAR

**Hon. Clinton Collymore:** Yes, the Hon Mr ROAR, and resulting from those three interventions the Government waived \$9 billion worth of revenue just to keep down the price of fuel, because the price of fuel will lead to an escalating effect on other productive areas and products in the country. When these people say that we are not giving the workers all they are supposed to get, we will like to give the workers more, we could have taken that \$9 billion and gave it to the GPSU. We could

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

have given them, then what would have happened? Tremendous escalation in prices, then there would have been a redoubling of efforts to get higher wages and salaries. So we did the wise thing, we kept down the foundation of the escalator low.

Mr Speaker, when we came to office, we met a wage of \$3,127.00 per month. Today as I speak, it is \$20,085.00 per month, *[Applause]* the wage hike is by 542.3 percent, since we came into office, we never froze wages *never* and we have always been giving wage increases commensurate with certain factors. The amount, the economy generated in GDP along with the inflation rate and some extras to satisfy the workers. This is what we have always been doing.

If we take the statistics in a linear fashion and I must say I have a nodding acquaintance with economics, it is not an enemy of mine, but I do not have a degree in it. Inflation from 1993 to 2001 amounted to 61.6 percent in a linear aggregate, and the wage hike that we have given to the working class amounted to 209.6 percent, that is how we know that the workers are better off under us, because they have had real increases in wages, *[Applause]* that is why our friends cannot come in to debate with us, they cannot respond to these points.

Mr Speaker, I just want to make a few final points before I take my seat. There is a plan in the Ministry of Local Government, to have certain waste disposal sites throughout the country. We have been deluged with complaints about waste; industrial waste, hospital waste, domestic waste. The NDCs and the Town Councils have been pilloried for failing to find areas where these wastes could be deposited. We have retained eminent Environmental Consultants, we have identified forty-five waste disposal sites, out of which fifteen such sites have been deemed qualified by the Environmental Protection Agency. Out of the fifteen, we have selected three sites or we are selecting three sites to be a pilot project, because the foreign agencies, who are anxious to assist us in financing these ventures want to have three pilot projects first, so they could see how they are going to run.

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

Each of these projects is estimated at the moment to cost between US \$750,000 to US \$1 million, so it is a considerable sum of money even if we run with the fifteen sites, and we are thinking about going with ten basic sites to correspond with the ten Regions of Guyana. Two sites out of the three which have been identified so far is Lusignan in Region 4 and Windsor Forest in Region 3. A third site is being identified in the West Berbice, we have not yet finalised that location as yet.

I must also say, in response to pressures from the City Council, that Government is prepared to proceed with the waste disposal site at Eccles, for which we have already earmarked 300 acres of land to be obtained from GUYSUCO. The consultants are already on the job, and the Inter American Bank has pledged to finance the project.

Mr Speaker, I want to close at this point of time, by going once more to the Budget Statement and to read what the Minister of Finance has said on Page 2, Paragraph 1.6 and to indicate that we on this side stand four-square behind the Minister. The Government is solidly behind this Budget. There is not a chink to be found and no adverse or alien instrument could be inserted in our valence. This is what the Minister had to say and I want to endorse it one hundred percent:

*Mr Speaker, in spite of the many threats and challenges, we were still able to manage our Economic Affairs in a way that allowed us to emerge ahead of Year 2000. As predicated in Budget 2001, growth returned to the economy, sugar recording its second highest production since 1978; inflation was at its lowest in more than three decades; ....*

Let me pause here. In 1990 inflation was 101 percent, these people over the other side are telling us ... 101 percent and they promised the workers substantial increases and gave them seven percent. That is substantial?.

Let me continue: ... and the external death overhaul was reduced

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

further. We made commendable strides in the implementation of our social sector programmes while significant improvement to the physical infrastructure attests to success in this area. All of this was achieved while many of the world's advanced economies were experiencing declines that resulted in massive layoffs, among other economic ills.

Mr Speaker, we have done well, we could have done much better, we admit better had we gotten the co-operation from our colleagues on the opposite side. But for this year, we intend to do even much better in spite of their manifestations of truculence.

Thank you. [Applause]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Honourable Member. The Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security.

**Hon. Rev. Dr Ramnauth D. A. Bisnauth:** Mr Speaker, in a recent telephone conversation with one of my children, she remarked almost irreverently, *Oh, this is that exercise in which everyone on one side of the House speaks for the Budget, and everyone on the other side against it.* Well, she has been wrong this time, in spite of the interventions of the Hon. Shirley Melville and Ravi Dev. Unfortunately, because of the unjustifiable absence of the PNC/R from the Chamber at this time, the absence of their intervention, on matters as serious as those raised in this Budget, must be a loss at least to their constituency. I hope that for their sake that that loss does not translate into other losses a few years down the road.

If I, on this side rise to support the Budget, Sir, as, indeed, I do, most enthusiastically, it is not because political and parliamentary proprieties demand that I must, but because of the intrinsic worth of the Budget itself. [Applause]

Without reservation therefore, I warmly congratulate the Minister of Finance Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar and his technical team for producing what has been described by the Hon. Manzoor Nadir, as a

fighting Budget. Congratulations, Hon. Minister of Finance. [Applause]

It seems to me, Sir, that the worst thing that can be said of the Budget, is that *it is the best in times like these, times that test the human soul - anxious times in an anxious region*, according to Willie Monne of the ILO, utilising a term coined by the former United States Secretary of Labour, Robert Wright.

The best thing that can be said of the Budget is that, against a dark back-drop, globally, hemispherically and regionally, Budget 2002 signals Government's intention to shape our own destiny, rather than to hibernate in economic conditions described by His Excellency, President Bharat Jagdeo as cold, very cold. A fighting resilient sentiment placed, about a fighting project, that demands not only our applause, but our total involvement in the shaping of our future as a country, and that of Guyanese children still to be born. Seize the opportunities, grab the time by its forelock, *carpite-diem*, and create wealth for the benefit of all Guyanese, urges the Hon. Minister of Finance and I cannot do otherwise, Sir, than add my small voice of support to that call.

Mr Speaker, if the inspite-of tone of the Budget inspires hope, and how in internationally disappearing times, people need that inspiration, the workman-like realism of the document, sprout out in do-able projects and programmes, indicates that we may move from where we are at the present time, to where we want to be several years hence. How would we promote economic growth and accelerate social progress in realising our vision of Guyana, as a good society, providing the good life for all its citizens?

After all, we are a National Government of the people, by the people, for the people, inspite of those who argue that we want to hug power for ourselves I wish to say them that the majority of the people have put us here. [Applause]

I suppose that it is the practical, programmatic and pragmatic aspects of the Budget that have earned it the criticism that it reads like a

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

management manual, or a managerial work-plan, loosely cobbled together with no serious over-arching philosophy to give significance to its discreet parts. This is factually incorrect.

But let me offer a rebuttal, if, indeed, one is needed. According to John Kenneth Galbraith, Warburg Professor of Economics, Emeritus at Harvard University, and author of many books on Economics:

*This is an age of practical judgement. Action must be based on the ruling facts of the specific case, while it may be satisfying in the expression of an economic and political faith to say I am committed to this, or that system, free market or otherwise, this is an escape from thought to rhetoric.*

He adds:

*An evident purpose of a good economy is to produce goods and render services effectively, and to dispense the revenue therefrom in a socially acceptable and economically functional manner.*

Mr Speaker, the emphasis is on the do-able, functional, the practicable and practically set out, and this, Sir, it seems to me, the Budget achieves, as is evident to even a cursory reading of the document by an economically barely literate as the Attorney General confesses to be. What is not readily evident has been unmasked by Minister Gail Teixeira, in her comments on the Budget in relation to youths, and moreso, by the erudite analysis of the Hon. Manzoor Nadir, in relation to the Budget and the business sector among other things.

As an aside, Mr Speaker, as my friend Manzoor spoke, I could not help but wonder what a difference a change in sides makes. [Applause] There is, therefore, hope for others, Ravi. [Laughter]

Mr Speaker, let me speak briefly, to what has been described as

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

our incapacity, inability, or reluctance to raise the income tax threshold.

According to His Excellency, the President, any such consideration must be seen and done within an overall tax system. It has to have a context, His Excellency, argues. The raising of the threshold, would reduce revenue by \$130 million, even if it is raised by a mere \$1,000. Revenue that is used:

- to expand school-feeding programme
- to provide subsidies for children writing examinations, and in some case to providing school uniforms for poor people's children.
- to provide health care and water, universally, and housing as well.

In other words, the beneficiaries from enhanced revenues are lower income earners mainly. However, if the threshold is raised, the benefits go across the board to the man who earns \$2 million a month, maybe like my friend Bernard, as well as to the man who earns \$19,000 or \$20,000 a month, like me. It is a consideration like this that leads to the threshold not being raised and who can argue with this consideration?

Mr Speaker, let me address the question of my Ministry in relation to division of the Budget. The mission of the Labour Department of my Ministry is:

*To contribute to economic and social development (incidentally, the twin axes of the Budget theme, Economic and Social Development) by formulating policies and implementing programmes, that will maintain a stable Industrial Relations climate, adequate Occupational Health and Safety Standards, and provide Integrated Employment and Training Services.*



Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

If it was not always obvious how a Ministry that has responsibility for labour administration in this country, can contribute to the country's economic development it is now almost axiomatic, as I shall seek to indicate a few seconds from now. Meanwhile, I wish to acknowledge that the Minister of Finance obviously knows and so has increased the vote to the Ministry by almost 100 percent, from \$1.1 billion in 2001 to \$2.2 billion in 2002. *[Applause]* It is almost like colourful and true in 2002.

Some of this money will be spent by the Department of Human Services and Social Security on programmes spelt out on page 35 of the Budget, and elaborated on by Hon. Minister Bibi Shadick in her presentations yesterday. These are programmes that relate to the provision of safety-nets for the displaced, the elderly, the unemployed, the vulnerable and the otherwise abled. But I wish to indicate that when the Budget says that, I quote:

the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, and will be strengthened to carry out its functions effectively that those functions relate to positive contributions to the economy.

This is alluded to in a statement on Page 6 to the effect that, I quote:

*the Government will work with, and the Private Sector, Labour and other stakeholders to create wealth for the benefit of all Guyanese.*

Labour ... a passing but portentous mention echoed again by Minister Manzoor Nadir, when he indicated that one of the important elements in the investment mix along with land, capital and entrepreneurship is labour.

Here is an indication that if the Private Sector is the engine of growth, and financial and budgetary incentives the fuel, if the market expectations provide the drive, then the operational service and maintenance crew are the workers.

To continue with the analogy. I suspect that if the engines decide to

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

dispense with the services of the operational and maintenance crew that it will soon grind to a crunching halt, and if the crew were to decide to sabotage the engine, they would soon find themselves stranded without work and without wages. Wan Samaza, the Director General of the International Labour Organisation, observed last year in his speech Reducing the Decent Work Deficit - a Global Challenge and I quote:

There is no overstating the priority of job creation, and this is done through investment. Access to work is the surest way out of poverty, but there are no workers' rights without work.

Mr Speaker, the climate of Industrial Relations has a direct impact on economic and social development. If development is to take place in this country, labour relations must be conducted in an orderly and disciplined manner, within acceptable norms, national legislation and applicable international labour standards. The Ministry of Labour must be un-inclusive in administering labour, true, but must seek to protect the interests of employees and employers, alike, to create a conducive environment within which they can, without undue interference, productively relate in the interest of productivity. Nothing makes this task more urgent than the phenomenon of globalisation and trade liberalisation, that is upon us as surely as the new millennium, whatever may be our private thoughts on that phenomenon.

The sociologist Manuel Castels sums it up thus, and I quote:

*A new economy, is a global economy, in which capital production, management, markets, labour, information and technology are organised across national boundaries, although nation states are still fundamental realities to be reckoned with in thinking about economic structures and processes.*

*What is significant is that the unit of economic accounting as well as a frame of reference for economic strategies can no longer be the national economy. Competition is*

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

*played out globally, not only by the multi-national corporations, but also by small and medium sized enterprises that connect directly or indirectly to the world market.*

*What is new, then, is not that international trade is an important component of the economy but that the national economy now works as a unit, at a world level. In this sense, we are not only seeing a process of internationalization of the economy, but interpenetration of economic activity and national economies at a global level.*

Should this be a cause for pessimism for us in a small country, with a narrow mainly agro-based economy? No, no not if we can effect efficiencies and cost reduction in the production of goods and services that will make us competitive in the world marketplace. Particularly when such preferential access for our goods in some markets would have been removed not too long from now.

Strikes, work stoppages, prolonged industrial unrest, and factory lockouts for whatever reasons rob our goods and services of those economies and efficiencies that can give us a competitive edge on the world market, whether those goods be sugar, rice, bauxite, garments, manufacture and services such as those related to tourism. That is why we have to operate on a fresh paradigm of management - labour relations - co-operation will have to replace suspicion and hostility, trust will have to displace cynicism, rapport and the will to talk and bargain will have to be substituted for standoffness and belligerence without prejudice to the workers and the legitimate expectations of employers.

There, Mr Speaker, are two ways of increasing competitiveness:

First, the low road that requires an abundant pool of cheap and unskilled labour, and low levels of labour protection mainly through arbitrary dismissals, depression of wages and salaries and suppression or containment of legitimate Trade Union representation, and failure to

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

recognise agreements arrived at by Collective Bargaining. The history of Trade Unionism in this country, the genesis, history and struggle for workers' rights, ethos, membership, self-definition and Jaganite inspiration of the ruling PPP will not permit the low road option. This is not an option that is open. I want to assure all and sundry, employers and employees alike, that this Government will not permit the low road option, and this has nothing to do with Ideology, Marxism or otherwise. It has to do with existential pragmatism, that is to say, action based on a knowledge of the realities of the present time. The second road entails the maximization of the use of labour in a qualitative and not merely a quantitative way, because it is largely the higher level of skills and competencies of the workforce that generates the benefits. Training is therefore key to this road, as is value added.

Mr Speaker, the high road approach to doing business, however, has great implications for the design of a more up-market industrial policy, labour policy, labour laws, labour market policy, sound and transparent and workable industrial relations.

Speaking for labour, I can say that indications are that we have already embarked on the high road. This Government has passed in recent times:

- the Prevention of Discrimination Act
- the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act
- the Trade Union Recognition Act,
- the Occupation and Safety Act.

Now we have to recruit and train Labour Officers to monitor the adherence to these Acts, to promote workers' rights by apprehending labour disputes, providing better conciliation and arbitration services, facilitating the settlement of trade union claims, providing labour inspection and enforcing and monitoring ILO Conventions and Recommendations. If these prevail, the economy will grow.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

Through the Tripartite Committee, which in my estimation should be widened to include representation of workers from the informal sector, especially women, we have to seek how to work together to enhance production and productivity in a climate of trust and to minimise the painful influence of partisan political consideration in labour relations matters.

We have to embark on a programme to educate business and labour on matters relative to their self-interest and welfare as well as the bigger picture of national development. This year, we must bend our efforts to finalise the formation of a social contract and to have the Industrial Tribunal Bill brought to Parliament. We have to take initial steps to develop an independent mediation and conciliation service in a context in which the Ministry of Labour is sometimes viewed as biased in matters involving the State as employer.

Mr Speaker, I have to announce that Guyana has been asked by the CARICOM Secretariat to take the lead role in the International Labour Conference Discussions on Occupational Safety and Health in June, this year. This is, no doubt, in recognition of the fact that in this regard, our legislation is the most progressive in the Caribbean. *[Applause]* Now we have to work on the regulations that would give the legislation teeth.

This year, we will work in the areas of agriculture, mining and forestry. We must confess, Mr Speaker, to some feeling of gratification. In reading the comments of CAGI's David Yankana, that reduction of regulated accidents and fatalities in Guyana, over the last five years, has been due to the Ministry's work in the areas of Occupational Safety and Health *[Applause]* and also to employers who practiced OSH habits at the Ministry's insistence.

It seems to me that OMAI is to be credited the best in relation to Occupational Safety and Health, the Alesie Rice Complex at Ruimzigt, Denmore Garment Manufacturing, Public Hospital Georgetown Corporation and a few of the enterprises that are not far behind. OMAI has integrated the prevention of accidents in its incentive scheme. It

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

seems to me that this is a practice that other enterprises can imitate. This year in Occupational Safety and Health, we have to target HIV/AIDS at the workplace.

Guyana is officially ranked as Category III as far as Labour Market Information Systems in the Caribbean are concerned. Systems, in this grouping, have and I quote:

*Almost no data sources in place, to generate the recommended labour market information so vitally necessary for labour market analysis that is in turn necessary for policy formulation.*

The fire on Homestretch Avenue put us back somewhat, but we recognise that estimates will not do in economic planning, so this year, we aim to move into Category II at least, just as we plan to widen the scope of the apprenticeship scheme under the Board of Industrial Training and to make that body pro-active in collaboration with the private and public sectors in the training and retraining of persons for employment and re-employment in technical and vocational fields. It is our intention, too, to establish a one-stop computerised centre that would provide information and job opportunities.

Mr Speaker, social security is not only a matter for the elderly and the indigent. It relates as well to the financial security available to retired and redundant workers and to the benefits available otherwise to those injured at the workplace or for the families, in the case of those who died there.

We urge the National Insurance Scheme, to speedily overhaul its systems to remove anomalies and to hasten its response to the insured, even as it publishes, and we are urging this, the number of contributions made annually to subscribers to that scheme. We appeal to employers to obey the law and to remit to Insurance Scheme such deductions that are made from workers' wages for that purpose. Emulate the best practice in this regard of the John Fernandes Company, for example.

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

The worst I know but would not name publicly this year.

Mr Speaker, Barbados is credited rightly with the best climate for investment. The cohesiveness of the society is recognised as is the solitary relationship between labour and management. This did not come about by happenstance, it grew out of a rediscovered sense of unity and nationalism, when an International Financial Agency (that will remain unnamed) demanded the devaluation of the Barbadian dollar, in order that that country may benefit from external funding. To a man and woman, the country, its people and its political business, civil and labour leaders resisted. The Barbadian dollar much prized and valued for its intrinsic worth, became a symbol of unity and a rallying focus for national effort.

Since the Hon. Minister of Finance invoked the Almighty in his Presentation, I want to say that would to God, we can find some symbol, something that would unite us in sentiment, that we can come to that national unity that is the *conditio sine qua non* for economic growth and social development.

Meanwhile, let us talk even if we have to quarrel, let the dialogue between the President and the Leader of the Opposition continue. Hon. Clement Rohee has demonstrated that what has been said as the reason for suspending the talks is unjustifiable. Let us engage one another, let us not surrender to the spirit that puts us apart and that involves us in non-engagement or shouting across the political divide from centres other than this Honourable House. Such a practice will get this nation nowhere fast.

Let me in closing say with the Hon. Minister on Page 52, modifying him slightly: Let us continue to strive together for higher and nobler ideals and with the blessing of the Almighty, work as one people to realise our shared goals and common destiny.

And raise our growth way beyond the projected two percent. Only so, Mr Speaker, we will be able to turn Guyana from a land of potential to a land of plenty or else, or else... onslaught to posterity and at the bar

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

of history. Who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member.

The Hon. Member, Mr Kumkaran Ramdas.

**Mr Kumkaran Ramdas:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise to lend my support to the Motion by the Hon. Minister of Finance to the approval of the Budget of 2002.

But before I do so, Mr Speaker, I just want to briefly comment on a few points that were raised by the Hon. Member, Mr Ravi Dev.

Mr Speaker, in his discussion here this evening, he spoke on a number of issues as it relates to the Sugar Industry and I just want to make two or three quick comments.

1. He said, and I remember quite well, that in his advocacy a few years ago, I believe probably about two years ago, when he was advocating the closure of the Demerara Estates, when he was advocating the privatisation of the Demerara Estates, he was saying that we should close those estates in Demerara. Today, in his presentation, he was saying that the Government is going to spend US \$110 million in the expansion programme in the Berbice Estates and nothing is going to be spent for the Demerara Estates.

Mr Speaker, I see a contradiction here. Here is this gentleman telling us, on the one hand that we should have closed the Demerara Estates and then he comes to Parliament and tells us that we should now spend money in the Demerara Estates. It is a contradiction that we have to address and we have to let sugar workers know, because I think, coming to this House and trying to give us a false impression of what we want to say is not only misleading, but I think it is dangerous. *[Applause]*

*(cont'd in Part II)*



# National Assembly Debates

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF  
THE FIRST SESSION (2001-2002) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF  
GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE  
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

## Part 2

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SITTING

2.00 PM

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

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*(cont'd from Part 1)*

2.. Mr Speaker, when one looked at the financial statement of GUYSUCO that was presented to this House, two years ago, one would have seen that the wage bill in the sugar industry amounted close to about fifty-eight percent of the total revenue of GUYSUCO and for one to say that today sugar workers in the Sugar industry continue to live in conditions and to work in conditions similar to those of the indentured immigrants and slaves is totally misleading.

Mr Speaker, which company in Guyana, which enterprise would pay out from its total revenue fifty-eight percent of its revenue to labour or to wages and salaries. It is almost impossible and this tells us two things:

(a) While we are happy that the sugar workers in the sugar industry have been able to get out of the Corporation fifty-eight percent of their revenue, we also should take cognisance of the role that the Unions in the sugar industry have been playing to ensure that the workers have a fair share of the cake and this is a compliment to the two sugar workers' unions, the GAWU and the NACCIE, and it is very misleading to come to this House and give us a different impression.

(b) The last point I want to make, Mr Speaker, is that in 1992, in our election campaign, in our Manifesto, we addressed the issue of the

sugar levy and we made a commitment that the PPP/Civic Government was going to remove the sugar levy. Today, we are proud to say that the sugar levy has been removed and that is another achievement of this Government in standing by its commitment. The Minister of Agriculture aptly puts it that this Government stands by all its commitment and I wish to make those three points. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, to present a national Budget for the third consecutive time or year without introducing any new burden of taxes on the population of this country is an achievement. I believe it is a significant achievement for the Government of this country and for the Minister of Finance .

Mr Speaker, moreso when we take into consideration the post elections violence, the disturbances, the disruption of the economic activities that ensued during the first half of 2001 and for the economy to rebound after a negative 1.4 percent growth in 2000, and to achieve a GDP growth rate of 1.9 percent of a projected 2.8 percent in 2001, deserves our compliment both to the Minister of Finance and to his team of dedicated personnel in the Ministry of Finance for a job well done.

Only two countries in the Caribbean according to the President of the CDB, Dr Compton Bourne, were able to achieve this growth, Guyana and Jamaica. This, to my mind, is also a significant achievement in light of what is happening in the world around us and to bring the inflation rate, to rein it in to single digit figures, I believe to increase wages and salaries above the rate of inflation is also an achievement of the PPP/Civic Government and the Minister of Finance. To elucidate this point, I want to make the following:

In 1999, our inflation rate was 11.9 percent, salary increases amounted to 31.1 percent.

In 2000, the inflation rate was 6.2 percent, salary increases were 26.6 percent

In 2001, the inflation rate was 2.1 percent, salary increases were 5.5 per cent.

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

These figures, Mr Speaker, cannot be contested and shows that contrary to what the skeptics are peddling, the economy of our country has been managed with a high degree of competence and expertise and with an economic understanding of the peculiarities of the Guyanese situation.

Mr Kowlessar's Budget, Mr Speaker, therefore has re-emphasized our Government's policy direction, a course, I believe, we adumbrated in 1992. He highlighted the difficulty that the manufacturing sector faced in the year 2001.

Mr Speaker, this Budget, I believe, ensures that Guyana maintains one of the most attractive tax regimes in the hemisphere, and to which Minister Manzoor Nadir ably led us through last evening.

A week ago we were presented with an amendment to the Customs Act - the Customs Duties and Amendment Order - and permit me, Mr Speaker, just to read a few of the items. This is what the Schedule says:

*Products for which immediate duty free concessions will be offered on imports originating in Columbia into the LDCs of CARICOM participating in the agreement from June 1, 1998. I will just briefly read some of the items:*

- *Resin acids, resin spirits and resin oils and gums. Now I believe, those are used by the paint manufacturing industry.*
- Prepared binders for the foundry and moulds for the manufacturing industry, prefabrication.
- Sewing materials and threads of artificial staple fibres, no doubt for the garment industry.
- Millstones, grind stones, grinding stones and the like.

Mr Speaker, the point I am making is that all these are measures that the Government has made available and put in place to ensure that the manufacturing sector, despite the difficulties faced in the latter part of

2001, these measures will assist the manufacturing sector in the coming years ahead.

The Government, in a continual consultation process with the business community has strengthened our relationship with the Private Sector as reported in sections of the media. The Presidential Adviser, Mr Mani Rampershad, held discussions between executives of the Associations of Regional Chambers of Commerce and wide ranging issues were raised including:

- The strengthening of the Private Sector in exploring market opening initiatives with Brazil
- Guyana Brazil Road link
- Recommendations of Chamber Members to be on Boards of Committees
- Forestry
- The Berbice River Bridge, and
- a number of other important issues for continual discussion with this important body.

Additionally, Mr Speaker, the Minister of Trade, Tourism and Industry is presently engaged with the Chamber with the question of upgrading the No. 63 Beach and other areas for the encouragement of tourism and the tourist industry.

Mr Speaker, in advancing my support for this Budget as outlined by the Minister, I wish to draw your attention to an article appearing in the Stabroek News of January 13. In that issue they were reviewing the economy, business and finance in the year 2001 and as the Hon. Minister Kowlessar told us, despite the difficult circumstances under which the Private Sector operated, meaning political unrest, instability and lack of capital, this is what the Stabroek News stated:

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

The few rays of sunshine saw:

- A \$70 million coconut milk plant opened at Coldingen
- A US \$15 million expansion by the DDL
- The opening of a new bottling plant and food processing factory.
- The opening of two new hotels
- Establishment of a plant to convert fish and chicken waste to animal feed.
- Launching of a feed mill
- Opening of a dairy development project.
- Banks DIH, one of Guyana's largest private companies announced a thirty-five percent dividend, \$73 million increase in after-tax profit.
- Sterling Products sales has been \$1 billion ranking it among the Caribbean's top one hundred companies.

In the article it also went on to say that there were five Guyanese entrepreneurs among the Caribbean finalists for entrepreneur of the year 2001. These five persons, Ronald Bulkan, Denis Morgan, Jerry Goveia, Prettipaul Singh and Mayfield French should have our commendation as pioneers in showcasing Guyana's quality products and services.  
*[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, it is indeed an indication of the transformation that is evident in the Private Sector and is no doubt, I believe, a response to the Government's call and a demand of the Caribbean market for quality product.

Now that the partial scope Guyana/Brazil Agreement has been ratified, new visitors and new dimensions have been cleared for trade

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

and investment opportunities for the business community. Already a delegation of ARCC Members, a seventy-man strong delegation, visited Brazil recently to explore these opportunities.

What is now needed in our manufacturing sector is a climate that is free from unrest and political instability, from threats and a climate that is conducive for factories to operate without hindrance and a climate of peace and tranquility and a climate of risks that are less or highly reduced.

Mr Speaker, at the Regional level, East Berbice, Region 6, agriculture continues to be our major economic activity and our regional attention has been focused on the operation and maintenance of the D&I Systems in the major areas namely:

- Black Bush Polder
- Nos. 52 to 74
- Crabwood Creek; and
- The East Bank Berbice areas.

Two new diesel pumps have been in the Mibikuri Polders, ensuring that the rice farmers will now have a trouble-free supply of irrigation water in the Black Bush Scheme. This has now resolved mostly the irrigation problems and obviously will be saving the farmers a tremendous amount of money that they were using to pump water into their fields.

This is a caring Government, Mr Speaker, this is what we have been doing for our farmers to ensure that we help them to bring down the cost of production. Farmers in some areas of the Black Bush Polder, are now receiving water with gravity flow, which they never had for a number of years. Discussions are continuing with the farmers of the Polders to ensure a more efficient management and control of the system in Black Bush Polder. We have established Framers' Committees in all four of the Polders. These are the farmers who now advise us in what areas they see fit, that maintenance needs to be urgently done and because

of these recommendations in D&I Systems in Black Bush Scheme, Lesbeholden, Johanna, Yakusari and Mibikuri, approximately one hundred and twenty miles (120) miles of canals have either been rehabilitated and/or cleaned of vegetation. *[Applause]* This is a remarkable achievement, Mr Speaker, taking into consideration what transpired years ago in the Black Bush Polder. We have also repaired six (6) of the major bridges which is now making it much more convenient and easier for the farmers to link the various Polders and the road network that we have in the system. But, I want to concede, Mr Speaker, that the system in Black Bush Polder is yet not functioning to its full designed capacity. We still have difficulties with our outfall channels which continue to be sedimented and silted from water coming into the system from the Corentyne River and the Atlantic Ocean. We have requested the advice and the technical expertise of the D & I Engineers and we are hoping that we will be able to alleviate and to improve the Black Bush system efficiency.

For those persons who do not know the Black Bush Scheme, Mr Speaker, it caters for approximately 35,000 acres of arable, cultivable land. Presently, 17,000 acres are under cultivation. The other acreage is used by the cattle farmers in the Black Bush Scheme. Originally it was designed that each farmer in the Scheme would have fifteen (15) acres of rice land and two and one half (2½) acres of homestead in which they would build their homes. The intention of the then PPP Government was that after the farmers would have sown their rice crop they would have adequate land close to their homes for the provision of cash crops, citrus and such other crops. It was intended that small factories, possibly canning factories, preserving factories, would have been established in these Polders. I am proud to say that recently, late last year, both Minister Satyadeow Sawh and Minister of Agriculture, Mr Navin Chandarpal were in the area. We are in the process of discussion with the farmers of the homestead to see how best we can ensure that we try to encourage them to go back to the original intention of the design of the Black Bush Scheme. That process will continue in 2002.

Mr Speaker, in *Housing*, the Region's Housing Committee in

collaboration with the Minister of Housing and Central Housing and Planning Authority, over the years, have been in the process of distribution of house lots. So far we have been able to distribute 4,050 house lots in eleven (11) identified housing schemes. *[Applause]* The most recent was the distribution of 1,040 house lots in the Corriverton area, No. 77 Village area. *[Applause]* Sixteen squatting areas are presently in the process of being regularised and Minister Shaik Baksh is very strong in ensuring that this is done very quickly and efficiently. I want to name just a few of these areas, Mr Speaker - Albion, Chesney, and other areas. It is evidence of our commitment to housing. Last evening we were told by the Hon Attorney General of the measures that his Ministry is putting in place to ensure that owners of these house lots, or allottees, are given their transports as quickly as possible. I want to say and to report to this august body that transports have been distributed in five (5) areas in Region 6. And I want to name those areas - Albion North, Ankerville R, Kilcoy/Chesney Block I, Adelphi and Cumberland. These are area where we have distributed transports to the allottees who can now go to the mortgage and finance bank, NBS and the other two banks, that have been now permitted to allow homeowners to access loans at concessionary interest rates.

Mr Speaker, **Land Titles**. This is a very important issue and it is part of the Government's programme, as we said, and had identified years ago, part of the Government's land reform in ensuring that land titles are made available to those persons who had agriculture lands. I wish to say that the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission has begun work already in the Black Bush Polder, has completed works in the No. 52 - 74 area, and has now established temporary Offices in the Crabwood Creek/Molsen areas at which time evidences, applications, documentation et cetera are presently being done. Mr Speaker, these are all measures that the Government has committed itself to and we are implementing to ensure that farmers, once they have titles, can use these as collateral to borrow loans and to continue the process of improving their livelihood and their economic activity in the Region. As I said, Mr Speaker, the response to these procedures have been overwhelming thereby forcing the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission to open



temporary Offices in the Crabwood Creek/Molsen Creek area.

Mr Speaker, we have remained committed and focused in the policies that we outlined in 1992 - private sector development, tax reforms and incentives, housing, land titles, additional funding for the social sector - these are all part of our plan for national development. No doubt, sometimes, we have to curb our impatience and sometimes we have to look at development with a bird's eye view to understand what this Government has done and how we have transformed this country over the past eight (8) or nine (9) years.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I envisage, like many Berbicians, with the commissioning of the Molsen Creek Road and the Guyana Suriname/ Ferry, the expansion of the Skeldon Factory, the expansion of the Berbice Estates, the upgrading of the No. 63 Beach and other beaches in Berbice, the construction of a National Airport at Rose Hall with possible links between Berbice (Skeldon/Albion), Ogle, Timehri and possibly Suriname, the extension of the Berbice Campus, the bridging of the Berbice River, an economic boom in the Ancient County. *[Applause]* This is our vision, this is the PPP/Cs vision for Berbice. In the final analysis I believe all of this will be in the interest of our Nation.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, the walkout by the PNC, I think, is a sad moment for us. But what we have to do... the PNC believes... and I think we have to let them get this message that waking out here would not ruffle us. I do not believe so. I suggest to them to think again because the strategy that they have now been using or the strategies that they have adopted were skillfully used by the PPP and the late Dr Cheddi Jagan in our fight against an undemocratic and fraudulent government.

**The Speaker:** You did say, Hon Member, that you were about to conclude so I allowed you an extra minute but you have gone on to another point so you will need some more time.

**Hon Reepu Daman Persaud:** I move that the Hon Member be given five (5) minutes to conclude his Speech.

**[Motion put and agreed to]**

**Mr Kumkaran Ramdas:** Thank you Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, we are now living in a new millennium and the strategies that they are now using is outmoded. Today, it is a battle of ideas in a modern world. And I believe that what they have done over the past two days, as Minister Collymore rightly said, they cannot face the debate in this Budget because they cannot find any difficulty with the Budget. They have actually surrendered. They have actually relinquished and abandoned their responsibility and the mandate that was given to them by the electorate of this country, a large proportion of the electorate of this country. I believe, Mr Speaker, that we have a goal ahead of us and we should work towards that goal. We should judge ourselves, our achievements, by the objectives that we have set, and in so doing I believe that Guyana would be proud of us.

Thank you very much.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon Member.

Hon Member Mr Ravi Dev.

**Mr Ravi Dev:** I wish to speak according to Rule 32 (4) which is to correct an explanation of some material, part of my speech, which I feel has been mis-represented by Mr Ramdas. He claims that I said that the Demerara Estates have been closed. I never said any such thing and I challenge him to produce evidence of that and if he cannot, he ought to apologise before this august body. What I did say was that if the Government's expansion programme in Berbice leads us to have a production cost of only 12 cents then it is very likely that the production cost in Demerara would be out of wack and at that point the Government itself might be forced to close the Demerara Estates. And, as I said in my speech earlier, we should begin to diversify the Demerara Estates.

On the notion that the sugar workers are so well off, Mr Ramdas said that by the workers getting 58% of the total revenue of GUYSUCO

as wages that discards that claim. But according to the PPP conditions were very terrible under Bookers. Dr Jagan has attested to that. And under Bookers in the 1960s wages were over sixty percent (60%).

In terms of the levy what I did say is that the PPP has finally abolished the levy but only when there are no profits.

Thank you.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon Member.

Hon Member Mr Heeralall Mohan

**Mr Heeralall Mohan:** Mr Speaker, I stand to give support for the approval of the 2002 Budget as presented by the Hon Minister of Finance, Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar. I feel very proud to be part of this debate in this Hon House. The Budget can be described as the most historic budget presentation, free from new taxes, fines and duties. The people cannot believe this. In spite of all the financial difficulties that face our nation the economy is projected to grow by 2 percent. The rate of inflation is projected at an astonishing 5 percent. The exchange rate is expected to be stable. The international reserves will exceed target once again. More investment and jobs are to be created. Mr Speaker for this careful and efficient management of our country's economy, I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to the Minister and his team for a job well done.

Mr Speaker, the dire need of the Guyanese people for a better way of life, peace and stability, and a guaranteed future has been recognised for a long time by the PPP/C Administration. As such an enormous amount of hard work, efforts, emphasis on sacrifices are being put in place to guarantee a brighter future for our people. The 2002 Budget, so carefully crafted like all other Budgets of the PPP/Civic Administration the clear manifestation of the PPP/Civic government is a serious commitment to do everything possible to bring about a better way of life for all Guyanese.

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

Mr Speaker, in Budget 2002 it has been clearly stated by the Finance Minister and I will quote Page 5, Paragraph 4:

*In 2002, we will continue to take the necessary actions to limit the damage to the economy from any further adverse development in the world economy, stimulate further growth, and generally ensure our economic survival. In this regard we intend to implement policies and measures to reinvigorate our main productive sectors and enterprises, expand the economic base, consolidate the financial infrastructure, and support private sector development, among others.*

Mr Speaker, Guyana's economy recorded positive growth in 2001. This was achieved despite the recession in the world economy and post election development that affected business and other activities. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanded by 1.9 percent which represented a reversal of the negative growth of 1.4 percent in 2000. Mr Speaker, we have had reasonable increases in our main agriculture products - rice, sugar, livestock, poultry meat, eggs, fresh milk, fish, and forestry had an increased output of 3 percent.

In the wake of all the difficulties and hardships that faced our country both from outside and within, it is very difficult for the prophets of doom to believe, it is totally against their expectations. It brought them shock waves. They cannot face the truth and that is why they chose to stay away. But at this point in time I would like to send a strong signal to them that it is with the continuation of good governance and careful management of the country's economy by our very competent Minister of Finance, Hon Saisnarine Kowlessar that we will continue to send them these surprises and shock waves. They must take some lessons from the Minister of Finance on how to manage an economy and not to mismanage as they are accustomed to.

Mr Speaker, our dear land is going through a very difficult time, both internally and externally. Nevertheless, we are not alone. There

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

are countries in the world far worse than us. We must understand there will be good times and difficult times. This is the law of nature. Despite our difficulties and tight situation our learned Minister of Finance has managed to produce a budget that has brought no new taxes nor added financial difficulties to our people. Instead, it brought greater and renewed hope and has given greater incentive to the private sector that will encourage rapid economic growth in our country.

Mr Speaker, taking into consideration the many financial difficulties and limitations that face our nation, Budget 2002 is a masterpiece so carefully crafted with the entire nation at heart that our Minister of Finance needs to be highly commended for such a fine job.

Mr Speaker, sound and careful management of our country's financial affair, our commitment to constantly improve the standard of living of our people is our first priority as it was all the time before. During the past years we have charted an economic and social course that has brought renewed hope and tangible benefits to our people. This course is definitely going to continue and together we are being asked to take on the responsibility to create a secure and brighter future for future generations. This year's budget has set the pace, like all other budgets. For the past eight (8) years this nation has been exposed to very sound economic planning that gives rise to all-round development in every Region, in every Town, in every Village and in every Community, especially among the indigenous communities in our region.

Mr Speaker, at this point in time I would like to focus your attention on Region 2, Pomeroon/Supenaam, the Region which I represent in this Hon House. I would therefore like to highlight some of the developments which have taken place and are taking place in our Region. But, before I proceed, I would like to express my disappointment and the strong disappointment of the people of the Region in relation to the very irresponsible behaviour of the Members on the other side of the House. I would like to state that the people of the entire Region are very much disappointed with such a behaviour by the Members of the PNC/R and the WPA having chosen not to participate in this very important and vital

debate in this Hon House where very important issues of this nation's welfare are being discussed.

Mr Speaker, I wish to say that this is a total misrepresentation of the people and their electorate. I think they have betrayed the trust that has been placed in them by at least 40 percent of the electorate of this country. This is very discouraging and very disappointing.

Mr Speaker, I would like to focus your attention on my Region which is predominantly agricultural. I must say rice takes the lead in the area of infrastructure development of drainage and irrigation. For the period, over 1.2 billion has been spent for the rehabilitation of totally broken down infrastructure arrangements. To date over \$100 million has been spent for drainage and canals to be cleaned, desilted by machines. For the year 2001 alone over \$100 million has been spent in the area of drainage and irrigation for the construction of six (6) irrigation checks, three (3) tail-walls, one (1) syphon, two (2) R.C. tubes, one (1) regulator gate, seven (7) sluice huts, ten (10) timber revetments, excavation by hymax and draglines of fifty-six (56) trenches and facades to the tune of 10,500 rods, cleaning and flushing of eleven (11) outfall channels, sea sluices, repair works, preparation of access dams, maintenance of drainage and irrigation trenches, construction of five head walls with tubes, rehabilitation of three (3) sea sluices and installation of four drainage pumps that are benefitting the entire Region. All of these projects that are being undertaken by Drainage and Irrigation Department of Region 2, Mr Speaker, has brought tremendous relief and help to every farming community and has enhanced greatly production and productivity of our rice industry.

Mr Speaker, a very good agriculture policy of total rehabilitation coupled with stricter management and supervision and also the art we have developed through our experience of spinning the dollar to get more work done has brought about tremendous benefits and improvement in the lives of entire farming communities. Today, we can proudly boast of 100 percent increase in paddy production. From 650 bags of paddy per crop in 1992 to over 1,250,000 bags of paddy per crop presently.

Tuesday, 26th March, 2002

Not only paddy yields have increased, Mr Speaker, but quality of the production has also increased in our Region. Our Region is now producing the best quality of rice in the country.

The *quality of life* of our people has also improved. People are looking ahead to higher standards and goals. Investment climate has also improved and we are now attracting many business entities and banking institutions. Today, we can boast of the establishment of over fifty (50) new rice mills that are purchasing paddy at a very competitive price. As such, the price of paddy has gone up reasonable for this crop and farmers are getting favourable payment, prompt payment. This is making the situation better in our Region right now.

I must say, Mr Speaker, that *diversification* is taking shape in our Region and is getting full support from the Ministry of Fisheries, Crops and Livestock, that is, in the area of fish, cattle and milk production, organic fruits and vegetable, organic cocoa and cash crops. I would like to say, and I am very saddened about this, that the copra industry is facing some very difficult times because of the lack of market facilities but right now we are trying to encourage the diversification of that industry. Also, we are raising a serious buy local campaign for our consumers to consume more coconut oil to support the coconut industry in our country. We are also getting some encouraging markets from the Caribbean for our fruits and vegetables. Right now we are exporting fruits and vegetables like avocado, pineapple, pumpkin and other vegetables and fruits from the Pomeroon.

Mr Speaker, I would like to touch on *Health and Education* as priorities in the Region. For the period over \$650 million were spent in the area of health facilities, that is, the construction of twenty (20) new health centres that are fully equipped with medical supplies and trained health staff. These centres are constructed mainly in much needed remote Amerindian areas in our Region. Not forgetting the complete rehabilitation of the Suddie and Charity Public Hospitals at the cost of over \$120 million. Attention to Health care is an ongoing activity in our Region. For the year 2001, the health team in our Region has completed twenty-

five (25) medical outreach programmes. These programmes were done mainly in remote Amerindian areas.

Mr Speaker, education is no more a privilege. This Government has made education a right. *[Applause]* As we all know, education is first priority all over the world today and in Region 2 there is no exception. In order to make learning and the teaching profession more comfortable and conducive, for the year 2001, we spent over \$90 million for the repairs, extension and painting of schools, the construction of headmasters' quarters, the building of libraries, the construction of dormitories. So far, Mr Speaker, we have constructed thirty-nine (39) new schools and rehabilitated thirty-two (32) old school buildings in our Region. These include nursery, primary and secondary schools. Even remote areas of our Region are receiving the blessing of secondary education. For instance, Kabakaburi, a remote Amerindian Village has just received a secondary school that costs over \$78 million and that will be delivering the highest quality of secondary education. This school will enable the children of that entire district, who are mainly Amerindians to access full secondary education easily.

For the year 2001, Mr Speaker, we spent \$308 million to facilitate education, that is, the construction of five (5) primary and nursery schools, extension, rehabilitation and repair of ten (10) primary and nursery schools, sanitary blocks and facilities including dormitory facilities in the remote areas and nine (9) head teachers' quarters.

For the year 2002, Mr Speaker, a bigger share of the cake will be allocated for the extension and complete rehabilitation of eleven (11) primary and nursery schools, construction of five schools including secondary, at Aurora and Abramsville. At this point in time, I am very happy to announce that this year, after a long wait, we will proudly see the complete rehabilitation of the famous Anna Regina Multilateral School, an institution that is so vital to our education system in Region 2.

Mr Speaker, computer literacy, Information Technology, is taking a grip on the minds of our young people in the Region. We have seen the



establishment of computer laboratories at the following schools : CV Nunes Primary with sixteen (16) computers donated by PEIP; Cotton Field Secondary with twenty(20) computers; Anna Regina Multilateral School with seven (7) computers donated by the School's PTA. We also have in our Region operating three (3) Internet Cafes. And talking about access to information there is a strong request from the Department of Education in Region 2 to have a link with the Internet service to access information for examination purposes and generally for education purposes for students preparing for exams.

Mr Speaker, I would not like to over emphasize or boast about the importance of school buildings or education facilities that we have acquired in our Region as some may argue. But, equally, I am proud to say that education standards in the Region is about the best in Guyana. Schools in our Region have acquired top places in the country for several consecutive years in passes with very high grades [*Applause*] at SSEE and CXC Examinations. The CV Nunes Primary School at Anna Regina has been one of the top ten primary schools in the country for passes at the SSEE Examinations for several years. Not forgetting the Anna Regina Multilateral School, which topped the country at CXC last year with a pass of ten Grade I. Mr Speaker, information technology will be offered for the first time at CV Nunes Primary in Anna Regina while at the Anna Regina Multilateral School a computer laboratory is being established at the cost of \$2 million by the Parent/Teacher Association of that school.

Mr Speaker, the PTA and members of the community are playing a very important supportive role in the delivery of education in our Region. The first ever Education Management Programme is being piloted and has been completed in the year 2001. Included in this Programme are twenty-seven (27) head teachers. The aim is to equip the teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge in the management and delivery of quality education in our Region. Two very great facilities we can boast and sing praises about are the establishment of a branch of the Cyril Potter College of Education based in Anna Region where our teachers can access full training right at home; and a Technical Institute where Region 2 youths are happily benefitting from skills and technical training.

We are hoping very soon, Mr Speaker, to have university education in our Region. *[Applause]*

## **GUYWA**

Water is life, Mr Speaker. The year 2001 has seen the completion of Phases I and II of GUYWA's programmes in Region 2. For Phase I we have seen the complete installation of seven (7) new submersible electrical pumps. These pumps have the capacity and the interconnection mechanism to deliver water to the entire coastland of Region 2, that is from Charity to Supenaam. For Phase II over 98 percent of transmission mains have been installed. This includes five (5) kilometers of 8-inch main, thirty-eight and one half (38½) kilometers of 6-inch main, and forty-seven (47) kilometers of 4-inch main. All wells had revisited services and developmental works are going on including water treatment with chlorine at the Lima Well. To date every village, estate and housing area is receiving pure water supply. GUYWA is servicing 7,500 customers, that is, a total of over 30,000 persons from Region 2 are receiving an efficient water supply. Phase III of the GUYWA water supply system in Region 2 is to look at quality water to be supplied to consumers, that is, for the coming year or two ahead. GUYWA is looking at a water purification plant that is to be installed somewhere in the vicinity of the Anna Regina township.

### ***The El Nino Well Drilling Project***

Mr Speaker, GUYWA has embarked on a massive El Nino Well Drilling Project mainly in the hinterland areas of Region 2. These areas are plagued with a severe shortage of water during the dry season and as such the administration recognises the need for those areas to have proper pure water supply by the sinking of wells. Over nineteen (19) such wells have been constructed in the lower and upper Pomeroon areas including Lima Sands, Capoey Lake, St Dennis Mission, Kabakaburi and all other Amerindian communities.

## **HOUSING**

Mr Speaker, young people entering into family life in our Region are aspiring greatly to acquire a home of their own. The Housing Department of the Region has received thousands of applications. A total of 1,752 applications have been recommended for housing in the Charity, Lima Sands and Onderneeming Housing Schemes. Allocation of these house lots will commence within three months time. For the period, Mr Speaker, we have established in our Region twelve new housing schemes, that is a total of 2,875 house lots. So far we have spent over \$19 million for infrastructural development, that is, the installation of kokers, culverts construction and upgrading of roads, streets, dams, and to some extent a pure water supply. Mr Speaker, because of the dying need for applicants to have proper documentation of their allocation of house lots, the Housing Department has put in place systems that would cause the processing of lease, transports and freehold titles to be completed in a very swift manner so the applicants can receive their transports, leases or title in a very timely manner. This document is necessary for them to use as collateral in the transaction of their businesses. The demand for house lots in our Region is ongoing and as such the Housing Department has an everyday task of ensuring that these demands are met. Surveying and studying of new areas for the establishment of housing schemes are engaging the Housing Department on a daily basis. Mr Speaker, over 250 leases, transports and titles have been issued. These documents are being used very conveniently by the allottee as collateral to access much needed financial assistance especially from the New Building Society for the building of their houses. I wish to report, Mr Speaker, and I am very happy to say that the New Building Society's banking institution in our Region is very supportive and helpful to home building in our Region.

***Neighbourhood Democratic Council***

Mr Speaker, we have functioning in our Region five (5) Neighbourhood Democratic Councils. These entities have the responsibility for maintenance, upgrading and construction of all infrastructure works that fall within their boundaries. Along with rates collection, each entity is being given a grant of \$3 million to carry out its work and function for the year. The NDC'S are engaged in day to day activities offering services to various communities like desilting of drains and trenches, upgrading of streets and roads with crusher run, cleaning and sprucing up of the roadside and the entire area. The NDC's are assigned the responsibility of environment and safety control. As such, Mr Speaker, the Public Health Department is being asked to play a very active and important role in the maintenance of a clean and healthy environment in our Region.

**Lands and Surveys**

Mr Speaker, Lands and Surveys has evolved into a new entity. It is now being renamed Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. It has changed from a Public Service entity to a semi-autonomous body which is being supervised by a Board of Directors. The main aim and objective of this entity is to fast-track or speed up, as we may describe it, the processing of lease, titles and transports and to implement a process called Land Tenure Regularisation. This process is to secure the rights of tenants on Government and state lands, the allocation and processing of application for leases, permission and freehold titles for state lands within Region 2, the issuing of leases, permission to applicants to survey state lands and demarcate boundaries, the collection of land rents and policing of all state and government lands in the Region and the issuing of notice for non-compliance of state land occupation. For the year 2001, Mr Speaker, over 400 applications have been processed and approved. Fifty acres of occupation survey at the cost of \$447,000 have been completed.

Repairs to Charity Market Bond at the cost of \$700,000, upgrading

of 1,000 feet of street in Charity Housing Scheme at the cost of \$1 million, upgrading of 2,400 feet of streets in Richmond Housing Scheme at the cost of \$1.8 million, building of 5,000 feet of new streets at Onderneeming Housing Scheme at the cost of \$1.65 million, building of 2,400 feet of streets in Suddie New Housing Scheme at the cost of \$1.2 million, repairs to 1,400 feet of street at Charity Housing Scheme at the cost of \$4.2 million have been completed. I am very happy to note that the new Commission will be giving leases and titles for over fifty years instead of twenty five years as it used to be, Mr Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Before you move on Hon Member, you will need some more time.

**Hon Reepu Daman Persaud:** I move that the Hon Member be given five minutes to conclude his speech.

*[Motion put and greed to]*

**Mr Heeralall Persaud:** Speaker, we have in our Region nine (9) well organised *Amerindian Communities* with a population of over 7,000 Amerindians. And speaking about Amerindian population, Mr Speaker, world statistics have shown that Guyana has the fastest growth of Amerindian population in the world. This is happening especially in Region 2. In 1920 Guyana's Amerindian population was a little over 6,000. By the year 1995 this figure reached over 54,000. All these nine Amerindian communities are equipped with basic facilities like modern and well furnished schools, health centres and health post with qualified health workers and health supplies, craft centre, learning centres, soup kitchens, pure water supplies, playground and recreational facilities to encourage sports and relaxation during spare time. Mr Speaker, millions of dollars are being spent on a yearly basis by EPA to train Amerindian communities in skills of management, supervision, agriculture science, re-forestation and soil recuperation. Each and every community has received either boat with engine for the purpose of transportation for their community, especially for school children, or a working tractor for helping in their farming activities. Some communities have received both tractor and

boat with engine from the regional administration. Amerindian communities are being given priority treatment in our Region. All NGOs are paying rapt attention to their needs, welfare and development. NGOs like SIMAP, Food for the Poor, Basic Needs and Cupid Volunteers are very active in those areas doing projects, training, food supply and clothing, training in education, equipment of schools and education facilities. I wish to also say that we have introduced solar system electricity generation in a couple of the Amerindian communities in our Region and that is ongoing giving electricity twenty-four (24) hours a day.

### **Sea Defence**

Mr Speaker, this is an ongoing operation in our Region. While it is very costly and burdensome and takes a big chunk out of our national budget, nevertheless we must maintain and pay careful attention to that area. Due to the effects of global warming such as the constant rise in the sea level our entire coastland has become highly vulnerable to the sea. At present we have highly critical areas to look at. For the period 1994 to 2001, the PEU has constructed over 6 kilometers of permanent rif-raff sea defence works along the sea coast at the cost of over \$1.6 billion. This is in areas such as La Belle Alliance, Reliance, Richmond, Sparta, Windsor Castle, Main Stay, Henrietta, Aberdeen and Columbia. For the year 2002, over two and one half (2½) kilometers of permanent rif-raff work will be done by PEU in the Columbia/Capoey area.

The IRP maintenance crew has done work to the cost of over \$460 million, that is, in repairs to access roads, earth works, temporary rif-raff rehabilitation, sand bags, placing of boulders, sealing of cavities, raising of coping and weeding of sea dam. Mr Speaker, the Sea Defence Maintenance Crew needs to increase their efficiency to do much more swifter jobs in critical areas like Johanna/Cecelia, Capoey, Affiance, Bush Lot and Lima.

Mr Speaker, Budget 2002 seeks to guarantee and secure Guyana's future. It has further provision for further all-round development in our Region. Assistance from a caring Government is always expected. The

*Tuesday, 26th March, 2002*

challenges facing our Nation are many. Our people have the understanding that this administration cannot do everything at the same time for everyone. No government in the world has ever done that. Everyone has a role to play. Together, the Government and the people of our Region have a commitment to work together to build and improve the social life and economic life of our people. We fully recognise that togetherness is the way forward for our country and our people.

Mr Speaker, there are initiatives in the year 2002 Budget that will take the country on the road to success. The future of this country is in the future of our children and future generations to come. The responsibility is in the hands of all of us. Let us not shed this important responsibility.

I wish at this point in time to make a special appeal to all Members of this House, especially those who are not here, that our people would like to move on. Let us put the interest of this country and its people above all our narrow partisan interests and objectives and work together in unity and real brotherhood for the realisation of that lofty goal and dream of One People, One Nation and One Destiny. *[Applause]*

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon Member.

The Hon Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

**Hon Reepu Daman Persaud:** Mr Speaker, I wish to move that the National Assembly stands adjourned to Wednesday, March 27, 2002 at 14:00 H.

**The Speaker:** The National Assembly stands so adjourned.

*Adjourned accordingly at 19:50H*