

National Assembly Debates

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

11TH SITTING

2.00 PM

Friday 29th June, 2001

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 (Absent - performing the functions of the office of President)</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 (Absent)</i> |
| The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P. | - <i>Minister of Local Government and Regional Development</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 (Absent)</i> |

Friday, 29th June, 2001

The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.	- Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development
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
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)
**The Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.	- Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce
The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P.	- Minister of Amerindian Affairs
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)
Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P.	
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)
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) (Absent - on leave)
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)(Absent)

*Non- Elected Member

**Elected Member from The United Force 11/2

Members of the Opposition (30)

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

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

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

Mrs Sheila V.A. Holder, M.P.	- <i>(Absent-on Leave)</i>
Mrs Shirley J. Melville, M.P.	- <i>(Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)</i>

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

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

OFFICERS

Mr Frank A. Narain, C.C.H., Clerk of the National Assembly

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

Friday, 29th June, 2001

PRAYER

The Clerk read Prayer

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2001 (2001 BUDGET)

Assembly resumed the Debate on the Motion for the Approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial year 2001

The Speaker: The Hon. Member, Mr Lance Carberry

Mr E. Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to his Debate of the 2001 National Budget, which was presented in this National Assembly on Friday, June 15, 2001, by the newly promoted Minister of Finance, the Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar. I note that he is no longer, Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance. I therefore extend my congratulations and best wishes to him.

Mr Speaker, I also join the chorus of those who spoke before me in congratulating the Minister for his valiant effort.

Mr Speaker, this is the first Budget for the first year of the new millennium, therefore, I expected this Budget to provide us all with the Government's vision of where it plans to take this nation. At least in the first five to ten years of this millennium. I want to make it clear, that I don't mean vision as is understood in the profession of my colleague, the Hon. Member, Dr George Norton.

Mr Speaker, after a very careful reading of the document, I was reminded of the observation in Shakespear's Macbeth,

Plenty of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Friday 29th June, 2001

Mr Speaker, I can only assume that the following statements are intended to be the Minister's vision statements and I quote from the Budget Speech page 1, Subsection 1.3:

we envisage a country in which our abundant natural resources are harnessed by a resilient and enterprising people to create wealth that is then equitably distributed among the people for their benefit. We are single-minded in our resolve to establish a society in which no one feels excluded from the mainstream of development - a society in which the rich diversity of our people is used to strengthen the bonds, rather than accentuate the things that divide us.

And then on page 2 Subsection 1.5:

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

The questions are, Mr Speaker, what is this strategy? Where can this strategy be found for scrutiny? What are the resources that will be required for successfully or sustainably implementing that strategy? The answers are not contained in the Budget. Everything in the Budget suggests more of the same old platitudes.

Mr Speaker, the most important statement in the entire Budget document is found on page 1 Subsection 1.2:

We have to work with the political opposition and other groups in the society to create a lasting environment of peace, trust and enduring stability. Without a doubt, there are vitally important pre-requisites for attracting investments that are so necessary for the continuation of economic progress and social development in our

country.

This is vitally important. This is a vitally important recognition that co-operation, equity, fairness, inclusivity and respect for the rule of law are among the necessary conditions for sustainable development in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, I have had opportunity to hear almost every presentation from the Government benches, almost without exception, the tenor of their arguments follow the part of first of all denial, not true, it was not me or it was not us. The other part is painting a rosy picture, everything is alright, we have not forgotten, we just have not gotten round to doing it. That sort of excuse, and then there is the part of unfairness. This is unfair for you to accuse us of this, after all we have only been in government for nine years. Then there is that assertion of the right of the government. We are the government, therefore we have a right to do whatever we want to do. If the law prevents us, we will change the law.

Mr Speaker, the responses are captured by an observation attributed to Sir Partley Shortcross and it goes as follows, and this is a dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty:

'But', said Alice, 'the question is whether you can make a word mean different things?'

'Not so,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'the question is, which is to be the master?'

That's all, we are the masters at the moment, and not only at the moment, but for a very long time to come

I think that sums up to what I have been hearing.

Mr Speaker, my colleague, Mr Corbin, reminded the government yesterday, that when you cross the threshold into government, you are expected to be government for all the people, not some of the

Friday 29th June, 2001

people.

Mr Speaker, according to the PPP/C's own, very popular, long playing 78 RPM record, they spent twenty-eight years as the shadow government and almost nine years as the Government. But one gets the impression like the bourbons, they learn nothing and they remember nothing.

Mr Speaker, the words and deeds of the government have lent truth to the very cynical observation of Albert Kamu, who wrote:

Politics and the Fate of Mankind are formed by men without ideas and without greatness. Those who have greatness within them do not go into politics.

I am wondering, Mr Speaker, why I am here?

Mr Speaker, in the circumstances, I thought that it was necessary for me to seek inspiration from the Holy Bible and for that I looked at the King James Version and I turned particularly to Ecclesiastes Chapter 1, verse 4:

One generation passeth away and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.

And then it continues in Chapter 3 verses 1 to 8 and advises:

To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.

A time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

A time to weep and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.

A time to get, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to cast away.

A time to rend, and a time to sow;

a time to keep silence and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate;

a time of war, and a time of peace.

Mr Speaker, I am amazed how apposite the observations and advice of Ecclesiastes is for Guyana 2001. My colleagues starting with the Hon. Member, Mr Winston Murray, have all presented overwhelming evidence of bad governance, incompetence, insensitivity, untrustworthiness and corruption. It is not surprising therefore, as stated by my colleague, the Hon. Mr Robert Corbin that this dear land is brought by the Government to the point of imminent explosion. There are some among us, who like the proverbial ostriches are burying their heads in the sand and seeking to convince themselves that nothing is wrong. This is dangerous escapism. On **the other hand**, there are also those who seem determined to provoke ethnic confrontation. This is dangerous adventurism.

Mr Speaker, any person who is aware of the contemporary history of Yugoslavia, Rwanda, the Philippines, India and Malaysia, et cetera, would recognise that the path of ethnic confrontation is an insane path.

Friday 29th June, 2001

There can be no winners. We can all lose as a society. It is a loose, loose option. Perhaps the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt will help to bring home the gruesome nature of war and I quote Franklin Roosevelt:

I have seen war.

I have seen war on land ad sea

I have seen blood running from the wounded.

I have seen men coughing out their gassed lungs.

I have seen the dead in the mud.

I have seen cities destroyed.

I have seen 200 limping, exhausted men come out of line, the survivors of a regiment of 1,000 that went forward forty-eight hours before.

I have seen children starving.

I have seen the agony of mother and wives.

I hate war.

I think it is important for us to understand that.

Mr Speaker, I represent the PNC/R, a party that has, throughout its existence recognised that inclusivity is the only viable path for Guyana. The party has pursued this in and out of Government. Our submission to the Constitution Reform Commission and the contributions which we made to its work bear testimony to this. We have always welcomed those who have joined us in accepting that Guyanese should irrevocably be committed to the creation of a truly multi-ethnic society. A society in which our diversity becomes a source of enrichment and strength rather than a means to divide us.

Friday 29th June, 2001

Mr Speaker, Guyana is large enough and naturally endowed with land, minerals, forest, et cetera, to ensure that we can all enjoy a comfortable and prosperous future. No single group has a right to monopolise or dominate all the space in Guyana. That is not a desirable or sustainable path. It is only greed and short sightedness that would prevent equitable access to the resources and opportunity for all Guyanese.

Mr Speaker, during this Debate, a number of Members on the other side referred to the issue of power sharing. In that context, I crave your indulgence to explain something which I believe is important for us all to understand. It is time for us to be frank and open with each other. I am aware that there is a risk that what I have to say will be deliberately distorted and misrepresented. However, I beg the Hon. Dr Bheri Ramsaran to listen very carefully to what I have to say.

Mr Speaker, except for a small number who came to British Guiana as indentured labourers in the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of our African ancestors came to Guyana as chattel slaves. At the time of the abolition of slavery, these ancestors, who had been instruments for the creation of wealth for the planters' class as well as for the construction of physical infrastructure, which has made up our coastal lands habitable and capable of economic exploitation were forced to use their meager resources to purchase abandoned plantations at inflated prices, in order to create for themselves a new life, independent of the plantations on which they served as chattel slaves.

Mr Speaker, it was the domination of all space by the planter class and their allies which frustrated and defeated their noble purpose and succeeded in converting their status from chattel slaves, to marginalised and discriminated against wage slaves.

Their descendants are intensely aware of the consequence of domination by any ethnic group in Guyana. Africans in Guyana have

Friday 29th June, 2001

never sought to dominate any other group and will not peacefully submit to domination.

In the words of the Rastafari,

there must be no bowing down

The call for a constitutional power sharing arrangement must be understood in this context, a truly inclusive approach must be accepted by all. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, if you are a regular reader of Sunday Stabroek, you would be familiar with the opinions expressed in the Columns by Dr Ian McDonald, Mr Jonathan Power, Mr David Jessop and Dr Clive Thomas. It should be evident that the advent of globalisation poses severe challenges for the survival of a small open economy such as Guyana.

Mr Speaker, it should be a matter of deep concern for us all, that this Budget gives the impression that the economy is on auto pilot. It seems that the primary focus is the implementation of public works projects which are all funded by the IFIs. We, the Guyanese taxpayers need to be convinced that this continuing escalation of our national debt since 1992, amounting to US \$711.3 million between October, 1992 and 30th September, 2000, is more than a facilitating mechanism for the appropriation of public funds for transfer to the favoured private pockets.

Mr Speaker, corruption and the drug trade, apart from undermining the moral basis for the maintenance of civilised living, will continue to stultify and eventually destroy our economy through continuous transferring of illicit earnings outside of the Guyana's economy. The laundering of these massive funds demands scarce foreign exchange, while at the same time robbing the economy of the vital financial resources which have been withdrawn. It is a no-win situation for the economy, though very beneficial for those individuals not caught and punished.

Mr Speaker, my colleagues:

- Hon. Mr Winston Murray and the Hon. Mr Jerome Khan dealt with Economic Affairs
- Hon. Mr Deryck Bernard dealt with Education, Culture and Information
- Hon. Mrs Backer dealt with Home Affairs
- Hon. Dr George Norton dealt with Amerindian Affairs and Region 9
- Hon. Mr Vincent Alexander dealt with Local Government and Region 4
- Hon. Mr Raphael Trotman dealt with Legal Affairs
- Hon. Mr Stanley Ming dealt with Human Settlements
- Hon. Mr Andy Goveia dealt with Housing and House Lots Distribution
- Hon. Mr Robert Corbin dealt with Public Infrastructure and Agriculture
- Hon. Mrs Volda Lawrence and the Hon. Miss Myrna Peterkin dealt with Human and Social Services
- Hon. Miss Lurlene Nestor dealt with Youth and Sport.

Our Regional MPs dealt with the Regions as follows:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--------------|
| - Hon. Mr Ricky Khan | - | Region No. 1 |
| - Hon Mr James McAllister | - | Region No. 3 |
| - Hon. Miss Amna Ally | - | Region No. 5 |

Friday 29th June, 2001

been presented is simply moving along the same development curb. What we need to do is to shift the curb, we need to make a step change, so that in fact, we can have sustained development and the fact is that nothing in this Budget has suggested how we will make that step change.

Mr Speaker, you may well ask where do we go from here? The answer is simple, the Government has got to stop being part of the problem and become part of the solution. *[Applause]* Just so, Mr Speaker, I could excite the already fertile imaginations of those on the other side who are pre-occupied with fire.

Let me close by quoting from the Song of Solomon, Chapter 8, Verse 6:

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm:

for love is strong as death;

jealousy is cruel as the grave;

the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I was watching the clock with a lenient eye, but I noticed that you have kept to your time.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I must first of all congratulate my colleague, The Hon. Minister of Finance for his well thought out presentation for the approval of the Estimates of the Public Sector and Budget for the financial year 2001.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

This is indeed a very special year, the start of a new century and the new millennium and I would hope a new beginning for our anxious nation.

Speakers on both sides have given their interpretations of where the close of the twentieth century has found our country and how and why, we have arrived where we are. These interpretations have varied widely, but all speakers without exception, have expressed the desire to find a way to propel our nation into a future of greater harmony and prosperity.

This, Mr Speaker, must be the origin of whatever system of coordinates we choose to map the path ahead. The final year of the second millennium has given us a serious message about the nature of the forces which determine our momentum. These are most strikingly highlighted in the agricultural sector particularly in our two major crops, rice and sugar.

The performance as pointed out in the Budget would show that in both sugar and rice the production for last year fell below what were targeted and what they were in the previous year. We had seen, prior to that, the rise of sugar and rice production over many years, and when we look at the fact that last year there was a production contribution to the GDP by sugar of \$846 million that compared to \$994 million in 1999, it was indeed greater than we did have, \$790 million, in 1998.

The point here, Mr Speaker, is that even when we would have done better than two years before, because we had set ourselves the target of higher levels, we not only feel disappointed but we recognised that it would pose difficulties in our abilities to deliver the goods that our country needs, and a similar situation existed for rice where the production also fell short of what we expected and what we need.

When I say, Mr Speaker, that these reflect the forces which

Friday 29th June, 2001

impact significantly on our development I am making the point that here we have two major contributors to our economy being subject in the first place to problems with the unpredictable weather. But if that was all, we could say, given better weather conditions, we will continue to move on. But, Mr Speaker, the very turn of this century also has highlighted and emphasized the process of globalisation and with that we find that as a small developing country, we are forced into the arena with large powerful nations, and that our main commodities must therefore be carried out, developed in such away that we can have the competitive edge that we need. This is where, Mr Speaker, our approach to these two major crops need to be highlighted.

We are aware, Mr Speaker, that sugar has been the cause for many of us to be here. We are aware that sugar made a contribution to the lives of a very large part of our population and therefore the fate of sugar must not only be measured in terms of the financial returns, but also in terms of how it continues to contribute to our people's livelihoods and living standards. That is why, Mr Speaker, there is a plan that has been developed for the expansion of the sugar industry. There have been many who are not happy with the fact that the government plans to expand and increase sugar production and the argument that is given is that sugar prices in the world market would not allow us to be competitive, that preferential markets are no longer guaranteed and therefore we should treat sugar as one crop that we should do less in .

To the contrary, Mr Speaker, it is vital that we move in a way that will allow us to capitalise on our competitive advantages in this important sector. Maybe it is not very clear that we do have these advantages, and this is what the expansion plan seeks to deal with. Unfortunately those who do not feel too happy about the expansion plan includes some of those whom we originally sought to approach for some financial support for the expansion and we have heard of the World Bank's counter proposals which includes a suggestion that in order to expand the Berbice Estates that the Demerara Estates

Friday 29th June, 2001

should be closed.

Mr Speaker, His Excellency the President has set out very clearly that that is not the way in which we will proceed. That we want to have the expansion carried out in such a way that the Estates in Demerara can continue to operate, that sugar production in Demerara might have to undergo some levels of rationalisation, but in the end we feel that with the steps that are intended that the cost of production here can also be kept low.

Mr Speaker, the World Bank and GUYSUCO have looked at some of these issues and we feel confident that an understanding can be reached with some adjustments so that the development plan, the strategic plan for expansion can be proceeded with.

Mr Speaker, there are other factors in the sugar industry with which we will have to contend.. We have to find ways in which we would be able to improve productivity, improve the quality of our product, we would have to increase efficiency with some of that coming through the application of new technologies. Mr Speaker, we also have to do that, bearing in mind the need to maintain the sugar industry as a major employer in this country and it is some of these balances that we would have to bear in mind as we develop these particular plans.

Mr Speaker, developments in Europe have been very discouraging in relation to what we have observed in the actions of the European Union. Shortly after we had a partnership agreement in COTONOU that was signed we were confronted with The **Everything But Arms** Proposal. On the surface it is something that we should feel happy that developed countries have thought of for the least developed countries, that is, to give special advantage to the least developed countries, but what we found in the application to sugar was that the European Union is seeking to give that preferential treatment to the least developed countries at the advantage of countries like Guyana, developing countries which are some way in the middle of the categorisation. Therefore, we have sought to

build partnerships with other sugar producing countries, developing countries, in order to approach the European Union to insist that they should be the ones to take on the task at their expense, and we hope that continued discussions would allow this. His Excellency the President, my predecessor, Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Foreign Trade did start that process in getting their other colleagues to move to have this process really set in place.

Mr Speaker, the rice sector is one in which a number of difficulties have been experienced in terms of financial questions. We must all be concerned when a major investor has to scale down operations and what we have is a situation where the market forces, that as we like to speak of, have gone somewhat beyond the controls of those who have to keep the sector going. We have a spiral in terms of the issue of indebtedness in the sector where at different levels there is a transference of who owes who, and this is one of the major challenges that we have to face.

It is true that some participants in the sector have been attempting to treat with this issue and government has moved to some of those in the banking sector to get their co-operation. Unfortunately, the responses have not been very positive but discussions are continuing. I met only one week ago with the rice millers and we discussed this issue, as indeed I did the week before with the rice producers and they have made some suggestions for follow up where some of the negative responses from the banking sector have been taken into account and together, immediately after the closing of this debate, we would be jointly pursuing once more a number of those initiatives with some new ones that would include the seeking of assistance from a number of international institutions to allow us to deal with the question of the indebtedness of those in the sector.

Mr Speaker, the rice sector also needs to be modernised in order to reach the levels of competitiveness that would be required in a globalised approach because we still have too lower the level of efficiency in our production. We still have too high a unit cost of

Friday, 29th June, 2001

production and here again as part of the strategy, these will be priority areas to be tackled.

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr Jerome Khan made the observations that these are serious national issues and would hope that the approach would not be of a partisan nature. There would be two levels at which we would need to proceed in pursuing these objectives. One would be in terms of those actively involved, the stakeholders, in what they would need to do as well as on a political level, where since these are major national policy issues, we would have to work on these questions together.

One of the Committees which are to be established in our Parliament, is that on Natural Resources and I want to indicate, Mr Speaker, that issues of the strategic plans for the rice and sugar sectors would be taken at the earliest opportunity when that Committee would have been convened.

Mr Speaker, while we are looking at what is taking place in Europe, we are also trying to get our colleagues within the Caribbean to also treat ... [*Pause*] with our desire for greater unity in this region because we have seen that attempts have been made to bypass some of the basic principles on which trade among ourselves should take place. We have made representations, we have negotiated and we have brought up at the relevant forums these questions. We have made a number of gains, but there are still a few remaining hurdles which we are actively pursuing.

Mr Speaker, not only rice and sugar, but the entire agricultural sector. My colleague the Hon. Minister Sawh, did point to some of these areas, but agriculture, as indeed many other aspects of life in this country, depend heavily on our ability to have our Drainage and Irrigation System operate efficiently and effectively. That is why you will observe in the Estimates of this Budget that Drainage and Irrigation is treated as a high priority, not only centrally, but that there are indications, some reflected in the regional budget, but some

Friday, 29th June, 2001

reflected in the national plans so that Drainage and Irrigation issues can be tackled effectively in different parts of our country.

Mr Speaker, the events of the last few weeks serve to remind us how vulnerable we are. The Hon. Member, Mr Lance Carberry referred to issues that have to do with global environment. One of the issues which have gathered a lot of attention recently, was the approach of the new US President on the question of Global Warming. Many of us who have participated in the discussions on climate change are greatly disappointed that here it is the President of a country, who had taken a very strong position earlier has turned around so drastically and has now thrown into great jeopardy, the whole set of issues which were proposed to make our planet a bit safer.

Climate change is, for us, a very important and relevant issue. It is not an issue that someone can simply put in the category of those new environmental issues. It is something which is critical to our existence. Our entire coastline is on the average one to two meters below sea-level. Sea-level rise would pose tremendously more problems to us. To tackle this, we have had a special National Committee, which is part of a Caribbean process following the Small Island Developing States conference in Barbados in 1994, the Small Island Developing States plan of action was established which placed climate change as one of its major issues, because for small islands and for low lying coastal states like Guyana, sea-level rise cannot really be something which we can turn a blind eye to. So under a Caribbean Programme Adaptation for Climate Change called CPACC, countries of the Caribbean have been working together and we have developed a number of guidelines. A vulnerability assessment was carried out to identify what would be our prime targets and as a result, we are in the process of identifying adaptation measures that need to be developed and, Mr Speaker, we have gone further to link all of these in what is termed a National Integrated Coastal Zone Management Programme. So that we take together the many activities that take place on our coastal zone and link them so that we can join efforts of the various agencies, departments, as well as organisations

Friday, 29th June, 2001

and individuals that are interested, so that we can tackle this together.

Drainage and Irrigation:

Mr Speaker, is one element of this adaptation. This response is a very costly exercise, but is also one in which constant vigilance is necessary and we have seen sometimes in spite of our best efforts, in spite of going through heavy expenses in order to have equipment in place, that sometimes through negligence we can have issues getting out of hand. I had cause just two days ago, to ask the Regional authorities to immediately move to dismiss two persons who, when they should have been opening kokers, were away from their posts and did not do what they were supposed to do. As a result we had, for a few hours, to drain excess water, representing a loss, and I hope they would not have any representatives, whether union or otherwise, to come to seek to have them not treated in that manner.
[Applause]

But this raises another point, Mr Speaker, and that is that, if we really have to take care of our drainage and irrigation processes then we would need the full co-operation of all of the bodies that can do so. The entities in the local government system as well as public spirited citizens, who we are sure, can be part of the monitoring processes because we have many difficulties and only that type of action can help.

We have plans ahead to move towards the enactment of a new Drainage and Irrigation bill and this it is hoped would allow a greater degree of cohesion in administering this area.

Land Use:

Mr Speaker, one important development in the last few weeks has been the creation of the Lands and Surveys Commission. This process is not merely to have a change in administrative arrangements, it also reflects a greater emphasis of the government and those involved in the sector to let the issue of land be treated in a way that

land-use can serve this country in a much more effective manner. We have too often seen that there are many conflicting aspects of use. There are too many situations where the best use of available land is lost, because one agency of government has given approval for its use and therefore, an important element in the work of the new Lands and Surveys Commission would be to direct land use in a much more scientific and organised manner.

We did have the preparations a few years ago of a base-line land-use document which has served to guide mainly hinterland operations, which guided the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and the Land and Surveys Commission, Ministry of Agriculture in terms of the allocation for different purposes. Actually that process has led to a testing period in sections of three Regions, Regions 3, 7 and 10, where that base-line land-use document has been utilised in order to involve the RDCs, NDCs and different stakeholders in a process of trying to use the information on the land to come to the right decisions. I think a number of proposals have come up from these three regions which we now intend to pursue.

Investment Diversification and Value added production:

Mr Speaker, much has been said about investment and the need to move our country forward. In our key sectors, we must not only look at efficiency and reduction of costs, we have to face the issue of Diversification and Value Added Production. Be it forestry, mining, rice, sugar, other crops, we have to go this way. We have too long been a primary producer of many key items and one of the targets of our economic expansion must be to have diversification and value added production given a higher priority. The inclusion in all of the plans, in forestry, in mining, of efforts in this direction are also being followed in the strategic plans being developed for sugar and rice. We hope that a number of new products would be hitting the markets, as indeed, package sugar is starting to get out and that we can also look to see the use of our raw materials for many different other

areas of production so that we can not only have added value but we can have more employment created in the process. We have to maintain this link.

It is in this context that the work in the intermediate savannahs project must be seen. It was slow in its evolution, but there are now eight major leases amounting to 60,000 acres which have been approved and six of the eight persons are in the process of taking the final steps to start their projects. We hope that these would then serve as a catalyst for further development.

NARI and GAIN:

Mr Speaker, - as a contribution to the scientific work in terms of having our country take the best advantage of development in science and technology, greater attention is being paid to NARI as the primary research institute in the country. NARI is not only now looking at particular crops, but you would have seen the developments in mushroom and organic agriculture which were referred to, and that NARI is being moved to play a role in supporting the efforts of farmers in different types of operations so that they can be helped in the early stage of their development.

Mr Speaker, that is also linked to our process which was kicked off just this very week, that is, the information networking system. In that system, which has been given the acronym GAIN - Guyana Agricultural Information Network, a number of institutions are being brought in with some support to obtain necessary hardware and a small team that is helping them to put their information together, so that there can be greater electronic sharing of information among agencies, among institutions locally, as well as to access what is available, in terms of science and technology, overseas so that we can help to guide the process here.

Mr Speaker, one other area which is linked to the major objective of poverty alleviation is the Poor Rural Communities Support

Friday 29th June, 2001

Services Project. This is targeting many different groups including groups of women, Amerindian Communities, youths and the landless. It includes provision of credit, the establishment of Water Users' Association and a number of D&I projects to allow lands to become available for cultivation. Already, this has brought benefits to several communities and individuals and we hope that this can serve, however small its contribution, as an input into the overall programme to reduce poverty.

Environment:

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member Mr Carberry, referred to sustainable development as something which must underscore and underline our national plans. But I want to say that for several years we have taken an approach which is being co-ordinated through the Natural Resources and Environment Advisory Committee, and which has brought out several results including the upgrading of many national plans in these areas. We now have a national bio-diversity action plan, which highlights key areas for the sustainable use of our rich bio-diversity and for its protection. We have National Environmental Action Plan which looks at environmental issues across the country for the next years. We have, as I mentioned, the programme for the adaptation to climate change, another full scale climate programme as well as the coastal zone management programme.

Mining and Forestry :

In the areas of Forestry and Mining, we have had upgrading of the policies and programmes in these areas, and I must say a lot of attention has been given to improving the techniques used by miners and foresters. We have completed the preparation of a national guideline for the forestry sector, to which all the foresters being granted permits would have to adhere to, and we are in the process now of developing a certification programme because the markets

Friday 29th June, 2001

overseas for forest products are increasingly demanding that forest products be certified and we are engaged with the Forest Products Association to finalise that approach.

Similarly in the area of mining, we have an ongoing programme which is aimed at improving the techniques to reduce turbidity and other impacts for mining. It is a slow process and I think we would all appreciate that those who are actively involved in these sectors are accepting these changes with great reluctance and that is why the process of having them come in place is not as rapid as we would have liked. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Time, Hon. Member.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Navindranauth O. Chandarpal: Thank you, Hon. Member and thank you Mr Speaker.

This brings me, Mr Speaker to what has been taking place directly in the area of our management of the environment. You will recall that in 1996, this Honourable House approved the Environmental Protection Act, which led to the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. That also was a move that was viewed with great skepticism by many. I remember some people telling me that this Act will close all businesses and I went at pains to tell them that we are, indeed, committed to the process of sustainable development, in which development must proceed, but in the course of that development, we must pay attention to our natural environment and, Mr Speaker, we have been working there.

We have had the support of the IDB in allowing us to have a number of experts brought in to help us and I am proud to say that in international competition to man the main office - the main directors

Friday, 29th June, 2001

of the Environmental Protection Agency - four out of five of these positions were won by Guyanese, who have all been carrying out their duties with great credit. Recently as we have approached the conclusion of the phase of that support, the IDB carried out an exercise to evaluate the progress that was made and I want to report to this Honourable House what they said:

The EPA has been very successful in the past eighteen months. It has accomplished its goals under the IDB Environmental Management Programmes (EMP). The main components and tasks of the Agreement have been satisfied and completed.

The organisation,

is staffed with competent people,

has created and implemented environmental quality control and environmental management systems,

has developed a legal framework and regulatory structure for environmental management and,

has assisted the Guyana Forestry Commission and Guyana Geology Mines Commission in their institutional and environmental management development, though to a lesser extent than was originally envisioned.

Mr Speaker, we are indeed poised at this time to create the environment that would be supportive of a major drive for development of our natural resources. It is therefore important, that we create the political environment that will allow this drive also to succeed. Too often, we lose opportunities because we have so many differences in our own engagements, when we should be combining our efforts to face the great threats that globalisation poses to us. That is why I cannot agree with what was said by the Hon. Member Mr Carberry about the approach of the Government in trying to

Friday, 29th June, 2001

move our country forward and what is said in the Budget. We have to recognise that the Budget is not the place where we spell out the major drives in policy. We have a policy framework that is in the making, that is in a number of processes including the National Development Strategy, these serve as the bases on which specific actions have been moving forward. We therefore have to see the Budget as saying what we are doing in this year - in this particular year - and to refer to those documents for what would be the major plans of our policies. If we look at that National Development Strategy, which I hope that we will be able to discuss at full length in this Parliament very shortly, I think it will help us to be able to work together in order to have common approaches to these major issues.

Mr Speaker, when I look at some of the arguments about what government is distributing and not distributing, I am reminded of the case of two rats and a cat with the cheese. I think some of us know that there were these two rats that found a piece of cheese and attempted to divide it. In the first division, there were two unequal pieces and they were wondering what to do. Neither of them trusted the other to make the division, so they called the cat that was passing. At first the cat was smiling very much with the rats while it bit off a piece of the larger one. Then the rats said, 'No, this is now smaller'. So the cat bit a piece of the other one, and he continued doing that until there was only one little piece left. Just when they were deciding which of the two to give the piece to, the cat said, 'No, this one is for my services'.

Mr Speaker, we have too little resources in this country that we should spend our energies in finding ways that will lead to the whittling down of those resources rather than in improving them. I would like to hope that in this new millennium, in this new age of threats to us, as a developing and small country that we will seek to find creative ways in which we can multiply the resources that are available to us. I would ask, Mr Speaker, that we use the mechanisms that have been established in order to do so. If you have to spend your time

Friday, 29th June, 2001

every time you have to move, in looking over your shoulder, you can only end up stumping your toes and falling down.

We need to be forward looking, we need to approach our work meaningfully with the common understanding that we all want to have progress in this country. Mr Speaker, if we are consistent in what we say in here, and what we do in the streets, I am sure that we will so influence the people of Guyana that we will all contribute toward giving full meaning to our Motto, *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*, so that we can together confront the forces of globalisation that are aiming to engulf us.

With that, Mr Speaker, I would like to support the Motion by the Hon. Minister of Finance and to say that it does give us a basis or hope for moving forward. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Hon Member.

The Hon. Minister of the Public Service

Hon. Dr Jennifer R.A. Westford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker as I rise to make my contribution to this 2001 Budget Debate I would like to echo the sentiments of most of the preceding speakers by congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance on his excellent presentation of the 2001 Budget.

Before I proceed, Mr Speaker, let me tell you that you will not have to be looking at your watch since I don't intend to be very long.

Over the past four days, we have heard exchanges from Hon. Members on both sides of the House and as the Hon. Mr Corbin so aptly remarked, we are all saturated. Most of the Hon. Members, it appeared to me and I repeat, Mr Speaker, *it appeared to me*, were mainly trying to gain political mileage. I must admit that there were some criticisms levelled against the government by Hon. Members of the Opposition and I am optimistic that necessary corrective measures will be taken to address these issues.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

We have heard allegations of poor or bad governance levelled at each other from both sides of this Honourable House. After all of these reminders, Mr Speaker, every Member in this House should be fully aware of where we came from, whether it be twenty-eight years or eight years ago and where we are today.

Mr Speaker, I would like to remind my Hon. Colleagues in this House that even though it is advantageous that we do not forget the past and be cognisant of the future, it is of vital importance that we focus on the future. A future of political stability will lead to social and economic development.

Mr Speaker, the question, Why am I here? asked by the Hon. Member, Mr Carberry is timely and of * much significance. It seems to me that some of us in this House have forgotten the mandate given to us by the citizens of this country, when they elected us to represent them at this highest forum. Mr Speaker, I hereby implore the Hon. Members of this House to desist from taking partisan positions and on issues of serious national importance, but let us, Mr Speaker, level objective criticisms to make constructive recommendations.

Mr Speaker, it is all well and good for me to make these requests of my Hon. Colleagues, but none of these requests will be realised if there is no trust amongst us. Trust, Mr Speaker, is the vital ingredient for meaningful productive engagements.

Mr Speaker, now that I have reminded my colleagues of our mandate and I hope that I have succeeded in doing so, let me now turn my attention to the Public Service. Mr Speaker, this government since its inheritance of an impoverished Public Service, has always been genuinely concerned about the workers' plight . It was because of the Government's deep sense of social responsibility and overwhelming compassion for the Public Servants' ability to eke out a reasonable existence that the minimum wage was increased incrementally from \$3, 137.00 in 1992 to \$19,000.00 in 2000. *[Applause]* Bearing in mind, Mr Speaker, that the percentage

Friday, 29th June, 2001

increases in wages were always higher than the inflation increases. Presently, Mr Speaker, wages negotiations are ongoing between the government and the unions and this may come as a surprise to most of the Hon. Members in this House, since you are not hearing any fighting and ranting. These talks are expected to be non-confrontational and fruitful. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, even though I have mentioned the vital salary increases of Public Servants over the years, this government has realised that we need to progress beyond the early days, when success was measured largely in terms of salary increases. To this end, government is recommending that the introduction and/or improvement of Other Employment Benefits to workers be included in the wages negotiations. Mr Speaker, a few of the proposed Other Employment Benefits are as follow:

Allowances and Advances

Low cost housing opportunities by establishing sectoral housing schemes.

Tax relief for public servants with more than three children

Introduction of a nest-egg retirement plan.

Allow me, Mr Speaker, to identify some areas and issues that have great potential to bring advantages to our country and citizens:

The unfinished business of reforming our Public Sector.

To transform it into a modern efficient organisation capable of contributing to national economic goal, as one such area.

Mr Speaker, all around the globe, governments are yielding to the forces of globalisation and trade liberalisation and are transforming their public services and fitting them for new roles. Mr Speaker, within CARICOM, as in the Commonwealth and North

Friday, 29th June, 2001

America, Public Services are embracing the necessity for change. Reform is seen as part of the change process through which this country will be able to compete in the global political economy, to increase its economic and social development and better position itself to meet the rising expectations of a modernising people. We here cannot be left behind without the entire country paying a high price. The reform we must take is not about reducing numbers only, and I repeat, not about reducing numbers only, it is about the adoption and application of new technologies to accelerate efficiency. It is about expanded opportunities, creating great satisfaction and motivation among workers it is about retaining skilled workers, and there again, I will repeat, retaining skilled workers since this seemed to be a preoccupation of one of the Hon. Members on the Opposite side yesterday, and providing a demand driven service. To this end, Mr Speaker, the government will soon be embarking on the initial phase of its public sector reform programme. The components of the initial stage are as follows:

An Overview Study of the Public Service.

Institutional and Organisational capacity assessments.

Building stakeholders consensus, and there it is, we are once again looking at collaboration and co-operation with stakeholders.

Capacity building and to this end the government has accelerated its training drive.

Designing a Compensation Reform Programme.

During this component of the Compensation Reform Programme, it is envisaged that the terms of reference for the long awaited wages policy will be formulated. There will also be modernisation and computerisation.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

Mr Speaker, this government sees the reform process as an integral part of development. It is when government has provided the enabling environment and attracted investment, when our Public Service serves the needs of investors, that we are on the way to greater wealth creation.

Mr Speaker, for us to accelerate the creation of wealth, our country must be seen as a favourable investment destination. Investors and potential investors seek assurances that an educated and the skilled labour force is available. They want to be assured that in our maturing we have evolved acceptable mechanisms to solve our political and social problems. They want to know that while the right to take industrial action is enshrined in our laws, we are judicious and considerate in any decision to paralyse the economic life of the country, retard production and escalate cost.

Mr Speaker, investors, whether local or international expect that a technologically competent and efficient Public Service will be available to provide services, explain the procedures and assist them to comply with regulations and advance their economic interest. To this end, Mr Speaker, the commissioning of a Public Service Institute is being analysed by the government. Mr Speaker, I have attempted to conceptualise this noble pursuit, locating it into a national situation and placing it within the global economy.

Mr Speaker, I believe that the pursuit of social and economic development for Public Servants will be following mirages unless the various stakeholders in our country are willing and ready to abandon petty differences and find common ground as we confront new and varied challenges.

Mr Speaker, efforts to beat each other into submission have not been successful in the past and will not be in the future.

Mr Speaker, let me remind the Hon. Members of this House that our maturity, our love for our country and our interest in advancing

Friday, 29th June, 2001

the cause of the people we represent must lead us to set aside idiosyncrasies and put the country first.

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr Jerome Khan during his presentation referred to Guyana as a lost ship without a compass. Mr Speaker, let me solicit all and, I repeat, Mr Speaker, all of the Hon. Members of this House to project themselves as compasses and thus as a unified crew and steer this ship, Guyana, on a course of political stability, economic development, and as the Hon. Member, Mr Kadir said in his address, social justice.

Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr Carberry graced us with a few verses from the Bible during his address. I would therefore, Mr Speaker, in closing, like to say these few words:

May the Good Lord touch each and everyone of us in this Honourable House and bestow upon us an abundance of tolerance for each other and the love for our country. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

The Minister of Health.

Hon. Dr Leslie Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, I stand this afternoon to give support to the 2001 Estimates as presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance. While debates like these are usually dominated by discussions on economic development, the goal of an economic system is to improve the social status of the people. From myperspective, this side of the House, there is no doubt that the social conditions of Guyanese have improved in the last decade. And whilst my colleagues on the other side may want to express some doubt, the people of Guyana have spoken and on March 19, 2001, have once again said that under the guidance of the PPP/Civic Government Guyana, indeed, has accomplished social development. The hallmark of the PPP/Civic Government is that they have focused over the last eight years on the social development of our country

Friday, 29th June, 2001

and this can be seen in the inputs that we have made in the last eight years in terms of social sector investment.

We must not forget, Mr Speaker, that not so long ago, in 1992, the last Budget presented by the PNC government, a mere \$3.3 billion was vested in the social sector in this country. A paltry eight per cent of GDP.

Mr Speaker, today, we spend, in this 2001 Budget Estimate, \$20.5 billion which have been allocated to the social sector, fifteen per cent of the GDP. Almost forty per cent of the expenditure appropriated in the Budget is for the social sector. It does not matter what song, it does not matter what mutterings one could make on the other side, you cannot escape the fact that under this Government, great emphasis has been placed on the social sector and the expenditure demonstrates that. *[Applause]*

In addition, the involvement of the other agencies, both national and international, contributes to further development in the social sector. We have succeeded in having a number of programmes financed by various other groups in terms of the National Social Development Programmes.

Mr Speaker, this is a government therefore that has shown that its priority is in the social development of our people. This has borne results in Guyana, as Guyana has gradually moved up in terms of human development index according to the UNDP Report.

Over the years we have had improvement in housing, in sanitation, in access to water, in education and in health. With respect to health, the rates of infant and maternal mortality, key indicators of development within the health sector, Guyana has made significant improvements. *[Interruption: 'I can give you those.']*

Mr Speaker, I hope that my colleagues on the other side would give me the same respect that I gave them in listening on this side of

Friday, 29th June, 2001

the House, but if we want statistics for the pre-1992 period, the maternal mortality rate was over forty per ten thousand, in the year 2000, the maternal mortality rate was eleven per ten thousand. If you want figures, I will provide them. In respect to our immunisation programme, today we have over ninety per cent coverage and Guyana is being quoted internationally as the best practice model.

The rate of malaria infection has been falling, rehabilitation services have improved and I will get the sum of these in a few minutes.

We have expanded the training programmes and we are introducing new categories of health workers. Development and good life require a healthy population. Over the last few years, we have focused on health sector reform, HIV/AIDS, malaria, immunisation, drug demand reduction, adolescent health, rehabilitation services and oral health. We have also paid close attention to the infrastructural and technological development of the sector.

Mr Speaker, we must create a health sector that is well managed that is capable of responding to new and more effective practices, to new procedures and information that maximises community participation, ensuring that all citizens have access to effective, efficient and equitable health care services. For this to happen, we will have to ensure that we build the infrastructure. This includes rehabilitating the present facilities, and/or construction of new facilities. We must also accelerate the technological development of the facilities and be able to implement a sustainable maintenance programme.

In addition, human resources issues must be addressed. We need more and new categories of health workers. There must be concerted efforts in capacity building with the sector. In this respect the 2001 Budget continues our tradition of investing in the sector, to build our infrastructure, to build our capacity, to improve our technological base and that is why I am encouraged, although I would have wanted more, that the Minister found resources so that he could

Friday 29th June, 2001

have allocated \$5.3 billion in the 2001 Estimates for the health sector. This, in comparison to what we used to have, shows that the PPP/Civic Government has placed the health sector as a high priority.

Mr Speaker, in 1991, the allocation in the health sector was \$704 million compared to the 2001 Estimates - \$5.3 billion.

Mr Speaker, let's look at the Regional Health Budget in 1991, under the PNC Government the health sector's allocation in the Region amounted to a total of \$176 million. In the year 2001, Budget allocation in Regional Health is \$1.5 billion. Compare those figures.

Mr Speaker, the Budget takes into consideration the fact that we must intensify the present programmes, but also that we must address other concerns in a more comprehensive manner. There are many public health issues that must be brought to greater prominence and over the last few weeks I have been talking about some of these. Environmental factors and lifestyle contribute to a great deal of our illnesses and to our health expenditure and these must now be brought to prominence and must not be dealt with in a peripheral manner.

Mental health and behavioural problems account for more than forty per cent of our expenditure and in all our history, until the PPP/Civic Government came, these were mere peripheral issues. Suicide is a public health issue, alcoholism, family violence, drug abuse, they are all public health issues that we must now bring to the forum. Under the PPP/Civic Government, these are issues that are being brought to prominence and this year these are going to occupy great attention by the Government. I note that in one of the presentations, I think by the Hon. Member, Mr Ravi Dev, it was said that whilst we talk about suicide, we have not allocated funds and whilst it is true that in the Budget itself, it is not itemised, it is covered in the programme of chronic health, the Division which has the mental health programme under its directorship. Alcoholism, the same thing. I might add here that in terms of the suicide problem, we are training counselors, we are also setting up a national crisis centre or crisis

centres throughout the country, the first which would be built this year in Region 6, at the cost of \$10 million and it is being built with contributions from the New Building Society.

Mr Speaker, a number of speakers from the other side have mentioned the problem of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is a global problem, it is a global emergency, it knows no borders, it knows no barriers, all races, all sectors of our society is affected by this and our country is threatened just like every other country. Our country is facing and confronting HIV/AIDS and this is just not another public health problem. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Speaker, HIV/AIDS is, as in many countries today a national emergency and we must work in fighting this plague together not separately and I hope that my colleagues on the other side and all of the people of this country will join hands and raise our voices together as we confront this modern day plague in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, the budgetary allocation for HIV/AIDS is not enough and cannot be enough even if we were to take the total national health budget for this problem and that is the crisis that we face. The University of the West Indies has estimated that for Guyana to implement an effective HIV/AIDS programme, we will require to spend US \$45 million annually. We do not have those resources and so as we approach the International Community, as we work with the United Nations and as we try to access the funds from the global aids fund, we will have to do this together as one people confronting this plague. So I am going to ask all of us to play our role, already NGOs, individual groups, other sectors in Government, are coming together and making a valiant effort to confront this plague. I note that the media has also joined the partnership. As we go out into our daily missions in this country, we must emphasize this problem, all of us, you and me, must make this known to the Guyanese people that we've got this plague in our midst and the only way we would confront successfully this crisis is that we stand together. We have to, we must work together, we must if we are going to win, but I know that in the past that we have done so when it came to crunch time. This is

crunch time for HIV/AIDS and I know that we will win.

Guyana and the Ministry of Health, we are not sitting idly by, we are fighting back. That is the message that I took to the United Nations. We will fight together, but we have other problems. Malaria continues to plague us and I note that some of the Hon. Members on the other side bemoaned the fact that malaria keeps increasing. In fact, Mr Speaker, we are bravely fighting against this infection as we have been fighting for many years. It is important to note as the Hon. Member, Miss Jennifer Westford said, we must know where we came from. The fact of the matter is, between 1981 and 1992, there was not a malaria programme in place, it was the PPP/Civic Government that brought back and implemented a malaria programme. *[Applause]* It is because of that programme that by 1994, we were able to confirm ninety-four thousand cases per year. That is so because an effective programme has been brought down. In 1999, Guyana re-introduced a rural malaria programme the goal of which was to, within five years, reduce by fifty per cent the incidences of malaria. But although the plan was to reduce by fifty per cent in five years time, in two years at the end of 2000, we had reduced the infection rate by sixty per cent, forty-eight in 1999 and a further twelve per cent in 2000 and our goal is to reduce another fifty per cent in 2001.

Mr Speaker, while we are successful on these traditional programmes, we have other emerging problems, as if HIV/AIDS was not enough. In the Caribbean, we are discovering hepatitis C, hepatitis E are problems, dengue is a problem. We are confronting all of these problems, we are not waiting for these problems to overwhelm us. The Government of Guyana is responding before hand. A good example is the response that we have with what is known in Guyana as bush yaws. Already research has shown that we have, with increasing activities in our forests and with the fact that the countries bordering us have these problems that we are bound to have cross-over effects and our research programme, our screening programme already have identified these things.

Other traditional problems:

Filaria.

We have introduced a comprehensive programme and we are able to do more and more smears, confirming more and more cases and treating them and, therefore, we are able to reduce the pool from which transmissions occurred. This year, we would be introducing the medicated salt for filaria and a similar thing would happen in terms of our dental and oral health as we introduce fluoridated salt.

Mr Speaker, our infrastructure and technological developments are being looked after. This year the Port Mourant Hospital, the Skeldon Hospital, the New Amsterdam Hospital, the West Demerara Hospital will all benefit from new X-rays that are being installed. Laboratory facilities are being placed in a number of our institutions. Mabaruma, Lethem, Port Mourant, Skeldon, New Amsterdam, West Demerara will all benefit.

The Blood Bank laboratory equipment, back up equipment are being improved, the Georgetown Hospital maintenance programme is being improved but we have not given up on our infrastructural development and so at Georgetown Hospital whereas in 1995, more than seventy-five percent of our in-patients were housed in inadequate and uncomfortable, dilapidated facilities, now we have reduced that down to less than thirty percent, and this year we are going to begin the implementation of a programme to put up a single new in-patient building.

New clinics, new health centres are being constructed and I have the pleasure, Mr Speaker, to say that in collaboration with PLASTICOS of Canada, we will establish a modern state-of-the-art Burns Unit. Mr Speaker, cancer continues to be a major problem in our country. A cancer treatment centre was planned in the year 2000, and we made a beginning. This year, we will complete the building and we will start caesium radiation treatment, the caesium equipment

Friday, 29th June, 2001

has already arrived.

So, Mr Speaker, we are taking a comprehensive approach to help. I will not stand here this afternoon and say that we have a perfect health system, we have a health system that has many deficiencies, we have a health system that has a long road to travel with not only greater input in our physical technological development but also in staffing it.

In 1992, we had sixty doctors working in our country, today, we have more than two hundred and fifty doctors working in our country. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, more than eighty doctors are working in our Regional hospitals and yet it is not enough, but for the longest number of years, Mibicuri Hospital, for example, had no doctor. I am glad to say that within two weeks time, Mibicuri Hospital will have its own resident doctor.

Mr Speaker, somebody said that you will have a cancer centre, but who will run it. Not only have we entered into a collaborative arrangement with the Cuban Government, but now we are also recruiting staff for the new centre. I am happy to say that this morning, I was able to have discussions and come to an agreement with an oncologist, who will take up his appointment here next month to run the cancer centre. *[Applause]*

And so, Mr Speaker, it is obvious that whilst we have deficiency, the health sector has been more responsive, the health sector has been improving and within this next period of development in the PPP/Civic Government we will transform a decimated health sector that we inherited into a health sector that can compare well with those of our CARICOM neighbours. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, for us to do this, our people will all have to work together and we all will have to contribute and that is why, when just

Friday, 29th June, 2001

before coming in here, I heard that Mr Edwin Singh, a resident in Lethem will be, maybe even now as we speak, placing equipment in his building, in the industrial centre to start a manufacturing plant. I can see that our people are all making their contribution. I hope that my colleagues will do the same in whatever way they can so that we can develop our country.

Before I move on and before I complete this, our social sector can only develop if we continue our economic development and in terms of GUYSUCO expansion plan, we must note that the modernisation cannot proceed, if the intent is to constrict. The expansion programme is an integral part of the modernisation programme. In modernising our industry to become more efficient, we must ensure that we do not do so at the expense of the workers. We must not do anything that will put hundreds and thousands of workers out of a job.

Mr Speaker, the last Parliament made some important advances, not only in Constitutional Reform, but in the functioning of this Parliament. The Public Accounts Committee was one of our success stories. It worked well effectively. It can perhaps do even more in the examination of our accounts, to ensure that the way we spend our money conforms to proper practices and that is why I hope that not only in Central Government, but at all levels of government, we are accountable. That is why when I see in our Local Government - several of our Local Governments - Region 4, for example, that operates an economic venture, a loom pit project, and I see an income of \$20.9 million between 5th December 1998 to the 1st January, 2001, \$20.9 million, and expenses of \$19.3 million and of that \$19.3 million, an expense of \$15.9 million, that is just a block figure with no vouchers, no accountability, just that we had expenses of \$15.9 million, not only on this side, but both sides of the House must ensure that this type of thing does not happen.

Mr Speaker, that is the task we have, it is a challenging task to build our country, we all must play a role. So with this contribution,

Friday, 29th June, 2001

Mr Speaker, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and I want to say, let us all build our country, let us move forward as one people, one nation, one destiny. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member.

The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Hugh Desmond Hoyte: *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, we are here once again to indulge in the annual ritual. Every year, we get a new Budget, but in reality, it is the same thing. The words are paraphrased and you get different numbers, but what is called a Budget remains substantially a document of obfuscation. It is not enlightening, it tells you nothing.

You know, Mr Speaker, last year, the Government commissioned a report, it was done by a World Bank Team and the name of the Report is *Re-orienting Public Expenditure to Serve the Poor*.

The Government suppressed this report. They dared not publish it last year or the early part of this year, because it would have contradicted everything they said in their elections campaign and it contradicts everything that is being said from the government benches in the course of this Debate, in particular, it contradicts severely, all with flights of imagination of the Hon. Minister of Health.

Listening to him, one gets the impression of a country where the health services are very good, they are all very healthy and we are all involved in enjoying pretty high standard of health care.

Mr Speaker, let me deal first of all with the Budget. In the document I referred to, some attention is paid to the Budget, the way it is put together and what it achieves, and I would like to refer to page 11 of that report in which the following assertion is made:

The Budget is the primary mechanism available to the Government to signal its policy intentions to investors,

Friday, 29th June, 2001

to the public and to its own staff

That is why when the Hon. Member, Mr Chandarpal was saying that the Budget cannot contain everything and so on, I was a little startled, because the Budget is the map. It is the sign-post, it signals Government's policies and the way the Government is going to get about implementing these policies. Then this document went on to say, talking about the Guyana Budget, the Budget of the PPP regime. The weaknesses in Guyana Budget process have been identified in successive public expenditure reviews by the World Bank even in the NDS. The Budget is developed without sectoral objectives or priorities, provides no opportunity for Government to assess new programmes against the existing ones, and is subject to arbitrary adjustments during formulation and execution.

That really is the primary criticism I wish to make of the Budget.

In fact, Mr Speaker, what we get in a jumbled set of ideas, no coherence, no clear indication, as to how objectives are going to be met and certainly no indications of inter-sectoral linkages and co-ordination.

Mr Speaker, the Hon Minister said that the Budget had certain objectives. They are stated in many different ways, but they all add up to the same thing in the end. It is to move this country forward, it is to create a good society, in which we are all happy and prosperous and it is to develop the infrastructure to provide us all with a good life. But the problem is that the Hon. Minister proceeds on assumptions that are unreal, untrue and unsubstantiated.

The Government is in a denial mode, because the realities are not in accordance with what formed the foundation of the Budget's expectations.

Mr Speaker, what are these realities. On page 18 of the Budget statement, the Minister said that in spite of all the difficulties in 2000, the Government was able to realise success in the

implementation of policies and programmes. It is interesting to know what this success is. The economy continues to be in a state of sharp decline as my colleague the Hon. Member, Mr Winston Murray pointed out. You look at what is happening with the rate of growth and you see a troubling picture with the economy plunging steeply from 7.9 per cent in 1996 to 6.2. in 1997 which in itself ought to raise alarm bells to 1.8 per cent in 1998, allegedly to 3 per cent in 1999, which nobody believes and in 2000 again, a negative growth.

That is not a once-off problem in the economy, that is something systemic, and if the government gets itself entrapped in a denial mode and keeps saying, well, oh, political problems, people objected to election results, people are marching and those are the reasons, this government is never going to be able to come to grips with the fundamental issues affecting our country.

The Government would have known, Mr Speaker, that it did not qualify for HIPC assistance. It did not meet the benchmark and the programme targets, but that the people who control the HIPC resources took a political decision. What people might say, a humanitarian decision, but it was political, not to allow the effort to fail in this country.

I will tell you that I know all the reasons for this political decision, but they decided that notwithstanding the failure of the Government to meet the programme targets, they would give debt relief. So the Government knew that the economy was not performing and that there were serious structural and other differences or difficulties which had to be addressed.

We heard in the Budget Speech, Mr Speaker, about all the wonderful infrastructure work that was done. We are told that infrastructure have been improved and millions of dollars have been spent. Let us assume the accuracy in the number of millions of dollars, the fact remains that the infrastructure of this country has not been significantly affected for the better. This same report commissioned

Friday, 29th June, 2001

by the Government makes the point that drainage and Irrigation, sea defences, roads, all of these areas are in decay, are in serious difficulties. When you learn to read, you will understand what I am talking about because I will lend you the report.

Now, Mr Speaker, let me read so that they can understand, not Hoyte say this, not the PNC say this, it is the technical team brought in by the Government, which had access to Government records and which in the normal way would have had discussions with Government Officials:

Frequent breaches to Sea Defences pose a major risk to settlements and economic activities. The road network is not maintained adequately. Flooding threatens the economic development of some of the most productive regions in the country.

You heard the Minister talking about how many drainage and irrigation canals were built and all of that. He evensaid, they built at Buxton and Enmore and even now as I speak, the people are up to their knees in flood water, because the reports are not true. Well, my dear, colleague through the Hon. Speaker, the purpose of the system is to cope with the heavy rains, so that areas would not be flooded. It is not to provide an opportunity for people to skim off public funds and put them in their pockets or in the pockets of their relatives by blood or by marriage.

Mr Speaker, there are many other references in this book here to the bad state and lack of maintenance of infrastructure in the country, but what is important is what do you get from the money that you spent. It is a point that we make all the time from these benches, and it is reinforced by the World Bank document. It says,

both the Government and donors can see that many projects while apparently well designed fail to disburse or achieve their intended objective in the cost effective

Friday, 29th June, 2001

manner.

These concerns have intensified recently because of weak economic growth during the last two years and because of HIPC Initiative. Now there is an implied criticism in this report about the HIPC Initiative because that HIPC Initiative puts pressure on the Government to divert money to the social sectors at the expense of infrastructure, at the expense of those parts of the economy, which would stimulate real growth and development.

Denial:

Mr Speaker, it is no use remaining in this state of denial. What I am saying here is that when we look objectively at our situation, we find that we are in deep economic trouble, but the Government benches do not accept this. They believe we are doing well but there is no sector in which we are doing well.

The Hon. Member, Mr Xavier, got up here with remarkable courage and said that there is no corruption in his Ministry, and the Tender Board Procedures are fair and honest, and I believe, he is the only person in Guyana who believes that.

Every year, the Auditor General complains about the process, up to in the last Auditor General's Report, he complained about his inability even to track the due regularity of the Tender Board Procedures and complained about the various assurances he was given, that the government reform the Tender Board Procedures, but up to now it hasn't happened and he said almost in despair, it doesn't matter how well designed the government's policies might be, how well intentioned, how beautifully crafted, from a technical point of view, nothing is going to happen until the government is able to restore the morale and the professional confidence of the Public Service. No government will be successful if the Public Service is in disarray and demoralised and we have a Public Service which is in disarray and which is demoralised.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

The Hon. Minister of the Public Service boasted about the pay of Public Servants. She said the Government moved the minimum wage to \$19,000 per month. Mr Speaker, in this very Public Buildings, there are government employees, who are getting less than that. So where is the correlation between what the government says and puts out as it propoganda and the reality.

Now, we have to do something about the Public Service, we have to treat with the Public Service, we have to establish a proper relationship with the Public Service and there can be no doubt in anybody's mind that the Public Service needs to be modernised, but in that modernisation process, the public servants themselves have to play a key role.

I know that the Government has been tinkering with Public Service Reform, there is a concept paper on Public Service modernisation, there is the application to the IDB for a loan, but the fact remains, it doesn't matter how many technical people you can bring in from abroad, it doesn't matter how many experts you bring in, you are not going to be successful with Public Service Reform until the principal stakeholders in this country participate with the government in identifying the problems and agreeing on the nature of the reform. The World Bank itself in a report in 1999, examined some of these reform programmes and concluded that thirty-three per cent of them failed absolutely and of the others which appeared to succeed, they were not sustained. One of the conclusions is that there was not a sufficient local involvement or to use the buzz-word which is so popular among these technicians, the ownership of the process was not in the hand of the local people. So, I am saying, it is useless to continue pretending that all is well, that the economy is in good shape, that our agencies and institutions are in good shape, and all the things that are necessary to sustain an economy and propel it to growth are functioning well. That is just not true.

Mr Speaker, the economy is being sustained by grants and foreign inflows. Without those grants and foreign inflows, the economy would

Friday, 29th June, 2001

be in a parlous state. I was about to say collapsed, but I don't believe that myself. Unless the government is able to attract substantial grant money, it is not going to be able to fund public expenditure at any reasonable level. It is not going to be able to do that and therefore, what the government should be concentrating now on, is how do we put this economy in proper shape. It is no use bleating and wining about globalisation and trade liberalisation, those are facts of life and I heard the Hon. Minister, Mr Rohee saying that, Oh! here is sugar protocol, these are legal documents and you get all kinds of wonderful things out of these legal documents. Well, I would have thought that he was around long enough to understand that in the final analysis, what move things in the international sphere is politics.

On the matter of international rules, you see what happened, for example, with Kyoto and the Americans. There is a book I read called the Imperial Economy by a man named Robert Karo and his thesis was very simple. The Imperial Economy he was talking about was the American Economy and what he was saying is that America is so powerful that she makes rules and she breaks them when it suits her purpose.

I want to tell Mr Rohee a story from my own experience, when I was ACP spokesman for sugar. Every year, we went to Brussels to negotiate the sugar prices under the Sugar Protocol. The fact of the matter is that there was no negotiation. Although the Protocol said the price should be negotiated every year, taking into account the relevant economic factors. The European Union gave a price to the ACP countries and I remember in 1982, I think, it was or there about, when the ACP countries decided that thing can't go on, because in the particular year, there had been steep rate increases, which had trenched into their expected profits. So there was this big argument when these two committees met. They weren't getting any place, so it was suggested that the two Chairmen and one adviser would meet privately in a room. The two Chairmen were myself and the European Chairman, was a man named Dhal Sagar, and my Technical Adviser was Mr Edwin Carrington, who was at that time the Deputy

Friday 29th June, 2001

Secretary General for the ACP. When we got into this room: I started off by saying this Protocol says, that we should negotiate prices every year, but you people don't negotiate. You just give us a price and he laughed very cynically.

He said, "you know the Protocol is in English and it is in French".

I said, "yes", and

He said that both versions are equally valid.

I said "yes".

He said, "it might well be that the French word *negotia* might have a different meaning from the English word *negotiate*."

Well, having delivered himself of that joke or criticism, call it what you will, he then said in a serious vein, look Mr Hoyte, we have given our farmers a four per cent increase, and we can't give you more.

Straight political consideration has nothing to do with that protocol and what it says about negotiating and taking into account economic factors. As far as I know, the Europeans never took into account freight, rates in attempting to arrive at sugar prices. So, the point I want to make to the Hon. Member and persons on that side, is that, you have the theory of things but you also have to understand the practicality of world affairs. That is why, we need to strengthen our diplomatic missions, strengthen our foreign Ministry and have highly trained competent people heading these agencies and looking after our interests, because in the final analysis politics is going to be a determining factor in decisions which are going to be made. You will find that despite all the agreements, certain countries will get a preference over other countries because they have made the political connection and do the political work.

Mr Speaker, we are facing a very difficult situation where

Friday 29th June, 2001

everybody has said that the Budget Speech unfortunately says nothing about how we are going to deal with these issues which the Minister himself raised - WTO, Globalisation, CARICOM, Common Market and Single Economy. It is not sufficient to indicate that these things are going to happen. How are we gearing ourselves to meet the challenge? What are we doing first of all in terms of our own internal organisation? What are we doing in terms of organising the economy in the new dispensation?

The criticism that was inherent in the point I made earlier was that it is not sufficient for the Minister to say that he is going to do a number of things to move this country forward. He is going to restructure traditional industries, but he doesn't say how. He talks about sugar and a brief reference to bauxite. He can make all the investments in sugar, all the investments in bauxite, that is not the issue. That is tinkering with the problem. How are you going to modernise the economy, place it on a modern basis so that you get the maximum value added from the economic use of the assets that we have? Where are the proposals for encouraging and stimulating downstream industries? For example, where are the proposals for linkages between agriculture and manufacturing? Where are the proposals for agri business? Where are the proposals for marketing agencies, which ensure that whatever we produce, finds a market both locally and externally?

We are told that there is a five-year plan. What I would say, Mr Speaker is that is the best kept secret in Guyana and it is not easy to keep a secret in Guyana, because a Guyanese secret is something everybody knows. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, ultimately there are some things we have to do:

We have to design a coherent macro-economic policy.

We have to let people know what are the broad objectives and goals of economic policy.

Friday 29th June, 2001

Where is it we are going and what is it we want to do with this economy as a whole?

You need in our circumstances to finalise the investment code. For years, you look at every IMF document, the Government says, it is going to have an investment code. USAID finances a project, there is an investment code. It is not happening and it is sending a bad signal to the would-be investors. It doesn't matter how peaceful a climate you have, if you don't have in place the rules to give an investor, a sense of comfort and an understanding that he is playing on a level playing turf, well then you are not going to get investments. We have ultimately to create a climate of governance in which not only the foreigner coming here, but more particularly every Guyanese can feel secure. The only way every Guyanese is going to feel secure is if he or she has a stake in this economy. *[Applause]*

Housing:

Now, he did talk, Mr Speaker, about housing and the number of houselots distributed. I want to say that that is really a fiction. The question is not the houselots, the question is houses, roofs over people's heads. So that the Hon. Member could spend all his time until dooms-day giving out houselots to people, who can't build any house, our situation would remain the same or even worse.

I want to challenge the Minister, not merely to give out houselots but to give people title to the land. I am inclined to the view of the Argentinian economist, De Soto, that for countries like ours, if you really want to move forward, and to move forward in a sustained rapid way, you have to give people property, you have to give them property rights, you have to give them that stake. *[Interruption: 'That's why you didn't do it.'*

"No, I didn't do it, because, you know, we were busy admiring you. [Laughter]"

Friday 29th June, 2001

Now ultimately, Mr Speaker, we need investment, we have not been getting investment and we can argue from now until doomsday, as to why not? What is important, is devising a policy that would attract investments. That calls again for the involvement of major stakeholders, because the future growth and development of this country is something which affects us all.

I do not believe that at this stage, you will have many differences of opinion on the need to attract investment or the need to develop our economy, and therefore there would be no good reason why we cannot forge a national consensus on some of the things that we need to do, and to do immediately. *[Applause]*

Dialogue:

Mr Speaker, we have almost surreptitiously, imperceptibly reached a significant stage in the political evolution of our country and I refer to the on-going talks between President Jagdeo and the Leader of the PNC/Reform and Leader of the Opposition. The strength of those talks lies in their informality. That is where the strength lies. That there is no formality about the thing with hundreds of advisers, photographers all over the place and I personally believe that the significance of the start of those talks is going to dawn upon people not too far from now. I am not a wild optimist, I am a cautious man. I believe, however, as the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the success of these talks will depend upon what results they bring about and I am satisfied, in my own mind that clearly the talks have been good - fruitful. They promise a great deal. *[Applause]* Things have happened. The various Committees have worked and as far as I am concerned, Mr Speaker, the agenda for these talks can never be closed. The agenda is an open agenda and I suspect that as the days go by, the talks can burgeon into an arrangement which involves other players, but which does not lose the strength of the informality which I have referred to.

We have had a long debate, many things have been said, many

claims have been made and many counter claims made, many extravagant things said and denied, but, Mr Speaker, at the end of the day, I believe, that most of the people have no where else to go. They belong to here and they are going to die here. So I would say that the duty to keep it intact devolves on all of us. That duty is not going to be discharged by pointing fingers and making allegations and writing letters to the Press, as to who did what and when. Since my good friend and colleague, Mr Carberry, made so many references to the Bible, it has crossed my mind at this point, what is it? We all have sinned and come cross of the Glory of God.

Mr Speaker, I believe, that we have an opportunity for a fresh beginning, a fresh start. All I say, let us seize the opportunity.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Hon. Members, I believe that's a rear event to see both sides cheering equally and loudly.

The Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I have, over the years, perused, read, and debated in excess of thirty budgets. Of all the budgets I have debated, I found this one before me presented by the Minister of Finance, Mr Kowlessar to be comprehensive and heated.

In fact, this Budget has an innovation which apparently has been missed by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, probably generally missed, in which it sets the structure for investment and I want to avert to page 27, where it states legislative, institutional and infrastructural mechanisms for investment. It also on page 41 talks about Budget Measures. It gives us projections as to the growth, the pages which ought to be read within that thirty-seven in addition to the Budget itself.

For a question which must be posed this afternoon is, where did this Government started from? One has to go back to 1992: an external debt of US \$ 2.1 billion, in which case from every dollar

Friday 29th June, 2001

earned, ninety-four cents had to go to pay our debt; sea defences were collapsing; there was no drainage and irrigation; there were no roads; there was virtually no infrastructure. As I stand today, I don't care who writes what and presents what, you travel across this country and there is a physical and conspicuous change for all to see. *[Applause]*

In talking about investment, I mean, if investment is not forthcoming as is expected, one has to logically address the reasons and one of the reasons given, and it is a good reason, whether in Guyana or any other part of the world, that the investors have got to be satisfied that there is stability and peace in the country and in my own opinion, that is the primary prerequisite for anybody to bring their money and to invest in Guyana. That being so, I take up the Hon. Leader of the Opposition: let us work together to bring about that stability. *[Applause]*

We faced many problems, innumerable. The political situation is complex. Mr Speaker, our democracy is still fragile: citizens' expectations are very high, they want to live in peace and stability. Citizens have initiatives and I would like to put on record almost immediately the investment locally between 1997 and 2000, G \$21.6 billion which is US \$122 million, in a number of sectors including manufacturing, mining, tourism, fisheries, agriculture, forestry, services, information technology and construction. In manufacturing alone \$7.5 billion, I can give you all the details, I have it all here, but what is more, Mr Speaker, locally people can invest and they are ready and willing to invest, but again like foreign investors, they want to ensure that there is peace and stability. So if we play this record incessantly in an unbroken way, it has to be played because that is the situation in the country. But I share the conviction and the optimism that there is great hope for Guyana and Guyana still has a magnificent future. People want to move ahead with their lives, they are fed up with conflict, fed up, just fed up. You hear people talk and they are saying that they don't know where the politicians want to take them.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

A new political environment is being constructed and I think it is for the good of the country, when we can meet and talk, exchange ideas, make proposals and give suggestions. For the people, their views are, they have spoken as two separate and distinct elections, they have spoken virtually at three separate elections.

I think out of these exchanges in the National Assembly, out of our debates, we must resolve to move this country forward. Today has been a special day in the National Assembly and I like how it started, notwithstanding some of the criticisms, which I do not share, of the Leader of the Opposition. You know that is his right and I expect him to criticise. I do not expect anything otherwise.

There were several occasions during the Debate today when speakers from this side of the House were chaired on both sides and the first speaker to receive that treatment in the National Assembly today is Mr Lance Carberry. It shows that we have the capacity and we have the will and we can avoid being acrimonious and hostile to each other. If we can do that in this National Assembly, why we cannot do it in every other corner of the country? I don't want to name any. If you truly love this country and care for this country and love its people, then we have to be honest to ourselves and let our words be matched by our deeds. What important people do, others are likely to follow. What we say bears influence, what we do bears greater influence. I speak from a profound depth of conviction. There is no room at all to promote hostility, Guyana is a plural society and we have lived for long years in this plurality and we have proven and shown that we are capable of so doing and we shouldn't allow any from any side and anywhere to undermine and threaten that harmony which can still be constructed in Guyana.

We must come out of this Budget, resolved to create a climate for development and progress. The new political culture of dialogue which I am glad, was injected into the Debate by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and I want to tell him and I think I can tell him, I have been in this House before him, he has an important role to play and I

Friday 29th June, 2001

say it publicly. *[Applause]* Not only that he has that role to play, I think he can play it and play it well. The note upon which he chose to end was reassuring and I want to urge him as Leader of his Party to let us not allow conflict, confusion and chaos to get the better of this country and our people, let us keep completely out of it.

The dialogue between His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr Desmond Hoyte, is the way forward. Both sides may have been criticised or have been criticised by both sides, if you understand what that means. *Wha Hoyte is doing deh* with the greatest respect, I just refer to how it is being said outside. *Jagdeo is weak*, I want to come and say what I think and what I hear, but I want to say, the action taken by His Excellency the President of this country, is an act of courage and equally, I want to say the response of Mr Hoyte is an act of courage. *[Applause]* At this juncture of history and I move slightly to the philosophical, *destiny has put these two men to take this country out of chaos and confusion*, they must perform to the admiration of the environment. *[Applause]*

I understand what has happened from 1992 to 2001, I know everything, I was here and I speak not from book knowledge, I speak from personal knowledge. I personally attempted in this House to move to reconcile, to show tolerance, to give and take and sometimes to even compromise and that was done in the best interest of this country and its people and I cannot see why others cannot do that.

It was frightening to look at the post-elections period of 2001 and we must ensure at the end of this Debate that those days never ever return otherwise all these exchanges and debates and reeling out of figures would have been a waste of time, a sham, a mockery, not in the interest of the people and the country. Our democracy is fragile, but we are living in a democracy, we must together strengthen that democracy. I have never succeeded in the last six/seven years when I prepared my speech to go to it and I have to always take out because I respond based on what is said and that is how you debate.

What is taking place internationally, globalisation, liberalisation, I don't think the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is right, cannot be ignored and must not be ignored. They are ganging up against the poorer countries ...[*Interruption: 'He said that.'* "*Alright, if he said that then we are at one*"].

... remove trade barriers, Everything But Arms, destroy the poor countries, forgetting that thousands live from rice and sugar. Let me say this, this Government is committed to the workers of this country. My party emerged from the working class and the last thing it will do, if it ever does it, is to do anything against the working people whether it is sugar, rice or bauxite. [*Applause*] It is based on that resolution, that decree, that commitment that we say examine the workers' proposals and other proposals (ALCOA) in bauxite.

The International challenges have to be confronted and I agree with the Leader of the Opposition, we have to strengthen the institution in our country to confront. You see I debate a little differently, I don't disagree with everything, I have to agree with something, if it's agreeable. I don't come with an agenda of criticisms, an agenda to attack, in fact I come with no agenda. I listen to what the contribution is and I respond accordingly, but let me say notwithstanding these adverse international developments or trade deficit, the overall balance of payments experienced in Guyana and it is in the Budget, a turnaround, on page 9, from a deficit of US \$4.4 million in 1999, to a surplus of US \$17.1 million in 2000, that's specific.

Real Estate recorded a phenomenal growth of 25.6 per cent, this is due to the upsurge in housing construction and it is not true that only land is given out, thousands of houses have been constructed and they are visible everywhere.

Mr Speaker, *bank deposits grew by 16.4 per cent compared to 3.9 per cent in 1999 and that is on page 10. Credit to agriculture by 7.3 per cent changing the decline of 9.9 per cent in 1999. So*

from these statistical showings, we can clearly overcome.

We need at the domestic front to work together, to create a stable environment for economic growth. The rule of law is paramount for building of confidence and hope. We must construct an environment of civility and I want to say Guyana can adequately provide for all. We must confront the challenges and pursue an aggressive programme to build our country. Our programme provides for job creation and the improvement of social services. Employment will reduce poverty and enhance the quality of life. The government places great emphasis on education because we need the skills consequently to emerge from our educational system. I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr Deryck Bernard, he is right that there has to be a link between education and development, it makes sense to me and it's a principle I support.

We got to see what our needs are and to so gear and craft and construct our educational programmes and policies so that we can turn out the skills so badly needed. We must not forget that improving skills and productivity are the only durable basis for increasing incomes.

By the same token, Mr Speaker, rapid growth requires greater competitiveness on international markets. Export growth is essential for employment creation. Guyana's economy is too small for domestic demand to be the main dragging force for economic growth. So we have to look outward as many successful economies around the world have done. In the measure that our exports find market and prosper, our domestic economy will expand as well. In other words, we've got to have an aggressive marketing institution, scouring every corner available to us, to sell our produce so that we are not confined and circumvented to the conventional and traditional market.

Mr Speaker, His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo pointed out in the historic Presidential Summit in October, 1999, that,

Friday 29th June, 2001

the turning point to creating a favourable business environment is the implementation of simple, clear economic rules, regulations and swift decisions by public institutions. For this purpose a new investment code will be tabled shortly.

I read from my document there just now, because the Leader of the Opposition said something to that effect. I wrote it before you said it. So that the investment code will be out, it is already drafted, it is already being discussed, consultations are going on so that when it finally reaches the corridors of the Chambers of this National Assembly, it would have come out of some degree of consensus. So I give the assurance that the code is in the making.

If you read page 27 of the Budget, I think Speakers before me referred to the fact that GO-INVEST is being strengthened, restructured. This institution will be aggressive in pursuing investors. The required infrastructures will have to be in place, the sum of \$18.7 billion is projected to be spent on the Public Sector Investment Programme. I am forced to ask the question, how these facts have not been discerned from the Budget Speech. We recognise that investment is crucial for our development, but we have to construct the right image for this country and market it aggressively every year. All investors and applications have to be expeditiously dealt with so that there is no slowing up of the process and I want to say, Mr Speaker, both the Government and the Opposition have to work for peace. This is a pet phrase, *Guyana is for all Guyanese*. What is distressing to me personally, and I say it, and this is me personally during the Debate, is the care and scrupulous care taken to see if a development is done in an area, what was the racial composition of that area. We got to come out of that kind of pettiness, and that is why I was heartened today. One of these days, we should have a little group to look from one end of the country to the other end of the country, where work was done and I am certain if that report comes out, this nit-picking will come to an end, because you would have found that the Government of Guyana, the PPP/Civic Government

Friday 29th June, 2001

have been fair to all the people, all the country, all the time.
[Applause]

So I say, the Opposition has a role, the Government recognises its role too and is committed to a programme that delivers social justice. The Government is not insensitive to the fact that ours is a plural society and we have to govern for all and provide equitably for all the people of this country. Let me just put on record that in excess of \$2 billion have been provided for poverty reduction ...
[Interruption: 'Where?' "On page 39 and because of our prudent physical policy, the level of international reserve stands at US \$199 million. I am sure we will not find ourselves in the position where we become bankrupt and unworthy credit wise".
[Applause]]

Recently, Mr Speaker, the Merchant Bank was opened, deepening the financial system and that is positive evidence of confidence in the Government and in the country. I will tell you what I have found: as soon as there is an air and sign of peace and stability, people start moving almost spontaneously. Why don't we give the Guyanese a chance to live, to work, to build this Guyana in a true spirit of togetherness.

I don't want to speak much longer because the Leader of the Opposition was very concise. I did not agree with all he said. Having heard me, I am sure he will change his mind on a few of the things he said [Laughter] and we can talk. I want to urge, Mr Speaker ...

Oh, let me say one word, I think it was raised by Minister Murray with respect to ... [Interruption: 'Mr ']

[Laughter] " Mr Murray, I gather he is congratulated - former Minister Winston Murray"] procurement legislation. The legislation is completed but it collides in many respects with the new Constitutional Reform that deals with procurement. That amendment does not simply say, there will be a procurement Commission, it has

Friday 29th June, 2001

many other objectives and other things that are expected of the Commission. Consequently the legislation has to bow honourably to the supreme authority of the land - the Constitution. What is being done at the moment is that those areas where there are collisions, or conflict being are considered removable as ... *[Interruption: 'When?'* "You know I wouldn't give you date. I wouldn't do that, you want me to be honest. I want to tell you that every step conceivably possible will be taken to bring it as early as possible".*[Applause]]*

Let me conclude on a high note that the deliberations in today's National Assembly hold good for the future. *[Applause]* They show signs and give indications and signals of strong possibility of absolute and unequivocal reconciliation and I discern from the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition that we must work together and build this country and truly and finally and rightfully *Put Guyana First*. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.*[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member.

Hon. Members, we have now completed the first stage of our consideration of the Budget for the year 2001, with the conclusion of this general Debate on the Motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure.

We have given full consideration to the Budget. Our debates occupying five full days covering approximately thirty-four hours with sixty-two of the sixty-seven Members of the Assembly making contributions. *[Applause]*

I would like to congratulate all Members of the Assembly who spoke and particularly those who made their maiden speeches. *[Applause]* I think you will agree with me when I say that those Members on both sides of the House, who made their maiden speeches have impressed us all. *[Applause]*

Friday, 29th June, 2001

I would like to thank all of you for the co-operation which you gave me. Many thanks also to the Deputy Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mrs Clarissa Riehl and to the other Members who occupied the Chair and presided during my temporary absences including the Hon. Member, Mr Vincent Alexander, a new Member of the House.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and to the Chief Whips, the Hon. Members, Mr Feroze Mohamed and Mr Lance Carberry for the diligent efforts to ensure the smooth flow of this Debate.

I would also like to thank, on my own behalf and, I am sure, on your behalf as well, the staff of the Parliament Office, under the guidance of the Clerk, for the dedicated efforts which ensured that the work of the Assembly was concluded in a successful manner.
[Applause]

There is still a week to go to complete our deliberations on the Budget for the year 2001 and we look forward to their continuing support.

I would like to express my gratitude and that of the Assembly to the Press for bringing our Debates to the public.. I would particularly like to thank those Members of the Media, who did not leave at 5.00 p.m. after their Headlines were obtained, but who remained right up to the end of the close of each evening's debate. I am sure that the public is looking forward to Press Reports of our deliberations for the coming week and that the Press would continue its good work.

Hon. Members, I would like to seek your agreement for a formal brief, but important task and this is to resolve ourselves into Committee of Supply now, not to begin consideration of the Estimates, but to consider and dispose of the Report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply. Is that agreed?

[Members replied in the Affirmative]

Friday, 29th June, 2001

Now, that I have your loud support, the Assembly will resolve itself into the Committee of Supply.

Assembly in Committee

The Chairman: Hon. Members, the Assembly is in Committee of Supply. I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of Supply met yesterday and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2001 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed a Resolution on the matter and copies of the Sub-Committee's Minutes, its Resolution and a Schedule, with its allocation of time for the consideration of the Estimates were circulated to Members last evening. I now call on the Minister of Finance to move the necessary Motion.

Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar: Mr Chairman, I move that the Committee of Supply agree with the Business Sub-Committee in its Resolution.

The Chairman: Thank-you, Hon. Minister.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

The Chairman: The Committee of Supply has been allocated three days for the consideration of the Estimates. The consideration will be in accordance with the Resolution and Schedule of the Sub-Committee. Let the Assembly resume please.

Assembly resumes.

ADJOURNMENT

The Speaker: I take this opportunity, Hon. Members to wish you all a nice weekend and a happy Monday holiday.

Friday, 29th June, 2001

The Assembly now stands adjourned to 14:00 H on Tuesday,
3rd July, 2001.

Adjourned accordingly at 17:30H