

National Assembly Debates

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

43RD Sitting

14:12h

Friday 29 February 2008

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

Speaker of the National Assembly

Members of the Government (42)

People's Progressive Party/Civic (41)

The United Force (1)

The Hon Samuel A A Hinds MP

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications

The Hon Clement J Rohee MP

Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Shaik K Z Baksh MP - (Absent)

Minister of Education

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey MP - (Absent)

Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Health

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Esseq)

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Minister of Amerindian Affairs

*The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP

Minister of Finance

*The Hon S Rudolph Insanally OR, CCH, MP -

Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt MP

Minister of Housing and Water

The Hon Robert M Persaud MP - (Absent)

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Agriculture

The Hon Dr Jennifer R A Westford MP

(R#7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Minister of the Public Service

The Hon Kellawan Lall MP

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

*The Hon Doodnauth Singh SC, MP

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

The Hon Dr Frank C S Anthony MP

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

The Hon B H Robeson Benn MP

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics

**The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP

Minister of Labour

The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Minister of Human Services and Social Security

The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP - (AOL)

Minister in the Ministry of Education

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

Minister in the Ministry of Health

*Non-elected Minister **Elected Member from TUF

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The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP

Minister in the Ministry of Finance

The Hon Manniram Prashad MP

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

The Hon Gail Teixeira MP

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal MP, Chief Whip

Ms Bibi S Shadick MP

(R# 3 – Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP

Mr Albert Atkinson JP, MP

(R# 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)

Mr Komal Chand CCH, JP, MP

(R# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP - (AOL)

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

*** Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP - (AOL)

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

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Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Water

***Non-elected Member

***Mrs Pauline R Sukhai MP

*Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of
Tourism, Industry and Commerce*

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP

Mr Norman A Whittaker MP

(R# 1 - Barima/Waini)

Members of the Opposition (28)

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

Mr Robert HO Corbin

Leader of the Opposition

Mr Winston S Murray CCH, MP

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl MP

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Mr E Lance Carberry MP

Chief Whip

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP

Mr Anthony Vieira - (AOL)

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP

Mr Keith Scott MP

Miss Amna Ally MP

Mr James K McAllister MP - (AOL)

Mr Dave Danny MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Aubrey C Norton MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Ernest B Elliot MP

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(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Miss Judith David-Blair MP

(R# 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Mr Mervyn Williams MP

(Re# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Ms Africo Selman MP

Dr John Austin MP

(R# 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)

Ms Jennifer Wade MP

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Ms Vanessa Kissoon MP

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

Mr Desmond Fernandes MP

(Region No 1 – Barima/Waini)

(ii) Alliance For Change (5)

Mr Raphael G Trotman MP

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan MP

Mrs Sheila VA Holder MP

Ms Latchmin B Punalall, MP - (AOL)

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr David Patterson MP - (AOL)

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

Mr Everall N Franklin MP

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs

Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

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PRAYERS

[Clerk reads the Prayer]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, His Honour, The Speaker is unable to attend today because he has the influenza which really has him in a severely poor state.

I wish to announce also that we would have a break at five o'clock for one hour for the main meal and we will have another break at 8:15 for fifteen minutes.

This was agreed by both sides of the House.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

(i) GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET FOR 2008

Assembly resumed the debate on the Motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2008

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, we will now resume the debate on the Budget for Year 2008. I believe the first speaker for today is Mrs Volda Lawrence.

Mrs Lawrence ...

Mrs Volda A Lawrence: Mde Speaker, I rise to speak to the Motion brought to this House by the Honourable Minister of Finance, a Motion which seeks approval for Estimates of the Public Sector and the Budget for the Financial Year 2008.

However, having been in this august House for sometime now, I have on several occasions witnessed estimates presented for a financial year and only a few short months later seen several requests for supplementary allocations to the very Budget.

Therefore Mde Speaker, as these 2008 Estimates are laid in the House I ponder as to whether these figures here truly represent the estimates for the 2008 Financial Year. Some examples of the past five years, 2003 to 2007, I witnessed that some twenty-seven supplemental provisions were brought to the House as follows:

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- In 2003 there were seven with a total of \$13.012 billion.
- In 2004 it was not a bad year; we only saw two totalling \$2.025 billion.
- In 2005 however, there were nine Supplementary Provisions totalling \$23.228 billion.
- In 2006 there were five provisions totalling \$10.356 billion and
- Just last year 2007, there were four provisions totalling \$11.504 billion.

All totalling some \$60.125 billion thus surpassing the allocations for those years

Of course Mde Speaker, it is a well known fact that during any given financial year there is from time to time the need to have an increase in line items allocations because of unforeseen incidences or changes in programmes or in the marketplace. In our case one cannot but think that one of the two things has taken place:

- (a) That figures presented in Estimates laid in this National Assembly are not a true representation;

or

- (b) That the Budget Department keeps getting the total expenditures wrong.

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For me, I submit to (a) that there is a deliberate act to deceive the people of this land and the Members of this House. For many of the line items for which a Supplemental is sought ranges from an increase of 30 – 100 percent of amounts allocated in the Budget. I sincerely hope that these amounts before us for 2008 are not a repetition of previous years and that the Minister has adequately made provision for each Sector in the Budget. The Minister outlined six promises which he and his government aim to keep. I am particularly interested in the fourth one, which reads on Page 3:

We will continue to give practical expression to the belief in compassion, fairness and equality of opportunity which are deeply held core values of this government by increasing targeted assistance to help the most vulnerable in our society and those most impacted by changes in the national and international economic situation.

I therefore challenge the Honourable Minister and his government to deliver on these promises beginning with:

- Firstly, ensuring that the farmers of Buxton be given a fair price for their crops and trees. *[Applause]*
- Secondly, immediately returning to the Guyanese people, especially the poor, the excess of over \$12

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million made on the collection of Value Added Tax for 2007.

- Thirdly, honouring the commitment to pay Party Scrutineers and Assistant Chief Scrutineers the agreed \$25,000 and \$35,000 per month. *[Applause]*
- Fourthly, organise a public consultation on food prices.
- Fifthly, seek to establish a Prices Advisory Council to address comprehensively from a supply side perspective, the level of prices in the economy; and
- Sixthly, going the whole nine yards in applying stronger monetary policy instruments to control liquidity and influence overall price levels. Further, going the whole nine yards to implement measures to impact effectively on the availability and marketing of food supplies which are critical factors behind the rise in food prices.

The disconnection between the problems of the people and the government can be seen in the latter's deafening negative response in the most part, to their pleas for relief.

On Page 48 the Minister says that it was his government's prompt move towards the end of 2006 and early 2007 to zero-rate an extensive list of basic necessities for the purposes of the Value Added Tax. I believe the Minister was trying to be humorous here, maybe raise a laugh in

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these trying times. For every Guyanese knows that it took marches, symposiums, country-wide community meetings, picketing, television programmes, commentary and a tremendous amount of letter writing coupled with a call by the Opposition Leader, Mr Robert Corbin to shut this country down before the Minister came to this Honourable House and announce the zero-rating of some items. *[Applause]*

Today, we continue to witness the economic suffering of the poor and working class people; it is tremendous Mde Speaker, it is real. The horse has already bolted from the stable.

The people of this country, with what little strength they have left, are calling for the lowering of the 16 percent Value Added Tax, but what they are getting instead, is the Hon Minister coming to this House with a long list but only three of those items, flour, peas and washing soap are of any significance in terms of helping the poor and bringing relief to a populace with a terribly depleted spending power. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, may I ask the Honourable Minister, why he believes that items such as:

- Casareep
- Cassava bread
- Farine

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- Locally produced nuts
- Toothbrushes

to name a few from his list of items relate to basic goods?

The people who sell casareep, cassava bread, and farine to a large extent are small traders like those women who planted on the dam in Buxton. *[Applause]*

So come on Mr Minister, get real.

Mde Speaker Economists and Social Development experts agree that the GDP gives an overall picture of the wealth of a nation, and growth in GDP provides an indication of the increases in that wealth. However, it has been established beyond reasonable doubt, that these indicators are not sufficient guides for the level of human development and ultimately the quality of life within a nation. Indeed one would ask why the positive economic performance of 5.4 percent GDP has not translated into an improvement into the Guyanese people's economic and social welfare. There is one thing of which we are sure, that is, after hearing the Honourable Minister read his 2008 Budget, the conviction of many fellow Guyanese has been strengthened towards the migration syndrome that is for sure. Further, let us not forget the overseas remittances in 2007 to the order of US\$286.8 million *[Applause]* which has substantially helped to sustain families in Guyana. This amount speaks to those remittances which pass through the system. Just think of those not accounted for in the system. To my mind, it is a blessing that Guyanese have access to those monies, if not,

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what would life for the family be. It must be noted also that for this year's 2008 Budget, it provides for a total of US\$277.2 million in remittances.

Families - The principle teacher and transmitter of ethical, social, spiritual and religious values is indisputably the core of our social fabric. It is no surprise therefore that many of the social ills that now imperil our society, can be directly traced to the disintegration of the family unit.

The factors indicate that one of the major contributory elements to this disintegration of the family is the disadvantaged economic situation of low income and single-parent families especially households headed by single females.

I would also like to cite the case of stigmatised communities such as Buxton where some of the men have moved to other areas and have started new families to the detriment of those left behind.

It is good to note that according to the Hon Minister of Finance \$100 million has been allocated for the establishment of a Fund to provide support to vulnerable single-parents.

We on this side of the House ask the Hon Minister of Human Services and Social Security not to allow this allocation to be taken up in high consultancy fees, Power launches and workshops [*Applause*] but rather that this Fund be allocated to any single-parent who is economically

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disadvantaged and who is faced also with Value Added Tax of 16 percent and high increases in the basic food items.

We urge the Minister of Human Services to go further and seek to have the National Family Policy brought to this National Assembly without further delay, to work towards a National Parenting Programme which will ably deal with:

- Educating young people on the role of parenting and the ideals of parenting; and
- The National Counselling Programme.

Minister, I do hope that you revisit the many recommendations which I brought to the 2007 Budget Debate and that consideration be duly given.

Mde Speaker there is another vulnerable group in our society which must be singled out for special attention; *Families Affected by HIV*. If time is taken to examine the living conditions and in particular the situation as it affects children, one would find that the situation is a desperate and deplorable one. One would find most homes with a single infected surviving parent and three, four or more children having to care for this parent. The role of the child as a caregiver is complicated because of the meagre income, if any at all, and the inability to attend school.

Some children are also HIV positive. What is the future for persons, especially children in these conditions? Is not the ugly face of HIV-obvious in the desperate cycle of poverty

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and disease in which these homes are doomed to remain unless we act and act now? We of the PNCR-1G commend the comprehensive health care for persons living with HIV/AIDS but, we must address yet another vulnerable group. We must support HIV infected children among those who are stricken with HIV, the most innocent, the most defenceless and the most vulnerable of our children. Their affliction was never their choice, they knew no fault, it was never their mistake, if indeed there was one. Some have lost a parent or both, some suffer discrimination from their peers; many are from households that are immersed in poverty and distress. Beautifully produced and acted television programmes are good but not nearly enough, hence our resolve must know no bounds in seeking to provide for these children. Thereby, we propose the following:

- (i) That we remove those HIV infected children who are in receipt of Public Assistance and place them into an entirely new category with different conditions for Public Assistance.
- (ii) That each HIV infected child be given a special monthly allowance towards his/her care and maintenance.
- (iii) That in so doing every measure must be taken to protect the privacy of these children and most of all, to make provision for a hostel for children orphaned with HIV/AIDS.

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Let us not Mde Speaker find ourselves lacking in making provision for these angels amongst us.

The Elderly -The Senior Citizens are with us now and will always be with us. Therefore, guided by this fact, we must increase our efforts to assist seniors beyond that of an increase in Old Age Pension.

While it is noted that there is a significant increase in Old Age Pension, let us not forget that these pensioners must also deal with the 16 percent Value Added Tax and increases in basic food prices.

But more than that, we must address our minds to constructive programmes for our elderly and perhaps, there is no better time than now.

As I posited last year during the debate of 2007 Budget for:

- The introduction of a food debit card to help our elderly and needy citizens cope with the high food prices.
- Putting in place the Commission on the Elderly;
- Work to begin on a Senior Citizens Policy Development Report; and
- The establishment of the National Policy for Senior Citizens.

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Many minibuses refuse to take our elderly. Any thought on how to help them? Something the Minister may want to think about. In this way Mde Speaker, we can ensure that our plans and programmes are geared towards complementing the aged and aging in our midst.

National Insurance Scheme Reform - I find it very unusual that in the Minister's 2008 Budget Presentation, the Minister did not comment on those principle recommendations made by the National Insurance Reform Committee in the 7th Actual Review which are:

- Increase the age for the receipt of Old Age Pension to 65 years and Public Servants who retire at 55 years be allowed reduced pensions which would be eliminated in about ten years.
- The Scheme should be allowed to invest overseas.
- Aggressively insure approximately half of the country's workforce who are self-employed.
- Increase the number of contributions required to qualify for a pension.
- Absorb the Dependants Pension Fund into the National Insurance Scheme by a formula satisfactory to all stakeholders.
- Change the definition of relevant wage so that the amount of the pension is reduced.

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- Introduce or increase the following six benefits:
 - (i) Benefits for age related ailments
 - (ii) Funeral benefits
 - (iii) Constant Attendance Benefit
 - (iv) Dental Care Grant
 - (v) Maternity Grant; and
 - (vi) Disablement

Honourable Minister of Finance, the government has a responsibility to explain these proposed conditions to the Guyanese people, and whether they propose to embrace these recommendations or not.

They must act without any further delay to avert the real danger of the Scheme running into financial difficulties.

Our Women -The establishment of the Gender Equality Commission. Since the last Parliament this Commission is still to be appointed. This is an important Parliamentary Commission and stakeholders are left hanging. We therefore call on the Minister to hasten the appointment of this Commission so that the many burning issues facing women could be addressed.

The Interim National Commission on Women has not been reconstituted. Women make up a large number, more than half in our society and women's rights must be properly

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addressed. Their human rights should be looked after, thus improving the status of women will bring double dividends and contribute to improvement in their lives and that of the country.

Equality, Development and Peace- the Theme of the United Nations Decade for Women's Conference in 1985 is even more relevant today in 2008. Parliament has not come through for its women. Look around this august body and see the number of women who are members. As policymakers, there needs to be more gender awareness. As I said before, women represent more than 50 percent of the population and are central to the development of our country. *[Applause]*

We cannot be further marginalised and our needs must be catered for. We call on Cabinet to respond to the CIDA Report and the University of Guyana to be more proactive and to make the Women's Studies Unit more viable and really relevant to the Guyana situation.

Development of the Poor - Traditionally the small man, whatever his potential for entrepreneurship, has been denied access to funding because of the lack of collateral, not only in Guyana but the world over. It is against this background that more should be put into attracting persons to become entrepreneurs by providing more funding in conjunction with education and training.

We are convinced that this will be an excellent way of empowering people of providing wealth-producing options

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for the common man; of getting some people out of poverty and onto the road of financial independence.

Governance and Accountability- It would be remiss of me before I conclude, not to mention governance, accountability and institution reform.

While the Minister addressed Institution Reform, it is noted that good governance and accountability were overlooked.

Mde Speaker the bedrock of any society is the observance of highest principles of good governance. Irrespective of our political makeup, our economic abilities, any government must ensure that it contributes to a legacy of integrity in all its affairs of public places where transparency and accountability are seen as the only accepted modes of behaviour. The standards must not be compromised hence I call on this government to show by their actions their commitment to the development of solid democratic institutions, the promotion of ethical conduct in public and private sectors, respect for human rights and the even-handed enforcement of the rule of law.

The Guyanese people need to be effectively represented irrespective of race or political persuasion [*Applause*].

At Paragraph 4:18 on Page 25 the Hon Minister addressed development of our country's infrastructure.

In Paragraph 4:19 Page 26 indicated that a total sum of \$6.2 billion was budgeted for roads and bridges. In this area,

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even more so than in others, the Guyanese people are not in receipt of value for money.

The Auditor General's Report indicated that a large percentage of these monies are lost or fallen through the cracks due to non-accountability. As much as 20 percent of this allocation will be lost due to:

- Overpayment
- Works not done according to specifications
- Shortage of materials used; or
- Incomplete work

I can assure this House, that the perpetrators of these acts, whether the contractor or the public servant, are in many cases allowed to go unpunished. In fact, the people's interest is not taken into account.

For example Mde Speaker, in 2007 the Auditor General indicated at Paragraph 17 of the Executive Summary of the 2005 Audited Accounts that -

With respect to payments on contracts, several of the large Ministries such as, Education, Public Works and Agriculture has overpayments on various contracts. One such instance was the construction of the male dormitory at President's College which was jointly funded by SIMAP and the Ministry of Education. There was an apparent

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overpayment of \$32 million due to payments exceeding the actual work at the time of inspection. [Interruption]

The Deputy Speaker: Time Honourable Member.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mde Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member fifteen minutes to continue.

Question put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Deputy Speaker: Continue please Mrs Lawrence.

Mrs Volda A Lawrence: Mde Speaker and Honourable Members of the House, this report was submitted two years after this transaction. I can assure this House that there are many Ministries, Departments and Regions where these acts are carried out unashamedly and there is no action taken by those responsible.

In the interest of the Guyanese people, transparency and accountability must be strong pillars in our development pursuits.

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In concluding, in my opinion, the 2008 Budget presents us with loads of figures, multiple promises. Will this year, be the year when promises are kept, when plans are implemented impartially or will this be another example of flattering to deceive?

In the interest of the development of our country, I sincerely hope not.

It is my hope that the Debate which began yesterday will engender positive responses and that the many suggestions and recommendations will be effectively addressed by the government, as it seeks to *stay on course and advance the transformation agenda*, thank you. [Applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon S Rudolph Insanally: Mde Speaker, Honourable Members of this National Assembly at the onset of my intervention in the debate, I would wish to congratulate most warmly the Honourable Minister of Finance and his team for the impressive presentation. As with all good Budgets, the contents are clear and concise yet comprehensive enough to address all sectors of our Nation's business. I had assumed of course that my physical proximity to the Honourable Minister would have entitled my Ministry to a larger share of the pie; evidently I was wrong in my assumption. None-the-less, I am very

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pleased to support the motion before us and to give further assurance that we will work very hard to discharge the mandates which have been entrusted to us.

Without any doubt, the most important of these mandates is the preservation of our national sovereignty and territorial integrity, for without peace and security on our borders; there can hardly be any hope for domestic development. As we are painfully aware, we continue to face challenges on two fronts; the east and west with both Suriname and Venezuela. Happily, as Minister Singh noted in his presentation, 2006 saw the HYPNOS Arbitral Award which delimited definitively, the maritime boundary between Guyana and Suriname. To quote the President-

This represented a triumph of reason over force

I would add to that, it was a triumph of diplomacy and also the rule of International Law. But what does that Award mean for our economy? As the Minister said, I think new and promising vistas are opened up for economic and social development because we would be able to return to the exploration and exploitation of these areas which are known to be quite rich in natural resources. So our task in the Ministry this year, in this regard, in terms of Suriname, will be look to the implementation of the Awards Provisions but very importantly this year, the Ministry will be preparing a National claim to the United Nations Commission on the limits of the continental shelf up to a distance of 350 nautical miles from our baseline. So in addition to this Award, we would be opening up the

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possibilities of access to these resources beyond our territorial sea.

We have just completed a Desktop Study and we are now in the process of consultation with our neighbours, and this is necessarily so because the Caribbean is a large archipelagic sea and there is great deal of overlap. So we have to work to find agreement for a common submission which is due, I understand, by 2009, so time is of the essence.

Very importantly too Mde Speaker will be our concentration this year to effect an update of our maritime laws because these can be considered somewhat out of tune and we are working with the Attorney General's Chambers to prepare new legislation in this year. I am told that the Draft is now in its final stages. This legislation will replace the old Maritime Boundaries Act of 1977 to allow us to access all the rights available to Guyana which the Act did not do under the UNCLOS; the Law of the Sea and all relevant Conventions and Treaties. So we are making an effort to modernise these laws. At the same time we will be revising our bilateral cooperation with Suriname but in fact, although it has been in suspense, there are areas of cooperation because as we saw in the recent incidence of piracy, through mutual consultation, we were able to nip some activities in the bud.

If I can turn briefly to Venezuela I would have to admit that our relations with that country continues to be somewhat of a paradox. On the one hand we have a fairly high level of cooperation in the sense that we now are a beneficiary of

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PETROCARIBE. There is even talk of a gas pipeline from Venezuela to Guyana to Suriname, and of course Venezuela has been very helpful in the dredging of our rivers and I may add, was one of the first countries to help when we were overwhelmed by the flood in 2005. On the other hand, there is this persistent threat to our sovereignty, which so long as it hangs over our head, will seriously limit our prospects for development and as we have seen we have had recent incursions by land, sea and air which have inhibited our march to progress. But I am pleased to say that through dialogue, we are now in discussion to sign several Memorandums of Understanding which will govern the behaviour of the parties whenever there is a threat to peace and stability.

For the information of the Assembly, I should let them know that we ... Guyana has proposed to Venezuela, a new Good Officer to succeed the late Oliver Jackman, because we feel that the UN procedure offers a good safety valve for our interactions with Venezuela but ultimately, we have to find a way out of the debacle. We have to find a way to put the controversy finally and forever to rest. So our policy aim continues to be to try and take the dialogue and the negotiations to a higher level, on the argument that with hemispheric integration and an embryonic South American community of nations, this claim has become obsolete and anachronistic

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One simply cannot speak of a unified Latin America and the Caribbean and at the same time you have spurious territorial claims in the hemisphere.

A quick word about our relations with CARICOM: We continue to work for a more closely interwoven Region. Now that the Single Market has been established, we are in the process of now working towards the single economy and at the upcoming inter-sessional meeting in the Bahamas later this month, in fact next week; Guyana will seek, at the highest level to give further momentum to intra-regional cooperation as provided for in the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Given the President's lead responsibility for Agriculture, special attention will be given to the sustained promotion of the Jagdeo Initiative which has as its priority objective, the assurance of the Region's food security and the expansion of its agricultural exports. You will understand that with the introduction of new global trade arrangements that have eroded preferential treatment for our goods and services, our diplomacy is now challenged to find safe niches within an increasingly liberalised economy which is closing its doors to countries like ours.

Mde Speaker at the same time, a strategic necessity for Guyana in its new and altered circumstances in the enlargement of its political and economic space towards Latin America and the wider Caribbean; The Rio Group Summit to which the Minister had referred that was successfully held last April under Guyana's chairmanship,

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is an indication of this new orientation. When this Summit convenes next week in the Dominican Republic, Guyana will be applying for full membership of this important group in our own right [*Applause*] since it gives us a much stronger voice in international affairs. At the same time we are expanding our horizons in search of additional opportunities for trade and economic cooperation.

In this context, our relations with Brazil will assume extraordinary significance with the signing of the Partial Scope Agreement between our two countries and the completion of the Takutu Bridge. In a few months, the road will be opened to increased traffic of visitors and goods and services. As a nation, we must ready ourselves for these developments so that they can be harnessed to our economic future. A priority task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this year will be to plan in cooperation with other relevant Ministries and agencies for the exciting possibilities which lie ahead of us.

The fresh focus on our hemisphere including our northern neighbours, Canada and the United States will not be hastened to add to the detriment of our traditional ties with the rest of the world. There may in fact be a need, as in the case of the European Union, to extend our diplomatic outreach beyond the customary western half to the eastern part, to what is called the New Europe for many of these countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland are now new economic powerhouses and also key decision-makers within the Union. For better or worse, an economic

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partnership Agreement between CARICOM and the EU will soon be in place. Its successful implementation however, will be the immediate challenge to our diplomacy. Similarly with China, India and other countries in Asia also in Africa and the Middle East, we will be continuing our diplomacy in the promotion of South-South cooperation.

Mde Speaker; and this is to depart a little from the high level of international relations to our diaspora, because this is yet another important activity which falls to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and where we are seeking the full involvement of Guyana's extensive diaspora in our national development. Already, many of our compatriots are contributing significantly to our economy. Not only as has been recognised by the previous Speaker are the remittances, a welcomed addition to our Budget, but many re-migrants encouraged by the government's liberal immigration policy, are investing in Guyana's future through the establishment of small business enterprises.

In this context, I may mention that a major part of our work is concerned with attending to the needs of our nationals abroad by providing travel and other legal documents as well as a vast array of Counsellor Services. So, that far from being the net consumer of revenue as some people imagine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is an important source of revenue for the nation's coffers in terms of the fees which are gained from these services.

To conclude I would say that faced as we are with the high cost of diplomatic representation, we in Guyana will have

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to continue to seek imaginative and innovative ways to advance our foreign policy. Fortunately, the prestige and influence which we have earned over the years have served without question and continue to serve, to win us the support of major donor countries and important multilateral institutions for our national objectives.

With this, the recent adoption by consensus at this year's United Nations General Assembly of Guyana's Resolution, calling for a new global human order in international relations, [*Applause*] a Resolution that was co-sponsored by seventy-five countries.

So that, it is seldom, if not very rare, that such a small country as ours is given an opportunity to at least begin thinking about a new international development model based on equity and social justice.

Mde Speaker Guyana's foreign policy will thus continue to make full use of the machinery provided by the multilateral system to address also the many threats now posed to our nation's peace and security.

The horrific killings at Lusignan and Bartica have terrified our nation, causing it to fear for its future safety.

In response to this criminal upsurge the government is prepared as was indicated in the Budget Speech to place all the resources disposable, to combat any further attacks and recognising the magnitude of the challenge, it has also declared its readiness to seek

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whatever external assistance may be necessary to counteract these threats. Accordingly, we have sought and have been promised the assistance of several friendly countries and international organisations.

As a signatory to the many Treaties and Conventions which now govern international cooperation in the area of international peace and security, the Government of Guyana can now quickly access the various forms of support offered by these organisations and institutions. Just recently there were two motions before this Assembly; seeking ratification of two significant Inter-American Conventions:

- (i) The Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters; and
- (ii) The Convention to Combat Trafficking in Small Arms.

Added to what we already have, these Agreements are premised on the recognition that while no one country may be able to withstand the encroachment on its security. An alliance of States, acting in concert may be better able to guarantee success.

Mde Speaker as you would have gathered from my presentation, the Ministry remains committed to securing the objectives outlined in this *transformation agenda*, since as the Minister has said, the international environment is never always conducive to success. We will therefore have

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to use our diplomacy to create a safe haven for ourselves and the aspirations that we have. Working with other likeminded States in the international community our aim will be to build alliances in support of this agenda for transformation. We have succeeded in doing so in the past and we have no doubt we will be equally successful in the future, I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: The Honourable Member, Dr George A Norton.

Dr George A Norton: Mde Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Debate on the National Budget 2008. I must congratulate the Minister of Finance Dr the Honourable Ashni Singh for being such an expert in finding impressive names for the Budget he presents. Last year, it was *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana* while this year it is- *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda*.

I would like to remind the Honourable Minister that we the Members of the PNCR-IG however, never judge any book by the cover or by its name on the cover and we are not prepared to do so now.

The Honourable Minister made mention of a vision that last year's Budget had for a better Guyana but so it remained, nothing else but a vision for not much was achieved by that Budget. While the Budget of 2007, might have presented programmes and projects aimed at consolidating so-called gains made in transforming the economy and improving the

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lives of the people that aim Mde Speaker was certainly way off target. For while the lives of a large number of Guyanese people never improved, others became worse.

There is no doubt, for different reasons, a large percentage of the Guyanese population who are in dire need of infrastructural development, who would benefit from investments in the social service particularly in Education, Health and Water and especially those impacted negatively by changes in the national economic situation, those from the section of the Guyanese society are the majority in the hinterland regions and especially from the Amerindian communities.

I studied this Budget and I was searching for something to suggest that the Government of Guyana has a vision for the hinterland. I saw none and probably that is why an editorial in Kaieteur News of Sunday last described this Budget as an out-of-space Budget. The editorial said-

The 2008 National Budget could well have been drafted in out of space for all we know, because it is totally out of sync with the realities of this country and fails to address the fundamental concerns of the Guyanese people.

To this I add, especially the Indigenous people.

As I have said before and we all know, most of the Indigenous people of Guyana live in our hinterland and to the extent that, there is no policy and strategy for the

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development of our hinterland the government's talk about being concerned about the Indigenous people is just mere talk. What is needed is a policy which states clearly that hinterland development is a major focus of our developmental strategy.

Such a policy must be accompanied by the creation of a Hinterland Development Strategy with a clear land use policy which states which land are for Indigenous people, which are for Agriculture, Industry, Conservation and other uses. This must be coupled with a government programme to develop the required infrastructure that is necessary for residential and business purposes. This must be done in collaboration with the Private Sector and the people in the hinterland.

Having developed the required infrastructure, government should then develop fiscal and other forms of incentives to create the conditions for more businesses to be established in the hinterland.

In this process Mde Speaker there must be special measures to develop an Indigenous Peoples' Business Group so that entrepreneurship spreads among our Indigenous people and communities. All of this must be done taking due care to preserve the culture of our Indigenous people.

The approach outlined above will develop the hinterland while at the same time, empowering our Indigenous people. The PPP/C government's approach of providing handouts and not empowering the people of the hinterland is the

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classic case of giving a man a fish rather than teaching him how to fish. *[Applause]*

What is needed is independence and empowerment. Should we take this approach, we have no need for hostels or this can be an option since our Indigenous people will be independent and have the resources to pay their way anywhere in Guyana. *[Applause]* Lest I be misunderstood; let me make it clear that I am not here suggesting that there should be no investment in building hostels for our Indigenous people, I am merely suggesting that this must be done to deal with the present situation but, the long-term solution is the empowerment of our Indigenous peoples so that they have the resources to go wherever they want at their own expenses and to compete as equals in our country of birth. *[Applause]*

I repeat, what is needed is a strategy to develop the hinterland and empower our Indigenous people.

We can look at the infrastructure in the hinterland region.

In 2007 over \$8.8 billion was spent on the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of roads and bridges; including rural roads and bridges in all ten Regions. In 2008 only a total of \$6.2 billion has been budgeted for roads and bridges which is \$2.6 billion less than in 2007. It will be very difficult for this amount to suffice for all this that the Budget has promised.

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Let us look at the situation where bridges are concerned. Of that \$6.2 billion only \$1.2 billion is earmarked for bridges.

In Region 9 for instance, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo; apart from the bridges that the Budget mentioned along the Timehri-Rosignol corridor, there is need for at least more than forty-five bridges between the Lethem-Kurupukari alone on the Lethem to Linden road and all these bridges are wooden structures. They are in need of repairs or in most cases, total reconstruction since these bridges are only single lanes.

What we found out was that for Region 9 there is only an increase of about \$20 million from last year in the Agency total for that Region.

In the Project Profile of this Budget there is a description of a bridge at Echilibar with a status of *ongoing*. This bridge has not started as yet in spite of being in the Project Profile since 2006 as well as in 2007. This has become the trend over the years in these Budgets especially for projects in the hinterland region where monies are voted for but no work was done. Also, the regular feature of giving contracts to persons outside the Region is becoming the rule of the day. This is why the residents of Region 9 are still questioning why the contract for this bridge at Echilibar was given to someone from Georgetown when there are persons in that Region who are capable of doing the same for they have done similar bridges before. In such a scenario, the Region is not living up to its Mission Statement which clearly states that it is to provide for the coordination and

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utilisation of human and material resources within the Region. The Region feels that this can probably be the reason for the project not even being started as yet.

Let us have a look at Hinterland Roads. The Budget caters for \$5 billion to be spent on roads. Of this part, \$35 million would be spent on the construction of the road from Catuna River to the Rupununi Bridge in Region 9. In this area we are dealing with very rough terrain and considering the swampy nature of this area and the fact that there are more than four bridges to be constructed, this particular project will cost quite a large sum, probably much more than that \$35 million. Besides, from that \$35 million as mentioned above, funds must also be made available for the continuation of the road to Aishalton.

The continuation of this road can be seen in the Profile of 2005, 2006, 2007 and now again in 2008. At present, a part of this road between Shulinab and Mountain Point is completed but it was so badly done that the residents do hope that the same design quality will not continue because this is found to be most unsuitable and of poor quality.

The residents of Lethem expect that the promises that they had last year of the construction of BBST roads in Lethem will become a reality this year thereby eliminating once and for all, the disgusting problem of dust in the village. Regardless of whether such a promise is reflected in the Profile as had happened last year, Mde Speaker there is no guarantee that this will be done. The residents of Lethem continue to live in hope.

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The road in *Region 8; Potaro-Siparuni* in Sub-Region 1, while the residents welcome the construction of roadways from Paramakatoi to Chenapou and from Tuseneng to Monkey Mountain, the residents in this Region in Sub-Region 2 are in dire need for the road from Manbodh Landing to Mahdia to be reconstructed especially from the Brian Succre Junction to Mahdia along with the many bridges found in this stretch of road. The residents here described this portion of road as being slushy during the rainy season and after much frustration, waiting on previous Budgets to cater for the repair of same, they are now calling for the formation of a Road Maintenance Association by the citizens themselves to take care of this road. Besides that part of the road in Region 8 Sub-Region 2, the residents are also looking forward to the repairs of the Salburu Road that was destroyed by miners during their mining activity. The village of Maicobi as well, they are expecting the construction of their road to get them to Mahdia which is so important for the proper life of that village. This Budget certainly did not cater for these roads.

The Budget of course, made mention of the completion of the Takutu Bridge by mid-year, officially bridging our borders with Brazil. However, the infrastructural design of the port complex seems to be inadequate, especially when compared to the Brazilian end of the bridge. For instance, there is no drive-through system for the Port Health authorities either for Immigration or for Customs.

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Let us examine the situation of *Health* in the hinterland regions. This Budget promised to offer the Nation health services in modern new hospitals in such places such as Lethem. The residents in Region 9 are looking forward for such and hope there will be no more postponement of the completion of the Lethem Hospital.

They also hope that with the completion of the hospital there will be an adequate staff where major surgical procedures can be performed. In other words, they hope that a fully equipped and staffed surgical unit with a department of anaesthesia will be made available to the residents along with suitable qualified personnel to manage the different medical equipment of the hospital especially the ultrasound equipment that is earmarked for, in this Budget. While there might be in existence, health huts in the different villages in Region 9, there is need to evaluate the suitability of the design of these huts and make the necessary changes; for the residents do complain of its unsuitability.

Lethem at this moment is without a functioning ambulance and past experience in the Region is justifying the need for two.

While funds might be available to acquire the necessary drugs that have been recommended by the Regional Health Officer, there seems to be a problem in the acquiring of same. The Regional Health Officer, (*a power onto themselves in these Regions*), in his effort to appear as a competent Economist is deciding what drugs should be

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bought and what should not be purchased from the list of drugs prepared by the Regional Health Officer. This creates unnecessary shortages and suffering of the residents.

Health in Region 8 especially in Sub-Region 1, while the necessary drugs might be available there is always the problem of distribution, so by the time the drug reaches its destination the shelf life becomes very short reaching expiry date in a few weeks, then it becomes useless.

This Budget spoke about Hinterland electrification with an amount of \$220 million to purchase a diesel electrification system for Port Kaituma among others. The residents of Lethem are eager to learn of what has happened to their FG Wilson generator and when it will be returned to the Region. No mention is made of the purchasing of additional generator sets and the plant at Lethem at this moment is working at its full capacity, so it is interesting to know how the extension of electricity will be realised to Culvert City, St. Ignatius, Tapachinga as well as in Aishalton, Annai, Sand Creek and Karasabai as is said in the Budget.

In Region 9 the Project Profile describes the project of water transport, purchasing of boats, outboard engines and life jackets but only a total project cost of \$2 million is earmarked. This will certainly be insufficient for there are so many villages that are in need of those items for their transport facilities to be improved. Such villages are Crash Water, Rewa, Apoteri, Katoka, Yakarinta, Jawari among others like Sand Creek and Patarnau which are also in need of such during the rainy season. It is hoped that the project

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will entail the purchasing of a vehicle in Region 8 would provide such for the Sub-Region 1 at the village of Cato.

At Mahdia, the water delivery system has been destroyed by miners who broke the pipes for their own use and it has remained so - broken. Since the streams and rivers are polluted, the residents have resorted to catch rainwater for domestic use. They have been looking forward eagerly to this year's Budget to correct same.

The people of Region 8 are anxiously awaiting the completion of the airstrip at Chenapou as is catered for in this Budget but there should also be regular maintenance of the airstrip at Kopinang, Itabac, Chiung Mouth and at Kanapang as well.

Now let us examine the situation of Education in the Hinterland Regions. In Region 9 the Budget describes a project of the construction of a primary school at Teperu but this school is already completed like is the case of the primary school at Surama also cited in this Budget for construction. The problem with the school at Teperu is the site location chosen by the contractor from the coastland to construct this school, contrary to the recommendations of the village, this site is totally unsuitable and now the school has to be destroyed and relocated. Along with the Primary school at Surama and Katoka there is also the need for the completion of the school at Erungpau which is ongoing for more than two years now probably because the Administration elected to go for forced contract in the construction of same. This construction is in need of good

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quality control for the clay brick is not properly burnt, the roofing is still to be done, as well as plastering of the walls and the construction of sanitary blocks. The Primary School at Sand Creek has a dust problem due to the poor casting of the cement floor. The Primary School at Achaea has a collapsing roof due to the wood for the rafter being of poor quality. The steel of the perimeter beam being $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick rather than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, this is in need of total reconstruction. The newly constructed school at St. Ignatius is too small and needs extending, since it was constructed with no proper population survey. This Budget fails to take into account this situation that is considered as urgent for the residents of these villages.

The Budget mentioned an amount of \$500 million for the construction of teachers' quarters in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 and the provision of water and electricity to schools in Regions 2, 3, 7 and 10 but no mention was made for the provision of water and electricity to the teachers' houses already built. In some houses for teachers, there is no water running through the pipe of the houses neither are there proper furnishings of these quarters. This is the case of teachers' houses in Aranaputa Valley, Woweta, Kaicumbay, Nappi, Shea, Aishalton and Katoka.

All in all in Region 8 the schools might be fully staffed but there are more untrained and unqualified teachers than there are trained and qualified teachers. Cato is in need of a Nursery School building for at present, they are sharing with the Primary School. Along with the dormitory at

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Paramakatoi, there is need for teachers' quarters as well that should be fully furnished with all conveniences. This will, like in other hinterland locations, serve as an incentive to attract suitably qualified teachers from other areas to work in such locations and the students will be able to offer more subjects at the C.X.C. Examination, for at present they are only offering three to five subjects.

At Mahdia, both the Primary and Nursery School need to be extended. The dormitory at Mahdia has not been used and was never used because of poor construction, especially a faulty roof. For this reason, there are about twenty-five children of secondary school age from the Maicobi Village alone who cannot attend school for there is no road to Mahdia for them to get there where the secondary school is located and as stated above, the dorms at Mahdia are not functioning.

According to the Estimates Volume 2 of this Budget the objective of Education delivery in the Region is to ensure equal access to quality education for all children and young people in this Region. This certainly has not been the case over the past years especially in Region 8.

In the Regional Report of the multi-stakeholders' forum held in Region 8 in 2006 by the Ethics Relations Commission, one of the key issues raised by residents was in the area of Education, the absence of Secondary Schools and no adult education opportunities. Two Budgets after that and the situation remains the same.

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The youths of Maicobie like the youths in many other villages not only in Region 8 but the other Hinterland Regions of Guyana, are deprived of proper education. It is not difficult to phantom why, according to the Report of the research by the Ethnic Relations Commission on the Hinterland Scholarship Awards between 1997 and 2006 of the four hundred and fifty-five awardees, two were sent to Queen's College, two to St. Roses, none to Bishops and none to St. Stanislaus. I remember during my days at Queens College there were more than ten Hinterland Scholarship Awardees at any one time in that school and the same could have been said for Bishops High.

Year in and year out we see the absence of the children of Region 8 from the National Track and Field Athletics Championship. Some officials at times, if they do care or remember, make some flimsy excuses for their absence along with the shifting of the blame for this from one body to another. Are these children not our own, are they not Guyanese? Must not they be made to enjoy the same opportunities like all other children from the other Regions? This from a certain point of view can be considered as open discrimination even if only geographically. The Region is failing to achieve its objective of Education delivery in ensuring equal access to quality education for all the children in that Region.

Last year, at one of the meetings, a senior official from the Ministry of Education from the highest level vowed that this would never happen again. We will hold her to her

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words and we will wait and see what will happen this year. Probably someone cares so much for them; the children of Region 8 that, as such, they were spared the spectacle of parading in front of the local dignitaries, bare feet on instructions by those in charge like all the other athletes did during the opening ceremony of that last National School Athletics Championship at the National Stadium. In this day and age, in the 21st century in Georgetown, this was not a pleasant site to behold and I suggest that every effort should be made by the relevant authorities whether from the Ministry of Sport or Education not to let this happen again. I would find it interesting to hear the thoughts of the Minister of Health or to see his reaction to having so many of our Nation's youths being exposed to infestation by parasites like the *negata americanas* which can cause iron deficiency anaemia or the *tunga caltrans* which can cause serious complications like tetanus and gangrene. This is certainly not good for the health of the nation.

At this same meeting, like so many other meetings before, athletes were fainting after performing, because meals were not on time or were not adequate, especially so for our children from the Hinterland locations. In the best interest of our children, in the best interest of their welfare, this should not repeat itself. It is time that they should stop.

Then they go through all this misery to what end. After the championships they go back to their villages and are forgotten about, until the following year if they are still at school, if not, they are forgotten forever, never to be heard

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of again. This is so regardless of whether they are the champions or not in their respective categories. From Region 9 they are not only National Champions but National record holders in certain events but what have been their chances so far or their hopes for the future of obtaining a sport scholarship to pursue such a career even locally.

Gone are the days when National Champion Athletes look forward to be awarded an athletic scholarship to Universities abroad like the Clementson University as use to happen in the past.

Our National Budget must make provision for such scholarship both local and foreign. Besides, it is high time that enough efforts been made at the highest level of this country for the construction of a proper track for both athletics and cycling. But we have not only champions in track and field from Region 8.

In Region 7, we have national champions in swimming as well as in Region 1 and this has been the case over many years, but like the children of the Rupununi, they are forgotten about by the relevant authorities and we report children of villages like Jawala, Waramadong, Kaco, Agatash, Riverview and Santa Rosa; children who became National Swimming Champions, who swam for the first time in a swimming pool during the championships; a true demonstration of potential just waiting to be exploited.

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Mde Speaker we have been hearing over the past years' Budget about the construction of an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Officials were even bold enough to have said on more than one occasion during last year publicly that construction was to begin within weeks but nothing so far. This Budget mentioned that from \$259 million, allocations will be again made for the construction of the Olympic swimming pool and the upgrading of the Colgrain pool. We await this with abated breath. For not only were there a voted provision last year of \$60 million, in spite of not being able to identify a location for same, but in the schedule of the Supplementary Provision for the period which ended 31 December \$36 million was sought as provision for an advanced payment for the construction of that same pool. This is the general trend of things in the line of sports here in Guyana. For in spite of the great strides we make and continue to make in the development of certain sports, there is never enough support from Central Government. Football is such a good example. Guyana has moved up in the FIFA ranking of more than fifty places in a very short period. *[Interruption]*

The Deputy Speaker: Time Honourable Member.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mde Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member fifteen minutes to continue.

Question put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Deputy Speaker: Continue Dr Norton ...

Dr George A Norton: Then there are the recent successes of our national team; The Golden Jaguars including a recent victory over the No.1 team in the CONCACAF Region; the 88th placed Cuba, which on any day, is one of the more rounded teams here in the Caribbean. Yet our National Football team is somewhat treated like an unwanted stepchild. They have been literally thrown off of grounds here in Georgetown during training sessions and had to go to another country only to train. For in spite of our large available land space, yet there is no national football playing facility.

Sports on the whole should not be the concern only of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport but also the Ministry of Tourism, Commerce and Industry. For in the Kaitaur News of 27th February, after expressing his disappointment in the response his entity had received so far from the government, the President of the Guyana Football Federation, Mr Colin Class has invited the government to come fully on board in supporting the hosting of the Caribbean Football Union FOOTSAL International Tournament to be held here in Guyana next month. This will be good for tourism in Guyana as it provides the

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opportunity for people to transmit positive news about Guyana. People will be coming from countries like:

- Puerto Rico
- Guatemala
- St. Marten
- Haiti
- Suriname and
- Costa Rica

They include news crews, photographers and supporters.

One would expect the Tourism Ministry should play an integral part along with the Sports Ministry in the re-establishment of the Go-Guyana Marathon similar to the ones in Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and in Jamaica. As recent as a week ago, that marathon in Barbados attracted runners from all over the world for the female champion was from Ethiopia while the male winner was from Kenya with a large contingent of European and of North American participants.

The Golden Mile of the Reds Pereira Fame should also be resuscitated and sustained and would certainly be another attraction for international and National Sports tourism here in Guyana. Likewise, the Ministry of Education must play an integral part in the development of sports in this country

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and as such, it should be reflected in the national budgetary allocation. The Ministry of Education must make sporting activities and physical education an important part of the National School curriculum as well as being a specialised subject area in its training institution.

It was very disappointing to me personally. At the Queen's College Athletics Championships recently when in the 1500 metres, all the competitors began walking after the first lap due to tiredness. Even in the recently gone days of the Minister of Sport, The Honourable Dr Frank Anthony, that was unheard of at Queens College. In my days at Queen's College we had to compete fiercely at the House Level to run the 1500 metres on Sports Day especially if you were in a strong house as Durban House.

Apparently, those days are now gone but we must bring them back. Sadly, the Budget is contributing very little to such a cause.

In this year's Volume II, the National Budget has as an objective the Public Hospital and it says that-

The Public Hospital is to provide the best possible medical and nursing appropriate care to all persons referred to in an efficient and effective manner.

One would hope that the funds provided to this institution by this Budget would be able to provide all that is required by this hospital to achieve its objective as stated above. The

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most serious problem which this hospital faces and which has become chronic, getting from bad to worse, is that of staff shortage. In all the different departments, if it is not an acute shortage of the nurses on the whole, then it is staff shortage of qualified nurses relevant to the area, if it is not shortage of nurses to staff it, then it is shortage of doctors. The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation for the longest while has one qualified Specialist Physician that is one Specialist in Internal Medicine who has passed the retirement age. In reality, Dr Doobay deserves the highest medal of honour. There are so many doctors who have worked in that Department of Medicine and have resigned over the past few years. Dr. Wilson the senior registered being the last. Before him, there were Doctors Chin, Brown, Forde and Carpenter, just to name a few.

From a batch of doctors who graduated not so long ago from the University of Guyana, Dr Flarindo is the only one of that batch who is left in that department and is now second in charge after Dr Doobay; all have migrated and Dr Flarindo is leaving later this year as well. Common reason for this migration is inadequate salaries. The doctors are finding it difficult to live off their salaries much less to use it to pay their expenses to attend courses, conventions, congresses or to pay the cost for overseas examination. This is known to all and sundry, you do not need to be that rocket scientist. But did the Budget address this problem? At least not adequately, for the doctors continue to go.

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There is a private hospital in St. Lucia where practically all of the doctors are University of Guyana trained Guyanese doctors. When questioned about their reason for leaving, the answer; low wages. Another reason for them leaving is the pursuit of post-graduate studies which they are going to do on their own, for the government is not making suitable offers, if any at all, hence, the chances of them returning to Guyana after becoming qualified, practically nil. Post-graduate training to specialise in a particular field of medicine is not only necessary for this hospital to fulfil its objective, but it serves an incentive for the young physician to remain in Guyana. This is not so only for the doctors at the Georgetown Hospital alone but for the country on the whole.

At this moment at the Georgetown Hospital, there is no Paediatric Surgeon at the hospital, for the one that was there, has now resigned, neither is there a Dermatologist and no one knows precisely if and when one would be replaced. The question is; to what extent the Budget is addressing this situation?

The situation is even worse than that of the doctors per nurses at the Georgetown Hospital. In the Intensive Care Unit of all places, the situation is critical. For the regulation states that for a seven-bed unit there should be at least thirty nurses, at the moment, there are only seventeen.

There is only one trained Midwife who works one shift a day in a three-shift in twenty-four hours system. In the post-surgical unit of the main operating room where the hospital

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policy only permits staff nurses to work there is one such nurse for the night shift with an eight-bed unit. In the Obstetrics and Gynaecological Clinic, the nurses have to go without lunch if there are no student nurses to help out. Once again, this Budget fell woefully short of attending to this problem of adequate wages for the nurses and they keep on going and going.

There are some serious problems with materials and equipment at this hospital and we do hope that this Budget will address these shortages. We are happy to see that there are plans afoot to purchase operating tables in the Project Profile of this year's Budget but so did the Project Profile of last year as well.

What is needed is four new operating beds in the operating room. For those at present are over a decade old and besides they are unsuitable for patients undergoing specialised surgical procedures and are required in particular positions like the lithotomic position, these beds are certainly not suitable. As well, you need specialised operating tables for the neurosurgeon.

We hope that as this Budget promises, new operating instruments will be purchased especially for the Neurosurgery Unit where an operating microscope is also needed and for the Orthopaedic Department but, not only for the main operating room but also for the Outpatient Clinical Room where there is not even a proper scissors to cut the Plaster of Paris casting.

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In last year's Budget there were promises of Physiological Monitors. That remained a promise and while no mention was made of such in this year's Budget there is need for five monitors in the post-surgical unit of the main operating room as well as in the Department of Accident and Emergency.

There is a dire shortage of linen at the Georgetown Public Hospital. There are literally no sheets on the majority of beds at times in the Accident and Emergency Department of this hospital, as well as in the main operating room and in the Intensive Care Unit. The nurses in charge of the Intensive Care Unit can be seen borrowing sheets from other departments. Sheets are now made from pieces of damaged gowns, that is, torn gowns are cut and stitched together to make bed sheets at the Georgetown Public Hospital. This is not a question of computer cut and paste but is one of the *hospital* cutting and stitch. Hand towels are unheard of in the Accident and Emergency Department as well as soap to wash your hands. Of course no toilet paper, no cleansing solution and this is also the case of the Intensive Care Unit and the High Dependency Unit. Instead of three gallons of bleach per week for the Intensive Care Unit, only one gallon is provided, and at times none at all. There is also a regular shortage of essential items such as bandages, gauze and cotton wool swabs. This Budget has mentioned its intention of ventilators; let us hope that this is done for there is need for proper working ventilators in the Intensive Care Unit along with IV pumps and more laryngoscopes.

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In the Accident and Emergency Department there is need for proper functioning Hodoscopes and Ophthalmoscopes. The Electrocardiogram machine is not working properly. The connecting tip for the oxygen port is faulty and there is no suction tip for babies' oxygen mask or paediatric laryngoscope. There is not even gel to do vaginal or rectal examination at the Accident and Emergency Department of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

Operation Miracle has come and gone and we are still left with a backlog of cataract cases awaiting surgery. It was always my contention that the backlog in the first place, was due to a problem of supply and maintenance, in other words, a problem of administration. The hospital administration waits until all the disposable materials are finished before ordering new stocks for which we regularly have to wait for a month for it to be delivered. This will lead to a subsequent suspension of cataract surgeries. If we do fifty such surgeries per week then a one-month suspension, there is already a backlog of two hundred cases.

At this moment, there is a shortage of Taipan Blue which is necessary for the routine cataract operation. The administration cannot say accurately when that would be made available. The Westfield Bipolar Corduroy is broken; no one knows when it will be repaired. In the eye operating room, there is an expensive state-of-the-art brand new Satin 500 Sterilizer since 2005 which costs over millions of dollars. This is not being used because the hospital refuses to buy distilled water necessary for it to function.

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There is a most modern Humphrey Visual Field Analyser at the cost of US\$40,000 lying since mid-2006 in the hospital; apparently no local can be found to put this equipment to use. We do need another Operation Miracle, only this time, to work a miracle to make the administration work, thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Minister of Culture Youth and Sport.

Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony: Mde Speaker, Honourable Members, allow me on the onset, to express my commendations to the Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh and his staff for a prudent... *[Interruption]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, the House is becoming too noisy. *[Pause]*

Honourable Members, the House is becoming too noisy.

Go ahead Dr. Anthony, please.

Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony: Allow me on the onset to express my commendations to the Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh and his staff for a prudent Budget that has the right mix of measures. These measures are building on our successes and will ensure that we *stay the course and advance the transformational agenda.*

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Mde Speaker, today young people are confronting unique challenges. This generation is the first to live in an age of instantaneous communication. It is the first generation to live in this world with HIV and AIDS. It is a generation and it is the first to live in this global economy and as if this is not enough, it is a generation that is experiencing the adverse consequences of international and domestic terrorism.

In addition to this dynamic environment, the theoretical foundation on which many of the youth interventions were premised has changed. The programmes of the 90s used a deficit model in the approach to youth development and now we have a new paradigm shift in that we are using a positive youth development model that, not only incorporates the risk factors but also the protective factors as well. We have also abandoned the stage-based concepts of adolescent development, to now using a more ecological model. It is within this context and the challenges that we must confront that we have made a theoretical shift on how we focus on youth work in the Ministry. We have identified five broad areas in which the Ministry works with young people, and these are in:

- Education
- Giving a second chance;
- Looking at adolescent health;
- Looking at youth employment; and

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- Looking at how young people can start a family and also promoting civic responsibilities.

In *Education*, the government has invested significant sums of money from Nursery to University. The principle aim is to create opportunities for human capital development by expanding access and improving the quality of education.

The government however, recognises that there is a small proportion of young people who would make the wrong choices or because of difficult domestic circumstances may have dropped out of school.

We would like to provide these young people with another opportunity, a second chance at getting an education. This is done through several programmes; the Youth Entrepreneur Training Programme which is residential and the non-residential programmes. The Kuru Kuru Residential Programme currently has an intake of one hundred and seventy-three students from all geographical regions of our country. We are continuously working to improve the quality of the curriculum and last year seventy six students benefited from a peer education training programme in HIV and AIDS. This was done with the collaboration of the Guyana HIV/AIDS Reduction Programme.

This year we will incorporate the Healthy Family Life Education into our curriculum at Kuru Kuru and this would not only cover HIV and AIDS but substance abuse and other topical areas. During the year it is also noteworthy

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that at Kuru Kuru we not only maintain the facilities, but we are able to add a new well so that the students there can enjoy a good supply of potable water.

The Non-Residential Programme that we currently have at Sophia has an intake of seventy students. This year an additional course was added in masonry and we would continue to work to expand this programme. A second Non-Residential Programme with twenty students is expected to start at Smithfield in New Amsterdam. This pilot programme is funded by UNICEF and we are starting in two skilled areas; one in Sewing and the other in Computer Science. These programmes will complement the existing training programmes that were mentioned yesterday by the Honourable Member, Minister Manzoor Nadir. It is our intention also to collaborate with the Ministry of Education, to ensure that when the CARICOM Vocational Qualification comes into effect that our programmes will also be accredited.

Another important programme within the Ministry is located at the New Opportunity Corps. This facility has undergone extensive rehabilitation on all the male and female dormitories and the Administrative building. We have invested more than \$50 million last year and the works are about 95 percent complete and this was financed through grant funding from the Health Sector Development Unit within the Ministry of Health.

In addition, the facility continues to train these young people in:

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- Carpentry
- Welding
- Electrical Wiring
- Plumbing
- Sewing; and

Also to give remedial classes in Mathematics and English

The educational programmes run by this institution is intended to give the young people a skill so that they can either continue their education after exiting the institution or they can find a job.

The Ministry has also partnered with UNICEF to implement a reintegration programme for children leaving the NOC. This programme has helped with the training of the staff of the NOC, parents and community leaders and this year, we will continue this programme and even expand it.

In other areas of juvenile justice, the Ministry has been paying for the services of a lawyer who is located and supervised by the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic. This service has been available to the public since the 1st September, 2007. A number of juveniles in distress have been able to utilise these services. There were more than thirty interviews and advice was given and representation was made in more than twenty-two of these cases. In civil

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matters, we had three cases; two on child abuse and one being a custody case. In 2008, the Ministry in collaboration with other stakeholders will also be reviewing the legislation dealing with juvenile justice.

In the area of *adolescent health*, there has been very close collaboration between the Ministry and the Ministry of Health. Research has shown that youth is a period when people begin smoking, consuming alcohol and drugs, engaging in sex, and having more control over their diet and physical activities, behaviours that can persist and affect their future health. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport recognising this, has embarked on an aggressive programme to educate young people especially those out of school on STIs including HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and many other pertinent topics.

This year, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, through the World Bank HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Programme we will further expand our reach.

The chronic, non-communicable diseases, is posing a threat to many in Guyana both in terms of the morbidity and mortality patterns. We can prevent these lifestyle diseases if we can orient our population to become more active and the Ministry has been rolling out a programme to do just that.

Our partnership with UNFPA has seen the development of several youth-friendly spaces. These have allowed young people to access pertinent information pertaining to

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contraception and family health. I will also like to talk about HIV and children.

The Honourable Member, Ms Volda Lawrence has mentioned that we need to talk and do more for children who are affected by HIV and AIDS and indeed the Ministry of Health should be commended for having a very comprehensive programme when it comes to HIV and children. *[Applause]* This programme has been able to detect children who are HIV positive and they have introduced a new testing method that is using DNA-PCR. This is a very expensive technique but the Ministry in its wisdom, in order to identify children so that they can treat these children, have gone and they are diagnosing these children and very soon they would also be introducing that testing method, having the equipment to test right here in Guyana *[Applause]*.

Apart from this, treatment for HIV children is a very expensive thing, you have first line treatment and you have second line treatment for those who fail the first line treatment and this is being offered by the Ministry and its programme. But not only are they offering the treatment for those who need it, they have also gone a step further and that is they are providing vouchers for children and their parents who are affected by HIV and AIDS. *[Applause]*

Those children, who are affected, also can receive school amenities and that is a programme that is in place. They are also working with many NGOs and the Ministry is funding these NGOs through the HIV/AIDS Prevention and

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Reduction Programme and these NGOs provide soup kitchens for these kids. They also help with food bank and I can name some of these NGOs if you like:

- The Ruimveldt Children Centre
- Artistes in Direct Support
- Linden Care Foundation
- Hope Foundation
- Lifeline Counselling

All receive monies through the government, through the Ministry of Health, to provide services for children who are affected by HIV and AIDS. *[Applause]*

In addition, there are a number of orphanages across Guyana, more than twenty-three orphanages and all of these orphanages have benefited from funding through the Ministry so that they can upgrade the services that they are providing, so that their caregivers can better know how to deal with children who are affected by HIV and AIDS and all that funding is provided through the Ministry of Health. *[Applause]*

There has been a suggestion that we should set up a special hostel for orphans of HIV and AIDS and there is a reason why we should not do that and the reason is that when you have HIV children in one area or in a hostel, they would be stigmatised. Those persons who are knowledgeable and

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who have worked in the area of HIV and AIDS would tell you and all the experts would tell you that is not the way to go.

We have expert committees that have been set up to deal with orphans and vulnerable children and we are heeding the advice of these committees. We have also international experts who are working with us, the Clinton Foundation among others, and we are using that advice to make sure that the children of Guyana who are affected by HIV and AIDS can have the best service possible [*Applause*] I just want to clear that air.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, we have also been working with our youth officers, to help young people with career guidance and we have done a number of these sessions in schools across Guyana. But not only are we giving career guidance in schools, we are also helping young people to get jobs, because the programmes that we run, we are able to apprentice young people and to put them in places where they can work and many of them go on to get employment in these institutions. There is also another programme that we are doing.

In 2007, one of the things that we have recognised is that during this period of youth it is when a lot of young people would become parents and we need to have programmes where we can educate young people about the responsibilities of parenthood. We have started a pilot programme in 2007 and the results are quite encouraging and therefore we will be scaling up that programme in 2008

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and of course, we would be partnering with other sister Ministries.

The Ministry also has three main programmes that help to imbue young people with a sense of pride and patriotism. During the August vacation, the Ministry usually organise camps in all Regions of Guyana. In 2007 we had more than six thousand children in fifty-six youth camps and we had another three thousand children in forty-seven sports camps. The President's Youth Award Programme, now in its tenth year, this programme is now in all ten Regions of Guyana [*Applause*] and in 2007 we had an exponential growth in this programme.

The Bronze Level, we saw an increase of 229.6 percent and we now have one thousand, one hundred and seventy-eight awardees.

At the Silver Level, we saw an increase by 148.4 percent and we now have three hundred and eighty-three awardees.

At the Gold Level, we had an increase by 342.2 percent and we now have one hundred and fifty-four Gold awardees. [*Applause*]

During 2007 and in preparation to host Cricket World Cup, we recruited more than one thousand five hundred persons as volunteers. These volunteers played a significant role in us hosting this mega event. We have retained this database and we are currently updating it for CARIFESTA. We will also be creating a Regional Database of volunteers in

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Regions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 10. We expect that we will expand our database to more than two thousand volunteers in 2008.

Mde Speaker, Minister of Finance alluded to the successful hosting of Cricket World Cup and indeed Cricket World Cup had a very positive impact on our economy. A study done by the Salves and Crudestown Universities and the University of Guyana have demonstrated that we had a lot of people who came for cricket and their spending power during these matches. Many of these visitors came in groups and the average groups size were three persons and they stayed an average of 7.65 nights and it is estimated that they spent about US\$1,902 for lodging, about US\$934 for food and beverage and additionally, they spent about US\$439 on shopping, US\$248 on stadium purchases and another US\$379 on transportation, and for other goods and services another US\$475.

In addition, 76.9 percent of the visitors said they would visit again and 87.8 percent would recommend Guyana to friends and families. *[Applause]* These figures are indicative of the value of hosting major sporting events and what it can do for our tourism sector.

On the *Social Side*, sports continue to contribute in many beneficial ways to the development of our country. In the roll out of the Fit For Life programme we had a number of signature events to test individual fitness. These events include the 10km Legacy Run, World Challenge Day activities and a Triathlon. We have started and another initiative that we have is that we are creating a number of

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gyms across the country. The first of these gyms will open next month at the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall. In 2007, we had another unique programme with the assistance of UNICEF and that is, we ran a series of days of community interaction and the purpose of which, was to use sports to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

The Parliamentary Parties were invited to participate and several of them did, several of the Honourable Members who are here participated in those activities. I would like to thank them for their presence and their inspiring messages. I think such events are sending the right vibes to our young people and we look forward to their collaboration in 2008.

In 2007 the Ministry also did a lot of infrastructure and rehabilitation work. At the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall we were able to redo the floor and replace many of the ventilation vents and fans that were needed. We also helped to improve the lighting. At the Gymnasium, we resuscitated the basketball court and at the Woolford Avenue facility, we started rehabilitating the court for lawn tennis.

These works, and further improvement with the funding that we will get during this Budget, we would use to even do more improvements in these facilities.

At the Guyana National Stadium we have started the process of putting in Stadium lights and this is continuing. The stadium over the last year, after the World Cup, we were able to host more than two hundred events days at the Stadium and so the Stadium is being put to very good use.

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With the introduction of stadium lights we would even expand the amount of events that we will have at the Guyana National Stadium.

We are also expecting a number of teams to visit us during this year, and starting from the 21 March this year we will have an English Schoolboys team that would be here and we are hoping to expand this to include many more teams that would come to Guyana and they can play cricket here in Guyana.

Apart from that, we will be having Sri Lank coming to play here at the Stadium over the Easter weekend. [*Interruption: 'When are you putting tickets on sale?'*] The Cricket Board is doing that.

Our Flagship Programme for this year is the Olympic-size swimming pool. Dr Norton you should take a drive down the East Coast and you would see that construction has already started. The contractor is Caries Engineering Inc. and the work has started and it would take eighteen months for completion. So take a drive down and you would see that the work has started. It is at Patterson, opposite the Convention Centre.

But infrastructure and all these things that we are doing, we also have to have coaches and through our bilateral arrangements with various governments we have been pursuing arrangements, to get coaches to come to Guyana. In 2007 we were able to bring a Chinese coach to coach our

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players and our coaches here, in terms of Table Tennis and he has been doing a good job.

We are also pursuing arrangements with the Cuban Government to bring a Boxing and Athletics coach to Guyana. We hope that these persons will be with us later in the year.

This year, China would host the largest sporting even in the world; The Beijing Olympics and I am assured by the local Olympic Association that Guyana would have adequate representation at these games. But what is more important is that in 2010 the first Youth Olympics would be held in Singapore and we have to start working with our young athletes to ensure that we participate in this historic event.

[Applause]

Among the many other developments that occurred in sports last year, noteworthy is the five-stage cycle race that was held in December 2007, and for those of you who have been following cycling, you would know that the last time this event was held, was probably two decades ago. We are working with the Cycling Federation to annualise this event because we see what potential this event has.

The Ministry has also played a very pivotal role in the resuscitation of the Chess Federation of Guyana. The Ministry is actively engaged with the Chess Federation and has been promoting Chess in schools. Already we have distributed more than two hundred Chess sets to our Secondary Schools and we are offering training to these

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young people. This year the Ministry will be hosting the School Secondary Chess Competition. *[Applause]*

There are a couple of things that the Honourable Member Dr Norton has mentioned and I just want to clear the air on some of them.

(i) He spoke about the track and field event that was held at the Guyana National Stadium. We were there together at the opening ceremony and he knows how that event is being managed. The event is being managed by the Guyana Teachers' Union with support from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sport facilitates. We do not give them any money; they never sought funding from us. So, we have been working with them and in fact this particular instance, I have asked them for about six months prior to the event, for us to get together so that we can plan it properly so that they would not have any hiccups, Mr Norton knows that. So to try to lay blame that we somehow had something to do with the hiccups or the children not having shoes to run is very erroneous. I want to clear that because adequate funds are normally provided, the event is run by the Guyana Teachers' Union. *[Applause]*

(ii) In terms of Scholarships, there have been a number of scholarships that were given to

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sportsmen to study sports abroad.

[Interruption: 'What about Sportswomen?']

And Sportswomen.

We have currently in Cuba five persons who are studying and last year we had four persons that came back and they are all working in the Ministry of Education in its Physical Education Department. So they are available.

- (iii) Let us look at *football*. Sports in this country, it is organised; the various disciplines have a Federation or an Association that are internationally affiliated. In the case of football you have the Guyana Football Federation, they are affiliated to FIFA, they have the rights to run football in this country. They receive subventions from FIFA, to help with the development of football in this country. When we give grants through the National Sports Commission, we require Associations to give us Audited Financial Statements and to give us a programme of what they are doing and many times, of the thirty Associations that we have, many of them cannot fulfil these basic requirements. So I just want you to know that, because development of football does not rest solely with the Ministry. We have been doing a lot of work but it is the Association who have to

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play a very pivotal role. I just want you to know that.

- (iv) *The Marathon* – that is something we have been working on and Dr Norton knows that. We spoke about that last year and he is a very ardent runner. We spoke about introducing this marathon and that is something that we really want to put on the sports calendar in Guyana and we will be working to ensure that this becomes an event on our sports calendar.
- (v) He also mentioned the need for *sports in school* and I agree with him. We need to do more to have more sports in schools and that is something that we have been actively pursuing with the Ministry of Education and with the persons that they have in Physical Education. I am sure that we can roll out a very strong schools' sports programme because that is one of the ways we can curb... not only for people to compete but that we can curb the obesity epidemic in our country.

So there are many things that we can talk about in sports. The Ministry and the National Sports Commission also recognise that we need to do more sports at a regional level and this year we are taking steps to address this issue and among the measures that we will take this year is the introduction of the Regional Sports Councils that will be affiliated to the National Sports Commission. *[Interruption]*

The Deputy Speaker: Time Honourable Minister.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mde Speaker, I beg that the Hon Minister be granted another fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Deputy Speaker: Continue please ...

Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony: There are many other things that I can talk about sports but I would leave that to some of my other colleagues who would follow.

I now turn to the cultural part of my portfolio. In 2007, we made significant progress in several areas and I think we have laid the foundation for a cultural renaissance in our country. *[Applause]* The Ministry, as you are aware, has responsibilities for:

- The Guyana National Museum
- The Museum of African Heritage
- The Walter Roth Museum

And the latest addition has been:

- The Dutch Heritage Museum

Each of these museums has very special and unique holdings.

The *Guyana National Museum* had several exhibitions in 2007 and one of the things that these exhibitions has helped with, is to get more visitors to attend the museum and I can report to you that we had an increase by more than 10,000 visitors last year. During the year, we have acquired the services of a Cuban taxidermist who is teaching and also assisting with the restoration of our taxidermy collection.

In 2008 the Museum would continue this programme; we will continue the programme of having special exhibitions. We will also be adding new taxidermy exhibits. We will be restoring the butterfly wall and we will also resuscitate the outreach programme to our schools.

The *Museum of African Heritage* was at the forefront of activities that highlight the two hundred years since the abolition of the slave trade with exhibitions, lectures and community outreach programmes. In 2008 already they had a number of school outreach to highlight Black History Month.

At the *Walter Roth Museum* they continue to be a very valuable source of information about pre-history of Guyana and about our Amerindian peoples. They have also continued the tradition of having archaeological trips and a more recent one was done with Wayne University of the

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United States, where they were able to identify the site of Fort New Guinea, in the Rupununi. The significance of this find was that it was the fort that the British established in 1842 and the reason why they had established that fort was that they thought that this was the site of the legendary El Dorado.

I am sure that if we market this properly, we can get many people to come and visit that area, as a tourist destination.
[Applause]

This year, UNESCO has designated as the *Year of Languages* and we in Guyana have a very rich language heritage and we should make use of that. One of the things that we would be working on this year and we would be seeking funding for is to reprint the many dictionaries that we have of our Amerindian languages and this is a project that we are pursuing, because while people know us as an English-speaking country in South America, they must also come to know us for our Amerindian languages.

I am also happy to report that in 2007 we have completed the new Archives building, which now has about 1,500 square feet of shelving. We have started the transfer of archival holdings from the old building to the new one and we will announce the date for the official opening ceremony of the Walter Rodney's Archives Building.
[Applause]

In the *area of Music*, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport has been working on the resuscitation of the steel

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band. Our intention is to create a National Steel Band and to resuscitate many school bands.

The Ministry has already hired a number of steel pan instructors including steel pan maestro Roy Geddes and this year Mash, we had a steel band on the road after many, many years. The Ministry is also working with the Guyana Music Teachers' Association, The Woodside Choir and the Evangelical Lutheran Church to resuscitate the Guyana Music Festival in 2009. The last time this festival was held was in 1997 and already preparations are on stream for us to have this festival in 2009. For those of you, who know the history, you would know, this goes back from 1948 and the first festival was held in 1952. So we have a tradition to keep up and we want to bring back that tradition.

In the area of dance, at the National Dance School we have on roll more than four hundred and sixty students at varying levels. Last year we successfully used dance as a form of edutainment where we used dance to educate young people in schools and in other community settings on HIV and other topics. This project was done in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Education and we will continue this in 2008. *[Applause]* But apart from these four hundred and sixty students, we will also be training another one thousand young people who will participate in the opening of CARIFESTA X at the Guyana National Stadium at Providence. *[Applause]*

In 2007, we made significant progress in the Performing Arts. Apart from the many local productions that we had,

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we also had several international performances that were facilitated by the Ministry through bilateral arrangements with several countries. Such performances include:

The Indian Dance Troupe that came from Rajasthan

A Chinese Acrobat and Music Troupe that came from Beijing

The Korean Nambo Folk Group; and of course we had The U.S. Naval Band

All of this has helped to give Guyanese exposure, to different parts and other people's culture.

In 2007, we also did a lot of work on the National Cultural Centre. We were able to rehabilitate the roof and this year, we will put more focus on the stage. In addition to this, the government has made a significant contribution of G\$15 million to the Theatre Guild for the reconstruction of the Guild. *[Applause]*

We have also waived the taxes and duties on the equipment that they are importing. This project is scheduled for completion in April 2008 and it would serve as another venue for theatrical performances. I would like to commend the Board of Trustees of the Theatre Guild for their splendid effort and I hope that we can use this model for future Public/Private Sector partnerships in the area of culture. Having these facilities upgraded alone will not revive the dramatic art forms.

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Our information shows that we have a limited amount of professional dancers and theatrical artistes. If this area is to grow, then we have to invest in cultivating young people in these art forms. To this end, the Ministry will commence a training programme for more than two hundred and fifty persons in sixteen different areas of theatrical production. These persons would be pivotal for us to host CARIFESTA but more so, would serve as a catalyst for the revival of Guyanese theatre. *[Applause]*

Guyana is one of the few countries in the Region that is offering Visual Arts Training at the Burrowes' School of Arts and at the University of Guyana. This formal programme has graduated many well-known artistes in our Region.

The Ministry continues to train artistes and facilitates Art exhibitions so that the artists can have an interface with the public. This year the Ministry will be hosting several exhibitions, workshops and master classes. The art community has already planned a number of signal events for CARIFESTA for both local and international artistes. We are also working with the artists and the Private Sector and the Private Sector has started commissioning public art work and I am sure that this would enhance our city.

Mde Speaker, Honourable Members, you are aware that Guyana has a rich literary tradition, extending as far back as the 1500s when the first book was published on Guyana by Sir Walter Raleigh and that book was called *Discovery of Guyana*. Over the years, there have been many, many

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important works that have been published but are currently out of print and many in this generation have never seen or have been able to read these works. Professor David Dabideen and Dr Ian McDonald have conceptualised a good project and that is, to publish about thirty-six books that we are calling *The Guyana Classics*. The government has agreed that we would fund the first six of these books and I could tell you that they would be available for launching during CARIFESTA. [Applause] This series would help Guyanese to get in touch with the ideas of our literary giants of yesteryear.

The *National Trust* continues to publish information on our National Heritage, on our monuments, on our various sites. Many of these sites and objects, some of them are landmarks but others are sometimes very obscure. Let me give you an example, everyday we pass the cannons that are outside of the Parliament Building. What do we know of these cannons? But I can tell you that these canons were captured in Savascpoe, Russia in 1855 and presented to the colony of British Guiana on the 10th May 1859 for our contribution of \$20,000 to the Patriotic Fund for the relief of widows and orphans of soldiers killed in the Crimean War.

These types of information are information that are pertinent for people to understand what heritage we have and so, the Trust has been doing very good work in terms of promoting our National Heritage. [Applause]

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Fort Zeelandia, a site that we have been cultivating as a site for tourism, last year we have done a number of things there. Apart from having that Museum, the Dutch Heritage Museum, we have also put in place a drawbridge as you approach the Fort, so this has become another attraction to the tourists who would visit Fort Island.

The Ministry of Culture continues to promote the various National Festivals and Holidays. The Ministry continues with our annual:

- Mashramani Celebration
- The Flag Raising Ceremony
- The Masquerade
- Calypso
- Soca
- Chutney Competitions
- The Children Costume and Float Parade; and
- The Adult Costume and Float Parade

These were successfully held in 2007 and in 2008. The Ministry continues also to provide support for Arrival Day in May and Emancipation Day in August. Our Independence celebration, we have done that with pomp and ceremony and we would continue to do so in 2008.

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Preparations for CARIFESTA X are advancing well. This festival is scheduled from 22 August to 31 August 2008 and we have a number of events that would unfold during this period. These activities are spread among the various venues in the city and in the Regions.

We are therefore quite happy that the Minister of Finance has allocated such generous sums of money to enhance a number of venues. *[Applause]* Already we have confirmation from sixteen countries who would be participating in CARIFESTA and the numbers are growing and we expect to have many more people coming in the next month. I can confirm to you that we have Noble Laureate, Deryck Walcott who is going to come to open the symposium *[Applause]* at CARIFESTA.

Mde Speaker our undertaking to host CARIFESTA is a major responsibility. This festival is going to be used to bolster our cultural confidence, to advance the Regional integration process and to promote and foster Regional and International appreciation of Caribbean Art forms.

It is an opportunity to develop our *Cultural Tourism Product*. *Cultural tourism* is an important segment of the global tourism market. In fact, the World Tourism Association estimated that 37 percent of all trips have a cultural element. This was cited in the market for cultural tourism in European document.

To successfully host CARIFESTA we would require a genuine National effort. I am convinced that each one of us

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in this House, you are all nationalists and patriots. While we might have our petty squabbles, but I am sure that we can all rise to the occasion to defend the interest and to advance the developmental agenda and to enhance this country's image abroad. I therefore ask that you do what comes naturally to you and work with us to ensure that CARIFESTA X is the best show ever that we have in Guyana. *[Applause]* We have to talk about CARIFESTA X; we have to support CARIFESTA X. Word and mouth promotion is the step in the right direction.

Mde Speaker, last year... *[Interruption]*

The Deputy Speaker: Time Honourable Minister.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mde Speaker I beg that the Hon Minister be given up to ten minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed

Motion carried

The Deputy Speaker: Please continue.

Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony: Last year Sports played an integral role in bringing our country and people together.

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This year I am confident that Culture will do the same. I would therefore like to thank the Minister of Finance for his allocation and I can assure him that it will go a long way to bring many tangible and intangible benefits to our country. I would therefore like to commend this Budget, thank you.
[Applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member Mr Keith Scott.

Mr Keith Scott: Mde Speaker, in my contribution to the Debate, I wish to congratulate the Honourable Minister of Finance for his presentation of the 2008 Budget entitled with the Theme *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda*.

In his cool and deliberate style, he succeeded in setting the tone for professional standards of delivery, a high standard that I recommend to others in a similar capacity in this House.

My feelings however, was that the timing of this presentation, in the light of the double tragedies of Lusignan and Bartica, could have been delayed until the month of March, in order to avoid the appearance of haste and insensitivity. The absence of any discernible interest by the population in this Budget at this moment of time, adequately tells us that the wounds of those tragedies have etched deeply into the psyche of the Nation. We offer our

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sympathy and we understand this is why we have got to go on from here on.

The proposed expending of \$119 billion this year continues the billion dollar-type Budget that impresses us that great things are in store for the Nation. But we expect that at the end of the day, the government will fulfil its obligations to the citizens by delivering an improved quality of life.

While we appreciate the improvements at the national level and that we appreciate also that this takes a little time. The people expect immeasurable relief in the form of wage increases, interest repayment reductions and tax breaks. These are some of the means by which they regard a budget as successful or not. The Budget paints an assuming picture of a growing economy; we have achieved a 5.4 percent growth rate as against a 5.1 percent of the previous year. This is to be commended but, growth must be experienced by the small man in the creation of jobs. *[Applause]*

Let us know the current unemployment rate. Tell us of the new companies that have been formed, what relief can housewives now expect, bring the dreams of progress and prosperity to her door step, so that he and she can feel the years of hardships of no jobs, of great sacrifices made in the past and other conditions of poverty will come to a swift end. This is the growth that the poor who make these sacrifices, are expected to see.

When the government grants a 9 percent wage increase in the face of a 14 percent inflation rate then the man at the

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bottom knows there is no light at the end of the tunnel. The Budget does not therefore reflect reality on the ground that Guyana is in today. Last year people were excited at the prospect of new prosperity once we could build a stadium, host summits and build many hotels.

We expected a large amount of tourists and jobs. Where are the tourists? They are gone; the jobs are still to come. *[Applause]* Show us the financial windfall that averages US\$4,654 per person. What have we done with that? Today we are still requesting payment for the World Cup that we hosted and have not yet gotten our money.

Instead, we now live in a less secure environment and have much less spending money. The allotment for crime and education Mr Minister is welcomed but what are the plans to retain the crime fighters, your teachers and your medical personnel. Is there a provision in the Budget to pay them new rates above the rate of inflation?

The reality of spending large sums of money on projects is really not enough for us, you must address the immediate needs of the people who expect accountability, transparency and good governance. Both short and long-term improvements are expected to be seen by the small man.

Mde Speaker the government has allocated \$1.5 billion to the Housing Sector. This is less than the \$1.9 billion that was allocated previously, but the Minister in his presentation said and I quote-

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Government will continue to provide access to affordable housing for low-income earners. This will be achieved by several measures including the acceleration of housing development.

End of quote that is found on pages 32 and 33 of his speech.

How will this housing development be achieved with the provision of less money? Where is his housing plan? Our population has achieved 0.3 percent growth rate in 2003-2007. Our population is almost static. This is a time to use the opportunity to provide an accelerated housing development plan, thereby easing the demand by our young people for houses. Instead, we place greater effort in providing house lots. Instead of a building boom, forestry production has declined 1 percent and this provides the timber for our homes.

Foreign materials which make up about 70/75 percent of our building needs have increased, resulting in greater hardships on the backs of those who wish to build houses.

The PPP/C Government in its 2001 Manifesto affirms that they want to see every Guyanese family own and live in their own homes, yet they have pursued a policy of house-lot distribution. Instead of development of housing schemes and the construction of various types of houses to suit the pockets of the buyers, while it is true that the government has provided house lots, large sums of money have been spent on infrastructure development. The fallacy then is that

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the government provides housing must be exposed. What they provide are house lots. What happens is that the government assumes that the recipients of house lots have the capacity to build a home; this is not so. This has resulted in a number of individuals unable to construct a house as seen by the increasing threats of repossession emanating from the Ministry of Housing, especially in Regions 10 and 7. The people of Linden cannot find jobs to enable them to meet the demands of the bank for loans to build. Try going to the bank with \$35,000/\$40,000 per month salary for \$2.5 - \$3 million to build a home. The time has come for government to recognise that poor housing has an impact on the health of the individual and hence, it cannot shirk its responsibility to provide affordable houses as distinct from house lots to our people.

A report from the World Bank seminar in Housing Finance in 2003 by Maraj C. Hogg-Smith and Douglas B. Diamond and I quote-

Housing plays a special role in the social and political dialogue in most societies. It is a major component in creating stable and healthy communities and is often the largest single household expense. Housing can be a sector for stimulus of the national economy but housing conditions are often, seem to be worse than they should be; given the national standard of living and societal values. For these reasons almost all societies intervene in

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housing markets through an array of policies and subsidies intended to stimulate housing production or consumption by various groups.

Government therefore must re-examine its policy to access land and develop a policy of access to housing. The 2001 PPP/C Manifesto promised to promote Private Sector participation in the development of housing. While there was early evidence that this was pursued in the past, this Budget seems not to encourage the Private Sector as it relates to housing. There is no role identified in this area for them to contribute. When it offers fiscal incentives to create a model by which investors would invest in low-cost housing to meet the benefits of the investor, the individual and the government, it would be a win-win situation. 60 percent of our youths, many of whom want to build, but we must acknowledge most of them are paying rent.

The government therefore must address the question of affording both the tenant and the landlord a good environment whereby the tenant can afford to pay a rent while through soft housing loans, he can engage in construction without financial ruin.

The government should engage the banks, Trade Unions and societies in research projects aimed at finding new ways to mitigate the risk involved in constructing homes. We need a plan that will provide homes in a structured environment also play fields, clean surroundings and proper infrastructure.

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The *Water Sector* continues to present problems as we find a solution by this government. Large sums of money allocated each year, this year alone \$3.7 billion, yet the government continues to fail to adequately supply potable water to the country. There are too many people in Guyana who are not accessing potable water when we are supposed to be the Land of Many Waters. It should be obvious that the mere declaration that \$3.7 billion is allocated for water, does not guarantee the efficient delivery of this water.

There is need for clear policies based on a vision of where we intend to take this Water Sector. Let me point out here that it is evident that there is no clear policy on water use much less land use and the linkage is clearly obvious. The PNCR-1G believes that there is need for a clear water and land use policy in Guyana.

Mde Speaker the PPP/C regime seems not to recognise that housing and water go hand in hand. Why will they allocate land, allow people to build houses then fight to deliver water.

The PNCR-1G has always practiced a policy of ensuring infrastructure is made available, either before or at the same time, that houses are constructed as seen from Laing Avenue [*Applause*], Roxanne Burnham Gardens and other places.

This government places the cart before the horse so that they are always seeking to provide water after the houses are built. Thank God, it is not the government that built the

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houses or else the people would still have been waiting for delivery. What is worse is that having expended money on water plants and commissioning them, people still do not have adequate water. This is true of South Ruimveldt Gardens, Sophia and many other areas where government would have constructed and commissioned water treatment plants.

Like many other sectors, the people of Guyana are asking the question; do we get value for our money? The answer is a clear no. This government likes to advertise how much they spend, unfortunately when we look at the service delivered to the money spent; a lot is left to be desired. More importantly is the reality that in the Water Sector people are paying more and getting less.

PNCR-1G wishes to recommend that there is need for a national community-based mechanism to monitor the delivery of water with the aim of ensuring that the people of Guyana get water for the money they spent. Isn't it sad that the Minister did not know what was happening in Region 1? Were there such a mechanism, he would have known. I submit that when he paid less and sometimes nothing for water a few years ago we were better off than the present situation in which taxpayers' money are wasted, because of incompetence and leakage in the process of allocating contracts.

People have lost confidence in this government's ability to deliver. An increasing number are now buying water from expanding water-processing plants around and that dots the

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place. The fear of typhoid and other water related diseases is widespread. Children now walk with drinking water rather than use the school pipes. Linden had a typhoid scare a few weeks ago. In 2007 \$915 million was used to improve water supply and the sewerage system in Georgetown. New meters, pump stations and rehabilitation of treatment plants at the Shelter Belt, yet residents at Sophia still have to go subsoil to access from a transmission pipe that spans a trench. Ruimveldt still cannot get regular water. The people of Barnwell North having received temporary standpipes are still awaiting the piped water to their homes.

We also advise that the customer billing and metering system which we commend is still not accurate. For example, in 2006 a resident was billed \$10,000 water for her home. In 2007, with the receipt of less water, she gets a bill for \$285,000 and her meter has not yet been read. This is just pure guesswork on the part of GWI.

The Mandela Landfill Site rather than being closed, as was promised, has now been extended to 2009. When will the new landfill at Haags Bosch be brought on stream? How much longer must the residents of Lodge and La Penitence contend with foul smells and other physical discomforts?

In the mean time, in Region 2, the Budget provides for works on bridges, roads and drainage on the Coast but what about the road leading to Lake Mainstay, Whyaka. This road is in a deplorable condition and needs urgent attention. This is the gateway to a tourist resort; urgency therefore

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should be the watchword. The residents of Red Lock are still to get aesthetic relief. Tourists are still met with growing garbage dumps along the side of the road to Red Lock, courtesy of the Three Friends-Walton Hall Town Council. They are asking for the Council to stop the dumping of garbage here and to find a more acceptable disposal site.

Region 2 has the strongest women's cricket team in the whole country. It has a reservoir of young talent honed nicely by coaches Daniel and Alfred Maycock, but the condition of the grounds are not conducive to good games. These grounds, with the exception of Anna Regina, are clipped by the NDC irregularly and the youths have to find cash to pay for this service. This situation must be remedied.

The promised Diagnostic Centre which should have been opened over a year ago at the Suddie Hospital is still to be opened. In the meantime the theatre tied to the centre has been closed down. Patients have to be taken to Charity Hospital and then return for post-operative care at Suddie. Meanwhile the list of those awaiting surgery, grows. When will the Diagnostic Centre be opened? When will the theatre become operational? *[Interruption]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, are you concluding shortly?

Mr Keith Scott: Yes Mde. In the field of Education, we are pleased with the \$19 billion allocated to this Sector but we

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wish to remind persons that Region 2 has a long history of performing well at exams.

We call on the government to establish an extra-mural department of U.G., at Anna Regina or Dartmouth so that students can be afforded the same opportunity for tertiary education as obtained in Berbice. *[Applause]*

We note a new development with the Community Enhancement Programme. The residents have been allocated \$25,000 to clean trenches. This was to help those in need of jobs but the Regional Office and the NDC are employing persons, placing them in offices, and paying them from this same fund designed for the unskilled worker. Discrimination in employment is obvious at this point here.

Where is the provision for compensation to the residents whose homes were damaged last month, by the last earth tremor? When will the government begin the desilting of the mouth of the Pomeroon River and what provisions have been made to compensate the farmers of both the Lower and Upper Pomeroon who suffered loss of their produce during the recent floods?

Finally Mde Speaker, the successful implementation of this Budget depends on both the Government and the Opposition accepting that the economic pie should be shared to the benefit of all. The need for inclusivity and trust has never been clearer ... we must put the nation first. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, we will now suspend for one hour.

17:05H – SUSPENSION OF SITTING

18:05H – RESUMPTION OF SITTING

Honourable Members, the House experienced some serious water problems and I think with the help of Minister Nawbatt we have now gotten that under control. So we wish to express our thanks to the Honourable Minister for coming so speedily to our assistance.

[Interruption]

Honourable Members, this Sitting is resumed.

We will now start with the Hon Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation.

Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey: Mde Speaker I stand in support of Budget 2008 and to congratulate my colleagues on a well crafted document which adequately reflects our condition and points a way forward.

At no other time in history has the world been more open and making a decent life so comparatively easy. Never mind the appearances, today the world is more prosperous than ever before, more persons have access to medical and

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educational services and generally are living better lives. In a nutshell, our world is far better than that of even our parents and that of our children promises to be even more comfortable. But living in this open world, requires an open mind and an adventurous spirit, which, of course, while calculating, view challenges as opportunities. If only we in Guyana could be properly organised to grasp these opportunities we will prosper. This is the kind of mindset that must drive our relationships, particularly our trade relationships with other nations.

Last year I underscored the fact that our traditional trade relations, based as they were on preferences, were continuing to decline in the face of the move towards more reciprocal regimes. I said then that what was absolutely critical is the nature of our response to this dynamic and relentless process of global change. In this regard, over the last two years our response has brought some dividend, we have had moderate positive economic growth. True, growth is not development, it does not in itself bring employment, however it should not be frowned upon. It is the necessary condition if we are to achieve almost anything, even the call for the government to construct housing schemes that my friend and countryman the Honourable Member Scott... I would only like him to remember though that it was the very fact of no growth that meant that when we came into office far from having housing schemes with infrastructure, there was no housing sector, as such. *[Applause]* But I would leave that kind of thing... I have gone through that so many times in the past when I was there. I will leave that

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for... (*I am looking back for Minister Nawbatt*), I am saying that is his thing now and he will no doubt deal with that sort of thing.

Mde, as you are aware, to effectively tackle these global challenges the countries of the Caribbean Community are attempting to deepen their integration. Thus, in keeping with the commitments expressed in the revised treaty of Chaguaramas, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy should be fully in place by 2015. The more important aspects of the Single Market itself are already established. The regime for the free movement of goods is fully implemented, except for trade from free zones and the question of free circulation. In keeping with the phased approach adopted by governments, the free movement of skills has also been implemented. As a first step the following categories of persons now have the right to free movement.

- (i) University graduates, media workers, sports persons, artistes, musicians, nurses, teachers and the managerial, technical and supervisory staff of companies.
- (ii) Self-employed professionals, agricultural, industrial, commercial and other service providers; and
- (iii) For persons wishing to establish companies.

The establishment of the Single Economy that is, the creation of a single economic space is now gathering

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momentum. Of course, many difficulties, particularly at the level of national implementation exist. However, the single economic space is expected to better position the Region to take advantage of the global marketplace. It will provide the kind of space for us to better lure and attract investments. Here, I agree that we need to create a conducive environment and be extremely aggressive in finding investments; we cannot sit here. There may be lots more finance in the international system today, but as I said in the beginning, there are also many more opportunities.

At the multilateral level, the *Doha Development Round Negotiations* were suspended in July 2007 but technical meetings have restarted in Geneva. Small and vulnerable economies such as ours can only benefit from a rule-based global trading system. As a result, calls for the full resumption of the negotiations have been all but universal. However, if progress is not made in the first half of this year, its future will be highly uncertain. Nonetheless, recent developments at the technical level have gone some way in addressing the concerns of developing countries in general and small, vulnerable economies such as ours.

But the general feeling is that all of our concerns have not yet been covered and of course the negotiations continue. In any case, the major developed countries and larger developing countries are still locked in battle on the issues of domestic support and market access and this is a real stumbling block. When coupled to the likelihood of American politicians making any a substantial a concession

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in this election season the possibility of the rounds completion this year is bleak indeed.

Mde Speaker as the Minister stated in his presentation, 2007 was an especially critical year in terms of our external trade relations with the European Union. The LOME Preferential Trade Arrangements under the COTONOU Agreement expired at the end of December 2007 and all ACP states were committed under COTONOU, to negotiate with the EU-WTO Compatible Trade Arrangements later to be called Economic Partnerships Agreement to come into force on the 1st of this year. Thus, on 16 December 2007, following nearly four years of negotiations, the Caribbean and the European Union initialled the first and only comprehensive economic partnership agreement.

There is little doubt, there is absolutely no doubt that the old preference regime offered a level of market security and resource allocation that no longer exists however, the reduction in the EU intervention prices for sugar and for rice etcetera, had as much to do with its reform of their agricultural policy as with the global trend towards liberalisation. Of course, as a consequence of the EPA and even if in a transitory kind of way, Guyana's *trade preferences* are now somewhat a little bit more secure. Among other things, the tariff liberalisation under the EPA has the following components.

- (i) Fourteen percent of CARIFORUM's trade with the EU, representing the more sensitive products in

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terms of industrial protection and revenue is totally excluded from the liberalisation process.

- (ii) The tariffs on 80 percent of the value of EU imports are to be removed in five-year phases over a 15-year period with an initial three-year moratorium.
- (iii) A further 6 percent is to be removed in twenty-five years; that's the trading goods.
- (iv) In terms of trading services, the Europeans have liberalised 94 percent of their market and CARIFORUM 65 and 75 percent for its less developed and more developed countries respectively.

It should be noted that 51 percent of CARIFORUM's trade is zero rated and with Europe it is zero-rated and therefore for all intents and purposes already liberalised. In terms of Guyana, only around 12 percent of total imports are from the EU, 37 percent are duty-free and a further 50 percent enter with duties 5 percent and below. Although 85 percent of imports from EU are to be eventually liberalised, this represents in Guyana's case only 11 percent of total imports and 6 percent of customs revenues.

Furthermore, about 50 percent of the revenue raised from the EU imports is charged on products excluded from liberalisation.

While we are on the issue of border taxes, let me say that it is good that we have implemented VAT at this time when

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trade liberalisation is gradually eating away at these kinds of taxes. Indeed, at another level, I am against any reduction in the rate of VAT. Even if it is true and I think it is true that it has brought the government a windfall.

I believe this largely, because I do not see the reason for returning money to the likes of Mr Murray and myself. What I believe should happen and what the government is attempting to do is to use any windfall to properly target and support those groups who are really in need [*Applause*] Old Age Pensioners, vulnerable youths, single parents and so on.

The chapter on trade participation for sustainable development in the EPA sets out the broad parameters for the cooperation and lists the priority areas which are further articulated in individual chapters. EPA funding is to be provided by many various sources. There are the ten EDFs (European Development Fund) of about €165 million, a part of which is directly for EPA implementation. The European states have committed to provide aid for trade of some €2 billion per annum by the year 2010 of which one billion has been reserved for EPA implementation. To address efficiency of delivery because many of the articles that call for us to deliver may be difficult in our condition, the EU has proposed using two tools; budgetary support of €340 million and the Regional Development Fund with an unspecified sum so far.

The European Investment Bank will continue to provide €2 billion in investment financing.

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The Economic Partnership Agreement will impact in a major way on how we conduct our external trade and economic relations. However, as indicated by the liberalisation schedules and commitments, the agreement is clearly asymmetrical, allows for special and differential treatment and contains a development dimension.

We can argue about the sufficiency of the level of asymmetry whether or not the development resources are ascertained and how they are located within the process and many other related things but, as I had indicated before, for us to successfully adjust to this new World Order, we must be internationally competitive. In collaboration with our Private Sector, we must almost single-mindedly pursue this goal. We have to exploit niches and foster cross-border business alliances where necessary.

So much for the important aspects of multilateral relations but at the bilateral level, our Ministry has continued to work productively with its partners. For example, only a few days ago the 24th Session of the Guyana-Cuba Joint Commission completed its work. Here we had intensified our relations, while monitoring and promoting technical and functional cooperation.

Under the auspices of this Commission, the Ministry has been able to source technical and human resources for the agricultural, health, education, culture, sport and trade sectors. During our participation in the Second Session of the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation forum in China last year September, Guyana concluded two

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grant arrangements to fund economic and technical cooperation projects. It is expected that much of these grants will be utilised to build possibly in Guyana, two ferry vessels, upgrading the local ferry yards to improve our shipbuilding capacity and building the vessels is estimated to cost some US\$21 million; roll on/roll off. *[Applause]*

The Fourth Session of the Guyana-Indian Joint Commission where proposals for the expansion of bilateral relations and cooperation between our two Nations is scheduled to be held later this year. In 2007, we benefited from access to a preferential line of credit to implement the solar traffic system. Proposals were also submitted to the Indian government for the creation of an ICT Park and the construction of two sports complexes. Representatives from Indian companies have presented plans for these projects and these are now being revised.

Agreement for the second phase of the Corriverton Water Project was concluded on 25th June, 2007. Under this project, two water treatment plants costing some US\$6 million will be financed by the Japanese government. Some fifty thousand persons stand to benefit upon the completion in 2009. The Japanese Government during our visit there (myself and the President) has also expressed a keen interest in funding the rehabilitation of the East Demerara Boeraserie Water Conservancy and Flood and Water Control in the Mahaica-Mahaicony area. This year, for the first time, it is expected that Guyana will receive a batch of

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senior Japanese volunteers who will provide expertise to the Health and Agricultural sectors.

Guyana has had friendly diplomatic, cultural and political ties with Africa for ever so long. Presently we have diplomatic relations with twenty-two of the fifty-four Nations on the African continent but current relations are primarily political.

Nigeria and South Africa are two countries with which we enjoy more active relations. The Technical Aid Corps Agreement concluded with Nigeria facilitates the deputation of Nigerian volunteers to Guyana. We have benefited from the services of Nigerian volunteers in the Trade, Health and Legal Sectors and will be working to resuscitate active cooperation with other African countries.

A bit closer home Mde, we continue to strengthen our bilateral trade and economic relations with Brazil through a comprehensive programme of activities. Our Ministry chairs the national coordinating committee which assists the government to manage its cross-border activities with Brazil. It coordinates arrangements relative to the Partial Scope Agreement and International Road Transport Agreement between Guyana and Brazil and generally attempts to develop and coordinate policies in relation to the ever-increasing cross border traffic. Recently the Committee has been coordinating activities to do with the operations of the Multi-purpose Complex which will facilitate the movement of persons and goods across the border. The Complex will house the operation of

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Immigration, Port, Health, Customs, Security, Agriculture and Tourism authorities. It is now some 90 percent completed and I think Honourable Member Dr Norton should take note. It has also been dealing with matters relevant to the implementation of the Guyana-Venezuela International Road Transport Agreement, as I said, matters such as dealing with insurance, health, security along the Lethem-Linden road and so on.

In April last year, we visited Lethem and discussed with the residents and the business community developments relating to Guyana-Brazil relations and the opportunities that could accrue to the region. We also addressed matters to do with regional international trade, paying particular emphasis upon the threats and possibilities of the EPA for that region. In June 2007 the Ministry collaborated with the Brazilian Embassy and the local Private Sector to organise a workshop on how to export to Brazil. The workshop was serviced by high-level technical experts from Brazil and was aimed at enhancing our knowledge of the Brazilian marketplace with particular respect to Customs, sanitary and phyto-sanitary roads and insurance regulations. Currently, due to the absence of legal trading arrangements on the border on the Brazilian side, there is essentially only a one-way trade in favour of Brazil. However, with the declaration of Bon Fin as a commercial port of entry, the inauguration of the Takutu Bridge in about the second quarter of this year, and the increasing readiness on both sides to trade, it is predicted that economic activity will gradually but significantly increase as we upgrade our

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roads, bridges and other infrastructure. We are now working closely with the Private Sector to review and renew the Guyana-Brazil Partial Scope Agreement in order to gain additional access for Guyanese exports.

The Deputy Speaker: Time Honourable Minister.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mde Speaker, I beg that the Hon Minister be give another fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Deputy Speaker: Continue Hon Minister ...

Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey: Mde Speaker, this Budget comes at a particularly trying time for our Nation. Marauding bands variously described, are killing, terrifying and robbing our citizens with seeming impunity.

All of us are pondering what conditions could possibly have given rise to such mindlessness. Though we may have different empathies, on one thing we are all agreed, like the bandits, the conditions which gave rise to them must be properly identified and removed. However, the magnitude of the present situation must not blind us to the fact that we

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have been somewhere in this vicinity before, both in terms of the problem and in terms of our responses.

For whatever reason, the solutions we attempted then were not very successful. We need to look deeper to find better solutions this time. *[Applause]* Caught in this kind of what I would call dangerous dilemma, it is sometimes difficult to focus the mind on other pressing issues. Nevertheless, just as our immediate existence depends upon our defeating the present security crisis, our viability as a secure and prosperous nation depends upon our successfully meeting some important global challenges, a few of which I have attempted to identify. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member Mr Mervyn Williams.

Mr Mervyn Williams: Mde Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the Debate on the 2008 Budget which was presented by the Hon Minister of Finance on February 22 2008. I assure the Hon Minister that this Budget does in fact stay the course of deceiving the Guyanese people in general and the people of Region 3 in particular.

I propose to demonstrate this in dealing with a number of issues specific to my Region but before I do so I wish to refer briefly to a very impressive presentation by the Hon Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport.

When I heard him speaking of the young people in our country I was wondering whether we were citizens of the

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same country and I wish to respectfully refer the Honourable Minister to the story in today's Kaiter News on pages 12 and 24 headlined *Gold Rush at Craig Village* where unemployed youths from Linden had travelled to the East Bank in search of gold from between scrap iron.

I wish to now address issues pertaining to youths in Region 3. There are a number of issues which affect the young people of Region 3 and this Budget does not address them. To begin with, I see nothing in this Budget which speaks to the creation of investment opportunities in the Region. The absence of a land use policy which addresses the establishment of industrial estates in the new and emerging housing schemes clearly indicates that there is no interest on the government's part to provide the support necessary for the establishment of new and necessary industries to lend to the development of our Region and by extension, our country. With the absence of new industries, pastures and farmlands, coupled with shrinking of existing economic activities, there is a growing population of unemployed youths in the Region. The government has therefore failed our young people and this Budget does nothing to change that fact.

The PRCSSP ignored the existing functional groups of people in the Region and set up new political support groups and constructed buildings etcetera for them as payback. In most cases, manipulation of these groups in order to control buildings at the Local Government level is a cancer which continues to eat away at the potential of

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young people by deliberately excluding them, in some cases, through the very provisions of the constitution of these groups. This further drives our youths to despair.

Millions have been spent in this area but our vulnerable youths have not benefited. For example, \$117 million was spent as project funding to benefit a relatively small population in one part of Hogg Island while the large and growing populations in Parfait Harmonie, Tuschen and farming areas such as Den Amsteel, Farm, Sisters and Goed Intent have been ignored. The denial of funding to a group in Free and Easy to drill a community well tells its own story.

The situation is made worse because our young people have no play fields at their disposal. School grounds and community centre grounds alike are being ignored. The painful thing is that while these grounds are overtaken by bushes and some of the buildings are being stripped while our young people make the best of the village roadways for a game of cricket or football.

With unemployment and the related difficult circumstances facing them, many of our young people continue to turn to substance abuse. I see nothing in this Budget that is suggestive of an initiative to address the social issues that affect our youths in Region 3. Even the available health care services in the Region cannot effectively deal with the possible health issues which can and will emerge in the prevailing circumstances.

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HIV/AIDS and the related effects readily come to mind. There is no special education facility and none provided for in this Budget to address the issue of special education needs among our young people in the Region.

Mde Speaker reintegration into the education mainstream also remains an issue, with no clear workable policy for accepting children into the primary school for the first time at ages above the 5year 9month mark. The Budget fails to address the need for parenting education, professional counselling and support or a home for vulnerable children in Region 3 especially at this time when single parents, orphaned and vulnerable children populations are on the rise in part, due to the effects of HIV, resulting in older children having to parent their younger siblings.

Last year, I recommended to this Honourable House that the Den Amstel Youth Camp be handed over to the youths of the Region. This once popular facility is now totally ruined. I had also recommended that the Den Amstel Practical Instruction Centre be given a project to manufacture furniture for the schools in the Region so that students can earn as they learn while making the institution a financially viable one. These suggestions, like the Critchlow College, have been ignored by the Minister of Finance in the Budget now before this Honourable House even as \$115.7 million is allocated to the politicised Youth Empowerment Initiative and youth initiative programmes.

I am heartened that the Honourable Minister of Labour has changed his mind with respect to the issue of child labour in

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Guyana. I was indeed heartened to hear the Minister say quote-

A second priority of the government in 2008 is going to be issue of tackling any form of child labour that exists.

This is certainly an about face [40.18.645] from his stated position that child labour is not an issue in Guyana. It is my hope that the Honourable Minister would now avail himself to meet with the international agencies which fund programmes in Guyana to combat child labour. I trust too that the Minister of Labour would make good on his promise to deliver jobs for our young people not the wholesale transfer of a number of security jobs from the United Associates Incorporated to the Strategic Security Company as the government tries to its best to crush one company at the same time promoting another.

The government's continued failure to provide jobs for our young people even as the international donor community continues to pour money into equipping our young people with the skills for life is nothing short of a national embarrassment.

Education- Government boasts of the construction of the Greenwich Park Nursery School to a tune in excess of \$100 million. We welcome it. It was a good thing but the reality is that the school does not have a population to productively utilise the massive increase and available space. No furniture or equipment has been procured for the students of this beautiful building. The ceiling, plumbing and windows

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are swiftly deteriorating already due to the poor quality of materials and workmanship. Who pays for the slip-shot works of the friends of the PPP/C? The taxpayers of this country, even as our children suffer in the process. Many believe that the considerably less sum could have been better spent repairing the then existing building and constructing a small annex, allowing for the available dollars to provide for improving other schools in the Region. The Government however is staying the course of being helpful to its friends by constructing buildings, failing to equip, properly manage or even people them.

In the Work Programme of the Education Department of Region 3 for 2007, it was proposed that a new building be constructed to replace the Bagotville Primary School. The Minister had different ideas. The proposal was junked and the Santa Mission Primary School which was never in the concept of the Regional Proposal replaced the Bagotville School. Stern advocacy by the parents of the Bagotville Primary School children resulted in the fire-fighting measures by the Education Ministry in the form of some measure of repair work. A promise was made then by education officials that a new school building would be included in the 2008 Budget; it has not happened. The Regional Education Officer has since been transferred to Region 2 and has not been replaced.

Parents and students of the Wales Primary School endured double sessions for five long years while they waited for improved conditions at that school. They could not take it

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anymore; the school was recently shut down whereupon the Regional Chairman promptly visited in order to respond to their advocacy for improved conditions on CNS Channel 6. By way of response, he promised for the nation to see and hear that after the Budget Wales would get a new Primary School. As Regional Chairman, Mr Favour should have known that there was no budgetary provision for a new school in Wales. The stop-gap measures by the two visiting Ministers are not enough to address the difficult circumstances to which our children are being asked to submit themselves.

The Philadelphia Primary and Leonora Secondary Schools are in conditions similar to the Wales Primary. It is only a matter of time until similar action is taken by concerned parents to protect the health and safety of their children. The government has however chosen to ignore the cries of these very important citizens. The evidence is clear in the absence of any budgetary provisions for the repairs to these schools or for the provision of furniture for the schools in the Region. A measly sum of \$6 million was provided for desks, benches, chairs, tables, filing cabinets, chalkboards and cupboards for improved educational facilities in the entire Region 3 where they are forty-seven Nurseries, sixty Primaries including twenty-two Primary Tops, nine Secondary and five Community High Schools.

The only provision for building under Education in the 2008 Budget raises as many questions as it does eyebrows. The residents of Parika are asking why a dormitory at

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Parika-Salem Community High School and not a laboratory or a Home Economics Department with the appropriate equipment. Why no provisions for the restoration of the kiln for the enhancement of the technical and vocational aspects of the school's curriculum? Why not reconnect the electricity to the Technical Room and rehire the recently retired highly-skilled teacher?

What about furniture and potable water which I spoke about in the 2007 Budget Debate? Is the extension of the Windsor Forest Primary School of greater urgency than the need to rehabilitate the other schools that I mentioned? Or is the Windsor Forest area more important to the government politically?

Housing- There is a deafening silence in this Budget when it comes to the relocation of residents of that area of Plastic City which is closest to the Demerara River and those families who live on the Parika sea dam. There is also nothing said about the regularisation of those families in the other areas of Plastic City who were promised improved conditions of living; including roads, potable water and electricity. The relocation of the occupiers of the first two areas ought to be a government priority.

The residents of these communities live there because they have nowhere else to live. The conditions are absolutely shocking. The foreigners who have visited one of these communities with me and interacted with children and parents alike were devastated when they saw what they saw and heard what they heard. To them, it was an unbelievable

nightmarish experience. They wondered how people could live like this in the twenty-first century.

In fact, when I spoke about the vulnerability of the children in these areas, there was heckling coming from Members on the government benches, some of whom hail from Region 3. But those foreigners did not heckle; they invested in a local NGO in order that the lives of at least a few of those children could be improved. Their parents are now benefiting from parenting education; their awareness levels and confidence both improved to the extent that some actually became bold enough to speak out to members of the community and to the police that they were victims of incest.

One year after I raised this matter in this Honourable House, two families are now breathing easier with the arrest of male members of their respective households. However, had the Ministry of Human Services acted one year ago, our children may today may have been in better physical and psychological condition. It is my hope that out of this is born an initiative for handling our vulnerable children. The first step being parenting education and counselling at all levels, to go hand-in-hand with the creation of jobs to support sustainable family development.

Relocation to proper housing areas with the basic amenities is a prerequisite to such an initiative. Money must be made available to the Social Sector to facilitate this necessary initiative. I do not recall seeing any provisions specific to such an initiative in this Budget to Region 3. The Budget

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therefore seems to be staying the course of ignoring the interest of the next generation of leaders who are orphaned and vulnerable through no fault of their own. They are in fact victims of a government who clearly does not care about the country's human resources but which continues to emphasise on the construction of buildings which are really only necessary in order that friends of the PPP/C could become enriched.

Water- At page 17 of the 2007 Budget Speech, the Honourable Minister of Finance had said-

The hinterland and coastal water programmes continued with \$231 million being expended on transmissions and distribution systems in Wanina, Kokerite, Mahdia, La Grange and Meten-Meer-Zorg.

The people of La Grange and neighbouring communities and Meten-Meer-Zorg and De Kindren are still waiting for their wells to be completed after several revised deadlines for completion, the first being well in advance in the 2006 Elections.

The 2008 Budget provides \$1 billion for the design and construction of water treatment plants at Lima, Cotton Tree and Vergenoegen but the citizens of Vergenoegen in Region 3 want to know whether they too would have to wait in vain for the promised plants while somewhere, somehow the funds earmarked become exhausted, after all, the government has made it clear that this Budget would

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stay the course even if that means continuing to make promises which it never intended to keep. Citizens continue to experience grave hardships with regard to poor and unreliable supply of water as well as the poor quality of the water supplied when it is compounded by the terrible billing practices of GWI. The disrespect for the elected officials of Region 3, exhibited by the CEO of GWI and his team when they walked out of a meeting with the RDC not so long ago, has not helped the situation at all.

Health- The Tuschen New Housing Scheme was laid out in such a way that like Parfaite Harmonie, provision was made for land to be available for the construction of a health centre to cater to the needs of the growing population there. While out of the blues money has been budgeted for the construction of a health post at Zealot, the years old RDC's recommendation for a centrally located similar facility at Tuschen New Housing Scheme continues to be ignored.

Perhaps the decision to take it to Zeelugt was informed by the established voting patterns over the years, I do not know. In the meantime, the new Health Centre building at Versailles which I spoke about last year is still unoccupied to this day. It is also still in need of replacement roofing material and other fittings which were removed by vandals.

The new Leonora Hospital is yet to be commissioned. We heard a lot about that. But I am advised that after all that went into its construction and the publicity given to this project, I understand and the Honourable Prime Minister may be able to confirm that the government could not get

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the state-owned GPL to effect the electrical connections to the building.

For the umpteenth year the West Demerara Regional Hospital is without a substantive Administrator; a junior clerk continues to act in that capacity. The wage bill for health services in Region 3 for 2008 is in excess of \$150 million. No provision was made under *Head 611 Administrative* even though the staffing details show one employee. It is clear that the Leonora Hospital will be required to operate under similar conditions without an Administrator.

In terms of the actual health care delivery, the x-ray machine continues to be unreliable. The voluntary counselling and testing unit of the West Demerara Regional Hospital has been constrained to operate with limited supply of Rapid test kits for a long time now in the battle against the dreaded HIV scourge. In fact, there was a period during last year when there were no kits at all. In addition, only one HIV Counsellor who doubles as a tester operates per shift. This is clearly inadequate.

Generally, blood investigations are hampered by inadequate laboratory facilities. The Glucometer for example, is without glucose blood strips for the processing of simple tests. Consequently, treatment is often delayed. The ultrasound equipment remains unserviceable as it has been for several years. Patients are often referred to private facilities in the city. In emergency cases, huge sums must be found to cover expenses including taxi fare, laboratory

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expenses and hospitalisation. Clearly, this Budget does not address the reality of the demand for a better quality of health care in Region 3.

What good is it to have multiple hospitals when you do not have the capacity to properly equip, maintain, staff and manage the one you had for decades?

I wish to turn my attention to *corruption*. The Auditor General's report for 2005 on page 344 Item 1413 tells us that a total of 385 payment vouchers valued \$14.336 million were not presented for audit. Items 1418, 1419, 1444 B and 1446B revealed that a total of \$1.82 million was paid as mobilisation advances to four contractors whose contracts were eventually terminated for failing to commence works. In each case the contracts were re-awarded to other contractors and the report says-

There is no evidence to indicate that the mobilisation advances on the previous contracts were refunded by the contractors.

Item 1427 shows where a contract for the extension of the Zeelugt Nursery School was awarded to a contractor with the sum of \$2.942 million after which there was an approved variation of \$2.684 million or 91 percent of the original contract sum.

We wonder if the same thing is expected when the health post is constructed in the same village in 2008. At Item 1428, we learnt that the file containing documents relative to a contract valued \$9.632 million could not be located for

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examination. Items 1432 and 1444 E established that there was an overpayment to the value of \$726,488 with respect to two contracts. Up to the publication of the report these amounts were not recovered. Item 1388 reports that nineteen persons remained on the payroll up to four months, after they had ceased to be employees. One operator collected in excess of \$282,000 being twelve months salary although he had left the job, nineteen months earlier. The administration also failed to collect monies which it had paid to him in 2004 while he was already off the job.

Items 1414 and 1415 outlined where senior regional officials and contractors alike sent expensive equipment including computers and other items to the stores for safekeeping without any documentation or authority. We do not know where it was moved to after that. This is totally unacceptable but continues up to today.

In concluding Mde Speaker, this Budget has clearly failed to address the bread and butter issues of the people in Region 3 - schools without furniture and equipment, hospitals without competent staff and the unreliable and non-functional equipment. No new economic activity, zero job creation, frustrated young people, children in school settings which are a far cry from being child-friendly, partisan political allocation of state resources and a firmly entrenched corrupt Regional Administration represents the reality of life in Region 3. The fact that this Budget seeks to do nothing to effect change for the better, lends support to

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its team which with minor adjustment would be more appropriate. It should read- *Staying the Course, Advancing the Deception Agenda.* [Applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Minister in the Ministry of Education.

Hon Dr Desrey Fox: Mde Speaker, after listening to my brother Mervyn Williams over on the other side of this House, I was wondering that... I just concluded in fact that we might have a disaster zone there and that the communities that he is talking about in Region 3 are literally dead.

Mde Speaker, Honourable Members of the House, I would like to congratulate my learned colleague, the young and brilliant doctor, the Honourable Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance for working so hard to come up with a Budget that is clearly reflective of *Staying the Course and Advancing the Transformation Agenda* of Guyana. [Applause]

In addition, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for the \$19 million allocated to the Ministry of Education.

I rise in support of, and to review the Ministry of Education's performance in 2007 and to elaborate on some of our plans in 2008.

It has been only a little over one year and seven months since my colleague, The Hon Minister, Shaik Baksh and I

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took office as Ministers in the Ministry of Education. However, within the short space of time we have had to revise and review and where necessary, retain some continuity in the way forward for the Ministry of Education in the education of our Nation. In the process of assessing and reassessing, revising and reviewing, some priorities have been established.

First, we had to focus on the organisational changes for effective delivery of quality education. This is because the education system was not performing in achieving quality learning outcomes. The statistics of the results of the Grades 2, 4 and 6 Assessments at the primary levels and the Grades 9 Assessment and CSEC examinations testified to this. This meant that high percentages of children were left behind at each grade of the primary and secondary cycles which lead to high levels of functional illiteracy and numeracy and secondary school drop outs. It also meant that although so many resources were ploughed into the Education Sector in the provision of new and refurbished school buildings, learning resources, teacher education and training etcetera there has not been a corresponding delivery of education. This situation was embedded in a multiplicity of factors with the foremost reasons being:

- The ineffective monitoring of the school system,
- The limited measurement and evaluation of learning outcomes at each grade of the Primary and Secondary School system,

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- The need for effective management and supervision of schools,
- Improve reporting support capacity development of the various tiers of the education system and especially the schools.

This is the honest truth. This meant that there was an urgent need (*at least we were brave to understand that that is what has happened*).

This meant that there was an urgent need for some organisational changes to take place for the effective delivery of quality education to result in significantly better results at the various levels of the education system.

One of the changes that were made was the establishment of a new unit known as the MERD (Monitoring, Evaluating, Reporting and Development). The unit incorporated some of the functions of the Inspectorate Unit. This staff Regional Department of Education; utilising monitoring and evaluation instruments to assist school performance and effectiveness to enhance the delivery of quality education. The inspection of all schools is expected to be done at least once per school term and more often in poor performing schools. The MERD Unit is headed by the Deputy Chief Education Officer (Development) and is located at Central Ministry.

As I speak here today, the MERD Unit is in the fields visiting schools across the country which has not happened

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for a number of years. The hope is that the organisational changes is going to positively affect the way the various levels of the Education Sector is organised, managed and operated. For example, the Central Ministry of Education, the decentralised system of education management by the Regions and the core school system inclusive of the School Improvement Action Committees and Parent Teachers Associations.

Another unit was also established, this time it is the PIMU (Policy Implementation and Monitoring Unit). This unit is headed by the Deputy Chief Education Officer who functions as the Chief Liaison between Central Ministry of Education and the Regional Education System to ensure a high level of implementation of education policies. It was realised that monitoring and implementation of policies was weak within the Education Sector with an accompaniment of a high degree of non-compliance for example, release of teachers to U.G, textbook distribution, allocation and maintenance, fund-raising by schools, staffing and contact hours for teachers, use of school building for fee-giving lessons, schools as no-smoking zones. The flattening of the organisational structure in the Ministry of Education was necessary because although the MERD and the PEMU falls under the supervision of the Chief Education Officer, these units will have a high level of autonomy and with increased accountability for their output and performance.

The National Centre for Education Resource Development (NCERD) now falls under the Permanent Secretary instead

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of the Chief Education Officer. The three Assistant Chief Education Officers for Nursery, Primary and Secondary education are now directly under the Chief Education Officer rather than reporting to the Deputy Chief Education Officer. This provides for direct reporting to the CEO on the state and problems at the various levels of educational delivery. The teacher education and training at CPCE is now directly under the Chief Education Officer rather than the Deputy Chief Education Officer.

Finally, the Examinations Division now falls under the Permanent Secretary instead of the Chief Education Officer emphasising the strong administrative functions and responsibilities of this Division.

Mde Speaker I have said enough about the organisational changes for the effective delivery of quality education to this Nation. There is need therefore to focus now on other achievements in the Education Sector in 2007.

The Ministry of Education launched the new Literacy Model and Methodology nationwide to enhance the quality of literacy and numeracy in the school system. This programme is referred to as the fast-track initiative to promote nationwide literacy. It is a fact that literacy gives people the tools, knowledge and confidence to improve their ability to participate more actively in their societies and to make more informed choices. In today's world, literacy skills have become even more important. Recognising this fact, the importance of developing strategies to raise the level of literacy in Guyana is now a

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preoccupation of the Minister of Education thus its Strategic Plan 2003-2007 clearly stated as its objective the following:

- To improve the quality of delivery of education especially of literacy and numeracy and to achieve significantly, better levels of literacy and numeracy.
- To seriously support these objectives and to rectify failing performances in literacy and numeracy at all levels in the schools. The Ministry of Education has embarked on a fast-track initiative to promote this nationwide literacy. *[Applause]* This initiative proposes a more balanced approach to ensure increased literacy at both the Nursery and Primary levels.
- It requires a new classroom timetable for nursery and Grades 1 and 2 at the Primary level with the following inclusions:
 - (i) Shared Reading and the Language Experience Approach.
 - (ii) Accelerated Instruction
 - (iii) The Literacy Hour inclusive of the integration of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.
 - (iv) Continuous Assessments

(v) Differentiated instructions

To support these methodologies, materials in classrooms have been revised and supplemental teaching and learning materials have been developed. These materials include:

- Curriculum Guides
- Scope and Sequence Charts
- Literacy Handbooks
- Textbooks
- Library Books
- Continuous Assessment Materials
- Phonics CDs and
- Big Books

The components of the fast-track initiative to improve Nationwide literacy programmes have been rolled out and is in keeping with the aims of the United Nations Education for All Projections and Goals, which is the achievement of fifty percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuous education for all adults.

The target groups here includes students in schools who are currently left behind at various grades of Primary and Secondary schools, out-of-schools youths especially those

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proceeding to technical-vocational training and skills for life programmes, adults who are functionally literate.

Surely the mandate of learning in schools has gone beyond just being an institutional physical building but rather reaching out to the communities not only to school children but adults as well. The duration of this project is twelve months and will end in December 2008. The main objectives of the *fast-track initiative* to promote National literacy are:

- To promote the opportunity for all school-aged children to become functionally literate and numerate at an accepted standard at each grade of the Primary school.
- To provide opportunities to communities to access literacy training programmes organised for the adult population so they can become functionally literate and numerate.

The Ministry of Education's methodologies is to achieve success in this programme; involves the training of approximately three hundred young voluntary cadets across the country by literacy specialists to deliver the literacy programmes to school aged children and to young and matured adults. Persons interested in participating in this literacy programme would be assessed to determine their level of literacy as an entry point to this programme.

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Training will be conducted over a one-month period in each Administrative Region. This will be monitored by the literacy specialists to ensure efficacy of the programme. The literacy programme for school aged children will run for one and a half hours from Monday to Friday of each week. During the Easter vacation, half day literacy sessions will run for one week and during the August vacation, the half day literacy sessions will run for two weeks. For the adult, two hour literacy sessions will be conducted on weekends.

Mde Speaker \$60 million has been allocated for the expansion of the BCCP and Skills for Life programmes in Budget 2008. *[Applause]* These are programmes that were already established in ten schools in the case of BCCP and one PIC in the case of Skills for Life in 2007. This year, the Ministry of Education will be expanded to include fifteen schools for the BCCP and seven schools for the Skills for Life programme.

The schools where the BCCP programmes will be launched in 2008 include:

- North West Secondary
- Charity Secondary
- Cotton Field Secondary
- Leonora Secondary
- Patentia Secondary

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- Diamond Secondary
- Novar Primary
- Bush Lot Secondary
- Line Path Secondary
- Port Maurant Community High School
- Waramadong Secondary
- Paramakatoi Secondary
- St. Ignatius Secondary
- Kwakwani Secondary
- New Amsterdam PIC

The Seven Schools that will offer the Skills for Life Programmes are:

- (i) Cotton Field
- (ii) Leonora
- (iii) Bush Lot Secondary
- (iv) Waramadong Secondary
- (v) St. Ignatius Secondary
- (vi) Kwakwani Secondary; and

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(vii) New Amsterdam PIC

Mde Speaker BCCP, the (Basic Competency Certificate Programme) caters for students who are technically inclined in the Secondary schools and it is an alternative pathway for students. BCCP has the competency-based method of teaching where a child learns at his/her own pace under supervision. It is equivalent to the Level I Skills Competency at the Caribbean Vocational Equivalency or the Level I CVQ (Caribbean Vocational Qualification). Some of the subjects thought in the BCCP programme include:

- Carpentry
- Joinery
- Sheet Metal
- Welding
- Electrical Installation
- Masonry Work
- Visual Arts
- Catering
- Garment Construction
- Crops and Animal Science

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- Hydrophonics
- Agricultural Mechanic
- Cake Decoration; and
- Information Technology

The first batch of BCCP students are expected to graduate in March this year.

The *Skills For Life* is a sister programme of the BCCP which caters for school-leavers, young adults with insufficient qualifications for the job market and persons who may want to learn a trade. Classes are held in the afternoons to cater further for workers.

The programme utilises the same equipment, machinery and teaching personnel to cut on cost. The first graduation for *Skills For Life* was in August 2007 and fifty-nine students graduated from this programme. It was so successful, since all fifty-nine were absorbed by employers following the work-study exercise, some before and after graduation.

In other areas of technical education, the Ministry of Education is pleased to announce that the Carnegie School of Home Economics has introduced a new programme patterned after the Barbados Tourism Association in the field of Tourism and Hospitality. The accreditation for the technical subjects inclusive of the courses just mentioned is in the process of being equated to the CVQ. In addition, for

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better management, the Craft Production Unit and the Carnegie School of Home Economics have now been merged. Mde Speaker the Ministry of Education is also extending technical education to two Regions this year thus two new industrial training centres are intended to be established in Regions 3 and 5. These technical schools will again cater for school leavers and all ambitious young adults. To manage technical-vocational training better, the Ministry of Education encouraged the inauguration of the new TVET Council in January this year. The Council is expected to bring together the Accreditation Unit and the Ministry of Education to establish policies pertaining to the accreditation of core subjects in Technical Education to the level of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification. This is to prepare for the free skill movement in the Caribbean region. Presently UNICEF has indicated an interest in supporting a project to reintegrate teenage mothers into Secondary education.

In addition, the British High Commission is willing to invest in Technical-Vocational Education for school leavers in three rural underprivileged communities.

The Ministry of Education is striving to have a holistic approach to educating not only school children but all young Guyanese who must be given a second chance through various educational programmes. The Ministry of Education in 2007 also embarked upon developing a policy titled *Education Sector Policy on School Health Nutrition and HIV/AIDS*.

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This policy has been formulated to improve the education, health and nutrition of school children, teachers and members of the Education Sector. This policy is the core to mainstreaming school health, nutrition and HIV/AIDS education.

Good health and nutrition are not only essential inputs but also important outcomes of basic education of good quality education.

Our children must be healthy and well-nourished in order to fully participate in education therefore improving their health and nutrition can enhance learning and educational outcomes. It is also a fact that poor health and nutrition are important underlying factors for low school enrolment, absenteeism, poor classroom performance and early school dropout as reflected in the World Declaration on Education for all.

Programmes to achieve good health, hygiene and nutrition at school are essential to the promotion of basic education for all children.

Committed to what has been said before, the Education Sector Policy on School Health Nutrition and HIV/AIDS is a directive for the establishment of a new unit called the School Health Nutrition HIV Unit this year at the Ministry of Education. This would promote and facilitate the implementation of health and nutrition programming for the schools in Guyana. It will also educate to prevent

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HIV/AIDS across the Education Sector. This unit will be located at Central Ministry.

Finally Mde Speaker, the Ministry of Education will continue to stay the course and is very much involved in the advancement of the Transformation Agenda of Guyana, thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member Dr John Austin.

Dr John Austin: Mde Speaker, this 2008 Budget is:

- A budget containing deficiencies
- A budget containing fallacies
- A budget containing discrepancies
- A budget containing fantasies

Inordinate emphasis has been placed on infrastructural development to the detriment of human development. In addition, the infrastructural development projects have been allocated in a discriminatory manner. Some villages and areas have been neglected over the years while others are favoured.

Region 6 has many problems with drainage and irrigation of residential, commercial and agricultural lands. Of the \$82 million budgeted for drainage and irrigation in Region 6 there is no allocation for some of the vital projects.

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For years the front lands distributaries to some areas in the Corentyne have been neglected. A little work has been done here and there but no work has been done in a satisfactory manner that this problem can be solved. As a result of this chronic neglect, some villages have been flooded to such an extent that villagers are unable to utilise their agricultural lands. Also, residential and commercial lands in these villages are similarly affected. Some flooded frequently, some flooded chronically.

These villages include:

- Gibraltar
- Courtland
- Fryish
- Whim
- Lancaster
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Olverstown
- Alness
- Sand Turn
- Hogg Stye

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- Adventure
- Limlair
- Friendship
- Nernie
- Kildonian
- Bushlot

Rose Hall town is another example of a community with inadequate drainage and irrigation.

The 2008 Budget has shown no allocation for rectifying this recurring flooding in Rose Hall town which affects more than 2000 persons. Mde Speaker if rain falls significantly for one night or for a one day time period, large areas of Rose Hall town become flooded and this flood can last for up to six days.

Other communities have serious drainage and irrigation problems which have not been addressed in this Budget. In No. 53 Village on the Corentyne, there is frequent flooding when rain falls. About 950 persons have to frequently live with the inconveniences and hazards resulting from the flooding of their residential and agricultural lands. These problems are even more conspicuous because there are no occurrences of similar flooding in No. 52 Village and No. 54 Village.

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The 2008 Budget for Region 6 has \$8.1 million for purchase of desks, benches, stools, cubicles and chalkboards. I do not know of any case where students have to take chalkboards to school. However, knowing the way things are in Guyana, this may well have occurred. This \$8.1 million allocated to purchase these furniture for the schools in Region 6 is very inadequate.

There are numerous cases where students have to take chairs, tables and stools to school so that they can sit in fair amount of comfort in the classroom to do their school work. Again, this Budget allocates \$14.5 million for office materials and supplies and print and non-print materials for the Region 6 education system. Again, unfortunately I have to say that this amount is significantly inadequate. For example, there are numerous cases where students have to pay for the production of question papers for school examinations or tests. Not only does this Budget reveal disregard for conducive working conditions for students, it does the same for employees of the education system. There are many examples of this 2008 and recent Budgets woefully failing to cater for conducive working conditions for the staff of the Education Sector. *[Applause]*

One hundred and ninety semi-skilled and unskilled workers' salaries were budgeted for in the Region 6 Education Sector in 2007. This number is reduced to 153 in 2008. This reduction attests to the fact that relevant officials either do not comprehend or do not want to comprehend the fact that the semi-skilled and unskilled categories of

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workers like the majority of other categories of workers in the Education Sector and other sectors in Region 6 is understaffed. In fact, this category of workers is very much short to the extent that there are many cases when personnel, students, teachers have to clean their classrooms, other parts of their School and their School compounds. In some cases students and parents have to provide money to pay the salary of a janitor or a security guard. This acute staff shortage is not due to lack of employable persons, it is due to the fact that adequate money to pay salaries is not provided by this Budget and recent Budgets.

The situation has deteriorated so much that in December 2007, a charwoman at one of the schools in Region 6 was paid two weeks money short and when she asked why she was paid the short money she was told that money was not available for her to receive the full amount due.

The 2008 Budget caters for three contract employees in the Education Sector in Region 6. This is an increase of one from the 2007 Budget. The payment of special salaries to contracted workers combined with employing contracted workers under highly irregular circumstances is having a negative impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the Education Sector and other Sectors involved.

Many irregularities are interwoven with the super-salaries these contracted employees receive. For example, in Region 6 a retired person was employed as Regional Education Officer for a contractual period of three years. This contract employment has many irregularities. For example, suitably

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qualified and available persons below the age of retirement were ignored when this vacant position of a head of a Regional establishment had to be filled. To make matters worse, this retiree has been recently re-employed again on contract after the end of those three years of contract. This case of obvious abuse of normal procedures for employment in Guyana sets a dangerous precedent, a very dangerous precedent.

In addition, this type of abuse of employment procedures in Guyana has many negative effects. One result of this type of highly controversial method of employment is degeneration of affected systems. For example, in 2007 the Cyril Potter College of Education Mathematics examination in Region 6, approximately 86 percent of the trained teachers failed; this is massive failure, unprecedented in the history of the Cyril Potter College of Education.

Mde Speaker this government plans to spend approximately \$93 million on rehabilitation of roads in Region 6 during 2008. The rehabilitation of roads is good. It is not good however when the rehabilitation of roads is done in a discriminatory manner. It should be an embarrassment to any government. For example, the long existing and highly populated boroughs of Princetown and Queenstown of Corriverton still have, what Guyanese call, *mud roads*. During rainy weather these roads become mud tracks, sprinkled with muddy ponds of varying sizes. Another unsatisfactory aspect of rehabilitation of these roads is substandard workmanship. During 2007 rehabilitation work

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was done on roads in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Hibernia. Within a few months, all of these roads have deteriorated significantly ... millions of dollars wasted. In fact, for some time after the rehabilitation of the Hopetown Road, a notorious situation existed.

If a motorist had to apply brakes while driving on this road, the tyres of the vehicle striped off layers of the surface of the road. Mde Speaker, \$980 million has been budgeted for completing the access roads to the Berbice River Bridge. US\$8.7 million is said to be the cost for the contract awarded for these access roads. From the way work has been progressing on these bridge approaches, the final cost is likely to be much greater than what it would have cost to rehabilitate the East and West Bank roads which would have provided a better citing for the Berbice River Bridge. From eyewitness accounts' statements revealed that sometimes two piles are driven one on top the other and yet firm earth has not been reached. There was one account of a pile being driven one day but could not be found the next day. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, \$34.8 million has been allocated for capital health services projects in Region 6, however, as can be seen, there is inadequate provision for staff and patient comfort and welfare. These are necessary for optimal utilisation of human resources. Human resources are the greatest resources any country has *[Applause]*. For example, this government does not see it necessary to construct or provide restrooms and dining room for the staff

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of the New Amsterdam Hospital although this hospital has been acclaimed a state-of-the-art institution.

Mde Speaker as an example of the blatant disregard for the welfare of health staff and patients, I would give an outline of an incident at a health institution in the Corentyne. I would not mention the name of the health institution because I was informed that in the circumstances in Guyana, government officials are likely to victimise the staff if they are identified.

A part of the building had deteriorated and posed an accident hazard for both staff and patients visiting that health institution. When the health institution staff complained to the government officials one time too frequent, they were threatened to be disciplined if they complained again.

There is no mention of budgetary allocation for sea defences in Region 6. We hope that soon the government will do some sea defence works at Harriet and Spring Garden on the Corentyne. This would stop the land erosion and flooding currently occurring. The chronicling of the problems in Region 6 directly and indirectly related to the Budget can continue. However, I think I have said enough for now. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Irfaan Ali.

Mr Mohammed Irfaan Ali: Mde Speaker, I rise this evening firstly to congratulate the Honourable Dr Ashni

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Singh and the staff of the Ministry of Finance for a budget that shows the dynamics of the world economic system and the integration of Guyana's economy into that overarching framework. *[Applause]*

I had no intention to, but I must respond to some of the comments by the Honourable Member, Mr Mervyn Williams.

Mr Mervyn Williams complained about the space facilities at the Greenwich Park Primary School but I want to say something. This government is a government that thinks about the future. There is new scheme, the largest housing scheme in Tuschen. When that scheme becomes fully populated, where are the children going to go? *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, Members of the Opposition complained about other institutions that are overcrowded and here is a scenario that the government is building for the future and still they are complaining. *[Applause]*

You are damned if you do and damned if you don't. I am very happy that the Honourable Member proceeded to quote extensively from the Auditor General's report. Of course, he would be too young to know that under the PNCR-1G Administration, we never had an Auditor General's Report *[Applause]* and further, the Members of the Opposition speak about transparency. We do not have anything to hide in this government; nothing to hide that is why the Auditor General is given the independence to report as is. *[Applause]*

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We have no intention and this government would never silence the Office of the Auditor General. *[Applause]*

To add to this, I must say at the PAC level, there exists a high level of professionalism by all the Members of the PAC and high levels of objectivity. This shows that we on the Government side and the Members of the Opposition who are on the PAC, we do not have interest in hiding corruption or hiding any irregular activity as is reported in the Auditor General's report.

The Honourable Member Mr Murray for whom I have tremendous respect spoke ... *[Interruption: 'Of course, he is a man that deserves respect']*

He spoke about the National Development Strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the integration of the two and the update of these two strategies to reflect the realities of changing times. However, Mr Murray failed to point out that as a component of the National Development Strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy we have a number of sub-components including:

- The Sugar Modernisation Plan
- The Competitiveness Programme for Industry
- The ICT Plan
- The Tourism Development Action Plan
- The Health Sector Development Plan

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- The Transport Sector Development Plan; and importantly
- The Security Sector Reform

[Applause] These are all sub-components; these are all sub-components of the overarching National Development Strategy that is implemented at the sectoral level to fulfil the macro- objectives of the National Development Strategy. The Economic Services Committee of which the Honourable Member Mr Murray is a Member is actively pursuing the evaluation of the work done to accomplish the goals as set out in the National Development Strategy and the PRSP. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker with regard to the export of skilled workers spoken about by the Honourable Members Mr Basil Williams and Mr Winston Murray, this stands testimony to the fact that we have revolutionised our educational system in this country and we are now in a position to have human resource capacity that can fill any position anywhere in the world and function effectively. *[Applause]*

The 16 percent allocation of the Budget in the Education Sector stands testimony to this fact and for those of us who understand Economics and understand developmental economics like Mr Murray we would know that there is a concept of knowledge-base economy.

We are speaking about the CSME. We have all supported the Caribbean Single- Marketing and Economy. They have

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all supported our efforts to be part of the WTO but here is it in this Honourable House that we are going against core principles of these two organisations:

- (i) *The WTO* provides for the free movement of all aspects of production including human resources. We are a signatory, a partner to the objectives of the WTO.

They asked Mde Speaker, the Honourable Members asked why nobody are coming but I could remember right in this House we were criticised of bringing Indians from Indian when we were building the stadium, we were criticised of that and yet now, we are accused that people are not coming.

We have Cuban doctors who are coming here and we are thankful for that, we have engineers from India, Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria who are coming here and indeed we are thankful for that.

The transformation of Guyana's economy to acknowledge capital is part of our effort to build the entrepreneurial ability of the Guyanese people. Even in India and China, the two fastest growing economies in the world, the knowledge-based aspect of the economy was the primary driver of changes and transformation of those economies. We should study the effect of training of skilled personnel and skilled human resource and the contribution to those economies.

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On the issue of the perception of corruption, the Honourable Member Mr Murray spoke of the need to have the names of companies to which contracts are awarded. May I humbly invite the Honourable Member to visit the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board website at npta@guyana.org. There you would see well listed out and up-to-date, all the contracts that were awarded, whom they were awarded to and the values of the awards. Not only that, Mde Speaker, I humbly invite the Honourable Member to visit the website. *[Applause]* The truth, this is the tingling effect of the truth, it creates grumbling and we are hearing a lot of grumbling but that is just the effect of truth.

On this note I wish to quote from the IMF Executive Board 2006 Article 4 Consultation with Guyana and I quote:

There was significant progress with structural reforms, strengthening of public sector expenditure management and improved governance.

I wish to quote that again for the Honourable Member, Mr Murray.

There was significant progress with structural reforms, strengthening of public sector expenditure management and improved governance.

What does that mean? That means that the level of governance; we have improved in governance, we have improved in public expenditure management and we have

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improved in the overall performance in the economy.
[Applause]

The Honourable Member, Mrs Sheila Holder quoted from this very report, but she omitted to tell us about the good story that the report concluded with.

Mde Speaker, in terms of inflation, in terms of increase in wages and inflation, I wish to respond to the Honourable Members Messrs Basil Williams and Murray and I wish to remind them and I was happy when the Honourable Member, Mr Murray took us back to 1992.

In 1991, inflation stood at 125 percent. Currency devalued by more than 4,333 percent but guess what, minimum wage rose by 508 percent; 500 percent below the request of the T.U.C. In 1991, the daily minimum wage was less than fifty United States cents, the lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean. On May Day in 1991, the General Secretary of the TUC said, the late Mr Joseph Pollydore, he said-

Workers were at a near state of destitution and the government had left the children breadless and the home riceless.

Honourable Member Mr Seeraj, I am sorry you were not there then to render some rice to the homes *[Laughter and Applause]*. Of course, this amount could have only bought about 1½lbs beef. The daily minimum wage at that time could have only bought 1½ lbs beef or 6 eggs or 2 ½ lbs of

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sugar. Definitely it was insufficient to purchase a pound of chicken.

I see the older Members of the Opposition leaning wearily on their left side, but I am happy that the younger Members in this Honourable House and those in the media are listening attentively so that history would be recorded correctly and a sense of perspective... *[Applause]* A sense of perspective would be placed as to where we have come from and where we are today. *(I am going to tell you where we are, happily).*

However, the government today can boast of increased wages, not only consistent with inflation, but also ensuring social protection intervention to benefit the poor and vulnerable. Minimum wage moved by over 950 percent since 1991. This is an average of 63 percent annually. What more can we do for the Opposition to see the light and follow the ray, by coming over with us on this side of the House *[Applause]* thus creating a brighter future for all Guyanese. *[Applause]*

I wish now to touch on some of the initiatives that we have also included to target the poor and most vulnerable sections of society and these include:

- \$810 million to be spent in Public Water Charges Assistance Programme, benefiting over 15, 000 persons;

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- \$120 million to offset the water charges for the elderly
- \$105 million to benefit the Amerindians directly
[Applause]
- \$100 million to assist vulnerable single parents
[Applause]

Honourable Member, Mr Mervyn Williams, may I repeat that for you; \$100 million to benefit single parents, single-parent is not only single female parents but single male parents too *[Applause]*.

We also have \$50 million to provide spectacles for the poor.

This is testimony to the fact that the PPP/C government is a truly working-class government *[Applause]*.

This is a government that ensures our children are never again left breadless and our pots are never again left riceless. On this note let me conclude by quoting the IMF Executive Board's 2006 Article 4 Consultation with Guyana-

Executive Director commended the authorities for implementing sound macro-economic policies resulting in better growth and inflation performance and improved debt sustainability outlook.

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Yet the Honourable Member Mr Murray asked; *where is the growth?* Even the foreigners and outsiders can see the growth but we in this Honourable House are not willing to accept that there was growth.

I am very happy that the Honourable Member Mr Ramjattan's vision is so blurred that he can only see human beings that are getting bigger but, he lacks the vision to see the bigger picture, and that is a united and progressive Guyana under the PPP/C Administration. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker Mr Murray asked for the evidence of growth. I wish to take us back to the Honourable Minister's first Budget presentation when he premised Guyana's growth strategy as a *pro-poor* approach to growth. This is important for us to note because by *pro-poor* we mean growth that possesses equitable distribution between social development and economic growth. We would not want to see growth at 10 percent and disparity of 25 percent.

What sense would that make? Mr Ramjattan would not understand this; the vision is not so good. Global growth was 4.9 percent that is .5 percent below Guyana's growth rate while Regional growth was 3.9 percent, 1.5 percent below Guyana's growth rate, yet the Honourable Member Mr Murray cannot see growth. Yes, the Honourable Member Mr Murray asked for evidence, apparently Mr Murray is not residing in Guyana because:

- if you drive down the East Bank Highway you would see beautiful hotels;

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- if you drive down and around Georgetown you would see beautiful hotels;
- if you go to Parika you would see that they now have access to banking and other financial services;
- in Bartica you have access to banking and financial services;
- in Region 2 you have access to banking and financial services;
- in Region 3 you have access to banking and financial services;
- in Region 10 you have access to banking and financial services;
- in Region 4 you have access to banking and financial services;
- in Region 6 you have access to banking and financial services; and of course Mde Speaker, to top it off
- in Region 9 we have access to banking and financial services. *[Applause]*

The Honourable Member, Mr Murray whom I have tremendous respect for asked for evidence. There lies the evidence Mr Murray, so I invite you to come in our loving arms and we will take you here. We will take the

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Honourable Member here and make him evidence of that growth.

I also wish to advise this Honourable House that very soon, we would also have a bank in Diamond. So Mr Murray, please, look carefully and in another few months you would see the foundation being laid for more growth. If you want more about growth, Mde Speaker, let us look at motor vehicles. Between the period 1982-1991 we have 22,490 being registered. Between the period 1997-2007 we have 91,000 vehicles being registered. *[Applause]* You want more growth. The level of growth is now necessitating the expansion of the infrastructure of this country. *[Applause]*

I wish now to deal with the issue of VAT. I am happy I have the attention of the Members of the Opposition, let us interact; *(Come on, let us interact)*. While we speak about the so-called windfall of VAT, we are overlooking the other objectives of VAT which were to increase efficiency, transparency and to widen the tax base. Those were also core objectives of the VAT. So I am happy that all of the objectives of VAT holistically which include the issues of undervaluing, are all addressed with the implementation of VAT. More so Mde Speaker, we would not apologise for revenue, we are happy for every additional source of revenue and income because that gives the government the opportunity to deliver more to our people especially the poor and more vulnerable. *[Applause]*

The Honourable Member Mr Murray spoke about VAT handouts to rice farmers as if this is something bad. Mde

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Speaker, I want to make this clear, whatever it takes, whenever it takes, however it takes; we are going to ensure the Rice Sector remains sustainable, viable and profitable.

[Applause]

We have no apology, if we use revenue that we gained from taxes on VAT, for the benefit of the rice farmer and the benefit of the Rice Industry and the benefit of farmers in Guyana because that is what this government stands for, we stand for the people, with the people and by the people.

[Applause]

Budget 2008 is crafted in a particular context, as the developing economies and the developed world focuses on basic economic issues with severe consequential implications. Right up on the agenda is the issue of food and food security.

2007 saw the highest ever recorded price of wheat, at \$400 per tonne. Maize recorded a world record also, exceeding \$175 per tonne. Rice also recorded high prices. The Economist Food Prices Index is at its highest since the establishment in 1845. Drought in Australia caused the wheat crop to fail for the second year running. Of importance though is the fact that the present issue of inflation is inflicted at a time of abundance rather than scarcity and if we all claim that we have the willpower, let us deal with this.

Let us debate the issue of abundance but yet scarcity and let us be bold enough to tell those who need to be told that they

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need to change their policy direction to benefit the developing and the less privileged sections of the world.

Mde Speaker according to the International Grains Council, grains is projected to be 1.66 billion tonnes. Higher income in China and India now drives up the demand for meat. For example; in 1985, an average Chinese consumed 20kg of meat annually, today, that average is 50kg. The growing demand for meat products has a consequential effect on the cost and the production of feed.

Secondly is the issue of the American Ethanol programme and global warming which is expected to cut world farming output by 1/6 by the year 2020. Cereal prices are expected to rise between 10-20 percent by 2016-2017.

According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization's forecast, inflation in food prices is in emerging markets nearly doubled in the past year, causing inflation to be at the highest over the decade. This is the context in which the Budget is crafted and these are the parameters that our strategies were developed, putting Guyana in a position to face these challenges.

The Budget is a further fulfilment of... *[Interruption]*

The Deputy Speaker: Time Honourable Member.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mde Speaker, I beg that the Honourable Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Question put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members this is about the time we ought to have a break, but if you want we can have the ... we will give you the five minutes so we break at 8:20.

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali: Mde Speaker, the Budget is a further fulfilment of our contract with the people of Guyana in our 2006 Manifesto when we promised a brighter future for all Guyanese. Mde Speaker, tell me if:

- The modernization of the Sugar Industry is not a brighter future.
- Isn't the bridging of the Berbice River a brighter future?
- Isn't the construction of airstrips at Wakenaam and Leguan a brighter future?
- Isn't the bridging of Guyana-Brazil ... that is just a kissing distance away ... a brighter future?
- Isn't the Agricultural Diversification Plan a brighter future?
- Isn't the completion of the Supernaam Ferry Stelling a brighter future?

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- Isn't the construction of a Technical Institute in Region 3 and also in Region 5 adding to the existing facility in Regions 2, 4, 6 and 10, testimony to the fulfilling of the promise of a brighter future?

Join with me colleagues, and echo the chorus that indeed we have a brighter future and that all Guyanese are beneficiaries of this future. Not only is the future brighter, but the contract of this PPP/C Government outlined in its 2006 Manifesto is fulfilled by every passing day. With the hope Mde Speaker that we solve the issue of crime very quickly, very quickly and, with the confidence we have on this side, we wish to assure the Guyanese people that the future is bright and beautiful and we are not going to rest until Guyana achieves that bright and beautiful future in which lies our promise land. With this Mde Speaker, I commend this Budget to this House for approval.
[Applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, we will now take the suspension.

20:17H - Suspension of Sitting

20:45H - Resumption of Sitting

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, the Sitting is resumed.

Honourable Jennifer Wade.

Ms Jennifer Wade: Mde Speaker, I rise to participate in this Debate on the 2008 National Budget. Every year the Honourable Minister of Finance prepares a Budget on what his government will do and what relief they will bring to the Guyanese people and at the end of the year we seldom see evidence of any relief but hardship on this beautiful land of ours. Mde Speaker, it is my sincere hope that on this occasion promises will be fulfilled and Guyanese will be able to breathe a sigh of relief.

As the Constitutional Representative of Region No 5 and that is Mahaica-Berbice, I bring to this Honourable House issues that affect my Region. The Budgetary allocations to this Region continue to be inadequate and this sees the affairs of the Region not properly administered. The Regional Administration, that is the RDC, sits with all ten Neighbourhood Democratic Council officials and prepares programmes for inclusion in the Regional presentation. Yet only a small percentage of their submission appears in the National Budget hence hindering development in my constituency. Region No. 5 is an agricultural Region and I wish to remind the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, I am sorry he is not here, lest he forgets that agriculture is the backbone of Guyana's economy and as such, much more attention is needed.

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One year ago Mde Speaker, I stood up in this Honourable House and spoke of the concerns, the issues and needs of my constituency in various sectors.

Ministers responsible came to our assistance. Yes, a few things were done and we were grateful but that is the responsibility of the government of the day [*Applause*] to improve the lives our people.

On page 43, the Honourable Minister, under Agriculture mentioned that rice output is targeted at 321,000 tonnes representing 7.6 percent growth and the recovery from adverse conditions experienced in 2007. I want to say to the Honourable Minister that in Agriculture maintenance of drainage and irrigation is absolutely necessary and with the lack of these systems in place, we would never meet the targets Mde Speaker, if the government of the day does not put in place a comprehensive disaster preparation programme to deal with emergencies. They will continue to play the blame game, while residents of Region No. 5 continue to suffer.

Over the past years this government paid no attention to some areas in my Region and I would not come here to mislead this Honourable House. Mde Speaker, the blame game is on heavy rainfall, is on the climate change, is on global warming but my Honourable colleagues, I am saying it is gross negligence [*Applause*] that has caused the drainage and irrigation system in Region No. 5 to be in its sad state. The government needs to invest more in the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary Agricultural Development

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Authority and I want Mr Seeraj to listen carefully because the Minister is not here. We need to do much more for our farmers Mr Seeraj. Even as I speak Mde Speaker, there is a billboard mounted at Cotton Tree Village on the West Coast of Berbice and it says-

Attention government, MMA/ADA corrupt hands off Cotton Tree lands. Big land shark grabbing state land. Investigate and disband MMA now.

This is so because of the malpractices of officers placed to manage our Regional affairs. This is not perception that the government likes to speak about; this is reality. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, it seems like nobody cares. I say this because time is the evidence and has shown in many instances that farmers are treated with disrespect, disregard and indifferences. The farmers are belittled by the officers hence; it is appalling to witness the humiliation farmers are subjected to when they approach the MMA-ADA for assistance to save the millions they borrowed from the various banks to spend on their farmlands. They are being reminded in the presence of staff and the entire John Public of the millions due to the Authority hence, reluctance from most farmers to seek much needed assistance, yet others will go just to get their cases attended to. Mde Speaker, the hardest work on earth is waiting. During the rainy season in December, some farmers along with the assistance of the MMA risk their lives (*and I have evidence, they talking about evidence, I have it here*) risk their lives...

[Interruption: 'Show them'] Look them there. Look at this.

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[Interruption ‘Sharma give you them pictures or what?’]
Risk their lives to save their crops *[Interruption: ‘That’s GINA pictures’]* doing manual cleaning at the outlet of the Abary Creek to save their crops.

Finally, the desilting of the mouth of the Abary Creek commenced on Monday, 25th February a mere two days before the commencement of the Budget Debate.

[Interruption: ‘What wrong with that?’] Mde Speaker residents are pleased but feel Honourable Minister of Agriculture; that a long boom excavator would have been more effective, thus realizing the building of a modern Guyana.

The entire Region is affected by flood waters; rice, cattle, poultry, cash crop, cash crop farmers along with human beings, they all suffered. The Honourable Minister visited and made promises of compensation. Mde Speaker, I do hope this time the Minister will live up to his promises and ensures that all farmers affected receive compensation. *[Applause]* Million of dollars have been spent in some areas to rehabilitate dams, structures, drains, canals, embankments and the installation of pumps. What is worrying is the failure of the Administration to manage the business of the State. Mde Speaker, cattle continue to ravage farmers and to destroy infrastructure, hence we need systems in place to deal with the situation immediately. Farmers’ machinery are stuck in the backlands since the last preparation of the crop as a result of the state of the dams.

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In the Yoble-Bran area over 568 acreage of land are under-utilised since 1996. Farmers have been clamouring since then for help.

The canals Honourable Minister in that area are all silted up to the extent that residents can walk across. Mde Speaker, here again, three weeks before the Budget debate, work started [*Applause*], farmers breathed a sigh of relief (*do not cheer yet*) lo and behold on Thursday 21st February; the Honourable Mr Seeraj, the MMA/ADA authorities removed the machinery and returned same to the compound without even an explanation to the farmers. In this area, small farmers have to depend on relatives and friends overseas over the years for survival.

Honourable Minister, I am asking you to make an intervention into this matter so that work can continue in order for farmers to plant this coming crop. Honourable Minister, in your presentation you said you are the people's representative and that MMA/ADA more lands will be under cultivation because of the rehabilitation work of the secondary and primary system and also expansion to the right bank of the Abary river and so I will tie you to that. [*Applause*]

I said in my opening remarks that Region 5 is an agricultural region. Farmers know of their indebtedness to the MMA and we are hearing of the representation of the government in all forms, yet the area too, Honourable Seeraj, farmers' land were being taken away and the government did nothing to represent them. There again,

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those farmers suffered the same drainage and irrigation situation. How will those farmers exist? You cannot chew a bone with your gum. You do not have the system in place, how would you pay? *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, those farmers suffered losses of hundreds of acreages of land yet the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, who is quite aware of these issues, diverted his attention elsewhere and has left those poor farmers confused, frustrated and in deep depression.

I want to bring this Honourable House's attention to page 2, paragraph 17 where the Honourable Minister made mention of delivery of promises to the Guyanese people in six broad areas and he went on, on page 3 listing his mode of delivery. Guyana will be a lovely native land if only this government talk the talk and walk the walk. *[Applause]* Here we are again Mde Speaker, words on paper. We have seen this before and will continue to see the failure; the failure to deliver on its promises. What is supposed to bring relief to our people? Mde Speaker, what we need in our country is an economic and social revolution, not a political revolution. *[Applause]*

In my Region, I want to turn my attention to discrimination. At the Agriculture Office, the Agricultural Officer's position requires a Degree in Agriculture. We had such a person there Mde Speaker. Lo and behold, Honourable Minister of Agriculture, I want you to take note. An officer with a certificate supersedes the qualified officer who was in charge and when that officer spoke for his right he was

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later transferred to the hinterlands. Qualified officers within the same department with experiencing ranging from 18-20 years were bypassed; even their duty-free entitlement was withheld from them since 2006. This is blatant political mischief.

Mde Speaker, I say to this Honourable Minister of Agriculture, this matter needs your urgent attention. You have claimed to be the people's representative so I challenge you to deliver.

Mde Speaker, all is not well in the Health Sector in Region 5. We welcome the Diagnostic Centre at Mahaicony in the Sub-Region 1. Honourable Minister of Health and I would like to turn your attention to the Fort Wellington Cottage Hospital on the West Coast of Berbice, Sub-Region 2. There is a well-equipped operating theatre but no surgeon for over years. Sick people with need for surgery for various ailments, either pay their exorbitant cost for their surgery at a private hospital or wait on their November 2008 or January 2009 date to get same done at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. The big question pops up; is this a nationalist government? The residents of Region 5 are citizens of Guyana and deserve equal treatment in all areas. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, one year ago I stood up and spoke about inadequate water supply, no incinerator or dump site to dispose the hospital waste, the call for a pathologist, have all fallen on deaf ears. Residents are forced to stand the cost of transporting their loved ones to Region 6 to have their

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autopsies done. There is no toilet facility at the dental unit, at Outpatients and the Pharmacy Department. There is one toilet located in the nurses' restroom. That facility is only used by nurses. So what happens to the workers and the patients? There is also need for a Health and Safety Club at the institution to sensitize workers.

In this modern time, residents are still forced to put ice on their dead since there is no fridge at the mortuary. Honourable Minister I urge you to address these concerns immediately.

Mde Speaker, on Page 19 line 2 and 3 of the Budget, the Honourable Minister spoke about pensioners being able to receive their book at the start of 2008. This is so but let me say that there are some pensioners who to date, have not received their book, Honourable Minister of Human Services, because of little errors made and had to be returned to the Ministry and, as I speak, they have not returned to the Region.

Honourable Minister, the recipients of Public Assistance were never catered for in the early distribution. I am requesting that the Honourable Minister of Human Services examine the situation. There are those, the less fortunate in society, who depend only on that for survival, or let me say, they survive only by this mean.

The merging of Probation and Social Services is of great concern. Honourable Minister of Human Services, the people of Region 5 are suffering. The workload for the

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officers seems to be heavy and so they fail to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Mde Speaker, the Nation's future of young people is in a state of hopelessness since there are no job opportunities for them. They continue to loiter on the street corners and by the roadside. Gambling is on the increase. The youths have nothing to do. The Honourable Minister of Finance on page 34 said-

They have a duty to ensure that the future is secure and that our young people are fully engaged in their communities and development of this country and that they are empowered to lead the generation that follows.

I am afraid that there will be no generation to lead if the government does not tackle this issue in a meaningful way.

Youth Choice Initiative buildings are in Region 5 but all are white elephants due to the lack of proper management.

Yet on Page 35 Paragraph 41:52 in the Budget the Honourable Minister spoke about \$60 million being allocated to ensure the expansion of programmes in areas of Carpentry, Masonry, Welding and Information and Technology. Mde Speaker, I hope these white elephants Youth Choice buildings will be put to good use in my Region during this year. *[Applause]*

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The government continues to boast about additional infrastructural works including roads, water supply, electricity etcetera, yet they fail to provide electricity to the residents of No. 8 and 9 North and South, Third Street – Western half of No. 13, Catherine and Calcutta. They are in total darkness for years. The President during his visit to Region 5 in the run-up to General Elections in 2006 made promises to make these areas priority, but to date to no avail. Mde Speaker, care is given, not spoken. *[Applause]*

I need to turn my attention to Housing as it relates to Region 5. There is an absence of Housing Committee meetings to deal with applications and this is leading to the present state of discrimination in all the allocations of house-lots.

Teachers and nurses await their plots of land to build their homes. Honourable Minister, please note and address these concerns.

Before this Honourable House are real issues that need real solutions urgently for my constituency. *[Applause]* Let us not forget that we have a duty to provide equality for all the people of this beautiful land.

The PNCR-1G our priority is the well being of all Guyanese. We are tired of ungodly standing in heavenly places. Mde Speaker, I urge this government to recognize that cheap political agenda is not going to help us. Building a modern and prosperous Guyana requires the commitment on the part of the government to craft and implement

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policies that would contribute to the development of all Guyana; policies that would address non-functioning Regional Administrative bodies and equal access to the State machinery.

Finally Mde Speaker, the issues that I raised are not unique to Region 5 but affect the wider society and against this I urge the government to take up the mantle and bring relief to Region 5 by extending the relief to Guyana, thank you.
[Applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj.

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj: Mde Speaker, I must admit even at this late hour you do present a good sight for sore eyes. *[Laughter and Applause]* Mde Speaker that does not mean I will go over my time. As a matter of fact, I will finish long before the time I was told I have.

I wish to join my colleagues in congratulating the Minister of Finance and his staff on his presentation of a comprehensive Budget for 2008 in this Honourable House. Before I proceed to deliberate on some of the things I have written Mde Speaker, please allow me to address a couple of matters that were raised by Honourable Member, Jennifer Wade.

I totally support her when she said the budgetary allocation for Region 5 is inadequate. That argument can also be said

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for the other Regions. Likewise, I would venture to say that \$119.3 billion is also inadequate for Guyana at this juncture of our development. In looking at expenditure, you also have to look at where you are going to get the resources. You cannot put up an extensive list, shopping list I dare say and don't know where you are going to get the resources from to finance that list hence in terms of prudent management you have to prioritise [*Applause*] in your areas in keeping with the resources available. I agree also that and I suspect all of us in this House will agree totally that agriculture is the backbone of Guyana and coming from the Rice Industry itself Mde Speaker, I find it difficult to argue against some of the positions put up by the Honourable Member, Jennifer Wade.

I support the position that maintenance of drainage and irrigation is important but in the context of Region 5 where you have the existence of the MMA/ADA Scheme, we all know that we are prohibited from giving monetary assistance to the MMA/ADA because of conditions on the establishment of the MMA Scheme going back some two and a half decades. Hence, the operation and maintenance of the MMA Scheme itself, the cost of it has to be borne by the beneficiaries of the Scheme and if the beneficiaries of the Scheme do not contribute towards the operation and maintenance of that Scheme, well then we would have problems as it relates to the maintenance of the drainage and irrigation infrastructure.

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Region 5 farmers would know also that a number of landlords were operating within the MMA Scheme. That by itself is not too bad but when these landlords collect rent up front from farmers who are exposed to adverse weather conditions and cattle roaming and fail to pay a small amount of that rent towards the maintenance of the drainage and irrigation system then that is a terrible situation.

I support it and I guess most of you if not all of you in this Honourable House would have supported a position of giving the land to the tiller. Why should the farmer be exposed to all the vagrancies of the weather conditions and as the Honourable Member mentioned the cattle problem, has a landlord collect the money, living fat off of it and not paying, a single cent for the operation of the Scheme? Hence, measures had to be taken, and by and large these measures were supported by farmers who were actually in cultivation; were taken to give that land to the tiller because of the hundreds of millions that the member mentioned outstanding in terms of rates.

The Honourable Member mentioned also Mde Speaker that farmers with assistance from the MMA risked their lives to save their crops. The operative words there are; *with assistance from the MMA*; because it is a partnership and when the crops were in danger the organisation I represent was also there with the farmers to ensure that whatever was humanly possible, given the resources limitation, was done to protect the crops itself recognising that Region No. 5 is the largest rice producing Region in the country and also

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the largest cattle-producing Region. A lot of people do not know this, they think that Region No. 9 is the largest cattle-producing Region; that is not so. So we would support any ventures that will seek to improve the livelihood of farmers in Region No. 5.

The desilting of the Abary River Mouth- Did started and I voiced my concern about the use of short boom excavator in the operation because I realised that this would not adequately address the problem of desilting the Abary River Mouth adequately but because of the size of the pontoon or the barge if you want to say (*Barge is the correct word I think Minister Benn?*) [*Interruption: 'He does not know'*] [*Laughter*]

Because of the size of the pontoon Mde Speaker, it would have been dangerous, extremely dangerous to put an extra long boom excavator on this pontoon given the weight and the size of the machine and the danger would have been this machine falling overboard. This was explained to the farmers and they agreed that while this is not the best thing to do, well then it is the next best thing to do; that it would bring some relief to farmers in the area. [*Applause*] This also, was a partnership arrangement with farmers and the authority because the farmers were there helping in a positive manner.

The cattle problem we sought to address only last year Mde Speaker because I recalled distinctly we have been making representation time and again to ensure that we have the kind of legislation that would encourage a more lawful and

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disciplined behaviour from cattle farmers themselves and that legislation has since passed in this National Assembly.

Since Phagwah last year, we have been experiencing adverse weather conditions.

Farm to market access roads throughout the entire Coastal Belt, even in areas where GUYSUCO operates are not in the kind of condition that you want them to be. And I have seen for myself areas where tractors have difficulties in traversing, but it is not a lack of will and in most cases resources but it is simply the fact that the conditions did not allow for the proper rehabilitation drive to proceed with.

February is supposed to be one of the driest months. There are farmers in the Mahaicony River area who waited out the rainy spell in December and January. Some of them even had to pump water into their fields to sow their crops and then three weeks after that, they had to use mechanical means to get water out of their field because of this unprecedented adverse weather conditions which I think the Hydromet people is calling *La Nina*.

These are some of the conditions that are facing the farming sector. Nevertheless Mde Speaker, I am happy to say that the rehabilitation of the secondary drainage and irrigation canals has commenced. Some areas have been completed within the Scheme and farmers before were tasked with the responsibility of maintaining it, while at the same time not paying for the secondary irrigation and drainage canals. This system by and large did not work because of the

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culture itself and I subscribe to it that whilst we can go in and clean a canal that was not rehabilitated for twenty-five years or twenty years, it is difficult to change the culture of how we operate within a space of five or six years.

Sometimes we lose a generation or two generations before you can change a culture of how you operate. And it is within this context Mde Speaker, representation was made to change that way of operation and give the authority the resources to do the secondary drainage and irrigation canals and charge the farmers for it if good jobs are being done. We are playing an active role in ensuring that we monitor the quality of work.

Farmers have been selective for the five areas and they form a majority part of what we call *Works Committee* within the area itself. So while I admit that all is not well I must say that things are on stream to ensure that we have better services in place for the farmers.

Yesterday, I listened attentively to the Honourable Member Mr Winston Murray, and I must admit that his presentation was good, very good but I am certain Mde Speaker that if not all then most of you here will agree with me that his presentation in 2007 was better. It is not better because the Honourable Member himself got better, it is better simply because this Budget, this 2008 Budget is a much better one than the 2007 Budget. *[Applause]*

I think the Honourable Member had great difficulty finding weaknesses in this Budget. I said mainly so because I think

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the Honourable Member was also mulling over the merits of a letter I saw published recently by one Hamley Case in the Stabroek News. So he probably got a little bit distracted from the contents of that letter.

The Honourable Member, Mr Murray in his presentation also said that global warming was not addressed by the Budget. I was a little taken aback by this position having known the Minister of Finance's concern about the impact of global warming and I hastened to verify by looking at the Budget Speech of the Minister of Finance itself and I think the Honourable Member, Irfaan Ali mentioned this briefly. Taking a look at that speech Mde Speaker, I want to focus attention to Page 28 of the Budget paragraph 4.29 and I wish to quote from that paragraph Mde Speaker-

The conservancy adaptation project is an important intervention undertaken by government with the objective of reducing the vulnerability of catastrophic flooding in Guyana's low-lying coastal area which is currently under threat from global warming and rising sea levels. [Applause] Through this intervention, government intends to develop a hydraulic engineering foundation critical for flood control management, identification of at least ten key drainage regimes for follow-on interventions and increase the current discharge capacity of the coastal drainage and irrigation system. An amount of \$50 million is allocated in 2008 to commence this work.

To commence this work Mr Carberry. Because we all will admit that given the global impact of this phenomenon, \$50 million is not in any way going to solve our problem but is also going to satisfy the start of a process and it also lends significantly and factually to the fact that we have acknowledged that global warming is going to have impacts on the way we live and the way we operate. *[Applause]*

Paragraph 4.3.0, also speaks of works to be undertaken to address global warming. Well it is against the scientific study that the Honourable Member would have been knowledgeable of that caused him to make those declarations.

Global Warming And Adverse Weather Conditions: A number of paragraphs, Paragraphs 3.37 on Page 15, 3.38 on Page 16. Paragraph 3.39 makes mention of measures that are being taken with significantly more allocations to address this issue of global warming.

Mde Speaker, we are all aware of the VAT and Excise Tax yield \$3.7 billion and as the Honourable Member said, this is a 48 percent increase on the revised projection. We do not have a difficulty with that, but in passing, the Honourable Member said that the rice farmers were given a significant handout from this resultant windfall. Mde Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, the last time rice farmers rightfully received some assistance from the State because of adverse weather conditions and spiralling cost of

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production was in December 2005. So I fail to see...
[Interruption: 'It is because of his respect for Mr Murray'].
So I fail to see how the windfall, the resultant windfall of the implementation of the VAT could have been used retroactively in this instance. But if Mr... the Honourable Member said so he also erred; Honourable Mr Carberry.

A brief review was given of the global economy by the Honourable Dr Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance when he stated that the world economy grew by 4.9 percent in 2007. Of more significance is the performance of emerging economies which grew by 7.8 percent and this growth in emerging economies, was led by China with a growth of 11.4 percent. The impact of these performances can be felt world over since economic growth leads to increased consumption and we are feeling the effects especially by way of increased prices for commodities. These increases are linked to among other things, decreasing world stocks. In January 2007 USDA reported the following Mde Speaker:

World rice stocks decreased from 150 million tonnes in 2000-2001 to 76 million tonnes in 2006-2007. Wheat stock decreased from 202 million tonnes to 150 million tonnes for the corresponding period. Coarse grain stocks also decreased from 203 million tonnes to 125 million tonnes.

The World Grain Stock; to-Use Ratio of 14.7 percent in the year 2006-2007 will be the lowest on record with the USDA, with the previous lowest being 16.1 percent in

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1973. A number of factors contribute to this sorry state of affairs globally. Of note Mde Speaker is the world's increased consumption of animal protein; the Honourable Member Irfaan made mention of this. This increase of animal protein is also linked to better income especially in emerging economies of which on average 7kg of grain is needed to produce 1kg of meat.

Secondly, is the global drive to increase Ethanol production to reduce and/or replace consumption of fossil fuel. The catastrophic mistake is the use of food stock, the use of food stock in the form of grains as feedstock for Ethanol production.

In 2006, the United States produced 1.8 billion gallons of Ethanol using 78.3 million acres of corn and it is projected by the USDA to produce 3.1 billion gallons in 2008, utilising in this year, 87 million acres which represents 25 percent of the US total corn production.

In the meantime Mde Speaker, world grain stock is decreasing, prices are climbing and world hunger is increasing. In the move to avert or avoid a world fuel crisis the strategies are leading to a more pronounced world food crisis; prompting, since in February 2007, the former President of Cuba, El Commandante, Fidel Castro to call this strategy the internationalization of genocide.

Here is where the Jagdeo Initiative is of vital relevance. The CARICOM Heads of Government at an emergency meeting late last year considered the rising cost of living in the

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CARICOM Region in particular, and expressed great appreciation for Guyana's generous offer of access to land in pursuit of agriculture production. In the scenario I have just alluded to, Guyana is strategically placed to play an important role in addressing the issues of food production and food security. [*Interruption: 'I get the page mixed up here'*].

Mde Speaker, to justify what I have just said, I wish to briefly inform this House of what I think they already know, by using some statistics, a habit which I am not practicing really. Rice exports have increased from 54,000 tonnes in 1992 to 269,000 tonnes in 2007. [*Applause*] The performance of this Sector deserves a round of applause for the courage and sterling performance in adverse weather conditions. [*Applause*]

Production Mde Speaker... production of 321,000 tonnes is targeted for 2008. A grant of €1.7 million under the EU Rice Competitiveness Programme is presently being executed by the industry's stakeholders to enhance productivity and production. We hope to achieve 6 metric tonnes per hectare in the medium term from a present productivity of 4.6 metric tonnes. Two additional seed processing facilities will be commissioned to supplement the production of the existing five seed production plants we have throughout the coastal belt.

Sugar production is also expected to increase to 290,000 metric tonnes in 2008, up from 266,482 metric tonnes in

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2007. Consistent increases are also expected in the other crops, livestock and fishery sectors.

We have Mde Speaker, the human resources, the natural resources and the visionary institutional framework crafted in this Budget that is so aptly labelled *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda* to achieve these objectives. This Budget is pregnant with measures and the delivery has already started. *[Applause]* It is not like an elephant, it is pregnant with measures that will see Guyana achieving one of its most dynamic performances ever, but Mde Speaker, there is a problem. Here I wish to join my voice with that of the Honourable Member, Mr Manzoor Nadir, Minister of Labour and also Mr Irfaan Ali in saying that crime and terrorism can derail this process. Here is where I want to make a personal plea for us here in this Assembly, for us to collectively rededicate ourselves to provide peace and security to our people. This should be our pledge.

Before I take my seat Mde Speaker, please allow me to recommend this Budget to this august body. *[Applause]* Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Norman Whittaker.

Mr Norman Whittaker: Mde Speaker, preparing a National Budget with the primary aim of allocating scarce resources among the various sectors and sub-sectors and among the ten Administrative Regions could not be a

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simple task. And it is for this reason that I must from the outset, offer my congratulations to the Hon Minister of Finance and his Budget team [*Applause*] for rising above the challenges we today face as a Nation, for *staying the course* and submitting for our consideration and debate, a National Budget which aims at *advancing the transformation agenda*, which, for me, started some fifteen year ago. [*Applause*]

These are challenging times Mde Speaker but for us as a government, the biggest challenge at this time must be to rise above the callous acts of a few recalcitrant and beastly outlaws and get on with the business of development. [*Applause*] Mde Speaker, under the circumstances just described, our government's \$119.3 billion 2008 Budget is commendable and we must maintain the momentum. [*Applause*]

The National Budget remains for us in hinterland regions like the Barima-Waini Region, the primary source of funds which our Regional Democratic Councils, our Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, our Amerindian Village Councils receive and utilize, to bring about improvements in areas of social services such as Education and Health Care and physical infrastructure such as our roads and bridges thus creating for our people in these Regions, economic opportunities that would ultimately lead to growth, more jobs and improved living standards for our people.

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Consequently, Mde Speaker, we believe that we owe it to this National Assembly in which this Budget is debated and approved to inform you on how we utilized our 2007 allocations. In the process, I would draw attention to other interventions, other development projects emanating or funded by other agencies which would have made contributions, no matter how small or large towards improving living standards in our Region. But before I do this, permit me to deal with a few issues that only a few evenings ago were raised by my colleague and friend, the Honourable Member Desmond Fernandes.

Indeed, I was taken aback by his comments because I have always held him to possess a profound amount of humour and I thought this was one of the occasions on which he was expounding this humour but it turned out that it was not. I propose to deal with these. *Interruption: [‘No I have them here’].*

The Honourable Member said that and I am quoting, this is Monday 12th February 2007, Page 125, I am quoting what the Honourable Member Norman Whittaker said-

We started with about less than one hundred and fifty children accessing Secondary Education.

Norman Whittaker did not say that the PPP/C Government brought Secondary Education to Region 1. He said we started, we the PPP/C in 1992 started with about less than one hundred and fifty children accessing Secondary Education and by constructing Secondary Schools. We did

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that, we constructed Secondary Schools at Mabaruma [*Applause*] and that allowed us to use the old building to start dormitory facilities. We constructed a Secondary School in Santa Rosa, so I do not know where the Member got the impression that I was conveying... I do not know. I hope it is not an act of deception but I needed to clear that point there because I do not want Members here to feel that I am being dishonest.

Page 133, this is what it says; we are talking here about water.

Seven thousand to eight thousand persons in the Hobo Hill, Mabaruma Settlement, Mabaruma Township and Compound, Barafina, Kumaka, Hossororo, Bumbury, Wanaina and Wauna villages provided with water.

I would accept the name Hobo Hill should not have been here, I accept that, but this is what happened. The Honourable Member extracted and focused on the minute bit of detail and would generalize and have us believe that that kind of significant improvement did not happen in the area of water improvement. This to my mind is a form of selective amnesia [*Laughter*] because that village of Hobo has about fifteen households; we are talking about fifty people as against seven thousand plus persons. Again, on page 134; I had introduced my good friend Mr Fernandes to a gentleman by the name of Mr Honesty but they seemed to have separated [*Laughter*] or else he would not be making these statements.

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1st January, 1993 not a single household in Region 1, this... it is repeated here, not a single household in Region 1 was in receipt of electricity provided by the Regional Democratic Council. Mde Speaker, I hold to this, I am not saying there was not a building, I was not saying there was not a run-down piece of machinery lying somewhere but I am saying there was no electricity hold me to this, this is the truth. *[Applause]*

I propose, to deal with a few other issues; steamer service etcetera as I go about my presentation. *[Laughter]*

Mde Speaker, the RDC's Region 1 Capital Allocation for 2007; I am reporting on what we have achieved, the Honourable Member dealt with what he thinks we should have and what we did not have. I do not want to take you down that road again. It would be boring. I want to deal with what we have achieved and what we further plan to achieve during 2008. *[Applause]*

The RDC's Capital Allocation for 2007 was \$133 million and in 2008 \$142.9 million representing an increase of 7.5 percent. This increase, in spite of the difficulties and challenges, is the act of a loving and caring government. We love the Amerindian people and if loving them is wrong I do not want to be right. *[Laughter and Applause]* While the current allocation rose from \$698 million in 2007 to \$850.4 million; 21.8 percent increase Mde Speaker. I wish to deal with these things under several items among which is Education, Health Care etcetera because I have been taught, *(correct me if I am wrong)* that Education,

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Health Care, the very things Mr Fernandes spoke about Electricity, Water, all of these items, go into any basket of items that you consider when you are looking at living standards and improvement in those living standards
[Applause]

It was only a couple months ago Mde Speaker, that I was invited to give a key address at the graduation of some students of the North West Secondary School; that is, at the CXC and so I sought to find out in depth about the performance not only of that school but Santa Rosa Secondary, Port Kaituma Secondary etcetera so as to know what was happening in the field of Education and I am about to share this with you, and I want to say to the Hon Minister, Dr Fox that many of the changes, the positive changes that you have been talking about are already filtering down into our system in Region 1. *[Applause]* Perhaps Minister Dr Ashni, some of the very growth has already filtered down into our Region also. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, during 2007 our RDC spent \$34.1 million on constructing, extending schools and dormitories. Why do we do that? We do that because of several factors.

- One is that we want to create a better environment in which teaching and learning must take place.
- We do that as a response to the increase in the yearning for education on the part of our people. They want to learn, they want to go out to school.

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- We do this because of the several interventions we have made in terms of providing uniforms, assisting them with textbooks, assisting them with meals, have allowed many more of them to go out to school.
- We do this because we are fully aware that education is what is going to take people out of poverty.
[Applause]

Besides that I want to tell you that under the EFA-FTI project, the very thing that Dr Fox spoke about. We have had several other interventions which succeeded in improving the environment within the school. We have had several improvements in the area of training of our teachers and that is a very important thing.

We have the Hinterland Teachers' Training Programme by way of Distance Education. When I addressed the Assembly last year I indicated that twenty-eight of our teachers have graduated under that programme and I wish to say to you now that there are forty-six of them presently on this programme *[Applause]* on the new cohort.

The results of these interventions and many more like the improvement in the learning resource centres have resulted in our students doing much, much better and last year for the first time, we had a young man who got nine CXC's with six grade ones. *[Interruption: "You can quote me; hold me to that"]*

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Not only that, the North West Secondary School produced three students with nine subjects and when you look at the performance of the Secondary Schools in the entire Region, there were seventeen students who got five subjects or more [*Applause*] and this is because of the several improvements that have been brought to bear as a result of the kind of funding that has been put into Education in this Region.

What about our teachers? Four hundred and fifty-five teachers in our Region are enjoying better salaries in addition to hard line allowances, remote area incentives, uniform allowances of \$6,000 per year, performance incentives; four hundred and fifty-five teachers. These incentives are intended to attract, train and retain and you know something, we have one of the best rates of attrition, we keep our teachers, we train them and as they train they perform and we keep them. [*Interruption: 'They ain't learn the way yet'*] Well, my dear, they do not come to town. We train them right in the Region. That is one of the things ... that is one of the positive things. We can train some from your Region, we can work out an arrangement for that if you so desire.

Mde Speaker, the result of all these interventions has been a better learning environment for our teachers and I want to mention one other important thing here. That is the role of the parents. The significant improvement has been brought about because parents have begun to come on board and are playing a very significant role. The School Improvement Action Committees that have been formed include parents.

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They have been involved in preparing the School Improvement Plans. The meals that are being cooked, the materials to cook those meals come from the very communities; they get the first choice, the first preference. The people who cook etcetera come from the very community so they feel a sense of involvement and they have a hands-on attitude and there are many school managers who would tell you that as a result of this, there is a better relationship between school and community and we want to thank our government through the Ministry of Education for all of this. *[Applause]*

A lot of focus is also on literacy and numeracy as the Honourable Minister spoke about, and in fact, under the BEAMS programme we already have some Master Trainers, Counsel Trainers who are training teachers, so there is a lot of focus on that. There is also a lot of focus on the teaching of Mathematics and English. Such a programme has already started at the North West Secondary School and of course, let me not forget the very BCCP that our Minister talked about which was introduced to cater for students who are technically inclined, and so we have made quite a lot of progress in the area of education and I wish to posit that:

- we will continue to make progress.
- we will continue to repair run-down schools;
- we will continue to extend schools where the school population is increasing and

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- we will continue to put schools where there are none.

Under the *Health Programme* - lots of improvements, of course everybody talks about the new Mabaruma Hospital; it is fantastic, over \$100 million. Very shortly it will be completed.

Besides that, we spent a lot of money rehabilitating our other districts' hospitals like:

- Pikera in the Matthews Ridge area
- Port Kaituma
- Santa Rosa Village

We built health centres in Madawarin for those of you who know the Geography and Waraburi and we did not only do that;

Training- the human resource, somebody spoke about the *human resource*, being very, very important and I want to tell you that we dealt with that. While the buildings are important for the purpose of accommodating and treating patients, the upgrading and continuous training of our health personnel is a prerequisite to improve health care and permit me as I highlight for you some of the improvement here:

- Management of chronic diseases like Diabetes,

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- Increasing the scope of our medical outreach activities especially in the river-rain areas. We take health care to the people and do not necessarily wait for the people to come to us and that is what we have been doing and that is what we would continue to do.
- Improvements in sourcing, transporting and distributing drugs, in this regard many of our staff was involved in a training programme and I think that the most outstanding student was one of our Medex from our Region.
- Our immunization coverage improved tremendously especially in the Barama River and Honourable Member Mervyn Aldolphus I wish to say to you because I know you visit Region 1 from time to time. Persons with disabilities are now receiving physiotherapy treatment at the Mabaruma Hospital *[Applause]* no insinuation Sir.
- For the first time, the remote village of Baramita, in the far-flung area of Region 1 is being visited every month, every month a health team visits there and the people feel now that they belong to Region 1, that they belong to Guyana. *[Applause]*
- In the area of Malaria we train a number of health workers in microscopy and I am thankful to the Honourable Minister, through his office, twelve additional microscopes were made available to these

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health workers and the miners would have me say to this National Assembly; thank you, thank you very much for the 2000 odd treated nets that you made available because all of this has resulted in a decline in morbidity and mortality in so far as Malaria is concerned.

- Of course, I could not come off of health without telling you that recently we had a graduate in nursing. [*Interruption*]

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, by agreement with the two Whips we will go until 10:30 pm. After Mr Whittaker, there is one other speaker. I just want to give you that. Please continue Mr Whittaker.

Mr Norman Whittaker: Yes, we have a graduate in Nursing from the University of Guyana; somebody from Region 1 who is now in charge of the Mabaruma Hospital. [*Applause*] We are very, very proud of this.

Mde Speaker, I wish to look at some other areas in my available time especially *Agriculture* and *the roads and transportation* because some people have been peddling that Agriculture is on the decline in Region 1 or it is dead or it is dying. Agriculture in Region 1 is changing its form and if you do not keep your ears to the ground and your eyes out you would not see it, you have to be living there to know it. Agriculture has changed its form. Our farmers

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have realised that volatile markets, unpredictable weather, fluctuating prices, they no longer put their eggs in one basket, so they no longer depend on the ground provisions alone.

You know what? I will tell you what they do. They are into green vegetables, they are into poultry. There was a period in time in Region 1 and the Honourable Member knows, he went to school up there, that all our poultry needs for Region 1, came up with hucksters on the North West steamer and Mr Fernandes knows that too. There was a period in time when the green vegetables and so that we needed came on the steamer, and you know what? Now, Mabaruma supplies not only Mabaruma, but we take also to Port Kaituma. *The form has changed.*

A lot of our farmers are involved in other things. Take for example cocoa, organic cocoa, we have the Mabaruma Organic Cocoa Growers Association.

Twenty-six farmers, it may sound small but if you multiply that by five, an average household of five, we are talking about feeding about one hundred and thirty mouths, okay.

The cocoa farmers with assistance from NARI, they were given 7,800 budded plants to plant and you know what? Before the end of the year, many of them will be ready to reap their cocoa and to sell and the cocoa already has a ready market.

In the meantime, you know what they have been doing?

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I think it was the Stabroek News that carried it recently and that is commendable; they do not normally do that. They convert the cocoa into cocoa sticks and sell it. They sell to Nigel's Supermarket; they sell to Pegasus through the assistance of the Guyana Marine Turtle Conservation Society. They do these things.

In addition to that, our *peanut farmers*, thirty-one peanut farmers with assistance through the Office of the Prime Minister are engaged in a project which sees them being assisted in the form of fertilizer, limestone, peanut seeds to plant peanuts with a guaranteed market and this peanut is going to be processed into nut-butter. The project is at Wauna. If you need further details on the project I will certainly provide that for you. *[Applause]*

My friends, there are so many other things I could go into; *the Palm Oil Project* at Wauna where ninety-four persons are employed, where Agri Solutions Technology (AST) is taking the palm oil fruit, processing it, converting it into bio-diesel which is supplied to our Regional Democratic Council. Ninety-four persons are employed because of that project. My friends, again I say that agriculture has changed its form, no longer do we talk about eddo, plantain and cassava farmers only, they have diversified, they are getting into a lot of other things also. *[Applause]*

Transportation- I was taken aback when the Honourable Member said that the steamer takes thirty-six hours to go from Georgetown to Kumaka. On the very first journey after the M.V. Kimbia had had extensive rehabilitation, not

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wanting to push the vessel to the extreme, yes, it did take a long time. But if the Honourable Member is going to say that and leave it like that, that is deception. In fact, the average time taken by the M.V. Kimbia in moving from Georgetown to Kumaka is about twenty-two hours. *[Applause]* The average time taken by the steamer to Port Kaituma is about twenty-six hours.

My friends these are tremendous improvements for our people when you bear in mind that in 1992 one never knew when and if the steamer would come. *[Laughter and Applause]*

I want here to thank the Hon Minister Mr Robenson Benn who went as far as to travel on the steamer to experience for himself what other people do. *[Applause]*

My friends this is quite ... we walked ... *[Interruption: 'Man walk the talk' That's right]* This is quite apart from the assistance given to our Amerindian villages through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. They are provided with transportation where they can move to the market with their produce. I know that time is ticking and I would wish to talk a little bit... The Honourable Member Mervyn wants to hear about the roads. Let me talk a little bit about the roads. *[Interruption]* My friend, we encourage the Private Sector. Some people believe that government is the sole creator of employment. That is not true ... we encourage, we facilitate, we encourage the Private Sector *[Applause]* We do not do that.

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But I want to talk about the roads. Now if you look in our Budget you would see that \$24.3 million has been earmarked to bring improvement to our roads. The Honourable Member complained that the road from Wauna to Yarrakita that should have been done last year was not done. In fact, I wish to say to this House that the project was started, but it is true, it was not completed but if you check here, it is scheduled to be continuous, a roll-over project as we call it and for this purpose our Region, our RDC has acquired additional equipment in the form of a roller, a lorry and extensive road works, added to that the unpredictable weather conditions, these were factors. Having said that there was a time when there was very little road to talk about, there was a time when you had a couple of old cars barely going along the scene. But now, when you look at the number of vehicles that we have in the Martakai sub-region, the Moruka sub-region, the Mabaruma sub-region is a testimony to the fact that our roads have improved. In fact, I want this House to know that within the Martakai sub-region [*you are wrong there Member*] it is a North West investment, a company owned and managed by North West people with equipment valued over \$300 million owned by North West people that maintains the roads in the Martakai sub-region [*Applause*], you must know this.

So we continue to be empowered, we continue to handle things ourselves.

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Our Education Officer is a daughter of the soil; our Health Officer is a daughter of the soil. In fact, you know a friend told me recently, he said you all have so many that you export because I see that the person who is the Public Relations Officer for the GRA is a North West person, you know, they are all around.

Mde Speaker, I would wish to bring my contribution to an end by saying this. For us in Region 1 there is an air of optimism that we are about to see the blooming of diverse economic activities in our Region. Occasioned *on parte* by the improved social services and available physical infrastructure in our Region, there has been a surge of small and medium-scale gold mining fuelled no doubt by rising gold prices.

S.R. Steel, a company, is planning for the restart of manganese mining and processing in the Martakai sub-region, Strata Gold is prospecting for gold in the Tassawini and Four Miles area (*You did not know this Mervyn, I am happy you are hearing this now*) [*Applause*]

Jialing Forest Enterprise is interested in logging and setting up a mill in the Four Mile quarry area. There are other needs to be met and we will meet them, there are other challenges to be faced and we will face them. I exhort that we show pride in our achievements because we show pride in our Region. Let us show pride in our achievements as a nation and optimism in our future. We must resolve to continue to develop our country and improve the lives of its people. Our 2008 National Budget provides the impetus and

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the modus operandi for staying on a course for even further development.

There is a role for each of us in *advancing the transformation agenda* put forward in the 2008 National Budget. Let us all get on board and support the Budget. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member Mr Mohamed Khan.

Mr Mohamed F Khan: Mde Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to support this 2008 Budget at this late hour in the evening. I wish to join with my colleagues in offering congratulations to the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh for a presentation well done. I wish to thank the staff at the Ministry of Finance for the assistance and support they have given to the Honourable Minister. *[Applause]*

This government has set itself certain goals as mentioned in the PPP-Civic Manifesto and the populace has endorsed this government's programme and has given us, given the PPP/C the mandate at the last General Elections to continue in government so that we can implement the programmes for the betterment of all in this country. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, being one of the Members of Parliament representing geographical constituency, Region No.2 which consists of seventy-five villages on the coastland, fifty-five villages in the Pomeroon and nine Amerindian communities

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in the lake areas and with a population of about 60,000 people who live in peace and harmony. I would like to point out some of the achievements we have made in the Region. Before that, being a representative of Region 2, we were all disturbed about the incidents that took place a few weeks ago and the residents of Region 2 condemn the brutal slaying of innocent people including women and children at Lusignan and Bartica by trigger-happy notorious criminals and call on all MPs and peace-loving Guyanese to give their fullest support to the government and the armed forces to bring an end to this horrific massacre and lawlessness.

As I said I would like to point out some of the achievements made in our Region. In every single village on the Coast we have:

- Paved streets;
- Potable water;
- Electricity;
- We have built and extended or repaired schools, health centres and health posts on the Coast and in the Amerindian communities.
- Our people have access to modern, efficient, reliable and quality services in Education, Health and Transportation.

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- We have branch offices of the Guyana Revenue Authority, Immigration, Registrar General, Lands Commission, High Court and Registry, branch of the CPCE, Fire Service, Technical Institute and IDCE.
[Applause]

Mde Speaker, many of the services which our people in Region 2 had to travel to Georgetown to access are now available in our Region *[Applause]* and within a few weeks or maybe days we will have a well-equipped and functioning Diagnostic Centre at Suddie *[Applause]* and later this year, we will see the completion of a roll-on-roll-off ferry stelling at Supernaam. *[Applause]*

We will also have a new well and water treatment plant at Lima which will service the people from Walton Hall to Queenstown.

Very soon also we will have a branch of the Guyana School of Agriculture.

Region 2 is an agricultural Region with approximately 33,000 acres of land under rice cultivation and 40 acres of land under other crops and cattle rearing. The bulk of the people in the Region depend directly or indirectly on Agriculture for a living, therefore it is imperative that the government of the day should further rehabilitate and modernize the drainage and irrigation network to meet the needs of the agricultural sector. I would like to highlight what was done for last year in that Sector. A total of \$90 million was spent on *Capital works* to construct:

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- irrigation jets
- tail walls
- box culverts
- access bridge
- timber revetment
- regulator
- Access dam and raising of embankment.

Also another \$66 million was spent on maintenance work to make the system more efficient. Why all these spending Mde Speaker?

- To provide adequate drainage of water from the cultivation and housing areas;
- To irrigate rice lands within the shortest possible time;
- To minimize on wastage of irrigation water;
- To provide easy access to farmlands and to transport produce to markets and factories.

But, all is still not perfect within the drainage and irrigation system in Region 2. Government will continue to spend this year, \$94.5 million to rehabilitate the D & I Sector in

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Region 2 also an additional \$80 million will be spent on maintenance works.

On response from the EU Rice Competitiveness Project we will see the complete rehabilitation of the Dawa Pump Station, installation of four new pumps, the supply of two long boom excavators, boat and engine at a cost of \$409 million. I wish to draw to the attention of this Honourable House, Mde Speaker that this Dawa Pump Station was built in 1962 by the PPP/C Government *[Applause]*. Forty-five years later, this very PPP/C Government is now completely rehabilitating that Dawa Pump Station. *[Applause]*

We will also have this year a double-door sluice at Westbury and at Golden Fleece at a cost of \$290 million which will further enhance the effectiveness of the drainage and irrigation system in Region 2. Mde Speaker, while this government is putting the necessary infrastructure in place to enhance production, the work in these D & I areas would certainly make life easier for hundreds of families. At present, every square rod of land is under rice cultivation and an average yield of 33 bags per acre which would give us a yield of over one million bags of paddy per crop we are expecting this year. *[Applause]*

In the world of Science and Technology it is important to educate and equip our farmers with the necessary skills to cultivate rice and other crops in a scientific manner. GRDB-RPA in collaboration with FLAR that is Funding for Latin-American Irrigated Rice are conducting Farmers'

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Theory School. The objective is to increase rice productivity and the sixth practice based on the following:

- Time of planting
- Seed rate and quality
- Seed treatment against insects and diseases
- Weed control
- Dry application of fertilizer; and
- Water Management

Last crop we had two such farming schools. This crop Mde Speaker, we have seven such farming schools. More farmers express their willingness to learn and implement the new technology in increasing production and productivity. I am a farmer, we can put all the necessary infrastructure in place, we can apply all the technology, the required inputs but if we do not have favourable conditions which we do not have control over, we will not get production and productivity.

Mde Speaker, farmers in the Pomeroon have been suffering from flooding due to intense rainfall because of global warming, climate change and also the siltation of the Pomeroon River mouth. Having recognized the problems the farmers face, two long boom excavators were given to... valued over \$60 million and a working capital of \$3.5 million were given to the farmers in Lower and Upper

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Pomeroon. For last year, approximately 32,000 rods of land were empoldered and drilling works were done which covers an area of approximately 3,000 acres and benefited 60 farmers. Transporting these excavators in the Pomeroon from one farm to the other is a necessity but, the farms in the Pomeroon, you cannot access them by road, you have to transport by water. Having recognized that, last year, this government had given to the farmers in Pomeroon a steel pontoon valued \$14.5 million to transport the excavators.

By the end of this year, it is expected that most of the existing farms in the Pomeroon will be empoldered and drained. This will make it possible to increase production and productivity. *[Applause]*

The Cozier Scheme which runs adjacent to the Pomeroon River has about 6,000 acres of land. These farmlands, most were abandoned because of lack of drainage. The Regional Administration has cleared and desilted most of these drains. It is now possible, for these lands to be cultivated and later this year a pump will be installed at Cozier to help drain these lands.

Mde Speaker, the farmers of Pomeroon are now exporting directly to the Caribbean and I wish to name some of the products that are being exported:

- Plantains
- Pumpkins

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- Citrus
- water coconuts
- copra
- dry coconuts
- crude coconut oil

These are being exported from the Pomeroun. Mde Speaker, Pomeroun is now regaining its rightful place as the main contributor to the breadbasket of the Caribbean. *[Applause]*

The Fishery Sector is a viable and growing Sector particularly in dried and preserved shrimps and certain species of marine fishes which are being exported. The Anna Regina Fish Pond Station is now equipped with a laboratory facility and is geared for research and development and to transfer Agriculture Science to stakeholders within the community. At present Mde Speaker, we have thirty-five active farmers involved in aquaculture.

In *Housing*, and I want the Honourable Member Keith Scott to listen. This government has regularized three squatter settlements in Region 2 and those people squatted under the PNCR-1G. We have established twelve housing schemes and ten of those Schemes have water, paved streets and electricity. *[Applause]*

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By the end of this year we are hoping to hand over those Schemes to the Town Council and the NDC. Also, before the end of this year the other two Schemes; we will construct streets, lay pipelines and supply electricity. At present we have 65 percent occupation of these lots.

I will like to deal a little with *Health*. In Region 2 Mde Speaker, we have one Regional Hospital, a District Hospital, eleven Health Centres, eighteen Health Posts with adequate drugs and trained personnel at these locations. This government had made it possible for every resident in Region 2 to have access to primary health care. *[Applause]*

The government along with the Regional Administration continues to improve on the infrastructure by constructing and repairing buildings.

Last year we rehabilitated the Charity Hospital, El Kuburi Health Centre and a new nurses' hostel was built at Suddie Hospital at a cost of \$9 million also medical equipment was bought at a cost of \$8 million such as ECG grading table, primrose, bulbs, extra tubes etcetera. This year Mde Speaker, government will spend \$9.8 million to purchase a Haematology Analyser, blood bank refrigerator, orthopaedic bed etcetera.

The Diagnostic Centre which will be completed within a matter of days will be manned by a team of Cuban medical personnel.

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Our own Guyanese doctors who are now being trained in Cuba, our children, will be trained to man these centres. *[Applause]* When these centres start operating, the residents of Region 2 will benefit from additional medical services which they had to seek in Georgetown and residents in Region 2 will experience a quantum leap in health care. *[Applause]* The people of this country and especially in Region 2 are very grateful to the PPP-Civic Government and President Bharat Jagdeo for negotiating with the Cuban Government and President Fidel Castro for the four Diagnostic Centres. *[Applause]*

We are thankful to the Cuban people for such gifts. Viva Cuba. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, without any doubt in mind, Region 2 is moving ahead at an accelerated pace, programmes are in place to diversify our local economy to achieve high and sustained growth rates, create jobs, promote employment, reduce poverty and improve social services and standards of living. I therefore wish to call on every Honourable Member of this House to promote Guyana's interest in an atmosphere of peace, unity and cooperation and support this 2008 Budget as presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance, thank you. *[Applause]*

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Members, this concludes our business for today. Honourable Prime Minister

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Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mde Chair I propose that this House be adjourned until Monday 3rd at 2pm.

The Deputy Speaker: The Assembly now stands adjourned until Monday 3rd March.

Adjourned Accordingly at 22:30H