

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2008) 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

45th Sitting

14:12H

Tuesday, 4 March 2008

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

The Hon Hari N Ramkarran SC, MP

Speaker of the National Assembly

Members of the Government (42)

People's Progressive Party/Civic (41)

The United Force (1)

The Hon Samuel A A Hinds MP

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications

The Hon Clement J Rohee MP

Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Shaik K Z Baksh MP

Minister of Education

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey MP - (AOL)

Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Health

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- The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP
(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Esseq)
Minister of Amerindian Affairs
- *The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP - (AOL)
Minister of Finance
- *The Hon S Rudolph Insanally OR, CCH, MP - (AOL)
Minister of Foreign Affairs
- The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt MP
Minister of Housing and Water
- The Hon Robert M Persaud MP - (AOL)
(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 - (Absent)
Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs
- The Hon Dr Frank C S Anthony MP
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport
- The Hon B H Robeson Benn MP
Minister of Transport and Hydraulics
- †The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP
Minister of Labour
- The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP
(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)
Minister of Human Services and Social Security
- The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP
Minister in the Ministry of Education
- The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

* Non-elected Minister

† Elected Member from TUF

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Minister in the Ministry of Health

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

Ms Gail Teixeira MP

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP - (AOL)

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 - Essiquibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP - (Absent)

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

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

† Non-elected Member

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Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Water

Mrs Pauline R Sukhai MP

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP - (AOL)

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 Nat. Assembly

Mr E Lance Carberry MP

Chief Whip

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP

Mr Anthony Vieira

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP - (AOL)

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

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

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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

- (AOL)

Ms Latchmin B Punalall MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr David Patterson MP

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

Mr Everall N Franklin MP

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs

Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

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14:20H

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker: Honourable Members I would like to welcome students from the New Guyana School and I understand they would be here ... you have seen them standing. Thank you very much [*Applause*]. I would like to welcome these students, and I would like to encourage, not only students from the New Guyana School, but encourage students from schools, all over Guyana, to come and witness the deliberations in the National Assembly.

In addition to school children, other persons from civic society and elsewhere are welcomed to attend the National Assembly to listen to the debates and to the work of the National Assembly. Thank you.

Honourable Members we can now resume The Debate on the Budget for the year 2008. We start this afternoon with Honourable Member, Mr Anthony Vieira.

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Mr Anthony Vieira: Mr Speaker, the Minister introduced the 2008 Budget, by stating that he was building on his 2007 Budget theme, '*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.*' He then went on to relate in glowing terms the perceived improvement in our lives, which has resulted from the government's vision and well thought-out strategies which have taken us one step closer to prosperity. *[Applause]* He also made the statement that *we Guyanese* were all proud that we achieved so much as a result of World Cup 2007.

Mr Speaker, I thought that all Guyanese had agreed that we had built a stadium which we could not afford and which we apparently cannot even afford to maintain ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Members, remember that we have school children present ...

Mr Anthony Vieira: ... and that the entire affair was an economic disaster to everyone who was duped into investing in it, and that not one Guyanese profited economically from it

If Minister Singh intended for us to take him seriously, he would have to stop making these types of claims. He is, after-all, a technocrat and not, strictly speaking, a politician. All we can do now is to hope that the truth will reveal itself quickly enough to the Guyanese people to hasten the proper label to the Hon Gentleman and his government as to whether they speak the truth or not. But Mr Speaker, we do not have to wait, since the same

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Minister stood here in this National Assembly, in 2007 and told us that his VAT taxes of sixteen percent for 2007 were revenue neutral and it would not add any financial burden to the Guyanese people. Well Mr Speaker, the evidence is in; Dr Singh has been proven wrong. The only questions now are; was it deliberate? Or did he make a mistake? VAT has definitely added seventy-six percent more revenue than projected and the poor Guyanese citizens, the poorest and most taxed citizens in the Caribbean, have paid the price for the sad way our economy is performing, with these excessive new taxes.

After reading these introductory remarks, which I personally found disturbing, since I know that the economic reality for the majority of Guyanese is a different situation, I decided that I will present what my perception is of a more realistic look at our national situation. To do so, Mr Speaker, I refer to the issuance in this Parliament in October 2007 of a set of documents by the Ethnic Relations Commission, which, in a last ditch effort to salvage its credibility, presented this House with numerous documents on its performance thus far. It is clear to everyone, with even one eye, that the Ethnic Relations Commission does nothing to ease ethnic tension in this country. In fact, fuelled by the natural animosity to Dr Edghill that the Commission generates, it is more likely to raise rather than quell ethnic tensions in Guyana. Never-the-less, they presented this House with several reports of their activities and mixed in with the huge pile of documentation, totalling probably 500 pages, was a

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presentation by Dr Melissa Ifill entitled '*A Study to assess whether there is any discrimination in the award and distribution of economic opportunities in Guyana.*'

I expected that anything from the ERC would be highly sanitised, but the following escaped their attention. Dr Melissa Ifill states that, and I quote her:

Indian Guyanese, far more than African, Mixed or Indigenous Guyanese, believe that the State, the Private Sector and the NGO Sector, act in a fair manner in their provision of economic opportunities. 80 out of 94 Indian respondents believe that the State acts in a fair manner. The corresponding figure for African Guyanese respondents, is 15 out of 73, while for the Mixed group, it is 10 out of 40...

And Mr Speaker, may I say that I am part of that Mixed group and I agree with Dr Ifill. *[Laughter and Applause]*

... and for the Indigenous respondents, the figure was 6 out of 23.

So now, we have Desmond Hoyte's perceptions of marginalisation, which he spoke of in 2001. Finally, down on paper in 2007, using a proper statistical device, which is that, 85 percent of Indo-Guyanese, feel that the State was working in a fair manner, but only 20.5 percent of the Afro-Guyanese, thought that they had a chance of getting a fair deal in this country and only 20 percent of the Mixed Guyanese like me and Ms Backer, while 26

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percent, incredibly, 26 percent of the Indigenous population, thought that they had no chance of sharing in the national pie. Before someone from the opposite side of this floor jumps up and tells us that, Dr Ifill's Study had methodological flaws, as the PPP Parliamentarian said, when I brought up this matter in the Economic Services Committee last December, let me say this; I have showed Dr Ifill's report to several knowledgeable people and her methodology is clearly laid out in pages 28-31 of her report, and there is no flaw in the study's data collection [*Applause*] And even if there were methodological flaws in Dr Ifill's report, Mr Speaker, ought we not as a nation, to pay attention to these dangerous perceptions?

Mr Speaker, this comes at a time, when we are divided here in this House, as to who should head the ERC and we must decide if the Ethnic Relations Commission, headed by Dr Edghill, can serve this country, given these perceptions recorded in 2007, after several years of its functioning. So Mr Speaker, the conclusion is clear. The answer is no.

Secondly, we have to ask the question, how can any government hope to rule effectively in a country in which half the population do not have any confidence in them to rule fairly or equitably, since nearly, three- quarters of the indigenous people voted that they could say that they are being discriminated against, on building a hotel in Georgetown for Amerindian students, which is in the Budget, will not help their situation in their perception.

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Since nearly three-quarters of the indigenous people voted that they perceived that they have been discriminated against, building a hotel or hostel in Georgetown for Amerindian students, will not help their situation, it's their perception from living as they do in their villages, isolated and deprived as they are, from many resources other than government handouts, has left them to believe that they are deprived. The indigenous peoples in this nation are not free Mr Speaker, they are oppressed, and they adapt to situations that are put to them [Applause]. In Dr Ifill's own report Mr Speaker, on Page 52 she said this and I quote her ... Well, it's in your own Ethnic Relations Commission that submitted the Report. Why don't you go and ask her? Go and ask Edghill:

The available evidence suggests that the group most at risk of discrimination in the distribution of economic resources, as evidenced by their poverty levels, their isolated residential location, their lack of knowledge of the available lending institutions and the lack of sufficient institutions serving their communities, is the Indigenous population. [Applause]

So Mr Speaker, I ask the question again. How can anyone hope to rule this country in peace, cooperation and harmony under these circumstances? [Applause]

The Finance Minister then refers to the horrific events of 23 January and 17 February of this year. Mr Speaker, it is unreasonable to expect that, any country which is as poor

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as Guyana, declared so by the World Bank, heavily indebted poor country, and which is identified as a major transshipment point for Andean cocaine to the U.S estimated elsewhere as 25 tonnes a year does not have criminals operating with impunity within its population.

Last year, our under-staffed, under-paid and under-resourced police force seized 167 kilos of cocaine in this country. But if the estimates that there are 25 tonnes passing through Guyana to the US per year is true, then intercepting and seizing only what amounts to less than one-third of 1 percent a year, is so ridiculous that making an adequate comment fails me and so I leave the definition of this situation to the people in the street, who are more, or who can use more descriptive language ...
[Laughter and Applause]

Mr Speaker, when we add money laundering operations, smuggling operations, backtracking operations and trafficking-in-persons operations to the traditional criminal activity going on in this country any right thinking person would be convinced, that there must exist in this country criminal organisations that are beyond anything that we can even imagine. For cocaine alone there has to be three massive criminal organisations – one to receive the coke here in Guyana from wherever else in South America it comes from; the second group or organisation is distributing to gangs, who deal with the third group - the ones who find a way to send it up to America and Europe through whatever means they can devise: mules, lumber, soap ... *[Interruption: What is his*

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name?] ... between luggage, all sorts of methods. What is being revealed in the US courts today is only the tip of the iceberg. In view of all of this, the US State Department on Drug Control recently criticised Guyana for not effectively implementing this drug master plan, two years after it had been launched. The Report added that,

the U.S would also continue to use its diplomatic tools to encourage the Government of Guyana to organise an effective counter-narcotics programme, especially within the context of the British-funded overhaul of the Security Sector.

Now I support all of this, but I will not support anyone, who without one shred of evidence accuses this organisation of anything that happens through the Ruling Party, from the lack of understanding of the monstrous criminal activities, that have flourished and grown to such magnitude under its stewardship [*Applause*]. Indeed, a recent US State Department release tells us that

News Media routinely report instances of corruption reaching to high levels of government, which are not investigated and go unpunished.

But to be honest and truthful in reporting, the report also says that no conclusive evidence is available to back up these claims and for that we would have to share part of the blame.

Mr Speaker, in the 2005 Auditor General's Report, the Public Accounts Committee of this House, in this very

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Chamber, found the following on Pages 175 and 176 under Subheads 701 and 703; Mr Speaker, the two subheads outlined a series of events associated with the retransiting and repair of a vessel, the MV Setter, which is a launch used to transport passengers in the Essequibo River. The repairs of the MV Setter were made in two parts: The first payment of \$68M, which was labelled as an advance payment, whereby the full amount was paid to the contractor before the works commenced, and of this \$68M advance in this manner, \$40M of the funds came from the Ministry of Works' routine funds, and \$28M came from the Transport and Harbours Department's routine funds. But this was a capital project, according to the Auditor General's Report, so the monies were being used from the wrong head in contravention of the Law. Incredibly, Paragraph 703 of the same 2005 Auditor General's Report, tells us that,

... a further \$73M was awarded to the Contractor two days after the first \$68M, making the total cost of repairs to this launch \$141M, through a most irregular splitting of the two contracts issued two days apart, also in contravention of the Law.

Mr Speaker, my investigations have disclosed that this launch's total value at the time when all of this \$141M was being spent on it was about \$40M. Mr Speaker, this, by no means, is a unique occurrence. Similar examples abound on almost every page of the 2004/2005 Audits ... but the media must pay more attention to the workings of

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the Public Accounts Committee, in this House. Mr Speaker, the ladies and gentlemen of the media should be well advised to pay attention to it, since there is a lot of very juicy news to be had, right here in this House, but of course they have to sift it out, which at times is tedious, but when it happens as my friend Adam Harris would say, it happens '*big time*.'

Mr Speaker, surely, the international community which is allegedly so interested, and now having a proper democratic parliamentary system and which gives us so much financial aid to that effect, should be paying attention also. What is the point of financing and continuing to finance a farce? So the question is, is there evidence of corruption in the management of this country's affairs? Of course, there is Mr Speaker, mountains of it.

Mr Speaker, having made these general remarks, I would now address my specific area which is Agriculture. Unfortunately, I know that my Minister is not here, however I presume that he will get a copy of my remarks from GINA. Throughout the Budget presentations, government has been saying that there is growth here and growth there, in agricultural output. I found this to be confusing and misleading. For example, last year we produced 266,482 tonnes of sugar and the Minister of Finance told us that our Sugar Industry grew by 2.7%. Well Mr Speaker, how could the Sugar Industry be growing, when in 2002 we produced 331,180 tonnes? In fact, if one were to take the Bank of Guyana's statistics,

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published every year and use the year 2000, which as a benchmark year produced 273,703 tonnes as 100%. In the year 2007 no agricultural produce of economic significance in this nation, from sugar to tomatoes, came up to a level of production equal to that which we produced in the year 2000. So we are diminishing as an agricultural nation and not growing. There is disaster written over everything, everywhere around us, Mr Speaker, but we are not paying attention. Our Minister of Agriculture is dancing around telling us how many billions he spent on this or that, completely overlooks the fact that it is not how much you spend but what you achieved by spending it [*Applause*]. No Guyanese would agree that the monies spent on any agricultural enterprise, be it drainage or otherwise in Guyana, would stand scrutiny as monies well spent, that has achieved any significant or tangible result. So in the case of our Minister of Agriculture quoting these large sums of monies he spent with no result, highlights his inexperience as a manager and forces us to observe that, never in the history of governments in this country has so much been spent to achieve so little [*Applause*]. Perhaps Mr Speaker, we should give each Minister a 200-acre rice farm and let them run it successfully for two years before giving them the people's money, to run our government's affairs [*Applause*]. To run a 200-acre rice farm efficiently, expenditure would have to balance income and in the case of rice, the income is defined by world market forces. Our Ministers would learn quickly enough that, spending the money irresponsibly would quickly

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make them indebted to some bank and they would be out of business. But, Mr Speaker, in government when these mistakes are made, the IDB writes off their debts and they tax the poor population further, to fill the rest of the hole created by their poor management abilities.

Mr Speaker, I want to digress slightly here for a moment, to comment on a matter I found disturbing. In their presentation of the 2008 Budget in the Stabroek News, the firm of Ram and McRae stated that, the 2007 Half-Year Report of the Bank of Guyana was not published, until after the Minister presented his Half-Year Report to this House, in November 2007. The firm of Ram and McRae, in fact, does not openly accuse the Minister of these shenanigans, but I think that I would like to. I have concluded, quite independently of the firm of Ram and McRae that, no Bank of Guyana statistical releases are made until after the Minister of Finance releases his Report to this Parliament, both at half-year and at the Annual Budget presentation time. Mr Speaker, this is very wrong since deprived of last year's performance, one is not in the position to question the Minister's conclusions, as to whether they did well or not in 2007 I myself can report to this House that, I asked for the Bank of Guyana's 2007 Report, before the Budget presentation this year and I was told that, even though the one that I wanted was completed, no information on the Bank of Guyana Report can be issued until the end of February, which is after the Budget was presented in Parliament. The evidence is, therefore, that the Bank of Guyana is

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subjugating its autonomy, on the altar of political expedience [*Applause*] and in doing so, it is depriving us of access to information on the running of our country and I completely condemn this action. I call on the international community to take notice. If they want us to function as an effective Opposition in this so-called democracy, then we have to have the tools to do it.

Mr Speaker, just before World War II, Winston Churchill told the British Parliament, a Parliament which had consistently disregarded his warnings for more than six years that, Hitler's agenda was threatening the security of all of Europe and I quote what the Honourable Winston said:

The era of procrastination, of half-measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to a close. In its place, we are entering a period of consequences.

I am afraid that it is true for us here in Guyana as well. We are entering a period of consequences in this country, in almost every sphere of our national life: rising poverty levels, poor security, poor job opportunities, poor salaries, even for those who have jobs, the poor legal system, an under-paid, under-trained and under-resourced Police Force, incapable of dealing with the masses of well-equipped crime organisations, they are suddenly faced with; a drainage system which is continually failing us and especially our farmers; low and lower levels of

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production as our farmers and other skilled workers desert us, for better conditions in other countries.

Mr Speaker, we have to face reality. Global climate changes are upon us already, here in Guyana. It is becoming clear to me that, more rain is falling in Berbice, than is the historical norm. In fact, more rain may be falling in some parts of Berbice, than in most parts of Demerara over the past three years, but we do not have a professional enough Hydromet Department, to tell us what is happening. I am making no accusations of incompetence, about the people working in the Hydromet Offices. In fact, I did see our Minister of Agriculture sending four young ladies to be trained in hydromet business abroad. But this is a country which is so close to the equator, that it has two rainy seasons a year, most other countries only have one rainy season a year, but Guyana, along with only a handful of other countries on this planet, occupies this unique position, immediately below the Intertropical Convergence Zone of the equator, that renders its weather conditions unique and very wet. It is that area on our planet, where the northern and southern trade winds collide and where the climate situation has to be monitored very closely, by professionals. Are we really monitoring it intelligently? When we add to the equation the fact that we can only drain our land when the tide is low the situation becomes even more complex and potentially disastrous, but the answer to the question as to whether we are prepared is no. We need a world-class meteorological expert working

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in our Hydromet Office here in Guyana to interpret and postulate a theory as to why Berbice, which used to get lesser rainfall than Demerara, is now getting nearly the same or perhaps even more in some parts. Mr Speaker, large national plans hinge on this fact which has apparently escaped the attention of all. The Skeldon project was initiated on the presumption that, there was lesser rainfall in Berbice and therefore, we can expand Skeldon's production capacity by three times what it is now, since mechanised agricultural practices which might have been possible, which is not possible elsewhere, might have been possible there. Therefore, if there is more rainfall in Berbice because of some climatic phenomenon of which we are unaware then the entire Skeldon crop would be in jeopardy.

Mr Speaker, the facts are now clear that even the Minister of Agriculture can't dance around the Parliament any longer and has now confessed that we will not be able to start the new Skeldon factory in 2008 since, we would only have 40 percent of the cane it requires to function economically. But because the GUYSUCO estates have been systematically looted to build this new factory, they have been denied the money they need for routine and capital maintenance and repairs over the past three years. The other factories are therefore now in deep trouble and some pessimists even predict that, our Sugar Industry may be on the verge of collapse, forcing the Minister of Finance to allocate GUYSUCO \$47.6B this year to complete the Skeldon project. I, however, still would like

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to know from whence would come the three hundred and fifty thousand tonnes of cane required to make that factory work.

Mr Speaker, there are those who would say that I am a pessimist and that I am looking at the ... but I would like to point out some facts. During the entire year of 2007, no sugar factory in our industry ground far more than 69 percent of the total time available to it. One factory, Uitvlugt factory, only ground 49 percent of the total time available to it. Mr Speaker, I would like to repeat this, the Uitvlugt factory worked less than 50 percent of the time available to it during the crop, for the entire year and all the other factories spent more than 30 percent of their time, out of cane or broken down.

Fact two: Mr Speaker, fact two is even harder to play but I have hinted more than once that expansion of the backlands of Skeldon must be accompanied by an equal expansion of the drainage system at the front of the estate so that the additional water could drain comfortably into the Corentyne River. Well, Mr Speaker, again in 2007 as in 2006 and in 2005 the juice purity at Skeldon was the poorest in the Industry with a poling cane of only 9.26 percent. Mr Speaker, the juice ... at Albion, which is a few miles away from Skeldon, was 11.38 poles. Mr Speaker, the juice in the cane at Albion has 23% more sugar in it and the two estates are less than fifteen miles apart. Up to this day I cannot comprehend how anyone in their right mind can cut out the water from the sloppy backlands into to existing Skeldon cultivation without

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realising that there will be serious consequences for such a rash and uninformed action.

Fact Three: Mr Speaker, in the old days the Berbice Estate used to take less tons of cane to make a ton of sugar, which was due to a combination of reasons but mostly it was because the rainfall in Berbice was less than in Demerara, where the cane was more vegetative. Mr Speaker, in 2007, the average tonnage of cane to make a ton of sugar for the Guyana Sugar Industry was 11.63 tonnes of cane to one ton of sugar. In Berbice it was 11.63 and in Demerara it was 11.63, in other words, Berbice and Demerara producing at the same level of juice purity, which is attesting to this phenomenon of extra rainfall in Berbice.

Fact 4: When this Skeldon project was first conceived it was anticipated that to survive the world crisis Guyana must produce sugar at US\$0.12cents per pound. How did we do in 2007? Well at Skeldon the cost per pound was US\$0.30cents, at Albion US\$0.19 cents at Rosehall US\$0.19 cents, at Blairmont it was US\$0.18cents per pound, at Enmore it was US\$0.17 cents per pound. Now Mr Speaker, remember I was saying that, some of the Demerara Estates are performing as well as the Berbice ones, especially Enmore. Well Mr Speaker, here is more evidence of it: Enmore is producing sugar at less cost than the Berbice estate but still way above the estimated US\$0.12 cents. LBI, the cost of production was US\$0.26 cents per pound, Wales US\$0.23 cents per pound and at Uitvlugt it was US\$0.41 cents per pound.

Fact 5: I find it extremely disturbing and surprising that the Skeldon factory, which is being supplied by a cultivation, which is supposed to be expanded nearly to three times what it is now, only worked for around 63% of the time available to it, during the crop in 2007. Mr Speaker, it seems inexplicable to me that they could be out of cane so frequently, in an environment of an expanding cultivation.

Fact 6 is that, Skeldon, as all the other GUYSUCO estates, has developed critical labour shortages to do almost all husbandry including reaping, which is curtailing almost all the estates' operations, including planting of cane.

Fact 7: It happens to be that, rain was falling in Berbice so badly that the loading machines for the expansion of Skeldon are not working efficiently, because they are bogged down in the mud and in view of the high rainfall being experienced, there was no indication that this will change in the near future, which again is going to cause serious trouble to the Uitvlugt expansion. I, myself, cannot see any useful Skeldon utilisation of the factory, within five years.

The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member.

Mr Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, can you grant the Honourable Member 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried

The Speaker: Please continue ...

Mr Anthony Vieira: Thank you Mr Speaker. Our Minister of Agriculture, who misses no opportunity to get his face in the media, recently commissioned the Skeldon co-generating system. However, my sources tell me that serious limitations to the infrastructure of the grid are affecting the factory, putting only 4 percent of its available capacity into the grid. Mr Speaker, only the Lord in Heaven knows when Skeldon would be supplying power from sugarcane bagasse which was the intention in the first place. I would not even like to venture a guess, but it is currently using fossil fuel to generate power. So, in 2007, this sugar estate which we were told was being expanded to produce 75,000 tonnes in this year 2008 only produced 27,000 tonnes in 2007. Mr Speaker, I wonder where the other nearly 50,000 tonnes of sugar is coming from?

Mr Speaker, the consequences of bad planning, bad conceptualisation and bad implementation are upon us and to pay the piper, we must now ask the poor Guyanese people for it.

Now, I come to the area which my Whip has told me that he wants me to specifically concentrate on. Mr Speaker, on 11 January 2004, I repeat Mr Speaker, on 11 January 2004, I did a commentary in which I said this:

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Ladies and gentlemen, the PPP has been very lucky in the eleven odd years they have been in power, in none of those eleven years, have they had to deal with the traditional high rainfall this country experiences, especially along the Demerara Coast, from Abary to Uitvlugt, and they have been complacent in the way they have maintained the existing infrastructure on the Coast since coming to power, especially in Regions 4 and 5.

If one looks at the rainfall pattern in this country over the last hundred years, one would quickly see that the average rainfall at Skeldon, was approximately 40% less than Uitvlugt, which means that the rainfall traditionally occurs with more intensity as you go from the eastern boundary to the western boundary along the Atlantic Coast. So I don't need any British company to tell me this. I don't need them to tell me that during the period 1992-2003, this country received less than its traditional average rainfall and that the drains that were existing prior to 1992 had to be maintained, those that I mentioned, since every twelve years or so, this country receives alternating high and low rainfall patterns. This lack of understanding of the potential rainfall in this country had led to blocking of drains, diversion of drains, building of structures in drains, siltation of drains which can impede the system of catchment, so that the rainfall water can deliver to the kokers swiftly after opening them at each side. Let me give you the rainfall that occurred in this country Mr Speaker, between 1966 and 1976, to

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establish the high gain levels in this country, which we can traditionally expect now... Mr Speaker, I want to say again, this was something I presented to the public in January 2004 and for this I would give the rainfall recorded during those years. During the eleven years, between 1966 and 1976, one hundred and thirty-two point four five inches, average, fell in each year. The past eleven years from 1992-2002 produced an average of less than seventy-five inches and everyone went to sleep in complacency, and this included the Chairman of the D&I Board, the Permanent Secretary – Ministry of Agriculture and the Government. We did not know about El Nino in the 60s or the 70s but we knew that there were cyclic changes in the weather pattern: it would be dry for ten or twelve years or it would be very heavy rainfall for ten or twelve years.

Mr Speaker, I foresaw what happened in 2005 a year before it actually happened and I want to say this; that apart from a few small but expensive plasters for this festering sore, not much has changed. On the entire Coast up to the Abary, I did not see one functioning outfall channel on the East Coast, when I visited the area in December and which I reported on. Mr Speaker, we are talking about our survival as a nation. I noted that other speakers spoke about the rising ocean floor levels and what it could mean to those of us who are living here on the Coast. Mr Speaker, I think that the ocean level has risen by at least 4-5 inches already, since 1978. There is a koker at Versailles next to my home which I built in 1978

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when I was manager at Versailles ... I saw water from the river running over the top of the koker door three months ago, something which I had never seen before, in all the years I have been looking at that koker ... since 1978.
[Noisy Interruption]

Mr Speaker, there is one further complication. We don't really know what is happening with the levels since the Brass Admiralty Gauge at the Demerara Bar, which had been placed there since colonial times and which was used to determine all levels in this country, was stolen by scrap metal dealers some twenty-odd years ago and was never replaced. Since that time we have been using estimates to write up our timetables, so in fact, we really don't know what the ocean levels have done over the past twenty years, whether it has risen or not. But Mr Speaker, if the ocean rises even one foot, our ability to live on the Coast will be in serious jeopardy, since this country's coastal belt exist on tidal gravity drainage, almost exclusively. Imagine, Mr Speaker, what would happen if we have to drain every drop of our heavy rainfall by pump from Region One to Suriname, if the tide rose even one foot. It is unreasonable, Mr Speaker, to expect that the high tide level would rise, without the low tide level also rising; they both would rise in a linear manner; so if the high tide rises one foot then the level of the low tide would also rise one foot and we would be incapable of draining the rainfall through our kokers.

Mr Speaker, now, before our ability to hold out the rising ocean becomes a reality, our inability to drain our

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coastland would become a major issue, forcing us further inland. No amount of grandstanding can change the issue Mr Speaker. We have a seriously compromised drainage system, occasioned by years of neglect during the period of low rainfall from 1992-2003 [*Applause*], when every major outfall channel is blocked by siltation. To his credit, President Jagdeo is right. To undo all this siltation all along the Coast now would cost billions. I must say, that in this case, for once, I heard the truth from this government. I, never-the-less, especially enjoyed Hon Robert telling the farmers in the Pomeroon area of Region 2, that he is going to give them free new seeds to replant their crops that were knocked out, when that Pomeroon area flooded about two months ago. Mr Speaker, at low tide one could practically walk across the mouth of the Pomeroon River, which is so blocked with silt, but the Hon Gentleman is giving free seeds [*Laughter*]. Mr Speaker, I had to find it hilarious or else I would weep.

Mr Speaker, our Rice Industry is merely hanging on. The support that our farmers need to make them more competitive in an ever-increasingly competitive global situation is just not happening. Our output of rice which was 365,385 tons in 1999 was only 298,198 tons last year. Our farmers are finding it difficult to get almost everything they need to grow their crops on time. Fertilisers are frequently being received very late, especially now, Mr Speaker. Apparently, in recent times the RPA announced that they would be bringing in urea at a better price than was being sold on the local market, so

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the traditional suppliers stopped importing urea and to date the RPA has failed to supply the urea, so the crops are advancing but there is no fertilizer for them.

Mr Speaker, with the other chemicals necessary to grow the rice efficiently, the insecticides and weedicides, there seems to be a very much worse situation than with the fertiliser; and there is a shortage of almost all chemicals for the control of weeds and insects. But Mr Speaker, it's mainly our agronomical practices. With the planting of rice in this country that has not changed for decades; our yield per acre is not improving and it seems to be improving elsewhere. Where fifty bags per acre is now the norm, we are still producing 25-30 bags per acre. We are just not advancing technologically to compete in a world which is more and more moving away from preferential markets to globalisation, and so unless we improve our productivity we will not be sustainable as a rice-producing nation.

Mr Speaker, I have to report again this year that major issues with our fishing and shrimping industries have not been resolved. We still do not have a marine biologist monitoring our fishing grounds, to ensure continuity of the industry. Security is still very much an issue and theft is still a major impediment to productivity. Of course fuel, which I know is rising worldwide, is a major problem and any help in this regard, by the government which would ensure the continuity of the Industry, would be very welcomed. The government has, in fact, been kind enough to wave certain taxes on the fuel that the

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trawlers use in the ocean. However Mr Speaker, the processing of the fish is a very energy-intensive operation and therefore any concessions that could be made in that department, could help the Industry.

Mr Speaker, losing out on some money from the income, on taxes on fuel, for the Fishing Industry seems to me to be a small price to pay, to keep an industry which is currently contributing so significantly to our GDP, alive. Mr Speaker, I was happy to hear that the logging output was down in 2007. We have been getting very little from the excessive logging that has been going on in this country. Mr Speaker, there are major issues in our Forestry Sector, which is now engaging the attention of a Special Parliamentary Committee to examine the new Forestry Bills, but when the Guyana Human Rights Association publicly demanded an independent forestry investigation into the Sector, in the media, and went so far as to demand the dismissal of Commissioner James Singh, one is forced to take notice. The GHRA also alleged that:

- 1) There has been massive overpricing in the sector, robbing Guyanese of taxes.

Mr Speaker, in view of the crushing effects of VAT on our people today, the GHRA is saying that we are losing billions in taxes from multinational corporations, which are raping our forests, and is it our national policy to overtax our own people and let the multinationals pay none?

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- 2) The GHRA alleged that over the past decade there have been numerous incidences of dubious and illegal management practices, including over-logging of prime species.
- 3) The GHRA alleged that, there has been landlording of concessions and non-payment of rentals again resulting in loss of revenues to the Consolidated Fund to the detriment of our Guyanese people.
- 4) GHRA alleged that, there exists widespread labour exploitation of Indigenous people in the Sector.
- 5) GHRA alleged that, the practice of reversed buyouts, which disguise the true ownership of forest grants, is a common, widespread practice throughout the Sector.
- 6) GHRA alleged that, there is discrimination in the Forestry Sector, since there is a preference to use foreign labour over Guyanese labour.
- 7) GHRA alleged that, there has been a substantial and probably irreparable destruction of our national and Amerindian forest assets.

Thank you Mr Speaker and colleagues. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Clement Rohee ...

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Hon Clement J Rohee: Thank you Mr Speaker. I would like to extend warmest and sincere congratulations to my colleague, Minister Ashni Singh, for another piece of splendid and excellent work done [*Applause*]. He and his team I believe have done Guyana and its people well, in presenting a well-thought out Budget once again, in this 2008.

Mr Speaker, we have heard from the Opposition benches the usual condemnations, rejections, criticisms and disparaging remarks with respect to this Budget. We have also heard the usual clichés that the government is corrupt, incompetent, negligent and discriminatory and as usual, we are accused of mismanagement, ineptness and unaccountability. Mr Speaker, once again we are told that the Budget is uninspiring, lacks vision, has nothing to offer, proposes only manmade solutions and has brought relief to no one. We also heard that our sole preoccupation is with self-preservation.

Mr Speaker, in debate after debate, we have heard the same old threadbare and hackneyed arguments from the Opposition benches regaling us why the 2008 Budget will be unable to deliver, and as usual the doomy and gloomy tunes that nothing is working, everything is collapsing around us, nothing is in the Budget and what is to be done. Mr Speaker, when you reflect on the contributions made thus far from the Opposition benches it is indeed hard to find any specific line of argument, any single focus, any single area of concentration of argument, that have been made by them. Even my good friend and

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parliamentary colleague, Mr Murray, the Honourable Member, did not bring to this year's Budget debate his usual sharpness of focus save and except for the attention of emphasis he placed on the VAT and the benefits derived therefrom. So Mr Speaker, it is hard for us at this time in the House to really determine the real thrust and focus of the arguments raised by those who have spoken thus far from the Opposition benches. All we have gotten as I said earlier is that nothing is working, the government has failed, the Budget will bring no relief and that there is no vision. All but clichés we have heard before and so what does that leave us with. It leaves us Mr Speaker with a '*mish-mash*' of arguments which is like a bowl of spaghetti; you can pick and choose what you may wish to respond to. Mr Speaker, this is not good enough because if the Government and its Ministers were to be in a position to be guided by anything we have none. Mr Speaker, we came prepared as we always do, to listen to alternatives, to constructive proposals, the various options and recommendations, but regrettably, we heard none [*Applause*]. So Mr Speaker we have to stay the course and to continue advancing the transformation agenda. Instead Mr Speaker, all we heard were abuse, rhetoric and share politicking. Where are the plans? Where are the proposals? Where are the alternatives? Mr Speaker, in retrospect I believe the Opposition outdid Mr Sharma [*Laughter*]. I thought Sharma had aired on television all the grievances we can think about in this country but from what we have heard over the past few days, Sharma may be soon out of business. Mr Speaker, we are told that we

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are off-course but look who is telling us we are off course. You can only tell when someone is off-course when you yourself are off-course. Mr Speaker, let us exercise some caution here, lest we end up on a collision course and that is what the country certainly does not want at this point in time.

Mr Speaker, no recognition is given by the Opposition to the achievements the country has made over the years since 1992. It is as if we are living in a serene world; whatever the government does, whether it is for the improvement of the physical and social infrastructure, vulnerable groups et cetera, these measures will bring immense benefits for all the people of Guyana in the short, medium and long term.

Mr Speaker, surely the PNC cannot be saying that the country has stood still since they left office in 1992. If this is what they are saying Mr Speaker, I have to say that this is most disappointing. Mr Speaker, let us call a spade a spade. Supporters from all political parties will benefit when the \$12.B for Health Programme is expended *[Applause]*. Supporters from all political parties will benefit when the \$1.9B for the Education Programme is expended *[Applause]*. Supporters from all political parties will benefit when the \$3.7B for Drainage and Irrigation programme is expended. When the new airstrip at Wakenaam and Leguan and the rehabilitation of the airstrip at Baramita is completed at a cost \$100M all political parties and their supporters will use these airstrips *[Applause]*. Mr Speaker, supporters from all

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parties will use the roads and the bridges to be constructed and rehabilitated to the tune of \$6.2B. The question therefore Mr Speaker is why would the PNC and the rest of the Opposition oppose these measures? Why would they be opposed to the transformation and modernisation of their own country from which their own supporters would benefit? *[Applause]* Talk about being in denial syndrome, this is a classic example of being in the denying mode. When we talk about transformation and modernisation Mr Speaker, we are talking inclusiveness *[Noisy interruption]*, a process from which all Guyanese will benefit. Again I ask Mr Speaker, why would parliamentarians who are elected to represent their constituents be opposed to a process of transformation and modernisation of their own country? It boggles the mind.

Mr Speaker, unless it is simply a matter of being politically childish, petty or obstructionist, I see no reason why I would not want to be part of such an exciting process within my own country, so long as I am alive. This is what patriotism and nationalism is all about *[Applause]*. Mr Speaker, every nation at some point in time in their history has faced one challenge after another. Such experiences are not peculiar to Guyana. The point however is, we must not run away from the challenges, rather we must confront the challenges as a nation and above all, do so as one. Mr Speaker, when we talk about staying the course, we mean doing so nationally and internally. At the international level, speaker after

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speaker has referred to the challenges of climate change for Guyana, the problems of food security on small, vulnerable economies such as ours which we continue to face in this complex and increasingly hostile global environment. In this regard, trans-national crime such as drug trafficking, the illicit weapons trade and trafficking-in-persons continue to pose a serious threat to the security and sovereignty of nations around the world including Guyana. Guyana, Mr Speaker, has responded to this threat by deepening its cooperation with the international community particularly the United States, CARICOM and other neighbouring countries in Latin America. We are constantly working to deepen our security and intelligence cooperation with CARICOM and other South American neighbours. In this regard, we take into account:

- 1) The evolving nature of the hemispheric and regional security integration process.
- 2) Available platform for initiating and deepening security and intelligence cooperation.
- 3) Our priority is to intensify our work on the counter-narcotics front utilising existing bilateral agreements with the United States, Colombia, Venezuela and Suriname and Cuba.

Mr Speaker, critical to making progress in these two areas is our active collaboration with the Inter-American Drug

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Abuse Association (CICAD), the Caribbean Drug Information Network (CARIDIN), The United Nations Drug Control Programme, CARICOM Operations Planning and Coordinating Staff, The Joint Regional Communication Centre and the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security. Mr Speaker, our participation in hemispheric bodies such as The Guyana-Brazil Cooperation Agreement on Drug Interdiction, The Association of CARICOM Commissioners of Police, The Guyana-Suriname Police Cooperation Agreement, Bi-Annual Meetings of Latin-American Ministers of Defence, Meetings of CARICOM Ministers of National Security, The Central-American Security Cooperation and last but not least, work aimed at fashioning the Caribbean Community's fourth pillar to suit our local conditions and realities.

On the domestic level, Mr Speaker, we have just recently established the Task Force on Narcotics and Illicit Weapons involving all the relevant law enforcement agencies with a view to securing greater coordination, sharing of intelligence and joint action among these agencies. A similar task force has been established to effect greater coordination and joint action in respect of smuggling of illegal fuel and contraband. A ministerial body meets on a regular basis at a collective high level to address issues pertaining to trafficking-in-persons. Mr Speaker, we have noted the statement made in the Annual US State Department Report on Drug Control as quoted:

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There is no evidence that the Government of Guyana or senior Government officials encourage or facilitate the illicit production, processing, shipment or distribution of narcotics or other psychotropic drugs or other control substances or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions.

The Report went on to state:

The news media routinely report on instances of corruption reaching to high levels of government that are not investigated and thus go unpunished, but no conclusive evidence is available to back these claims. U.S Government analysts believe drug trafficking organizations in Guyana continue to elude law enforcement agencies through bribes and coercion, but substantiating information is anecdotal at best.

Mr Speaker, when this statement is juxtaposed to a recent report of the United Nations Organisation on Drug Control and the World Bank which states:

Since the Caribbean nations have limited resources to effectively fight the drug trade significant assistance should come from the destination in support of the interdiction effort. [Applause]

The answer with respect to the rate of implementation of the National Drug Strategy Master Plan therefore Mr

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Speaker, is clear for all to see. On March 28, 2008 a mid-term review of the National Drug Strategy Master Plan will be held under the auspices of the National Commission for Law and Order. The objective is to assess where we are in respect of implementation of this Master Plan.

Mr Speaker, notwithstanding its limited resources CANU is doing its level best to impact the fight against drug trafficking in narcotics. In 2007 CANU conducted over two hundred house raids in various parts of the country. Only last week CANU destroyed over seventy kilos of cocaine. Mr Speaker, as regard the fight against crime, this is another major challenge which has now taken centre stage. On page three of his presentation, Minister Singh in referring to the six broad areas the government intends to deliver as stated:

We will ensure that the Justice and Security Sectors will continue to accelerate reforms to deal with the current and emerging challenges.

Then at page thirty-seven we are informed that \$13.7B is to be provided for strengthening our public safety agencies. Mr Speaker, taken together with the assistance from bilateral and multilateral partners, a raft of seven steps is highlighted in the Minister's presentation.

Mr Speaker, we have always maintained that our National Security Plan is founded on three main pillars:

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- 1) The strategic and holistic approach outlined in our Annual Budget presentations
- 2) The Citizens Security Programme
- 3) The Security Sector Reform Action Plan

The Strategic Plans of the Guyana Prison Service and the Guyana Fire Service as well as the Terms of Reference of the National Drug Strategy Master Plan are also taken into account. The recent engagements between the Office of the President and stakeholders, and the political parties on the crime and security situation, augers well for the further consolidation and advancement of this plan. But Mr Speaker, what about this holistic approach we have been hearing so much about in recent times. For the benefit of those whose memories are short, let me remind that last year in his Budget Speech, Minister Ashni Singh had this to say:

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

Mr Speaker, that was on 15 February 2007. Nine months later, on 1 November 2007, the government tabled the Security Sector Reform Action Plan in the National Assembly. The document refers to a holistic approach based on a comprehensive threat assessment.

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Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Corbin has introduced however, into the public debate another version of this holistic approach, that is the socio-economic and political dimension and to this he has linked the statement about *A need to address the root cause of criminals and political violence*. Obviously Mr Speaker, this approach appears to be politically attractive to Mr Corbin. So what do we have here Mr Speaker? We have two schools of thought as regards this holistic approach. Mr Speaker, as far as the Security Reform Action Plan is concerned,

... the holistic approach is merely to cope, bringing together existing sectoral strategies in the area of drugs, disaster management et cetera to enhance coordination and rational resource utilisation/mobilisation as well as strengthen strategic planning and implementation capabilities within government and the security institutions.

Mr Speaker, as we can see from the Security Sector Reform Action Plan Holistic Approach, nothing is in there with respect to socio-economic or political factors. However, if we take Mr Corbin's version, the Honourable Member's holistic approach, the socio-economic and political implications are quite evident. But Mr Corbin, the Honourable Member is late and obviously has missed the boat because, as I said, in Minister Ashni Singh's Budget Speech one year ago, he drew attention to the need to embrace a holistic outlook in the solution to the

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fight against crime. As I said, this position of the government was adumbrated nine months ago before the Security Reform Action Plan saw the light of the day.

Mr Speaker, reference is frequently made to the need to take into account, previous studies and reports done as regards the Security Sector such as the Simmons and the Disciplined Forces Report. For the benefit of this Honourable House Mr Speaker, allow me to point out the following: At the Ministry of Home Affairs, a comparative analysis was done on the following documents:

- The Citizens Security Programme
- The Security Reform Action Plan
- The Simmons Report
- The Disciplined Forces Commission Report and
- The Scottish Police and Centrex Report

We found that they are fifteen common priority areas in each of the five documents. These are:

- 1) Anti-Crime Unit
- 2) Crime Intelligence
- 3) Special Firearms Unit
- 4) Forensic Capacity
- 5) Traffic Police
- 6) Operations
- 7) Investigative Capabilities

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- 8) Remodelling of Police Stations
- 9) Modernisation of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the General Registrar Office
- 10) Community Action
- 11) Human Resource Development
- 12) Leadership and Succession Planning
- 13) Training Facility
- 14) Heightening Communication
- 15) Community Policing

All these fifteen areas form a common trend that run through all of these five studies and reports which have been referred to from time to time by persons who have, I doubt, read any of these reports, made any comparative analysis between them and have therefore come up with arguments to suit their own political agenda. Mr Speaker, it is therefore incorrect to say that these reports and studies were not taken into account when the Citizens Security Programme and the Security Reform Action Plan were formulated. So that instead of coming to this Honourable House and making whimsical observations Mr Speaker, no scientific study was done and its poll is therefore misleading or simply mischievous.. Mr Speaker, clearly, somebody is trying to play catch up.

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Mr Speaker, what is this holistic approach to the fight against crime that we speak of? Our approach takes into consideration fifteen areas principally in the social sector but it also has to do with expanding employment opportunities, encouraging foreign and local investments, promoting and consolidating the new growth areas such as the IT Sector, Tourism, the Non-Traditional Sectors and encouraging confidence by the business community such as introduction of legislation to reduce the cost of doing business in Guyana. This holistic approach Mr Speaker that we speak of is an approach that is grounded in the realities of our local conditions and our financial and budgetary resources. The commitment made by the President at Baboo John in respect to money, resources, encouragement and support for the Joint Services to go after the bandits is to be welcomed.

Mr Speaker, we recognise that there is some correlation between crime and poverty. However, in Guyana's context we must make the distinction between crimes of necessity where persons with limited options to eke out a living commit a crime out of necessity such as larceny from the person, shoplifting, praedial larceny and other petty crimes and we must make this difference between those types of crimes and psychopathic criminality with an implicit political agenda [*Applause*]. Mr Speaker, the latter types of crime have nothing to do with poverty. In such cases, it is established that some unemployed youths in their formative years can be influenced either by politicians or social malcontents to leverage their political

agenda [*Applause*] utilising various means including the use of force and armed gangs to pursue these political objectives. Mr Speaker, it would be incorrect and absurd to claim that criminal gangs influenced and indoctrinated the third political motives and have a cause that grew out of poverty. Actually, it grew out of a peculiar political culture that has been with us for some years in Guyana [*Applause*]. Mr Speaker, after all, how can we explain the activities in the context of the criminal enterprise with heavily-armed AK-47s and other automatic and semi-automatic weapons? The hiring and paying of look-outs and informants as well as financing persons to provide transportation to move stolen weapons and booty from one location to another and to stash these weapons as well as to give criminal elements safe houses, not to mention the provision of large sums of money to persons to provide them with ration and freshly cooked meals. Certainly Mr Speaker, these are no ordinary criminals, who, as some claim, have a just cause. In fact, these are para-military operatives, who have their dubious political, ideological masters as well as their shadowy military tactitional settlements [*Applause*] so as to guide them in their '*killer operations*' be it at Lusignan, Bartica or elsewhere. Mr Speaker, the challenge from this ominous criminal enterprise is not to be underestimated and requires a national response that is rapidly taking shape at various levels of society. Mr Speaker, in this connection, the role of the Joint Services in the execution of their legal action is to keep up the action to dismantle the criminal enterprise and to go after the brutal criminal

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operatives. These actions must be supported by all Guyana; no quarter must be given. Mr Speaker, in this regard, let me bring to the Honourable House, information, which many of us are aware of, with respect to criminal elements which have been roaming and destroying people and property over the years and to show the track record:

Dale Moore	-	shot and killed
Troy Dick	-	shot and killed
Shawn Brown	-	shot and killed
Andrew Douglas	-	shot and killed
Mark Fraser	-	shot and killed
Roger Bunbo a/k DonDick-		Arrested captured
Prem Kumar Sookraj a/k		
Inspector Gadget	-	shot and killed
Christopher Belle	-	shot and killed
Romel Reewan	-	shot and killed
Dillon Accra	-	shot and killed

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Rondell Rawlins a/k

Fineman	-	still at large
Jermaine Charles a/k Tinny-		captured
Dwight Da Silva	-	captured
Dillon Henry a/k		
Nasty Man	-	captured
Quincy Adams-Evans	-	arrested
		and charged
David Zammet a/k David		
Leander/Biscuit/Cat	-	captured
Orlando Andrews		
a/k Bullet	-	shot and killed
Noel James a/k Baby	-	killed
Richard Daniels a/k Chucky	-	at large
Not Nice	-	at large
Michael Solomon a/k Sonny	-	whereabouts
		unknown

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Anthony Harewood

- a/k John Corby - shot and killed
arrested and
charged,
surrendered
- Modda - arrested and
charged,
surrendered
- Chung Boy - arrested and
charged
surrendered
- Magic - arrested and
charged,
surrendered

and a number of persons arrested and charged.

Mr Speaker, let me remind this Honourable House that it behoves every Guyanese to submit to the authorities. I want to quote from Romans 14: vs 9-13 in this system:

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Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment onto themselves, for rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you, for he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Mr Speaker, compounding the situation even more is the number of weapons that is yet to be accounted for by the PNC [Applause]. The Honourable Member, Mr Corbin had promised to make a comprehensive statement on the matter, but he never did. I believe that it would be a good gesture if the Honourable Member Mr Corbin was to show this Honourable House that immediately after this Budget is passed he would make the much anticipated comprehensive statement to the nation which he had promised to give on the matter [Applause]. The nation needs to know what happened to:

- the M-70 rifles,
- the 30 self-loading rifles,
- the 14 DC rifles,
- the 6 Carbines,
- the 7 Beretta submachine guns,

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- the 4 (.22) rifles and
- the 73 M-10 pistols.

Mr Speaker, somebody is desperately trying to get this very important matter of the unaccounted weapons off the radar but it would not go away so easily. I hope Mr Speaker that Honourable Member Mrs Backer would take note of this matter since it was the Honourable Member, who, wearing the hat of '*Singing Debbie*' during last year's debate has reminded us of the nursery rhyme '*Hot Cross Buns*' and has revised the lyrics to read '*Guns, Guns, Guns, one a penny, two a penny, Guns, Guns, Guns.*' Mr Speaker, what is the new tune now, Singing Debbie?

Mr Speaker, in a related matter President Jagdeo assented to the Firearm Amendment Bill.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, let's have some ... We have students and our behaviour ...

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, in a related matter, President Jagdeo has already assented to the Firearm Amendment Bill. Soon after the approval of these estimates I intend to sign the Order bringing into force, the provision of the Act, making them effective in respect of penalties in being in possession of illegal firearms. The nation must take note. But Mr Speaker, it is not only a matter of legislation; it is also a matter of action. Last year the police seized a total of one hundred and forty-four firearms. For this year, to date, a total of twenty firearms have been seized. We support the police in the

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ongoing campaign to halt these illegal weapons on the streets. Mr Speaker, in the fight against crime, the government has made more and more resources available to the agencies that contribute to public safety and national security. I referred earlier to the statement made by His Excellency the President. In this regard Mr Speaker, in this year's budget, there is a thirteen percent overall increase in the resources to be made available in the 2008 Current Budget for those departments that fall under the Ministry of Home Affairs. As regards the Capital Budget, a ten percent increase has been budgeted. Mr Speaker, a quick glance of the '*Big Ticket*' allocation shows that Prison Buildings will be given \$40M; Fire Ambulance Stations – and I heard the Honourable Member say that no money has been allocated to Bartica, they must read the document carefully. Last year we allocated \$10.7 and this year is \$9.8M in the Budget for the Bartica Fire Village Station [*Applause*]. Mr Speaker, a juvenile centre is to be built at Sophia to the tune of \$34M and for the Police, \$100M has been allocated for land and water transport; \$40M is to be spent for a surveillance vehicle and boats with outboard engines; \$200M will be allocated to the Police for equipment, out of that \$200M, forty computers are to be bought for the Police Stations in inner coastlands to support accountability reporting and \$100M for arms and ammunition; \$25M will go for forensic equipment. Twenty seven million was used last year for the purchase of forensic equipment.

Mr Speaker, last year when I reported to this Honourable House, we had one hundred and forty Community Policing Groups with two thousand members. As we speak today, there are two hundred and eleven active groups with three thousand, nine hundred and sixty-seven members who this year will be celebrating the 32nd Anniversary of Community Policing Groups in Guyana.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, there is too much noise on this side of the House. Please, the Honourable Member cannot be heard. Could you please tone down? Thank you.

Hon Mr Clement Rohee: Mr Speaker, the question is asked: Whether we are getting value for money in light of the large sums we are pouring into the Security Sector? The Honourable Member, Winston Murray himself stated:

Huge sums of money for projects are not impressive. People want to know whether they are getting value for money.

To answer this question Mr Speaker, in respect to the Security Sector, we have to have an idea where the bulk of the budgeted resources for the Police, Fire and Prison Services, particularly the Police, is being spent. The three main areas that eat up the bulk of the resources allocated to the Police particularly are fuel and lubricants, travel and subsistence, equipment and spares. Cabinet, Mr Speaker has requested from the Police accountability reports on a monthly basis to assist in assessing its

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effectiveness, the nature of its responses as well as the quality of service offered to the citizens of Guyana. These reports are to be submitted on a monthly basis by Divisional Commanders through Force Headquarters. It is for these reasons that out of its own resources that government will purchase forty computers for forty police stations across the country particularly for those on the coastland.

What are the people's expectations of this Sector Mr Speaker, and can these expectations be fulfilled, Mr Speaker? We recognise ... [*Interruption: "I am not Gajraj ..."*] 'They don't have force like Gajraj'. We recognise that people's expectations ... [*Interruption: 'Most of them talk about putting something on them ...'*] We recognise that the people's expectations are very high. These expectations will be fulfilled over time but require hard work at various levels. Mr Speaker, does the Sector have the tools to effectively execute its mandate? There are six Police Divisions with a total of seventy-two Police Stations and fifty-five outposts around the country. The actual strength of the Guyana Police Force is two thousand five hundred and fifty-two, while the establishment is three thousand, five hundred and seventy. This means that there is a shortage of one thousand and eighteen ranks. At current strength, there is one police rank to every two hundred and fifty-six members of the population and four police to every thousand civilians. According to best practices, Mr Speaker, there should be five police ranks per thousand members of the population.

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Mr Speaker, as the law enforcement agencies become more effective in executing their lawful duties, correspondingly, the criminal justice system will be expected to administer justice in such a manner that members of the general public feel a sense of satisfaction that justice was fairly and widely administered. At the end of this process the recipient is invariably the Guyana Prison Service. As of today, we have in prison, including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners, two thousand, two hundred and fifty-six remand prisoners. The prison population ratio is 290 for every 1000 members of the population; 7.5% of the prison population are prisoners on remand, 2.6% are women and it costs the State \$253 daily to feed every prisoner. Mr Speaker, what we need is not a prison, what we need is a more efficient and modernised criminal justice system whose principal task would be to reduce significantly the number of untried and remand prisoners, ensure that Courts in the Interior areas are held more frequently and to consider placing greater emphasis on alternative sentencing. From our part of the Ministry of Home Affairs we continue with our plans to expand the combination facilities at the five prison locations to fill the eighty-two vacancies within the service and to further enhance security arrangements at all prison locations.

As regards prisoners themselves, we will continue to place emphasis on correctional and rehabilitation programmes such as the literacy programme, sentence planning and management, technical and vocational training and to rehabilitate the trade shops, establishment

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of a corporate prison enterprise and to finally, increasing the number of welfare officers at all prison locations, the basic objective being to help prisoners turn a new page in their lives and to reduce the cynicism in the prison system. The end point of our programme, when implemented, will result in an enhanced public safety and public security environment for all Guyanese, a secure and safe environment for foreign and local investors, a better equipped and trained Guyana Police Force, Fire Service, Prison Service and General Registrar's Office, a better focused and a geographically more widely spread Community Policing Group.

The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Hon Minister be given another five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

Motion carried

Hon Mr Clement Rohee: Thank you Mr Speaker. The deliverable will make a considerable impact in the key areas of public safety and security. In these areas, the Citizens Security Programme and the Security Sector Reform Action Plan will be critical. It will take some time before we are able to judge the effectiveness of the deliverables.

Mr Speaker, in pursuing the budgetary objectives we are seeking to:

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- ensure that all Guyanese live in a safe and secure environment
- ensure that investors both local and foreign feel a sense of confidence to invest in Guyana
- ensure that the Police have the tools to carry out their functions, to gradually do away with the image that Guyana is a major transit country for drug trafficking
- ensure that the citizens of every community and neighbourhood enjoy an excellent working relationship with the police.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to echo the statement His Excellency the President made only a few days ago at Baboo John where he declared that as a people we must never lose faith. Mr Speaker, the opposite of faith is fear. Recall Psalm 23:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; your rod and your staff shall comfort me.

These are words of faith, Mr Speaker, and should be heeded and followed by everyone. I thank you [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Norton.

Mr Aubrey Norton: Mr Speaker, I would have wished to speak immediately after Minister Insanally not because

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only of handling Foreign Affairs but his presentation was intelligent, well organised and structured. For that, I commend the Honourable Minister. Unfortunately Mr Speaker, I have to speak after the combinations iconoclast Mr Rohee, and I say he is iconoclastic because as I understand it an iconoclast is one who uses bad intents against cherished elites and I believe, though I am not a church person, that the Holy Bible should not be misused in the way that Clement Rohee did [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, I am compelled to respond to some things said by Mr Rohee. First Mr Speaker, he tried to suggest or he said there are drug challenges to be overcome. Mr Speaker, I want to turn to the Stabroek News of Saturday, 24th October, 1992 in which Mr Jack Long of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Special Investigation had this to say. We're speaking about Guyana and I quote:

In terms of drug trafficking or money laundering, Guyana is on the breach [this is 1992, 24th October] He forethought the country is in a position to protect itself and the Police Force needs the training and information required to combat crime.

Mr Speaker, I mentioned that, because when Mr Rohee's government inherited Guyana, we were a virtually drug-free society at the level of trafficking [*Applause*]. Thanks to the People's Progressive Party we are a major sector of trans-shipment.

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Mr Speaker, I want to make another point. The Honourable Member, Clement Rohee was outlining persons and said 'shot and killed,' 'shot and killed.' The only thing he forgot to tell us was the problem still continues. You can kill, kill, kill ... the solution to crime lies not in killing; in fact, continuous killing accelerates, perpetuates and entrenches violence. We need an approach that will allow people to obtain jobs; we need an approach that will allow people to understand the nature of crime and to desist from crime but Mr Speaker, Mr Rohee's position on the issue leaves much to be desired.

Mr Speaker, he talked about clichés. Well I thought his presentation was highly platitudinal and filled with clichés and therefore I would pay it no more attention except to say Mr Speaker, that let us recall that on the 7th June, 2002 President Jagdeo promised this country a Swat Squad saying, and you could go to the Stabroek News of the seventh, saying that with a Swat Squad we will have the kind of reaction, quick reaction and be able to deal with crime. In 2005, we were told by the then Minister of Gajraj that the people for training were here, that the weapons were here and that it was in the making that 2008 it is still in the making. Who is responsible for that? No other person than the People's Progressive Party [Applause] Government.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to Foreign Policy. I said before, Minister Insanally's presentation is indeed a good presentation. What is unfortunate however is that the Budget has not provided the resources for the

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implementation for the strategy outlined by Minister Insanally. A paltry \$2.4B has been allocated to Foreign Affairs. Mr Speaker, let me make this point: The programme in the Ministry with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lies in a perception that was prevalent in 1992 and let me tell you what that is. Dr Jagan said:

I will pay them, the Foreign Service, from the current \$1.26B in foreign service expenses, since it costs more than Education, Health and the Fire Service.

Mr Speaker, I do agree that Education, Health and the Social Services inclusive of the Fire Service should be given resources and be given respect but I do believe as well, Mr Speaker, that the Foreign Ministry must be seen as part of the whole government machinery that is making a significant contribution and should be funded as such, and as I go along, Mr Speaker, I would show you that is a fact. And so I am suggesting here Mr Speaker, that there is a need for a change in the approach to foreign policy and the Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Ministry must not be seen as being in competition with other sectors. It must be seen as being part of the government structure and contributing to the overall developmental objective of the country. Mr Speaker, a foreign service properly structured as Minister Insanally did state, brings resources for other sectors. I believe Mr Speaker, therefore, the Budget should have given more resources to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and there should be adequate provision so that the Foreign Service can employ the level of

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persons that are necessary to make it a successful Ministry.

Mr Speaker, Minister Insanally pointed out that we have a paradox with Venezuela and I agree. He identified and said clearly that the government is in a search for another officer to replace Mr Oliver Jackman. Mr Speaker, I believe that is not enough. We need to do a little more when it comes to Guyana and Venezuela. I believe a well orchestrated campaign to sensitize the world to Venezuela's activities as it relates to Guyana-Venezuela's territorial question. I believe as well Mr Speaker that we need a well-organised campaign in Latin-America, pointing out the contradictory nature of purporting integration on the one hand, and pursuing aggression on the other. I believe, Mr Speaker, if as a country, we can develop these positions and promote them, we will obtain the support required in Latin-America and the Caribbean and we will be in a much better position to deal with the situation.

Mr Speaker, we all sat here and we talked about the Arbitral Award with Suriname and we welcomed it but I believe it opens new vistas for us to take action to help us to deal with the territorial controversy. I want to quote from Erokuniversal.com of Tuesday, 28th February in which it was pointed out and I quote:

According to Samuel Garivani, a former Venezuelan Ambassador to Guyana, Venezuela should have released a statement stressing that Suriname was making a

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percent taking into consideration Venezuela's claim on the Essequibo. This opportunity should have been seized from the political standpoint to set a legal precedence.

He continued:

The fact that Venezuela said nothing was a serious mistake and even worse, it shows the country its dropping its claim.

Mr Speaker, I honestly hope it is the last but I do believe that we have to look carefully at that Award and very early, hustle to develop a strategy to ensure that we can benefit from it and to ensure that we have a proper settlement of this issue. Mr Speaker [*Interruption: I won't comment on that because I think she knows history. It was set in 1899 by an Arbitral Award but there is still a controversy and that has to be dealt with.*] Mr Speaker, having been disturbed, I return to my point of focus. In this Honourable House, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in response to a question to me, when I asked about Head of Mission Conference told me last year, that we did not have one in a long time, but we would possibly have one next year. Well this is this year, 2008. I scrutinised the Budget to find an allocation and found none. It means therefore Mr Speaker, that for another year; we will go without the Heads of Mission Conference. We will go in a situation where our Heads of Missions are in countries for fifteen, sixteen, thirteen years out of touch with Guyana's reality and we do not see the need to bring them

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home for discussion and for sensitising them to the realities of Guyana. I was told that one diplomat of ours in a Mission was asked about VAT and he said what is that? Well if he would have lived here he would have known. So Mr Speaker, I believe that we need to have a proper Heads of Mission Conference but one important thing, Mr Speaker, before that Conference, this government needs to sit and review the Ambassadors, to give us proper representation in many capitals. In Suriname, the information is that we are short-changed. In the United Kingdom, the same is true. I understand Mr Hind's friend has been Counsellor General from 1992 until now. *[Interruption: He is my friend too, you are my friend Honourable Prime Minister, but this is not an issue about friends, it's an issue about the representation of Guyana.]* *[Applause]* I am saying to you, the reality is that we need to review Heads with an aim of having proper representation. In any country that is proper and has a proper Foreign Service, it will not, I repeat, it will not leave one person in a post for sixteen and seventeen years. I think Mr Speaker that is unfortunate. I want to make another point: Mr Speaker, the United Nations is one of the most crucial points of our foreign policy. It is probably the only organisation where we can meet every country and articulate our position but until now Mr Speaker, the United Nations is without a resident Ambassador – a Permanent Representative. Mr Speaker, that is unacceptable and I believe that this government owes it to the people of Guyana to appoint an

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Ambassador to the United Nations to promote the interest of the people of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, we talked a lot about security and I believe we should focus on security. Unfortunately, they put its political management in insecure hands. Apart from that Mr Speaker, I would have expected that at this point in time of our history that the government would have outlined the foreign policy dimension of our security plan and I saw none. It is clear that our neighbours have to be part of our crime fight. They are the source of guns - that is well known; they are a place of hiding for the escaped criminals. I believe, Mr Speaker, the government needs to adumbrate a policy of cooperation and coordination with border countries. The PNCR(1G) call on the government to develop a comprehensive diplomatic strategy that results in cooperation and coordination of security-related activities amongst our border countries with the aim of helping Guyana to deal with the problems that emanate from our having porous borders. I believe the same should be done with the Caribbean. Mr Speaker, I believe security is crucial, and I urge the government to address security in its foreign policy context.

Mr Speaker, I have heard in the press that this offer was made by President Jagdeo about the forest and the environment and I must submit I have no problem with it except we never saw it. It was first discussed overseas and then we heard it in the press; so much for inclusiveness Mr Rohee. As far as I know the Prime Minister of Great Britain was included rather than the

stakeholders in Guyana. But having said that, if the proposal is tabled and it's in Guyana's interest, we will have no problem supporting it but we believe there is need for a general environmental diplomatic strategy. You cannot have a situation where there is this initiative, that initiative outside of the context of a proper environmental diplomatic strategy. Therefore, the PNCR (1G) calls on the Government of Guyana to develop a clear environmental diplomatic strategy that seeks to ensure that Guyana's interest is promoted as it relates to bio-diversity, climate change, forestry and the whole struggle for sustainable development.

Mr Speaker, the Budget makes basic reference to climate change and I believe Mr Speaker, this Budget fails to put climate change on the agenda properly. Why do I say that? I think it was the Honourable Member Mr Vieira who pointed out what is happening in terms of climate change for Guyana. One of the realities we face Mr Speaker, is that Guyana has to shift its percolation to the highlands and I believe if this Budget was crafted in the context of understanding that international dynamic, we would have seen that it measures to shift Guyana to the highland as a measure to deal with climate change. The PNCR (1G) believes that government should have as part of its international environmental strategy, to initiate action with the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (HABITAT) with the aim of ensuring that HABITAT includes in its focus the resettlement of population affected by climate change and for Guyana to

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pursue a system that would contribute to the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive plan for human settlement in Guyana. Mr Speaker, that a reality. We have to shift but there is nothing in this Budget that projects a plan for a resettlement of Guyanese on highlands. In fact, in housing, we continue to put people on the low-lying Coast while at the same time talking about the effects of climate change [Applause]. To me, that does not make sense. So I urge this government, I plea with this government to look at this question as to engage HABITAT with the aim of ensuring that we deal with this issue in the future. Mr Speaker, at the foreign policy level, climate change has to be seen as a developmental, environmental and security issue. I believe as a country, we are vulnerable to climate change. Our sea defences are under threat. What is important Mr Speaker to note is that we are not responsible for climate change, it's a global phenomenon and therefore Guyana has to take action to ensure that this is recognised and when we are dealing with developments, our sea defences should be dealt with in the context of this dilemma. So Guyana's strategy must be to initiate action to ensure that systems come to countries like Guyana in the area of sea-defences since it is global warming rather than Guyana's doing that is responsible for our existing situation. Mr Speaker and I believe if we in foreign policy terms can do these things we would be in a better position. Mr Speaker I saw the Honourable Member, Mr Berry Ramsarran with his hands in the air in this Parliament saying we have a continental destiny. Mr Speaker, there is nothing in this

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Budget that suggests that we have a continental destiny. In fact, as I move from Foreign Policy to Public Works and Communication, I will show you that one of the fundamental weaknesses of this Budget is that no action is taken to move us in the direction of a continental destiny. So Honourable Member Mr Ramsarran, rather than getting it right, you got it wrong.

Mr Speaker, in the area of Public Works, we have been staying the course. I repeat Mr Speaker, in the area of Public Works, we have been staying the course but we are surely are not advancing the transformation agenda. Mr Speaker when you look at what is in the Budget in terms of infrastructure, roads and bridges, you will see that there is little or no focus between Linden and Lethem - little or no focus but yet we are saying that we are pursuing a continental destiny. I believe Mr Speaker and I will illustrate Honourable Mr Prime Minister; I will elucidate it for you, hold a minute. Mr Speaker, the approach that is taken by the Budget lacks vision as it relates to this continental destiny. We are rehabilitating old roads and poorly built roads and I believe we should rehabilitate roads. I believe it is good to have allocation for roads in communities – I am not saying no to that, but I am saying that if we, as the government claims are pursuing a continental destiny then our roads and bridges programmes should give some focus between Lethem and Linden. I believe Mr Speaker that Guyana needs a roads plan that opens the hinterland and the highlands and to construct roads and bridges that will contribute to the

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development of Guyana while still building and maintaining community roads and our existing highways.

I want to turn to the Linden to Lethem road. I believe Mr Speaker there is absolute confusion on the government side on this issue. Let me illustrate: Mr Speaker, in September 2, 2006 this is what Mr Jagdeo said in reference to the road and I quote:

You cannot spend US\$200M on paving a road that earns you US\$500,000 a year. Normally, the rate of return should be about ten percent so you have to earn about US\$20M and that is at the low end to justify if government is to be financing it.

So here are the words of President Jagdeo saying and questions about financing it because of the returns. I believe that approach is myopic. But then I have seen that the President is not disposed to this road. The Hon Dr Ashni Singh said this at Page 26:

Work on the Takutu will also be completed by mid-year officially ... (but I have questions about that word) bridging our border with Brazil, and further analytical work will be undertaken towards the construction of a highway from Linden to Lethem.

In this House, Mr Speaker, Members waived the Takutu Bridge may complete the check ... They had no contribution to this bridge but they were signalling this Takutu Bridge completion. But while the Takutu Bridge

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is completed we are doing analytical work (That's what he said, analytical work). Mr. Speaker, as a government you have to decide and be decisive. Do we believe that this bridge and that road will bring benefit to Guyana? If we believe that it will then we should take the decision and pursue it, but rather, we kept policy-dancing (if you see policy shifts man, like Rohee at a karaoke).

Mr Speaker, I believe that this Budget should have outlined plans for the construction of the Linden-Lethem road as a necessity but I want to quote something else. A technical team visited a few years ago and this is what the Guyana Chronicle said in an article entitled '*Requirements being put in place for Guyana-Brazil Road.*' It was reported that a government team visited the area and said, and I quote:

The development of the Linden-Soesdyke Highway was the key to successful implementation of the Agreement between Brazil and Guyana as it relates to the Guyana-Brazil road.

But Mr Speaker, there is nothing in this Budget for the Linden-Soesdyke Highway and so Mr Speaker, what is going to happen? This beautiful bridge is built, people will come from Brazil on nice roads, they will drive on these roads straight onto an excellent bridge and then when they get over the bridge we will say welcome to Guyana in dilapidation. Mr Speaker that is what we want? I think not. We should at this stage recognise that the Soesdyke-Linden Highway has to be part of this plan

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to give us access to Brazil and Brazil access to us. So the PNCR-1G calls on the Government of Guyana to develop the Soesdyke-Linden Highway inclusive of placing street lights on it to ensure that Guyana is prepared for and benefit from its link to Brazil with the completion of the Takutu Bridge [*Applause*].

But Mr Speaker, there is another small issue here. They are telling us that we are going to do analytical study. Let us recall and Manzoor should know this. In 1961 a study was done confirming that the road was feasible. The Hon Member Mr Manzoor Nadir cannot disown it because it's partly the UF, of course of a different era, that was involved in initiating that project and it was placed in their Manifesto in the 1961 Elections - I think it was the Highway to Happiness. So Mr Speaker, the point that is being made here is that there was a study in 1961 then there was one in 1989, and now we come in 2008 to do another analytical try. Mr Speaker that is unacceptable.

The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member.

Ms Debra Backer: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude.

Mr Aubrey Norton: Mr Speaker, the road is a costly business ... [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: Proceed ...

Mr Aubrey Norton: (*I hope I didn't lose that minute*). Mr Speaker, I believe that this government needs to take

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action to ensure that there is financing of that road. The PNCR(1G) urges this government to move in that direction, explore the possibilities with Guyanese and Brazilian businessmen because there are several studies out there that suggest, if properly done, it can be financed. But the government seems to feel that it has to do everything itself. You can't ... Competent governments can't ... How could you? And so, I am suggesting that there is a major role for the Private Sector here. Mr Speaker, I want to make the point that there is lot to be had from us making this link with Brazil and we need to do all that we can to ensure that it happens. But Mr Speaker, as well, I see in the Budget which is stated, in 2008 a total of \$6.2B has been budgeted for roads and bridges of which \$5B will be spent on roads and \$1.2B on bridges. That is just what will be spent because, Mr Speaker, I read in the Mission Statement of the Ministry where it said, and I quote:

*... to promote high technical Standards in
the Construction Industry ...*

And when I picked up this ... a road that was built under two years ... a man standing up with a big hole in the middle ... Mr Speaker, I made this point to point out that what we need is not telling us how much we will spend what we need is for us to get value for money [*Applause*]. I will repeat it for you Mr Rohee. When the People's National Congress built the Soesdyke-Linden Highway everyone knew it was going to give a minimum of twenty years service [*Applause*]. I want the Honourable

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Minister, Robeson Benn, when he is coming here, not only to tell us how much you would spend, tell us the quality of the work and how long this road will last [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, before I move on this whole issue of sea defences needs to be handled. I saw a letter in the press from Mr Malcolm Ally, pointing out the dangers of what is happening and I remember the Honourable Minister, Robeson Benn telling us that they would raise it this high and that people shouldn't be afraid and move off the Coast. Well I recognised he read the knowledgeable Engineer, Mr Malcolm Ally. I want you to read it; notice I said 'knowledgeable Engineer'.

Mr Speaker, I turn quickly to Region 4. In this House we are told that there is no discrimination. One of the areas I am responsible for is Region 4. I have extrapolated from the Budget some figures and I want to use them to illustrate the point to you. In terms of allocation for the Capital Budget for Region 1, let me state this before ... Region 4 has the largest population; its population is three times its second rival which is Region 3. Mr Speaker, I gave you those specifics from the 2002 Census and this *Member* does not know the difference between the Voters' List and the population of an area ... nursery school will improve you! Mr Speaker, I am talking about the general population, it has nothing to do with Elections; I think ignorance should sit in silence [*Applause*]. I'll go back to what I was saying – In Region 1 - \$142M allocated; in Region 2 - \$249M; Region 3 -

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\$205M; Region 4 - \$140M; Region 5 - \$193M; Region 6 - \$261M. The only Region that falls below Region 4 is another PNCR Region – Region 7 - \$96.75M; in Region 8 it is \$100M. Mr Speaker, I know they will argue that it is because of the amount of population but I want to show you as well when you look at millions of dollars spent per person, Region 1 gets \$5.8M, Region 2 - \$5.06M; Region 3 - \$1.96; Region 4 - \$0.45M. Mr Speaker, I am showing you that in every area allocation to Region 4 has been low and it is a trend.

Let us go to Education delivery (You asked for the evidence, I am giving it to you. Why worry?) In Education – Region 1 gets \$51M, Region 2 - \$23M; Region 3 - \$42M; Region 4 - \$32M. [Interruption]

Region 4 includes Georgetown. All I am saying ... [*Noisy Interruption*] Even if it is East Coast and East Bank, look at the population, the allocation is low.

In the area of Health delivery - Region 1 - \$35M; Region 2 - \$23M; Region 3 - \$34M; Region 4 - \$22M; Region 5 - \$32M; Region 6 - \$34; Region 7 - \$24M; Region 8 - \$15M; Region 9 - \$24M; Region 10 - \$35M. Again the lowest is Region 4. Mr Speaker, so in terms of Capital Investment, the reality, the facts reveal that Region 4 is under-funded. If you look in real terms, the reality of the matter is that Region 4 is under-funded and I say to this government, Region 4 must be treated as part of this country and they should be given the funding that is required [*Applause*]. Mr Speaker, I believe that for

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Guyana to achieve its objectives we have to be fair ... When you talk about flood argument here ... Dr Bheri said last night that the first time in the history of the country that Charity has a doctor is now ... *[Interruption: 'No, we didn't say that' "You said that last night and if you go and ask Dr Gladstone Mitchell where he was at that time he would tell you"]*

But the point is, Mr Speaker, the records will reveal it and so I want to make it clear Mr Speaker, that this Budget, in terms of Foreign Policy, does not offer much. This Budget fails in terms of ensuring that we achieve our continental destiny and this is so because of the lack of vision.

I conclude Mr Speaker, by saying it is easy to become annoyed. The best thing in life to do is to listen to criticisms, strip them of positives, take the positives and strip them of the negatives. But I say to you, Mr Speaker, one of the fundamental problems of this government is it believes that it is the fountain of all knowledge and everybody else has no sense. With all due respect Mr Speaker, I want to exclude a little from this bunch the young Minister Manickchand because I believe she strikes me as different in terms of involving people et cetera. But generally, this government has to learn to accept the views of other people and to recognise that it is not the only source of information and knowledge. I thank you *[Applause]*.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member, Mr Shaik Baksh.

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: Thank you Mr Speaker. I would like to make a few points here from the last presentation by the Honourable Member Mr Norton because there has been a lot of cross-thinking in his presentation. Firstly, he argued for a higher allocation for the Foreign Service. The government formulates a Budget and the government would have to determine its sectoral priority and this government over the last five years at least it has had its priorities right. We are concentrating on the Social Sector and infrastructural development. In 1992 you mentioned that there was a Budget ... In 2008 a provision was made for \$1.2B. In 1992 terms that would have meant 10% of the Investment Budget. In no way would this government allocate 10% of its Budget to the Public Service when there are so many other priorities. In this regard, I must mention that sixteen other staff members have been selected only two weeks ago for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Trade. So we are interested in developing these Ministries. No Ministry is really being neglected and I do hope in your presentation that is not what he was saying, that we are neglecting to put more resources within these Ministries.

Today Guyana is at the highpoint in International Relations, lead by His Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo [*Applause*]. Our Relations with the OAS, with CARICOM, with the United Nations, with individual countries like China and India, World Bank, the donor agencies, are at a highpoint and that is why we are

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benefiting so much from the inflows, inflows of funding for all of our major projects in the various Sectors because we have been, contrary to what you have said, we have been managing the affairs of this country so well that the foreign governments and the donor agencies are clearly impressed and they have been giving us not only loans but grants. Take the Education Sector for example, over the last three years we have been the beneficiary through the ESA/FTI (Fast Track Initiative) to the tune of G\$800M a year. This is the third year of that programme and no donor would give you those kinds of money unless they are satisfied that you are managing your affairs properly [*Applause*] and we can extend that, notwithstanding what the Honourable Member Ramjattan said, all of these things about perception of corruption and which tended again to pervade the Budget presentation ... these are all perceptions. So we have to be guided by the International Community on how they view this country. DFID has been giving us money for the Security Sector. The Japanese have been giving us money for the Water Sector; monies have been flowing into the country and they are ensuring that there is transparency and accountability in the use of these funds and you cannot deny that ... you cannot deny that. [*Laughter*]

Mr Chairman, the second point made here by the Honourable Member is that we must shift the population from the Coastal Belt to the highlands as a measure to deal with climate change. Now this is really a long, long-term objective, notwithstanding the threats of climate

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change. Mr Speaker, this country is an under-developed country and we do not have the resources to shift this population. We do not have the resources; we have to fortify our sea defences. I know of no other country that can prove me wrong, no other country which has started to shift its population away ... [*Interruption: 'I am not certain about that; I have not read about it and I don't think so' "You want to start shifting this population from the Coastal Belt?"*].

Mr Speaker, the third point that was made was that we needed, because of our continental destiny to focus on the building of highways – Soesdyke-Linden Highway, Linden-Lethem roads and so on and so forth. But again these are long-term, long-term and the government has ... we do have plans to deal with this. To improve infrastructure there is the Takutu Bridge being built ... there will be a greater flow ... we know of traffic and we have plans; we have long-term plans – yes. You forgot that the Rio Group visited here. We are in discussion with the Rio Group and there is a plan for the Highways of the Americas going way down into Suriname – that is so, South American Highways. We do have a plan, but it cannot be done now. This is what they say ... We do not want to be like the PNC when you touted the 20-20 vision; you wanted to build bridges across the Essequibo; you wanted to do all kinds of fancy dream-works in this country. We will take some time. [*Interruption: "That is a dreamy vision"*]. We will not dream dreams. We will move in a phased way to build infrastructure to realise our

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continental destiny [*Applause*]. Of course we have to do proper feasibility – feasibility is a must. You have been one-sided because you are not mentioning the connection; we are now building the Berbice Bridge to link us, to bring us closer to Suriname. We have the ferry service between Molsen Creek, Guyana and Nickerie and so on. So these are moves which we have been making over time but we would not be pushed into putting up a plan into a one-year Budget now for all of these ideas you are talking about to link us with Brazil and Venezuela.

[Interruption: "They like to live beyond their means man"] [Laughter]

Again the Honourable Member talked about allocations, the Capital Allocations as per Region. I really don't get the point. Really, I don't get the point. Is it a point that we are discriminating between/among Regions in Guyana? Each year there is a change in the allocations depending on the priority of projects. This is but natural. You plan each year and you make your allocations. He then made the big mistake here about Education delivery and said \$32M for Region 4. This does not include Georgetown, I can tell you that. Check the Budget and you will see it. But what is the rationale? A Budget makes projections; it's an estimate based from year-to-year and could change from time-to-time depending on your priorities. For example, in last year's Budget a lot of money was budgeted for Region 7 ... all the roads were paved in Region 7. For this year, the allocation has been

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less, so that is it, \$640M. But generally all the roads in Bartica have been paved. [*Noisy Interruption*]

The Speaker: Would Honourable Members stop quarrelling, please?

Hon Mr Shaik Baksh: When you talk about discrimination, you have to be careful because we spent \$640M in Region 7, in Bartica itself. In Region 10 also, a lot of money has been spent on housing ... You talked about the Housing Sector – Amelia’s Ward, Wisroc Schemes – hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in Region 10. So you have to be very careful when you are making accusations of discrimination. All Regions are benefiting from allocations, budgetary allocations from here.

Mr Speaker, the three ‘talks’ in the Budget presentations are the talk about discrimination; another speaker talks about corruption and there is no evidence being put on the table for corruption ... this is true; and then the talk about mismanagement. These are the ‘drill’ talks, the glib words that have been used ...

So I want to ask the Opposition Members to be constructive in their presentations. Come with constructive suggestions. They always come here criticising, criticising without making ... and this is clearly the case Mr Speaker in the area of Education – clearly the case. There has not been much criticism on the Education Sector. The Honourable Member, Amna Ally made a lot of points, a lot of those points that are very fallacious –

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incorrect statements but I do not want ... and I will prove it I have seven points to dispute what she said – seven points, seven incorrect points. I don't think the Honourable Member intentionally did that. I think it is a lack of research capacity on her part [*Laughter and Applause*] and her source of information; she went through the backdoor to get information from the Ministry rather than through the front door. Ask and it shall be given. We have a very open system at the Ministry of Education, very open, very open system, and if you ask for information it will be provided to you.

Point # 1: The Honourable Member talked about literacy and she said that this Minister stated that there was 100% literacy rate in Guyana. I have never made such a statement, I have never ... In any case, Mr Speaker Guyana in terms of the literacy rate, we are very much on top but we have to sustain the literacy rate. We have to sustain and ensure that those persons who are not functionally literate be comfortable. Now, this has come from UNESCO, the International Statistical Institute of UNESCO and this figure here lists seventeen countries. Trends in Literacy Rates: Population older than fifteen years of age – Latin America and the Caribbean – 2005 and Guyana comes second only to Barbados. All of these countries [*Applause*]... and this is fact ... very high. Again Mr Speaker, we have excelled in terms of millennium development goals for primary enrolments; the achievement of Universal Primary Education. We have moved and this is an important bold step and I want

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to tell you this comes from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Guyana is at the top of it all [*Applause*]. It is an achievement by this government in providing access to education, a remarkable achievement of this government [*Applause*]. [*Interruption: "After I would have made my presentation I would deal with that; I would deal with it"*] So Mr Speaker, we have been doing reasonably well. That does not say that there are not challenges contained in the Education Sector ... don't get me wrong. I would talk about some of the challenges just now but I must tell you something about the achievements in terms of literacy, in terms of gross enrolment rates and so on. I have had two workshops this year with one hundred educators – one on Literacy Education and one on Teacher Training. I'm just telling you ... it's out there in the public domain.

Continued in Pt II of III

National Assembly Debates

45th Sitting

14:20H

Tuesday, 4 March 2008

Part II of III

Continued fr. Pt I of III

Point #2: Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member made the point about computers in schools. As you said, it's surprising to me that she, the Honourable Member is the head of a primary school in Guyana. She said that some primary schools have only two computers. Well there is a programme, there is 'Computers for Schools Programme' There are two programmes dealing with IT in schools: one is where they are providing IT for Educational Management for the administration of the schools and in that case we would provide it for the head-teacher's office to do the Management. The other is where we are providing computers for the Learning Programme for Literacy, for the delivery of the curriculum, where they have in Guyana right now, fifty primary schools; it's a phased approach – we are not saying all primary schools do have computers, fifty primary schools have between four and ten computers for the learning programme [Applause] – fifty primary schools. We have about four hundred primary schools but they are moving. The Education Strategic Plan which I would come to later provides for us to achieve, over five years ... 50% of the primary schools must have computers. At the same time

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we will provide computers for all secondary schools within the five years, all of the secondary schools and the post-secondary institutions in five years time – that is our plan [*Applause*]

Point #3: Mr Speaker this is about the Education Strategic Plan. We do have a plan. There is a plan, the 2003-2007 Education Strategic Plan. We now have it in Draft form and you are right, it's in Draft form but I don't know the point you are making in saying it is incomplete and it is in Draft form; it is there and it will be completed within another month or two – we are taking our time because we have to cost the plan then we get a Strategic Plan to ensure that we get the resources that we require. So there is a plan that is being worked out with assistance from some of the donors, I must tell you. Some consultants are coming to help us to formulate the plan and this plan would provide for Universal Secondary Education. That is the plan based on the resources that we would need to have. It would provide for literacy and the priority objective of the education system. Again the Strategic Plan provides for School Health and I am glad that you have complimented us on that – School Health, Nutrition, HIV and AIDS. It would provide for the expansion of TECVOC (Technical Vocational Education). These are some of the very core areas and again it would provide for us to move from a 57% of trained teachers in this country to about 75-80% trained teachers in five years time. That is a challenge; that is a

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great challenge for us through pre-service, in-service, through distance mode of delivery and so on. But we are working on these things to ensure that we get better trained teachers and more trained teachers in all Regions of the country. In Linden also, I must tell you, most of the schools have their full complement of teachers and Region 10, Linden in particular, has more trained teachers than any other Region of this country – forty-two! *[Applause]* and that is because we have the Cyril Potter College of Education In-Service Training Centre at Linden. So that is it. It is important. *[Interruption: "I am unaware that the Centre will be closed"]*. Mr Speaker, the Education Strategic Plan will be a reality within another two or three months.

Point #4: The Honourable Member talked about the GDEP Programme and she thought that it has ended and there is talk of an extension, and will they get it? I am surprised that you are not aware that the GDEP Programme, the new programme at a cost of Can\$1.5M was signed on 6 June 2007 and has been implemented ... it has been implemented. So you have your information mixed up and wrong from the sources. It is being implemented right now with a secondary school bias in developing curriculum and distance modules and so on. Then you asked the question or stated the point that the EFA-FTI was funded by the World Bank. The EFA-FTI was not funded by the World Bank; it's by the donors ... I wrote it down here: it is funded by donors to the value of

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\$800M a year, which we are spending to improve the Education System in Guyana [Applause]. Then you asked the other question, frivolous as it might be, 'What is government's contribution to Education?' The Budget has stated \$19B less, less for funding the BEAMS project - \$790M and from the GINEYT Project \$150M. All the other monies in the Budget are funded by the Government of Guyana [Applause] which is just under \$18B. This comes to the point I want to make, because this government doesn't talk, it acts and it has acted in this Budget and it has acted over the last five years. Because as a percentage of GDP, I want to tell you that Guyana ranks the highest with St. Kitts and Nevis, the highest in Latin America and CARICOM in terms of providing funding for education as a percentage of GDP [Applause]. Guyana ranks very high, worldwide also and I have the statistics I can give you. Out of nearly two hundred countries as a percentage of GDP Guyana is among the eight countries in the whole world that percentage of GDP has very high figures. So we have spent money. For 2008 it's 16% of the Budget which translates to 8% of GDP. We have a commitment. I heard the Honourable Member Clarissa Riehl when she was speaking and she made a very good point. She said "Human Resources give character to a nation" and I fully agree with her. Human Resources gives character to a nation and that is the reason why we are spending so much money on the Education system because it is the key to the development of this country [Applause]; but

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she went on to state ... that is, she did not listen to my presentation ... that the government is neglecting its human resources. We are building human resources within the available resources we are compensating the human resources for their efforts. We are not saying it is perfect, we never said it is perfect but step-by-step we are getting there to provide the salaries and conditions of service for our teachers in particular and as you know we have multi-year agreement working fairly smoothly. There are all kinds of benefits going to teachers including school uniforms, a lot of other things – duty-free concessions, scholarships, housing loans, all of that, those things are part of the package. So you must not look at salaries alone. It leads me to the point that was made by one or two of the speakers here about migration.

Point #5: Migration issues ... This does not affect Guyana alone, migration within CARICOM and outside of CARICOM, in Africa, in Asia to the extent that even the Commonwealth countries were so concerned that they formulated a protocol, a protocol for teachers' recruitment where they were urging bilateral negotiations on teachers' recruitment. So the talk about teachers migrating, this will happen. With the coming into being of CSME, it will happen. Our task here is to train ... our challenge, our difficult challenge is to continue to train more and more teachers and retain them by offering more improved conditions of service and pay and that is precisely what we are doing.

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Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member ... this is the last point I want to make here on her ... for this time ...

Point #6: She made a point about the Acting appointment of a CEO within the Ministry, I want to tell her that is a matter for the Public Service Commission, not a matter for the Minister of Education but what is of concern to me mostly is the statement which she made ... the statements; I am giving you the statements [*Noisy Interruption: 'Take your time, I have a lot of time on my hand'*]. She asked the question about the CEO, she does not have the rights to look. I am taken back, as an Educator, this head teacher of one of our better schools in Georgetown; I cannot believe such a statement can be made. It can only come from a mind that is in turmoil ... a mind that is in turmoil. You know, that mind needs some psychological counselling [*Laughter and Applause*]. I can't believe we have that state of mind in our Education System. That is what I am worried about; it means that our challenge is greater, the task is more difficult, because, if we have teachers in our system thinking in this way it means we really have to put more money in the counselling services, not only for students but for the teachers themselves [*Applause*]. This is what we would have to do. [*Interruption*] I said that is a matter for the Public Service Commission.

Point #7: Then Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member talked about TECVOC Education and asked a very superficial question, 'Would the centres be strengthened?'

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The government has provided a large sum of \$60M in the Budget for the expansion of technical education in our school system - \$60M - and I want to tell you what we are doing. At present we have ten schools, ten centres at schools with the BCCP programme which is a competency-based programme. With this \$60M we will expand it to sixteen more schools. What are we doing here? Sixteen schools will be refurbished, will be given equipment to run the Technical Vocational Education; this is outside, this is for the Secondary School System, this is outside ... this is not a post-Secondary, this is not for the Technical Institutes nor the Industrial Training Centres, this is for the schools and of course we will be running a Skills for Life Programme in seven areas. We did a pilot last year at the BV Practical Instructions Centre and it was very, very successful. Sixty persons completed the Skills for Life and they were absorbed by the Private Sector and we will now proceed to put through hundreds, thousands of students and out-of-school youths, 15-24 in particular, in this programme here and what we are doing here is to provide employment opportunities for our young people who are out there. So this is a programme which we are moving ahead with and it is in tandem with what CARICOM is doing.

Mr Speaker, we heard about the need for good management and supervision and one speaker mentioned about the Inspectorate Division. What we are doing right now, well, school attendance, school drop-outs,

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classroom teaching all depend on effective supervision and management. That's why I urge you to look at this Reform and Innovation in the Education Sector. This has been implemented already ... [Interruption: 'We'd got to get it through the backdoor, too' "This was in the newspapers as a supplement. It was in our good newspaper, the Sunday Chronicle two weeks ago ..." 'I don't read the Chronicle...' "I have a copy and I can ... I'll give the Honourable Member a copy ..." 'Thank you' "It gives you one of the changes. Now, I think you are mixed up"]. So I want to tell you that the Inspectorate Division has been incorporated into a larger unit known as the MERD – Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Developmental Unit, that is a Unit which the Ministry has set up to ensure more effective management and supervision and outputs of the Education system.

17:24 SUSPENSION OF SITTING

18:23 RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Everall Franklyn.

Mr Everall Franklyn: Mr Speaker I rise to take part in this Debate 2008. I have not had the opportunity to hear, from all reports, the eloquent and able Finance Minister, present this year's Estimates under the theme: '*Staying*

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the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda. But Mr Speaker, we as a people have always been able to come up with really exceptional themes and slogans and this year's Budget Theme is no different and indeed impressive. In 2007 the theme was '*Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.*' No doubt these themes are chosen to inspire confidence in the people of this nation. But I do believe for the authors themselves because they, more than most of us, truly understand the state of affairs in the country and I think they need some amount of inspiration to paint a pretty picture of where we are going and what the situation is. I am very sure that it was a very onerous task to paint a picture of prosperity and upward mobility when in our towns and villages there is evident poverty amongst our young people, too much hopelessness and in the general population, and despair.

The National Budget should be more than just a statement of Income and Expenditure, debts and reserves. A national budget should be able to stimulate the imagination of the citizens of a country, allowing them to form a picture of their immediate future, medium and long-term goals. It should therefore give its citizens an idea of where their standard of living is and it should give all people, especially our young people, a sense of direction and hope. They must ask themselves - what must I do to fit in. What must I learn? What skills do I require to be part of any presented vision? This is Budget Speech 2007, nothing much has changed, my service.

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We as representatives of the people must ask ourselves, however, the question regarding the usefulness of these Budget Debates. After days and long nights, venting frustrations over various aspects of estimates and provisions, at the end of an increasingly futile exercise, the *Aye* would have it. It matters not at this stage what valuable suggestions or contributions were made to improve effectiveness and efficiency of monies spent by the state. At the end of the exercise, the *Ayes* would have it. Therefore we have become sticklers to form and very blind to substance. For the real government and the representatives of the people ought to be to improve the lot of our citizens regardless and pertaining to a Budget, where the idea for improvement or savings originated. The parody and pretence that is evident in our undertakings in this House at Budget time is so obvious that it is clear that we are still a far way from a truly functioning democracy. We make a mockery of Article 13 of the Constitution which sets out a principle, an objective of the political system of the State and I quote:

... is to establish an inclusionary democracy by providing increasing opportunity for the participation of citizens and the organisations in management and decision-making processes of the State with particular emphasis on those areas of decision-making that directly affect their lives."

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I don't think it is a point to debate. A budget directly affects the lives of citizens. It is therefore inconceivable that we prepare a National Budget year after year and giving little or no regard for meaningful participation as set out in that Article 13 of our Constitution, the ultimate Law of this land. In other situations, we still speak of law and order; we are not even obeying our own Constitution in terms of meaningful consultations by all citizens and the organizations. I have no doubt that the Honourable Finance Minister, Dr Singh is very competent and I am sure he has a very supportive staff. However, none of us, either on that side of this side of the House has a monopoly on good or even great ideas. I first submit that as a matter of good governance the Law sets out in Article 13 of our Constitution and we need to make use of those human resources both in, yes, here at home and out of Guyana where we have the diaspora. Why would any government be reluctant to listen and debate with citizens and the organisations on issues that affect their lives before presenting a plan for spending their money and distributing their resources? It is the people's money, it is supposed to be the people's budget and all this time that we take in going through the motion of legitimising the process could have been better spent implementing those plans that we have agreed to. I agree this is not to take away the responsibility of the government. The government ultimately has the responsibility to carry out those plans but I truly believe that those plans and projects would be implemented faster, more efficiently

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and would bring much more benefit to our people at a faster pace and I think that is what our people truly deserve. Mr Speaker, if we operated like this within our family, mistrust and disunity would follow.

Mr Speaker, the task of government in economic development is to create a modern industrial economy, is to create fiscal and social foundation for development, overall planning and integration development and promote a lasting and efficient distribution of goods and services. I would concentrate on the second item overall planning and integration for development. It is the responsibility of the government to analyse the country's economic position and developmental potential, determine feasible and mutually consistent developmental goals and must find ways to move the economy towards these goals rapidly and smoothly as possible. But to achieve the above the following has to be accomplished:

- Analysis of resources both human and natural.

I raise this question before on the natural resources that we need to have an audit of what we have so that we are better placed to know how we can exploit these resources. You have to know what is there under the rock and I dare say we are very far from actually knowing what we really have there.

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As a second point we would have to:

- Set short and long-range targets sector by sector and as far as possible, industry by industry.

Some of this I must say has been presented in the Budget.

And three, inform ... and this is the crucial one

- Inform all concerned what the attainments of set targets would mean in increased production and increased need for materials and equipment, train human resources, capital and foreign exchange.

It is bringing people on board so that they too can plan based on the overarching plan that is presented by the government of the day. They have to be involved from the inception. It cannot be ... smooth economic progress cannot be achieved if the players, who we intend to be a part of the process, have very little input in a constructive way prior to making the plan. If the process outlined is carefully implemented, it creates well founded expectations that enable economic agencies both government and private to base their plans and decisions on a common plan and work together for economic

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expansion. It is desirable to bring into the planning representatives of important agencies of government and private economic interests whose teamwork is needed if plans are to become a reality. It's about teamwork, it's about the much touted inclusiveness but we cannot continue as a nation to be sloganeering. We have to... if we are talking the talk we stealthily have to walk the walk because if it is not successful, all of us would be running.

This participation and involvement are especially important in mixed economies – one which we have where the Private Sector can make significant contributions to the attainment of national goals provided it is stimulated and encouraged by the government to do so. Mr Speaker, this is not to say that the full responsibility of there is any fault, I am not casting blame here. Some Private Sector entities and persons in our society also need to be brought on board. They also have to understand that we need to create wealth and the creation of wealth means that you have to invest in productive and as far as possible, export-oriented businesses and services and therefore the incentive regime must be set up in such a manner that it promotes the types of industries that we really want. We do not need a buy and sell Private Sector which to a large extent we have at this moment but I do feel strongly that the government incentive regime and stimuli needs to be addressed to 'push' even the Private Sector or ('pull' is *better, that is supposedly politically more correct*) pull

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the Private Sector on board in being a partner in national development. I tried after reading the Budget I had enough time to read the Budget and probably... it was a good thing that I had to read it and I wasn't dazzled by the brilliant presentation. Which framework... the question has to be asked, which framework does the 2008 Budget fit into? What is the overall plan for the economy let's say to the year 2020? Where is the much touted National Development Strategy fit into this? I have been hearing a little heckle on this side that it is being abandoned but the Honourable Nandlall yesterday stated that it is the National Development Strategy that the government is using. The same National Development Strategy that was devised by that great consultative process. *[Interruption: 'I would use the word formulated']*

I am not quoting, be quiet and in that respect, I have been engaging conversations about that National Development Strategy and it was clear that it needs to be revised because it is a strategy and strategies change depending on the conditions which are applicable at the time. *[Interruption]* Yes, but who revised it? Who revised it? You did that by yourself? We are not aware. That's the problem. You cannot consult and then insult.

Mr Speaker, the Hon Dr Jeffrey spoke about CSME but very shortly I would just like to ask the question.

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[Interruption: 'You are jumping around the point']

I wouldn't jump on you *[Laughter]*. What benefit does Guyana expect to get from the CSME when we are still trying to get our citizens hassle-free entry into some of the countries of CARICOM? I agree with some of the speakers that our destiny does not lie with CARICOM, our destiny lies South and we are ideally positioned for that and therefore I would like to see some sort of continuity, some long-term planning expressed in a Budget at this time of our development, when as some member of this House says, we are almost in kissing distance of a bridge being completed. I do believe that also the road also Lethem-Linden and other developments Deep Water Harbour and so on are important elements of our development and this do not have to come out of the government coffers. These I think are ideal investments for private enterprise of a multinational nature. *[Interruption]* Strategy we are talking about. Knowing that commodity prices will go up and will rise during the conversion as Mr Alli tried to explained, conversion of corn into ethanol and worldwide it would create a rise in prices of basic commodities. What have we put in place to meet these challenges, challenges that we know will face us? These are some of the answers that we would expect to see in a Budget. What is the state of underemployment and unemployment which was so obviously missing from Appendix I, headed '*Socio-Economic Indicators?*' I would like the Hon Finance

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Minister to explain why this vital statistic was missing. This is part of a Budget; we need to know how well we have done with the programme we put in place the year before, how do we stand? How is unemployment compared last year to this coming year? What we project? It was not there. Why was that omitted? It is the right heading and it is supposed to be there. Socio-Economic indicators – unemployment is supposed to be there. How does the government... These are things I want to know, I was looking for it and I did not see it. How does the government propose to deal with the excess liquidity in the banking system and the underground economy? Must not the government take responsibility for the huge gap between interest rates from savings and loans? Because the same investment in Treasury Bills which guarantees people with liquidity undisturbed returns on their investment take away money that may be available to reinvest. So we have lots of money but where is it? It cannot be used to promote investment and create jobs for our young people who sit on the bridges and done the day. That's what they do ... [*Wha yuh do deh, boy?*] "*Doning the day*" We have to be able to create those opportunities for them; I think that is our job.

I would like the Finance Minister to explain also, in a country where the Tax Rate is 33 1/3 [*there is a Value Added Tax of sixteen, we know that*] that the average income is so low. When we explain is it ... It needs explanation and I think an economist will be able to

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explain that because that is a discrepancy – it is a discrepancy. It means that something is missing. Does this government have an exit strategy from the IMF? Are we to be slaves to questionable economic models which is designed to keep us as a nation of suppliers of raw material and scarce human resources also, hence our nurses and teachers, they don't only go to Barbados, they go to the same countries that lend us money. I supposed this is part of the globalised world. It is not fair to us and knowing that we as a people have to put our house in order, are we to be slaves of the IMF forever. We should not lose that dignity of a sovereign state, being able to chart our own course even in difficult times and turbulent waters. We speak often of the interdependency of nations and globalisation and so on and Minister Jeffrey quite ably explained how difficult it is to stand alone. But I submit Mr Speaker, if we cannot stand together as a people, and under the Constitution, do those things that are necessary for us to face that world outside, then we have a very bleak future before us.

On the issue of corruption, Mr Speaker, the government should represent you almost in unison by saying 'bring the group.' If the government says that it suggests the following: that the information necessary to substantiate claims of corruption is hidden in some file, non-fireproof file and the realisation that you know that the Freedom of Information Act is non-existent, so you can't release such problems. Secondly, the government is aware of

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corruption as most of the population is but is unwilling to deal with it for political reasons; and thirdly, you must 'give Jack he jacket' – there is no corruption. I would have thought, Mr Speaker, that any responsible government would attempt to prove to all and sundry that monies allocated for public and other works were properly spent ... Bank Reforming, Value for Money Audit, value for your buck, so to speak. It is the duty for any self-respecting government to prove, they have to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the people's money, not your money, the people's money, is well spent and above board. The burden of proof lies squarely on the shoulders of the government. That is what you are supposed to do, prove, and prove that you are a lean and clean one - that is your responsibility. Do not ask stakeholders to breakthrough, that is a responsibility of a government. To prove to its people, yes, the people who voted for you and those who did not, that you are handling their affairs in the best of their interest. So the talk about 'bring the proof', stop it, stop it, it makes no sense. But as I chat today, even the Auditor General cannot present to the people of this country, how much money has been collected by the Lotto Company, how this money is spent and who signs the cheque. *[Interruption: Okay, we will argue that, we will argue that. Yeah, lean and clean]*

Mr Speaker, it is interesting when one is not in the setting in this Assembly and we listen to some Members of the

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Government speak. I was fortunate to be at a school exercise in Georgetown where the Honourable Minister of Education spoke. I must say, yes, the Hon Shaik Baksh. I must say, I have never heard a Minister of Education in any administration, going back a while, who admitted squarely to the problems that we have in the education system and the measure that he and his staff along with others, are attempting to do. We have a serious problem in education, and just today I got a short sample of some of the things – these are teachers of Fourth Grade preparing a Fourth Grade paper for Social Studies and it is from one of the private schools and I will give you some samples of the spelling: ‘Auther – Author Chung,’ it gets better. ‘Cheddie,’ ‘Cheddi.’ Bharrat was a nice one ‘Bharrot.’ These are people teaching our children and we cannot blame the Ministry of Education here. These are the teachers who left public schools; these are people who passed through Teachers Training College. *[Interruption: ‘That is PNC Education’]*

The Speaker: Your half-an-hour is up Honourable Member.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker I move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to complete his presentation.

The Speaker: Proceed ...

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Mr Everall Franklyn: Thank you Mr Speaker. So we certainly have some serious problems. But unlike Mr Irfaan who spoke about a system being so well-developed that our trained personnel, our trained people find jobs all over the Caribbean and they are so well received, I don't think that is the idea of educating our people for us to have them migrate. They migrate because they find a better standard of living in most cases than we can provide for them and therefore, we cannot continue just to spend on the shell when the heart and the blood of the Education System are being deprived. We have to do something for our teachers or else we get a lot more spelling like this and I don't think Dr Ashni Singh can work with them if they have to count. That's what we will be getting, that is the state of our education at this time and therefore, all remedial work, all efforts have to be made to correct, to arrest or to change the situation. Commendable in the Budget is the percentage that is required for ... that has been tabled for the Education Sector and that is commendable. I have checked figures around the world and it is a very high percentage [*Applause*] but it is absolutely necessary because that is the foundation for a prosperous Guyana and we need those people if we are to transform anything or place.

I would go quickly to the Energy Sector and I saw VAT was removed from the machinery components used for generating renewable energy – that is a good thing. On Page 50 I think Item D (a) is definitely a step in the right

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direction however, why restrict the incentive to agriculture alone. An aggressive energy policy must be implemented and the government agencies must lead the way. The waste which is evident at many Ministries leaves a lot to be desired. I suggest that tax and duties be removed from alternative energy products and components to encourage its use; tax rebates to house owners and businesspersons should be given when they employ alternative energy technology because the savings, the long-term saving that will accrue to the country far outweighs the taxes that you would collect on items such as these. These are the things I try to allude to that would have come out in discussion prior to the presentation of the Estimates. I think also that duty-free concessions on vehicles should have a fuel efficiency ratio on. It makes no sense giving a concession for a vehicle that is going to hurt the economy in the long run when we are talking about sustainable development and savings and we talked a lot about global warming. We should take taxes off all new vehicles that are energy-efficient because we will save more money in the long-run on spares and a better fuel-efficiency in the long run. These are some of the ideas taken outside of the normal box that could, if studied carefully, bring benefit immediately to our economy and by extension, our people. *I have to skip along.* I see Mr ... I am looking for the pink shirt, as I am not seeing it. I was glad that the students left before Mr Rohee's ... the Hon Mr Rohee's presentation because his analysis ... *They left after; well I*

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am devastated ... his analysis, his comparative analysis when trying to compare one to ... from fifteen different plans, everybody has the same one – one, two, three, four, five to fifteen, all the same plans, if they had the same plans ... that is what we are taking. That is so odd because Plan Nos. 1 and 2 may have been brilliant plans but they weren't the same like the other thirteen; that is the reasoning - that is shocking, shocking. I must state also that after the stakeholders' engagement which took place, it took a few days ... Minister Rohee's comment did not add to that engagement, it subtracted quite a lot and put into question whether the government is really serious about stakeholder engagement.

Mr Speaker, in summing up I do believe that we need to found a different process when we contemplate our National Budget. I think we need to throw more people into it so that it makes sense to the people who we have pledged to serve and at the end of exercise, the 'Ayes' would have it and we go back to business as usual. Thank you Mr Speaker [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Hon Member Jennifer Webster.

Hon Jennifer Webster: Mr Speaker, I rise today to join those who have preceded me in this Honourable House to give my support to the 2008 Budget on the theme '*Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation*

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Agenda. Let me once again commend my colleague the Hon Dr Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, for his second Budget presentation; also the staff from the Ministry of Finance who have all worked assiduously, and whose contributions must be publicly recognised for all the technical and analytical work done for this year's Budget presentation. This Budget reaffirms government's commitment to take appropriate actions in response to the immediate challenges both on the domestic and international fronts.

Mr Speaker, I wish to publicly condemn those atrocities committed on those twenty-three persons from the communities of Lusignan and Bartica. Mr Speaker, no amount of words can explain the pain experienced by the family members who lost loved ones. Mr Speaker, I pray that the perpetrators of these violent crimes will be brought to justice. However, Mr Speaker, on 7 March 2008 the world over would be observing World Day of Prayer and even as we observe World Day of Prayer here in Guyana on Friday, much focus will be brought to Guyana's prevailing difficult circumstances. I wish to encourage that all Guyana take this opportunity to stand in solidarity in observance of this Day of Prayer for the restoration of peace in this dear land of ours.

Mr Speaker, in light of the many challenges we face today in our country, our government remains committed to continue moving apace in the transformation of our

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economy thus improving the lives of our people. Government will continue to manage the economy responsibly and avoid short-term actions that can undermine our potential for long term growth.

Mr Speaker, it is our intention to pursue a path that would see the continued advancement of institutional reforms aimed at further transforming the business environment to stimulate greater investment, job creation and sustained economic growth. It is therefore imperative that we all join together and be steadfast as we continue to work and to achieve our vision realising the aspirations of our people.

Mr Speaker, in the year 2008 the Ministry of Finance would continue to formulate and implement policies that will support the maintenance of stable macro-economic environment conducive to sustained growth and poverty reduction, sustainable fiscal deficits and prudent expenditure policies. In this regard, I wish to state that work is continuing as it relates to a number of financial reforms. These include reform initiatives in the areas of tax administration, budgetary measures; strengthened fiduciary oversight, debt management, the strengthening of external audit, the strengthening of economic statistical system. There have been a number of significant improvements, Mr Speaker, in the area of Tax Administration. Today, under the Fiscal and Financial Management Programme the sum of \$512.2M has been

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spent at the end of the year 2007 to support a number of other initiatives. At the Guyana Revenue Authority, the major initiative was the implementation of a fully integrated automated Taxpayer System known as TRIPS. Mr Speaker, for the first time in Guyana we will have total revenue integrated processing system *[Applause]*. This integrated system is scheduled to become operational by the end of March 2008 and would allow taxpayers, upon filing their tax returns to have them processed immediately. In addition, there will also be accessibility to on-line facilities which will facilitate the filing of on-line Customs declarations, Value Added Tax and Income Tax Returns and facilitate the monthly remittance of PAYE deductions. Mr Speaker, this system will revolutionise the way business at the Guyana Revenue Authority is conducted, in fact, it will be more taxpayer friendly thus improving the efficiency of this agency. Work is ongoing with the implementation of a unique Tax Identification Number. With the introduction of this Tax Identification Number there is now an expanding taxpayer database at the Guyana Revenue Authority. This database would include those taxpayers who were not previously captured in the net and would facilitate one common number being used by all the taxpayers as well as facilitating the sharing of information. Mr Speaker, these reforms did not happen overnight, but clearly shows government's commitment to undertaking expensive tax reform initiatives.

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Mr Speaker, there has been the criticism put forward that we should further reduce the rate of VAT but Mr Speaker reducing the rate of VAT is not the answer to the issue of inflation. The inflation rate was 14% in 2007 as compared to 4.2% in the year 2006. The principal challenge proved to be the containment of imported inflation in the face of unprecedented upward escalation in the world market of energy and food commodity prices. During 2007, the Ministry of Finance took action to cushion the impact of rising inflation. These actions included lowering the excise tax rate on gasoline and diesel to 17% and 10% respectively; this limited the pass-through of oil increase in the world market. Mr Speaker, one cannot deny the fact that this government is caring and is concerned about the welfare of all our citizens and that is why we constantly continue to review the price increases on fuel imports so that the cost of domestic electricity would remain affordable and acceptable to all Guyanese, and to provide some support to some to some our key sectors such as mining, agro-processing, fishing, to whose operations fuel is such an important factor in the cost of production.

Mr Speaker, I would like to address the issue of lowering the VAT and what would be the impact on revenue. Mr Speaker, there has been a lot of misinformation about the relationship between the rate of VAT and the current prices of commodities. In addition to escalating world food prices as experienced by many countries and more

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recently, this was the subject of an emergency meeting held here in Guyana by the CARICOM Heads of Government in December 2007 where the main focus was the rising cost of living in the Region and the impact on our people throughout the Region. As one would observe from the inception, VAT replaces the consumption tax of 30% in over five hundred categories of items but this did not give a corresponding reduction in prices. Instead, what was often seen was that VAT was being applied on top of the old prices. Secondly, we would have seen recently that the National Flour Mill consequent upon the announcement in this 2008 Budget to zero rate flour proceeded to raise their prices by the same amount of the VAT from 0% to 16%. Mr Speaker, this is not a 6% reduction but a 16% reduction which this company is unwilling to give to the consumers of this country. Here Mr Speaker is an example of our government taking concrete steps by zero-rating items only to have efforts negated as in the case of flour by the National Flour Mill. Sir, let me continue to highlight the on-going tax reform initiatives. Under the FSMP, financial support to address the institutional strengthening and business process re-engineering to ensure its successful move from semi-automated processes to a fully integrated computerised system are ongoing. No doubt, we all will agree that there has been significant improvement in tax administration and we are now seeing the returns from these interventions. It is quite evident that the attributable amount in excess of what was projected for revenue-

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neutrality would have been as a result of the measures that the system of VAT would have implied. One could not have anticipated the levels of revenue as a result of the various modes of tax evasion. Mr Speaker, we are not saying that all modes of tax evasion has been addressed, but those that would have had an impact would have been captured with the implementation of this new system.

Much has been said on the revenue collected under the VAT system; however, one cannot ignore the reality of increased economic activity, increased imports and reduced tax evasion, the latter being the direct result of the significant progress made in tax administration. Mr Speaker, in the past there has been a high incidence of under-invoicing and smuggling. This is quite evident now given the returns which comprise both the revenue obtained from VAT and Excise Taxes. The tax base has widened significantly as a result of the Value Added Tax. The groundwork has been laid and that is why in this year's Budget government has increased the Income Tax threshold by 25% from \$28,000 to \$35,000 per month [*Applause*] with effect from 2 January 2008. Taxpayers will benefit from a higher take-home pay while 36,000 persons have been exempted from paying Income Taxes; Compared to 2002 this represented 94% increase Mr Speaker in the Tax Threshold. In addition, government has taken further initiatives to zero-rate additional items to ensure a more comprehensive basket of basic goods and services which would no longer be subjected to the

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Value-Added Tax. Mr Speaker, notwithstanding this measure which would result in the loss of revenues of approximately \$1.2B, government remains committed to the welfare of all our citizens and will provide additional relief wherever possible to all consumers of this nation.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Finance has held discussions with the Private Sector and other key stakeholders. As a result, government intends to introduce legislation to restructure Staff Duties and Fees paid by companies when seeking to incorporate or increase their share capital. This will have a direct and favourable impact on company cost, especially in the case of companies starting their operations and those expanding their equity as government moves to support greater private investment, and in a similar manner, complement all other actions being taken to reduce the cost of doing business here in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, during the year 2007, the National Competitiveness Strategy was produced in partnership between the government and the Private Sector stakeholders. This strategy sets out the agenda for strong Private Sector-led growth through economic expansion. Mr Speaker, in this year's Budget, government has provided significant resources to improve the capacity of the Guyana Office for Investment. In addition to the annual subvention provided through the National Budget, further resources will be expended from the National

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Competitiveness Programme to promote proactive image building, investment facilitation, investment generation, as we continue to create a dynamic, friendly environment aimed at supporting a dynamic and growing Private Sector.

Mr Speaker, during the year 2007, the Guyana Office for Investment was able to conclude investment agreement in the areas of agro-processing, eco-tourism, forest products, information and communication technology, mining, fisheries and the manufacturing sector. I will give details of some of those as follows:

- In the Mining Sector Mr Speaker, there were twenty-five projects. Of those twenty-five projects there were twenty-three projects which were foreign direct investment and joint venture agreements. Mr Speaker, of those twenty-three, thirteen were new projects and the total investment in the Mining Sector was approximately US\$144M.

- In the area of Agro Processing of fresh and processed foods, there were eighty-one projects, twenty-two of those being foreign direct investment and joint ventures, while thirty five of those were new projects. In this area there was a total investment of US\$113M.

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- In the area of Information and Communication Technology there were eighteen projects, eleven being foreign direct investments and nine being new projects at a total investment cost of US\$63M.

- Whilst in the Forestry and Wood Products Sector there were sixty-three projects, thirty-one being foreign direct investments and twenty-three being new projects at a total cost of US\$56M.

- In the Tourism Sector there were seventy-two new projects, twenty were foreign direct investments and joint ventures while there were forty-six new projects at a total investment cost of US\$33M.

Mr Speaker, I have provided some of the statistics to show that indeed that there are new business initiatives ongoing in Guyana. Mr Speaker, quite recently the Ministry of Finance commenced discussions with the Guyana Association of Bankers to discuss the potential for co-operating to facilitate the development in Guyana of an off-shore financial centre. Mr Speaker, offshore financial centres exist to provide financial services such as banking, insurance and access management to mainly non-resident individuals and entities. Mr Speaker, against

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this backdrop, the Government of Guyana intends to undertake an assessment of the institutional arrangements and legislation that would be needed to be put in place in order for Guyana to serve as an off-shore financial centre. The assessment will involve a review of existing legislation and draft legislation in order to assess implications they might have for the development of an offshore Financial Sector in Guyana and which will include consideration of the Anti-Money Laundering Act currently before Parliament.

Mr Speaker, the Minister of Finance continues to place major emphasis on the implementation of the Financial Management System, the strengthening of the Management Information Systems Unit to manage and maintain orange-rated financial management systems. The Integrated Financial Management System (IFMAS) is not operational in all the line Ministries throughout the country. In fact, Budget 2008 was prepared using this system. Towards the latter part of the year 2007, an organisation and management study of the Accounting General's Department was completed and a number of recommendations were implemented.

Mr Speaker, we continue to focus on strengthening fiduciary oversight. Right here in the National Assembly, there were major achievements. All Members of the National Assembly now use the new Standing Orders. To date, the sum of \$32.2M has been expended under the

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Fiscal and Financial Management Programme to support audit and oversight measures. Mr Speaker, government has been tabling in a timely manner, the Treasury Memorandum in response to the Public Accounts Committee's Report and Recommendations.

The Auditor General now operates in an independent environment in accordance with the Constitution and reports directly to the Public Accounts Committee. Mr Speaker, the Government of Guyana has recently signed a Technical Cooperation Agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank with respect for the support of the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Audit Office. The total cost of this operation amounts to the sum of US\$660,000 of which the Inter-American Development Bank will provide US\$600,000 and the Government of Guyana US\$60,000. The main objective of this Technical Cooperation is to further improve the structure of the Audit Office of Guyana by supporting the implementation of critical activities of its strategic plan with a view to strengthening our oversight system through four main components. They are:

- 1) Enhancing professional audit practices and standards where this component will see the building of capacity of the Audit Office to transact value for money audit.

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- 2) Improving critical support systems to enhance operational effectiveness.
- 3) Institutionalising best practices and skills transfer for sustainability.
- 4) Creating stakeholder awareness of the oversight role of the Audit Office of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, under the Millennium Challenge Threshold Programme funding will be provided in 2008 to further strengthen Parliament's institutional capacity in the Economic Services and Public Accounts Committees. The Unit is now in the process of finalising a detailed work programme.

Mr Speaker, on the issue of debt management Guyana continued to approach the Non-Paris Club and commercial creditors for debt relief. In February 2007, the Government and Citizens Bank Incorporated signed an agreement to reach an out-of-court settlement on the repayment of the outstanding Government of Guyana bonds. This was followed by the People's Republic of China granting additional debt relief to Guyana in July 2007 of approximately US\$15.3M. Mr Speaker, this sum represents 43% of the stock of debt owed to China at that time. On the issue of external debt, the principal

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repayments budgeted in 2008 include repayment to the Inter-American Development Bank. Mr Speaker, it is important to note that even if there were significant stocks of debt relief under the MDRI Initiative from this creditor, this relief applied only to loans that were contracted on or before 31 December 2004 and not to loans that were contracted after that date, hence government is still required to meet its full debt service obligations falling due to the Inter-American Development Bank. Although Guyana still faces the prospects of a decline in the availability of concessional resources from our traditional developmental partners, we continue to pursue initiatives to facilitate more concessional borrowing in pursuit of ensuring a sustainable debt position. An Internal Debt Sustainability Analysis team has been established and will receive ongoing training to ensure the necessary technical skills are acquired in pursuit of ensuring a sustainable debt position. This team includes officials from the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance and the Bureau of Statistics. Further training is ongoing in other areas such as macro-economic statistics.

Mr Speaker, there has been progress made in strengthening the National Statistics System. A nationwide household budgetary survey was conducted throughout our country from September 2005 to December 2006. The primary purpose of this survey was to derive an updated profile of consumers' taste patterns

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and expenditures which will lead to the updating of the basket of goods and services and the compilation of updated poverty profiles and a new Consumer Price Index. This would support the compilation of updated poverty profiles and the Consumer Price Index.

Mr Speaker, the Business Economic Surveys which are currently ongoing will support the rebasing of the GDP, while the implementation of the Social Statistics Project continues with technical support being provided by the US Census Bureau. Work is on-going in that department in the upgrading of the Cartography Unit and the training of staff to develop skills needed to scan maps. This project is expected to conclude by the end of the year.

Mr Speaker, on the issue of the National Insurance Scheme, government remains committed to ensuring the continued viability of the Scheme. The National Insurance Scheme, which was established in the year 1969, has recently undergone extensive reviews of their operations. The report has since been submitted and is currently engaging Cabinet's attention.

Mr Speaker, in closing, I want to urge all Members to support this Budget and to work collectively towards the continuation of building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana where all our citizens can live and work in unity and harmony while advancing the transformation agenda.

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I therefore wish to commend this Budget for the approval of this Honourable House. I thank you [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member. Honourable Mr Dave Danny ...

Mr Dave Danny: Mr Speaker, the only thing that feels good in this National Budget Debate is the order in which I am placed. When I looked at the order I see the Hon Jennifer Webster, Dave Danny and the Hon Jennifer Westford. I wouldn't want to say that I am a rose between two thorns ... that would be disrespectful. However, I do feel like a rose and my only hope is that the presentation given by the Honourable Jennifer Webster and Jennifer Westford would not be viewed by the general public as heard.

Mr Speaker, I would like to do some corrections at this time. The Ten Commandments – Exodus Ch 20 vs 7: *“You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”* So I would just like to advise when we use scriptures we need to be very careful [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, before I move into my prepared speech, I would like to make some quick observations. I had no intention doing this but having listened to my good friend, Hon Minister Nawbatt, I have here in my hand

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'Barticians face daily power outage blues after the massacre.' I would just like to take out two quick words out of this clipping: *'Home to close to 20,000, Bartica for several months now has been experiencing as many as four power outages daily.'* I'll skip a bit, in parenthesis, to pick up something important here, of the fears that exist in the community, and to close it off by saying that there is the engine that continuously trips causing the blackouts, but staff there cannot fix it. In Minister Nawbatt's presentation he painted the picture also that everything is okay as far as current goes.

The second one is that in the Budget there is a 63% increase in the allocation in terms of looking after the elderly. However, *'Lindeniers stage protest at NIS office'* so we need to take a look at that, not only giving money but we need to look generally at the welfare of our senior citizens [*Applause*]. And Mr Speaker, I think you would like this ... *'National unity is essential to a resolution of our problems'*; that is a heading based on your speech.

I will like to move quickly to two parts. I wouldn't be long; we can always go to the national papers and check this out. *'National unity in order to bring criminals to justice'* and it points out that poverty is the main, root cause of crime. I go down to midway now and say that you must not forget that in the continued existence of poverty which is the key cause of marginalisation and

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insecurity, and at the end of the day it is poverty which is one of the main, root causes of crime [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Cheddi Jagan taught me that, Honourable Member [*Applause*].

Mr Dave Danny: Mr Speaker, I now move into my prepared text in which I plan to really fill in ...

Mr Speaker, I rise in the name of the People's National Congress Reform One-Guyana to speak on this the 2008 Budge. Moreover, it's my intention to show that this Budget of 2008 will not remove the fear and the hopelessness that exist in this society. Mr Speaker, like my colleagues before me, I wish to place on record, my condemnation of the senseless killings that took place in Lusignan and Bartica. Unfortunately, there is nothing to give us hope and the security will improve. Even more troubling is it is having a negative impact on Tourism. Mr Speaker, every child knows that there is nothing that hampers tourism more than fear and insecurity that is the order of the day in Guyana [*Applause*]. If this government is serious about tourism it must first have a decline in the security situation. Mr Speaker, I endorse fully all that was said by the Members of this side of the National Assembly and I have no fear that the Members yet to speak would have no difficulty to show that the

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2008 Budget stays the course of advancing hopelessness

[Applause]

Mr Speaker, it is written in Psalms 22:9:

But Thou art he that took me out of the womb. You did make me hope when I was upon my mother's breast

And so when we came into this world we came with hope. This, in its proper context, is for those who might want to live *[Applause]*. It is hope that will keep us and not fear but at present the society is marred by fear and hopelessness. What is worse is that this Budget does nothing to remove the fear and instil hope. Mr Speaker, you may ask why I spend so much time on the hope in life. I beg of you tarry with me a little longer. Rich Du Bois in his book '*Hope for My Heart*', Page 11 said:

I learned long time ago that hope, even when it seems unwarranted, irrational or reckless ... dollars is essential in life and a prerequisite to success.

[Interruption: 'That looks like Hope Estate, boy']

You lost hope, there is no hope for you. You may also ask who is Rich Dubois? He is the self-proclaimed richest man in the USA netting more than US\$35M; owner of NBA Orlando Magic, the WNBA Orlando

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Miracle Team and co-founder of HAMWAY, a multi-billion company which does business in sixty-five countries in the world. He made this reference to point out the importance of Hope to Success and to make the point that success will not be achieved in Guyana if there is no hope.

Mr Speaker, this Budget was expected to contribute to the development of Tourism in Guyana. On this issue of Tourism this is what the Hon Minister of Finance said on Page 24: *[Interruption: 'Which one?']*

Mr Dave Danny: 4.1.3 *“Government will also continue to support the Industry in targeting the nature-base tourist-base tourist market with special emphasis on each Sector such as Yachting, Birding and Eco-Tourism.”* Mr Speaker, that sounds good. The PNCR-1G had earned the debate on casino gambling that the focus should be on eco-tourism *[Applause]*. Unfortunately, at that time, the PPP-C government was only concerned with passing legislation to give its French light to casino gambling. At the time they contended that Eco-Tourism had no place. To this end I would like to quote what was said by the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Clement Rohee. Mr Rohee turned to the ECLAC Report, the section on Guyana and stated that:

In none of the pages is any reference made whatsoever to the Tourism Industry or the Service Sector. Now, this of course cannot

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be an omission. The point is that the Tourism Industry and the Tourism products notwithstanding how much we make may want to talk about it in terms of Eco-Tourism are not on the radar.

I will like to repeat that – Mr Rohee is saying that Eco-Tourism is not on the radar (Page 127 ... Sitting of the National Assembly). Mr Speaker, I told you about confusion in the camp. Mr Speaker what is illustrated is this government is not committed to a clear policy on Tourism in general and Eco-Tourism in particular since at one time it was not on the radar and at another time it is. If the Tourism Sector in Guyana is developed there is need for commitment, consistency and a plan to invest in the Tourism Sector. Unfortunately, all of these are missing. Mr Speaker, it becomes a big laugh because having told this National Assembly that Tourism and Eco-Tourism are not on the radar, the Finance Minister now tells us on Page 23: 4.10 that:

While the traditional sector of our economy continue to grow and show great resilience, our government places high priority on activities promoting accelerated diversification of our economy. In this regard, non-traditional agricultural sub-sectors, Tourism, alternative energy and Information Technology are among the future growth poles

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Something to note here – one time it's not on the radar and the next time it's a future growth pole. This is inconsistency at its best – one time Tourism is not on the radar and next time – one year it is a future growth pole. Mr Speaker, this confusion as it relates to Tourism in Guyana is understandable since the government is not operating based on any study/understanding of the Tourism Sector. Probably, the best evidence of this lack of knowledge was manifested by the Hon Minister, Mr Maniram Prashad himself when in this debate he told this National Assembly that he was arranging to carry tourists to bird-watch and the tourists preferred to view the historic sites in Georgetown. Mr Speaker, the Minister should have recognised from his experience that he was out of touch with reality of the Tourism Sector and the preferences of tourists. In light of the Minister's own revelation the PNCR(1G) wishes to recommend that the government initiate a comprehensive study on the Tourism Sector with the aim of understanding the Sector and developing a proper marketing strategy [*Applause*].

Mr Irfaan Ali spoke a lot about plans in his presentation. [*Interruption: 'He is not here'*]

Well he needs to go to work to help his Minister to first understand the Tourism Sector and then develop a plan which he can then add to his reservoir of plans. He spoke a lot of plans in his presentation. Even that may not help this government since they have many plans but lack the ability to implement them.

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Mr Speaker, the National Development Strategy on Pages 237-238 identifies nature-based tourism, adventure-tourism, multi-destination tourism, heritage and culture tourism, cruise ship and eco-tourism as the possible options for Guyana. I noted that and I quote:

Tourism takes diverse forms, each with a special appeal to a particular class of tourists and there are small implications for the country's infrastructure and the revenue which they can generate. Before any real and meaningful development of tourism in Guyana can be claimed, it is necessary to have an understanding of the type of tourism products that are both suited to and suitable for Guyana. (Page 237: 20.1.2.1).

Mr Speaker had the Minister read the National Development Strategy he would have known that people have to try the market and understand the product before you can think of selling it. I wish to recommend that the Minister goes back to basics and first understand the tourism product, establish the priorities and then develop a strategy to market our tourism products. More it is worth all of the research on tourism and eco-tourism in Guyana to identify the major problems of the Sector or the difficulties involved in accepting the Interior, the need for improved transportation, access to potable water, security and access to proper medical services. Mr Speaker, when you go through the Budget there is no

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integrated approach in which the Budget is structured to tackle those issues. For example, there are little or no infrastructure projects that are aimed at facilitating tourism development. Mr Speaker, I wish to ask which measures in the Budget are aimed at making our tourist resorts more accessible and affordable – none. Which measures are aimed at convincing the tourists that when they are on the resort they do not have to worry about medical facilities and security? – None. In fact, if persons were to hear what is happening in the Health Sector they will worry and don't come to Guyana. Mr Speaker based on what I have just said I wish to urge that in future, Budgets must have clear measures that are aimed at contributing to the development of Tourism for this is one of the major weaknesses of this 2008 Budget.

The Honourable Maniram Prashad in his debate said that he was proud of the many accomplishments of his Ministry. He then proceeded to tell how many hotels, the rooms we have, how many Guyanese returned after twenty years, how many conferences were held in 2007, the fare to Kaieteur reduced from \$44,000 to \$22,200 ... but only for locals. But we must understand which direction we are going – do we want eco-tourism or international-tourism? Which kind of tourism will give us the kind of income that will support that growth pole of which the Minister spoke about? He also told us how many jets arrived in 2007, about the Fish Festival. Mr Speaker, all of these are good to have. But what should be

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of greater importance is how would these activities contribute to helping the economy and what role they are playing in the development of tourism products? To merely read of all of these activities happening in a vacuum does not make sense. Is there any report as to financial returns on Bird Watching, Mr Speaker? Then can we expect to promote growth in this Sector? Can the Minister say if there are figures to show how many yachts arrived here last year? Could he tell us how many passengers were on those boats, and at least, the money spent by the visitors on those trips? Has there been any proper assessment with the aim of improving the product? Mr Speaker, before I move on from this Bird Watching Tourism, Yachting, I would like to point our attention to the Sunday Stabroek: *'Cancellations hit Hotel Resorts.'* The date is Sunday, 24 February. I would just like to ... I would not read this whole article ... I would just put some highlights ... the ones you highlighted, maybe 3, 4 parts, I would just like to point out here:

"The killing of twenty-three persons at Lusignan and Bartica has put a damper on tourism with hotels and resorts seeing cancellations. Chairperson of the Tourism and Hospitality Association, THAG, Renata Chuck-A-Sang, has said since the horrifying incident travel advisories have been issued by America, Britain and Canada. Canada urged its citizens to

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exercise a high degree of caution and the Commonwealth Office advised against all but essential travel to the East Coast, Bartica and the tourist resorts along the Essequibo. Since January 2008, there has been an upsurge in violent crime activities in this area". (Move a bit further down): "Speaking to Stabroek News about the impact the incidents have on tourism, Chuck-A-Sang said that several members of the Association, include tour operators and resorts, have reported cancellations of bookings. (I would just like to move down a little): "Is it not uncertainty that drives fear into people and our tourism industry is not a booming one"? (Just to highlight ... that paints the real picture of tourism). "Marketing the country internationally was very expensive, noting that tourism does not happen quickly"; (and a little further down) "And TAG was looking to the government and the Guyana Tourism Authority to assist with marketing. Recently, before the Bartica onslaught, some operators in the Sector had told this newspaper that concerns over security had been rearranged flights and cancellations on hotel bookings".

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So Mr Speaker, you could observe there the fear that surrounds the Tourism Industry. The other thing to observe is that people were doing cancellations even before this incident. Mr Speaker, recently Guyanese workers at the National Milling Company had protested what they perceived as dumping of Trinidad flour on the Guyanese market and to point out that it was threatening their jobs. Here I have a clipping where the workers of the Flour Mill are fighting for their jobs. While we are committed to regional integration, we believe it is a task of the Government of Guyana to ensure that the interest of the Guyanese workers are protected and that all measures should be taken to ensure that dumping does not occur. The PNDR(1G) calls on the government to ensure that regional integration is promoted, that it benefits Guyana and contributes to the creation of jobs for Guyanese and it should never become an activity that results in the loss of jobs. We therefore need to make it clear that no other company should be made to face the threats NAMILCO faces in the light of dumping of flour on Guyanese market [*Applause*]. Mr Speaker, I would like to point out two very important aspects of this problem. I know the last speaker spoke of not giving the facts on the 16% VAT. However, there are two challenges the government needs to look at:

- 1) The fuel cost that escalates the production cost
- 2) Because of the small shipment that has to come here so many times contributes to the escalating

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cost, whereas in Trinidad, there are bigger ships that make trips to Trinidad; that reduces the cost of production of flour.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to remind this House that we need to deal with the deteriorating security situation which is crucial to the development of Tourism. There is need to reserve hope and a greater need for understanding the Tourism Sector and the development of a proper plan that is based on a proper study. Mr Speaker, as my footnote here, I was supposed to close with a Bible quote but I scratched it out. After listening to the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs I decided I would do it. In Romans 5:2 it is written: "*By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*" Mr Speaker, before I take my seat, I would like to read this poem by Martin Carter:

*This is the dark time, my love,
All round the land brown beetles crawl
about*

*The shining sun is hidden in the sky
Red flowers bend their heads in awful
sorrow*

*This is the dark time, my love,
It is the season of oppression, dark metal,
and tears*

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*It is the festival of guns, the carnival of
misery*

*Everywhere the faces of men are strained
and anxious*

*Who comes walking in the dark night time
Whose boot of steel tramps down the
slender grass?*

*It is the man of death, my love, the stranger,
invader*

*Watching you sleep and aiming at your
dream.*

Mr Speaker, I thank you [Applause].

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Member.

Hon Member Dr Westford ...

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I join my colleagues in congratulating the Hon Minister of Finance and his dedicated staff once again for preparing and presenting a well-crafted Budget which when implemented, will without a doubt, continue the transformation agenda embarked upon by this government.

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Mr Speaker, the last speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Danny, I must say that the last part of his speech was probably the best part of it and I did enjoy the poem. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member mentioned during his address ... [*Interruption: ... 'faulty microphone'*]

The Speaker: My apologies Honourable Member.

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. I think I have a loud enough voice to speak without the microphone. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member Mr Danny spoke about the blackouts, the continuous blackouts in Bartica, but I think the Honourable Member, I don't know from which newspapers he was reading; I think he should have had an updated newspaper because that problem which resulted from a faulty voltage meter on one of the outer generators, the only generator that is there was fixed since Friday and since then there has not been any blackouts and currently they are in the process of installing a second generator to prevent any recurrence. Mr Speaker, I am sure that the newspaper that Mr Danny was reading from would have mentioned other occurrences in Bartica such as developmental things because there have been lots of developmental issues in Bartica but it is just sad that Mr Danny just chose to speak about, and wrongly informed us about, the continuous blackouts. Mr Speaker, in that vein I would like to congratulate both the present and former REOs of Region 7, since the former REO did have

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a hand in the developmental process that continued ... that they experienced in the year 2007 along with their staff for the great improvements they have made. I would also like at this point in time [*Interruption: Loud chattering*]. Yes Mr Speaker, I would also like at this time to give special thanks to the staff of the Bartica Hospital who worked tirelessly to preserve the lives of victims who were injured during the Bartica massacre [*Applause*] ... a date Mr Speaker that would be tattooed into the memories of all Barticians. Your Health staff are truly our heroes. [*Interruption: 'They say they want you badly at the hospital' "I am going soon"*]

Mr Speaker, the Public Service Ministry is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that efficient and effective management modules are implemented within the Public Service as well as training our human resources. In order to improve the effectiveness of the Public Service, the government embarked on Phase I of the Public Management Modernization Project and, Mr Speaker, when the Honourable Member Mr Basil Williams made his address to this House he asked the question as to what has happened to the modernization project because there was no mention about it in the Budget. Mr Speaker, this programme was funded by an IDB loan of US\$2.8M and was designed initially to cater for six pilot agencies. This project was completed on 30 December 2007. As I stated last year in my Budget Debate this modernization project

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which commenced in December 2005 consisted of three main components:

- Component I which is supposed to deal with the Public Service Management Strengthening
- Component II – Improvement of Semi-Autonomous Agencies and Statutory Bodies; and
- Component III – Coordinating of the State Reform Process

Mr Speaker, complying with the Clauses of the Loan Agreement the following was done:

- A project executing unit consisting of six staff members was organised to administer the project.
- A Steering Committee to supervise the project which comprised members from the Public Service Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, the Public Service Commission, the Public Sector Commission and the Guyana Public Service Union.
- A modernisation of the State Board designed to monitor the implementation of the component of the project.
- An Inspection and Supervisory Project Officer from the Inter-American Development

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Bank who worked on the project from its inception to its finality.

- An external auditing was done throughout the life of the project by the internal audit firm of Deloitte and Touche.

Mr Speaker when I mentioned last year Component I was designed also according to the Loan Agreement Contract to conduct training of human resource practitioners attached to the Public Service Ministry, the Public Service Commission and the six pilot Ministries Mr Speaker, I wish to announce that on completion of this project on 30 December 2007, twenty-nine agencies HR practitioners were trained from twenty-nine agencies and not only the PSM, the PSC and the six pilot agencies. Also Sir, we were supposed to have a compilation of a revised job description for the six pilot agencies. That was completed also for twenty-two agencies instead of six.

That component also dealt with the review of the Public Service Rules. The review of the Public Service Rules, a Committee was formed consisting of an international legal expert in Civil Service - Dr Winston McCulloch, a local Public Service Commission - Mr Mervyn St. Hill , local legal firm in Administrative Law of Fraser and Housty and a Trade Union Consultant – Mr Leslie Melville from the Guyana Public Service Union. Mr Speaker, by the end of this project, the Public Service and

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the Public Service Commission roles and HR Policy Manual and a Gender Equity Needs Manual were produced. Also this component, Mr Speaker, deals with the wireless connectivity between the Public Service Ministry and the Ministry of Finance. This connectivity basically was supposed to be linking the human resource database with the payroll. By the end of the project, instead of the six pilot agencies, twenty-five agencies have been connected and outstanding we have Regions 1, 2, parts of Region 3 and parts of Region 4 which is in the process of being connected as I speak; not as I speak because it is now night, but it is being connected right now. Also, it dealt with the training of Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments since, Mr Speaker, when we designed this project we decided that instead of the norm of training from the bottom-up we should retrain from the top-down because it was no sense retraining the workers at the bottom when the persons at the top were not capable of accepting that new training the workers would have gotten. Mr Speaker, this training also was completed and that, Mr Speaker, was the end of Component I.

Component 2 focused on the improvement of the semi-autonomous agencies ... *[Interruption]*

Mr Robert Corbin: What about Component 4?

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: As per loan, there is no Component 4, Honourable Member Mr Corbin. This

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Component was supervised by the Ministry of Finance. The Consultancy was undertaken by the International Consultancy Firm of PA Consultants Group. To date an initial report and an institutional framework for the classification of semi-autonomous and statutory bodies was submitted to the Government of Guyana for its review and comments. The firm is still to incorporate the comments and submit its final report.

The object of Component 3 was to identify the long-term challenges for the state reform process in Guyana. A White Paper on the modernisation of the Public Service was delivered to the Government of Guyana by the Consultant for its review and comments. Once finalised and accepted by the Government of Guyana this White Paper will be presented to the Parliament.

Mr Speaker, implementation of the above components of this CNMP will be continuous with agencies specific reviews. It must be noted that the sole intention of the government is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector. Mr Speaker, in order to provide the nation with quality service it is imperative that we have a qualified, well equipped human resource base. To this end, Sir, the government has intensified the training of persons in the field of Human Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, Agricultural Science, Information Technology, Civil Engineering, Mining Engineering, Informatics, Sports Sciences and Management since 1992. To date, Mr Speaker, we have a total of eight

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hundred and fifteen students studying at international universities. Yes, Mr Speaker, for the first time in the history of Guyana we have at any one time a total of eight hundred and fifteen students [*Applause*] studying at institutions in Cuba, the United States of America, Canada, Mexico, India, Russia, the University of the West Indies, China, New Zealand, Greece, Colombia, Brazil, Japan and Bangladesh. [*Interruption: 'How many in Greece?' "Four"*]

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: All of these students, Mr Speaker, received financial assistance from the Government. Mr Speaker, it is a known fact that Cuba also offers additional scholarship to political parties. It is worth to note that these students also receive equal financial assistance from this government [*Applause*]. It proves, Mr Speaker, that this administration does not discriminate whether by ethnicity, religious or political affiliation [*Applause*]. No other government of countries where similar scholarships are offered has ever administered such across-the-board treatment to its citizens. This, Mr Speaker, is yet another example of a caring government. We of the PPP-C government see all Guyanese as equal. We also have sixty-one (61) students at the University of Guyana in various disciplines and twelve (12) at the Guyana School of Agriculture.

To ensure that the students from hinterland are educated to compete equally with their counterparts on the coastland there is also a hinterland scholarship

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component. Mr Speaker, the Public Service Ministry in fulfilling its mandate does not only provide training at the tertiary level. We also conduct Staff Development training at local and overseas institutions. For 2007, seventy-three public servants attended courses in India and Japan while another two hundred and sixteen attended Staff Development courses locally organised by the Public Service Ministry in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat. It must be noted Mr Speaker that these Staff Development courses which started in 1993 will be continuous and it is envisaged that all public officers will be exposed to varying degrees of job related advanced training by the year 2010. The Public Service Ministry Training Department also conducts Staff Development Training for entities outside of the traditional public service as well as for the Private Sector. Mr Speaker it is owing to this government's commitment to produce a highly trained cadre of professionals that the training budget has been increased from \$408.996M to \$451.409M an increase, Mr Speaker, of over \$42M [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, throughout this debate the issue of skills flight was levelled as an indictment against this administration. Mr Speaker, has this brain drain suddenly emerged after 1992? I think not. Mr Speaker, this administration is not unmindful of the serious implications of the skills flight that is occurring not only in Guyana but also throughout the Caribbean. Because

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this government is serious about retaining its most valuable assets, its human resources we are meaningfully collaborating with CARICAD which is researching methods to stem the skills flight from the Region. Mr Speaker, this matter is such a serious one that it has continued to occupy a front line position on the agenda of the highest policy forum of CARICOM. Mr Speaker, even though this government is involved in the researching of regional initiatives we continue to implement non-salaried employment related benefits for professionals. To this end, the government continually updates the duty-free travelling register by adding new categories of professionals. Professionals are even now entitled to additional sums of money as an incentive for their academic achievement. Mr Speaker, everyone on the opposite side of this House painted a picture of doom and gloom. As I said earlier Sir, this government views this picture as serious but the fact is that over the past four year we have had thirty-eight professionals in the field of Medicine, Civil Engineering, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine, Agronomy, Economics, Management and Information Technology return to Guyana. It is important to note that to date only one of those professionals, and I repeat – only one has migrated so far. Mr Speaker, this is testimony that our retention efforts have started to bear fruit. There has also been some decline in the migration of our professional nurses, even though a minimum, over the last three years. Mr Speaker, let us not fool ourselves, we may be able to

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diminish the migration of skilled human resources but we can never stop it from occurring. It is a fact that even some of the First World Countries are losing their professionals to other First World Countries ... what a vicious cycle. This government is fully aware that our human resources are our most important assets and it is for this reason that we have since 1992 to present increased salaries of over 800% bearing in mind that inflation over this period has been 508%. Mr Speaker, the workers of this country can rest assure that this government will continue to explore means by which their employment benefits and living standards will continuously be improved. Mr Speaker, there were lots of talks about second chances for dropouts. May I inform this House that the Public Service Ministry also offers scholarships at the lower level. Since 2005 we have offered such scholarships to young people to institutions such as GITC, GTI, Carnegie School of Home Economics, other computer schools and very soon for 2006 we offered forty-six such scholarships, in 2007 forty-three and this year that number is expected to increase and we may not be sending people to the Critchlow Labour College but I can assure you I have in front of me here some brochures from the Guyana Public Service Union and incidentally, they are the very exact same courses that are normally run by the Critchlow Labour College [*Noisy Interruption*].

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Mr Speaker, we have often been accused of union boxing but I wonder who is boxing now because I don't know, this paper is from the Guyana Public Service Union, we were not involved in it. Mr Speaker, we have also been accused of treating the Guyana Public Service Union with scant regard, discrimination at the expense of all the Unions. May I inform this Honourable House Mr Speaker, that the government has already been in negotiation talks with the Guyana Public Service Union and not only for wages and salaries, we are currently discussing several issues to date, twenty-four of those issues, and I can give a broad outline because I am not permitted to disclose the contents of this document as yet but I can safely say that we are discussing issues from housing, education, that is other issues pertaining to the workers – not only salary-based improvements, and it is hoped by the end of these negotiations that we would see once and for all the wages policy that we have been looking for over the years. On this note also, Mr Speaker, I would like to say that even though we have been accused by especially the Honourable Member, Mr Williams of imposing the increases on a yearly basis, please be informed that without a doubt there has been a year when we have not implemented and started negotiations with the Guyana Public Service Union but being a caring government, these negotiations are dragged on by the Guyana Public Service Union and because we are so caring we cannot allow it to go past December which is the end of the financial year

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[Applause]. We have no option but to give to our poor workers, the workers who you always say are in need of money ... we have no option but to give them what we have to give them.

Mr Speaker for this year 2008 it is the intention of the Public Service Ministry to improve on all of the progress that the Ministry would have made in 2007. We also intend in 2008 to ensure that all of the government agencies within the traditional Public Service reorganise their Occupational Health and Safety Committees in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour. Also, as we have started this we intend to include HIV/AIDS lectures to be incorporated in all of our training programmes to ensure that we keep our workers abreast with this condition. We also aim to train all of our public servants at all levels to make them computer literate and I must say that the hardware has already been put in place; it is only for the hardware to be started now. We are also, Mr Speaker, improving training at all levels of the public and private sector and last but not least, the Ministry intends, in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, to implement a half day, preferably a Friday to deem a half day on Friday as a Games Day for all of the public service *[Applause]*.

Mr Speaker, it is pellucid that this 2008 Budget allocation is further investment in our people thus advancing the transformation agenda of this administration. I therefore, Sir, recommend this 2008 Budget *[Applause]*.

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The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Member.

Honourable Members I think we can now take ten minutes so you can have a cup of tea, then we would return.

20:35 H – SUSPENSION OF SITTING

21:00H – RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Members. Honourable Member Mr Patterson ...

Mr David Patterson: Thank you Mr Speaker. Before I present my submission on this year's Budget, permit me to join my colleagues in offering my sympathies to the families of victims of the Lusignan and Bartica massacres. These two barbaric acts have laid bare the soul of our entire nation and have caused immeasurable pain to our people. Now is the time that we as a people should unite to combat and deflect these common enemies. A recent dialogue and stakeholders' meeting are the first step, a starting point but it is incumbent that we continue along the path that leads to the understanding and eradication of the root cause or causes of these killings and related acts not only to free our people now but also to ensure that this sickness does not return to plague our land.

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Mr Speaker, I was originally scheduled to deliver my presentation on the 2008 Budget last Friday. Fortunately, I was unable to do so. I say fortunately since I have had additional time to listen to presentations from both sides of this Assembly, which have caused me to reflect and to reconsider the contents of my submission. Of course, I prepared a presentation until the fire and brimstone ... This presentation included details such as Guyana's continuing fall in competitive ranking as reported by the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index which states that out of 125 countries Guyana is ranked 111th, down four spaces from the previous year's report when we were ranked 108th. My previous presentations included figures highlighting price increases of various domestic products particularly in the sectors under my review among other things.

Mr Speaker, I revive my submission based on several reasons namely, this Budget Debate in the end would resolve nothing – not one word, not one line item would be changed. Tomorrow evening when you put the question to this Assembly, the Ayes will have it. Budget 2008 'Staying the Course', which to the average man in the street means more of the same will be officially adopted.

I listened to the suggestion by the Honourable Member Deborah Backer and I endorsed this position. A better methodology has to be derived to ensure that these debates are more inclusionary. Mr Speaker, in

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concluding his presentation last evening the Hon Attorney General stated that he concurred with the statement expressed by the Deputy Speaker that equal consideration should be given to both our human resources as well as our capital projects. This is an honest opinion and I congratulate him for his forthrightness. However, immediately after he concluded he was accused by one of his own members of being part of the Opposition. The AG and the Deputy Speaker ... the point was well made; the government can build schools and hospitals in every Region, however, these structures are useless unless there are qualified teachers and doctors to man these institutions. Mr Speaker, on a personal level, on the same matter, I was very saddened when I just heard a Minister of our government state that a member of the Opposition needed psychiatric evaluation purely because he disagreed with the content of her speech.

The Speaker: Honourable Members we mustn't take too literally what you hear in the House and so on you know ... *[Laughter]*.

Mr David Patterson: The statement he made ... Mr Speaker I expected you to interject to say that is unparliamentary language.

The Speaker: But you know I don't mind what you expect Honourable Member. If that was an allegation made by a Member on his feet in his contribution to a debate, then that would be one thing. If it is side talk,

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there is a lot of it that goes on in every Parliament in the world. So we must not take these things so seriously. That is just a bit of friendly advice. I can't stop you from saying what you are saying.

Proceed ...

Mr David Patterson: Thank you for that Mr Speaker however, it is still my contention that you could have simply rebuked these statements by the Member on this side rather than sink into levels which he did.

The Speaker: Mr Basil Williams tells me much more serious things than that, you know ... privately, so I am sorry to interrupt you.

Mr David Patterson: Thank you for that clarification. Mr Speaker, the issue of inclusive governance is a matter that has to be addressed urgently. We cannot continue to operate as if it's business as usual. Guyana is on a sitting point and it is incumbent on all of us to work together to ensure that we maintain the balance on the side of law and order. Mr Speaker, based on that backdrop and as previously mentioned I have launched my presentation and I shall restrict myself only to areas of concern to the AFC and by extension to people in general. The areas of utmost concern to the citizens of this country, in my opinion are security and the unmanageable cost of living. The security concerns which have been heightened based on events I described earlier have been a constant source of worry before 2008. It is to this end that citizens

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eagerly anticipate a Budget from the government that would support initiatives to improve their safety in a marked way especially in the light of the postponement of the first reading after the Lusignan massacre. Mr Speaker, I ask you to recall the Budget Provisions of 2007 where money was allocated to various initiatives to enhance public safety such as the Citizens Security Programme, the development of a SWAT Team, The National Drug Strategy Master Plan, stronger anti-money laundering legislation, strengthening of the SIU among others. I now look at the 2008 and I see similar provisions – US\$22M for the Citizens Security Programme; S\$65M for equipping Community Policing Groups, \$900M on equipment or gear. I ask - is this the best solution that our government can coin to enhance the safety of our Guyanese people? The answer of course is no. However, as mentioned before, it is either their way or the high way.

On the matter on the cost of living, the average man in the street shall remember 2007 for one main reason – the negative effects that VAT had on their livelihood. The government on the introduction of VAT promised the country that this new Tax will be revenue-neutral. Of course, a year later, this has proven to be a hollow promise. The government collected revenue from VAT that has surpassed its budget astronomically which has translated to the fact that the man in the street has had to bear the additional burden. The step by the government

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to increase the tax threshold to improve the lives of the average person falls woefully short of what is actually required. An increase of \$4,620 per month does little to alleviate a year in counting of inflated prices. Additionally, the revenue which the government will give up will spread over the entire population whereas this relief needs to be concentrated on the average man in the street. We need better programmes to target the old people in a meaningful way that also prevent the continuation of the inflationary pressure that Guyana continues to feel. Mr Speaker, I see no analysis which shows that the VAT net has captured significant taxes from areas which were not previously paying taxes. What I see instead are persons, who are already burdened, having to bear a greater burden with no relief programmes in sight without any benefit of those tax accrued to them. I see mothers having to keep their young children home from school since the prices of school clothes, textbooks and food are beyond their reach. I see more persons soliciting on the street, I see hundreds of application every month where persons are qualified in various degrees and still cannot find employment. I see law-abiding citizens having to close their business as a result of their profitability disappearing – I generally see despair and it is the general expectation that this budget would provide some hope to the people. Mr Speaker I trust that there is more between the lines.

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Mr Speaker, on more specific matters, that is, the current house-to-house registration process ... Despite our best effort in and out of the Courts AFC/GAP continues to be excluded from this exercise. As you may recall, AFC/GAP had cause to move to the Court in an effort to show that monies allocated to scrutineering of this process was done in an equitable manner. It remains our contention that an exercise of such national importance requires the participation and endorsement of all stakeholders. No effort should be spared in ensuring that the effort is as inclusionary as possible. However, sadly this has not been the case thus far which does not auger well for our Motto – *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

Mr Speaker, notwithstanding GECOM's refusal to act in accordance with their Constitutional mandate the AFC is heartened to note that contrary to what some may say monies for the payment of scrutineers being provided but at discretionary powers of the Minister of Finance we heartened that this Minister of Finance acknowledges the errors in those statements and has included provisions for payment of scrutineers in his Budget, further confirming the AFC's positions that since these monies have been approved by this Parliament, payment for the Parliamentary Opposition should be done on a proportional basis.

Mr Speaker, another issue with the AFC has caused to raise in and out of this Assembly is the refusal of our

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membership to Local Government Taskforce. As a member of this Assembly we are entitled to representation to this Taskforce. This is a request we have made since the commencement of this the Ninth Parliament. Further, in December last year when this Assembly debated once again the deferring of Local Government Elections until 2008, this Assembly was informed by Honourable Member Basil Williams that what was required was a letter to the Leader of the Opposition requesting inclusion into this Taskforce. Mr Speaker, although we consider this an unnecessary approach to enable us to assume our rightful position, we nevertheless wrote the Leader of the Opposition requesting inclusion. I am saddened to report to date that we have not been given the courtesy of an acknowledgement of receipt of our letter much less an update on the status of our request. Mr Speaker, I therefore once again call for the full inclusion of the other parliamentary parties on this taskforce since it has always been our contention that without participation of these other parties this process will continue to be stalled.

Mr Speaker, like an earlier speaker, we also have concerns about the monies allocated to Region 4. Region 4 continues to receive the lowest budgetary allocation per head when compared with the other Regions. Based on the last census Region 4 has 310,000 citizens, this year's Budget allocates approximately \$2.2B ... *[Interruption: So what happened to Region 6 that has three*

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Municipalities? To this... New Amsterdam included? 'Region 6 has three municipalities, what happened to them?']

This year's Budget allocates approximately \$2.2B to this Region which equates Mr Speaker to approximately \$7,000 per person which compares against Region 6 which has approximately 124,000 citizens with a budget allocation \$2.6B that equates to \$22,500 per person. Region 3 which has 103,000 persons received \$20,500 per person in this Budget. Region 5 gets approximately \$25,000 in this Budget. Region 4 per head allocation is three times less than the next lowest Regional body and almost eight times lower than the highest per head allocation. The citizens of Region 4... I know the Honourable 'Member Donald Ramotar you are scheduled to speak tomorrow, you can enlighten the House. I notice the Minister of Local Government is set to speak next, he can enlighten the House. The citizens of Region 4 could be well be excused for thinking that since they form the brunt of the nation's working population thus contributing the most to the economy by way of taxes, that allocations to support developmental activities in their Region would at least reflect their contributions [*Applause*]. The AFC would like the Minister of Finance as well and the subject Minister to explain to this Assembly the basis on which the allocation monies to these Regional bodies has been derived.

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Mr Speaker, it is noted that this Budget anticipates that the Construction Industry shall grow by approximately 4%. This in our opinion is an unrealistic assumption based on the fact that last year's growth within this sector was fuelled by the activities surrounding World Cup Cricket. It is unlikely that the major cultural event for 2008 – CARIFESTA, will generate this level of growth especially since persons who invested in projects for the hosting of tourists for World Cup are yet to recoup monies on their investment and most face even harder times this year due to the current security situation.

Mr Speaker, with regard to housing it is noted that \$1.5B has been allocated to infrastructural works in various housing schemes around the country. While this appears adequate for its intended purpose, this Budget fails to address one critical housing factor – the ability of the average Guyanese to finance the construction of a home. If one visits any of these housing schemes he will note that less than 40% of the allocated lots have houses constructed on them. The Honourable Minister of Housing and Water gave several reasons why there are so many empty house lots, however, Diamond, Parfaite-Harmony, Tuschen, the simple fact is that the average person cannot afford to build a house. Mr Speaker, in the interest of the average home-builder, the AFC calls on the Minister of Finance to zero the following construction materials: cement, roof sheeting and windows. Such a measure, Mr Speaker, those three items zero rated, would

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garner savings of minimum of 6% of the cost of constructing a low-income house thus making the reality of owning a home more acceptable to the average Guyanese as well as providing a much needed boost to the entire Construction Industry. It is time this government starts walking the walk rather than talking the talk about being responsive to the average citizen's needs.

Mr Speaker, the AFC welcome the provision of over \$300M in this year Budget for the construction of an Olympic-sized swimming pool. On completion, this would provide our local swimming fraternity with additional resources to become more competitive in this sport. We however question the need for construction a swimming pool on piles foundation. Our research has shown that this is a first for the construction methodology in this country as well as this Region. A swimming pool, virtually by the design and construction, normally displaces its own weight, hence rendering the need for piles foundation null and void. *[Interruption: '15% ... that's 15%. The pile probably is 15%']* We urge the review of this design. *I see Donald looks puzzled; Yes Donald.* We urge that a review of the design be commissioned urgently *[Applause]* so that the savings garnered, if it has not already been paid out, can be used towards improving this facility or for some other worthwhile sporting venture.

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Mr Speaker, we note that the 2008 Budget zero rates bicycles excluding racing bicycles. It is surprising that the Minister of Youth and Sport did not object to the exclusion of racing bicycles from these exemptions noting that the percentage of racing bicycles purchases annually versus the overall amount of standard bicycles is minuscule. Maybe ... *[Interruption: 'You can't even ride' "Don't bother, we going to get a donkey for you" [Laughter] 'Maybe in the Minster's opinion the cycle racing fraternity does not need any assistance or is it that he considers that cycle racing in Guyana is not a worthy alternative for our youths']*

Mr Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, this Budget aptly named *'Staying the Course'* represents nothing new, nothing for the average person. Raising the Income Tax Threshold was welcomed as I mentioned before, falls far below what was needed. Even the increase threshold falls short of what would have been meaningful. The AFC, based on its analysis of the cost of living has repeatedly called for the minimum Income Tax Threshold to be not less than \$50,000 per month in order to provide the kind of relief that the government continues to promise.

Nothing new on Security is mentioned save and except helicopters and twelve specialist weapons which are yet to arrive. Nothing new in our strategy *[Interruption: ... 'That has not worked']* No strategic plan for the youths of revenue accrued from the Lotto fund. No new initiative for the injection of investment into this economy. It is the

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same boat, the same one, the same one and it does not provide the hope that the people have been promised ... no strategic plan as to how we are going to get out of this vicious cycle of poverty. Infrastructural development must be tied to revenue generating activities so that this nation can earn. We must stop taking money from the poor but rather generate our own revenue as a nation. Mr Speaker, I am not sure what the forecast is for remittances but I am sure with a Budget such as this one which promises to stay the course in 2008, those estimates for remittances will be exceeded that would be the only way our citizens will be able to survive 2008. Maybe in the presentation of next year's Budget, the Hon Minister of Finance may want to consider more meaningful consultation with the average housewife since these hard working women do a much better job of balancing meagre resources [*Applause*] and have gotten much better results.

Mr Speaker, with those remarks, I would like to close by saying let the pantomime continue, the pantomime which is Budget 2008. Mr Speaker, I thank you [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member ...

Honourable Member Mr Kellowan Lall ...

Hon Kellowan Lall: The previous speaker went on about Region 4 as I understand some others during this debate and the supposed discrimination that is taking place in allocations of monies to these Regions. I want to

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say emphatically that in considering the allocations to the various Regions I don't think that per capita allocation is the main consideration. I think that in deciding the projects that we would want to fund, the critical nature of these projects is the deciding factor when considering monies to be allocated. Additionally, Mr Speaker, I think it is a fallacy for anyone to believe that the Public Sector expenditure in a particular Region is only that expenditure made through the Regions. Let's take Region 4 for instance: Apart from the \$2B plus the additional sum in the Capital Budget ... Let me see here, the capital budget for Region 4 - \$140M, an increase of 7% over last year. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent by the Central Government in Housing, Water, Drainage and Irrigation, Health Services, Sports and all these things. Region 4 is the beneficiary of the biggest amount of allocation from the government [*Applause*] and that is excluding ... I am not talking about Georgetown, I am talking about hospitals. This year alone we will be spending a few hundred million in rebuilding all the bridges on the East Bank and on the East Coast, hundreds of millions [*Applause*]. That is not reflected in the Regional Budget. It was not reflected in the Regional Budget when we built the stadium, the CARICOM Headquarters, the Convention Centre. It was not reflected in the Budget when we built the Mahaicony Hospital and the Hospital on the East Bank – it was not reflected in the Regional Budgets. The Regional Budgets are allocations based on the critical nature of certain other

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projects. But the Central Government is doing ... Look, let's take river and sea defences, in Region 4 alone hundreds of millions of dollars in building sluices [*Applause*], buying pumps with main line [*Applause*]. Don't let politics come in this thing here, this is serious business, let's not make fun over it and make out the point that we are discriminating in Region 4. Look Region 7, we have spent almost a billion dollars to build roads, the drains and the market in Region 7 and the Bartica road a billion dollars. This year we will be starting a project for waste disposal in Region 4 – East Bank and East Coast - \$4B. That is not reflected in the Regional Budget.

Mr Speaker, there was another Member on the opposite side that's referred to a PNC Region or PNC Regions. I don't know anything about PNC Region. I know there are ten Administrative Regions in this country. They are serving ... [*Applause*] There is no PNC Region. When Mr Cornette, Mr Knights and Mr Mingo sit there as Chairmen they sit to carry out a programme of this government, not the PNC [*Applause*]. They swear allegiance to the flag of Guyana, not the Palm Tree [*Applause*] These gentlemen work with me and I must say that they are very co-operative and unlike the days when many of the Regions controlled by the PNC Party used to send back money to the Treasury so that they are going to promise the people that they are going to blame the government, now they are behaving better. In fact,

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Region 7, Region 10 and Region 4 they have done far better than all the other Regions in carrying out the government's capital programmes last year [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, I would also like to join my colleagues, at least on this side of the House to congratulate the Minister of Finance on presenting this year's well-crafted Budget which is geared to consolidate even further, the many achievements we have made hence the theme '*Staying the Course and Advancing the transformation Process.*'

Social and economic developments have been advancing in Guyana since the PPP Civic government took office. Tangible improvements in the lives of the /Guyanese people can be seen in every sector and I all parts of the country. Today, this is very evident in especially rural, river-rain, Amerindian and hinterland communities. With each passing year we can see development taking place – new schools, school feeding programmes, student hostels, teachers' quarters, new hospitals, more drugs, accommodation for medical staff, better roads, bridges, drainage and irrigations systems, training of personnel, improved accountability, more timely monitoring and implementation of programmes and projects. Indeed, the time when rural and hinterland communities were marginalised, has come to an end [*Applause*]

Mr Speaker, the underdevelopment that was experienced by citizens in rural and hinterland communities for

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decades cannot be corrected for a short while. Admittedly, there are still many constraints, the major one being the lack of adequate resources to meet the growing demand of services in these outlying areas. However, the Government of Guyana has shown its genuine commitment towards the development of the various Regions resulting in residents enjoying more and more access to basic services in Education, Health Care, Infrastructure, Agricultural Services, Housing, Water, Telecommunication, Transport. The recent increases in budgetary allocations for the ten Regions attest to our commitment to Regional development. Last year the government allocated some \$13.1B to the ten Regions, 98% of this sum was utilised in the areas in Health, Education, Infrastructure, etc. This year because of the importance given by the government to Regional development the allocation to the ten Regions of Guyana stands at \$15B, an increase of \$1.9B, this means more money for every Region. The Capital Budget for the Regions for 2008 is 1.7B, a 7% increase over the Budget last year. The current Budget stands at \$12.9B an increase of 17% over last year. This is the reason why this year's Budget them is so relevant [*Interruption: One for me, one for you*] [*Laughter*].

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Many of the programmes are ongoing [*Interruption: I know the one he wants*]. Many of the programmes are ongoing and will continue for some time, and the rural and hinterland areas experience a standard of living and access to basic services enjoyed by all other Guyanese.

Mr Speaker, I just want to emphasise the point that this year there is an average increase in the Capital Budget in each and every Region by approximately 7% and as I said Mr Speaker, the sums allocated to the various Regions represent just a fraction of that which the government is spending in many of these communities. There are other projects being implemented by other Ministries that augment the work of the Regional Administration thus adding to the improvements that are taking place. All these activities – improve education, greater health care, better roads, bridges, D & I systems, electricity etcetera are intended to improve the quality of life and create the environment for our people to create jobs for themselves, create wealth and in especially the Amerindian communities to eradicate poverty. *So you can laugh.* During this year the Ministry will be concentrating on the improvement and capacity of the Regions to achieve their

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objectives by delivering a higher quality of service. This year we will continue an aggressive training campaign programme aimed at preparing top managers of the Region to carry out their responsibilities. Together with the Central Ministries of Health, Education Agriculture, Public Works, Housing and Water and Amerindian Affairs we will be working to see the delivery of these services is qualitatively improved. Regional Health Officer and Regional Education Officers will be called upon to improve the management and monitoring of these systems. This year there will be more stringent monitoring of each and every school, school feeding programme, student hostel, hospitals, health centres and health huts. There will be more stringent management of the flow of supply such as drugs and food supplies. There will be stringent monitoring of staff to decrease the incidence of absenteeism and absence from the Region for whatever reason. The objective of these measures is to improve the quality of service provided to our people. Similarly, we aim to improve our monitoring and implementation of the capital and maintenance programme of the various Regions. There must be better management of the preparation of designs and bills of quantities for projects. There must be stricter adherence for tender and procurement procedures. There must be improved monitoring of these projects so they are completed within the specified timeframe and as a matter of policy, bills of quantities and other information pertaining to projects must be made accessible to the public to allow for more scrutiny.

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The Regions on a daily basis, Mr Speaker, engages the services of hundreds of contractors in all parts of the country. We have always taken the position that contractors are partners in the development process. However, contractors must understand that they have a responsibility to work with the government to carry out their contractual obligations.

There must be no tolerance for shoddy work and time delays. There have been many instances of these and this has affected our ability to provide quality service to our people. There have also been instances when public officers connive with contractors to divert funds and resources for their personal use. Whatever may be the reasons, systems will be put in place to stop such practices including consideration of previous performance of contractors during the evaluation process. As far as the rules permit, see to it that citizens of the various Regions benefit from project implementation especially with supplies and employment.

During the consideration of details of expenditure of the current year it is intended to identify the various projects to be undertaken. By way of example however, let me for the record state a few of the important ones to be undertaken: In Education - the construction of primary schools in *Region 1*, construction of primary schools at Katchekamo, Kuberema and Black Water; extension of Waramuri Nursery – the construction of three teachers' apartments.

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In Region 2 – completion of the Fisher and Golden Fleece Primaries, Nursery at Aurora, Somerset and Berks and St. John's

Region 3 – completion of the Santa Mission Primary, construction of dormitories at Parika Secondary; headmaster's quarters at Hogg Island; improvements to schools at Morashi, Alikee, Clemwood, Karia Karia and Bagotsville

In Region 4 – construction of the Practical Instruction Centre; rehabilitation of nurseries and primaries at Cane Grove, Laluni, Annandale and St. Cuthbert's Mission

Region 5 – completion of Phase 2 at No. 8 Secondary.

In Region 6 – construction of teachers' quarters at Siparuta, nursery at Gibraltar and No. 79; rehabilitation of the technology centre at Black Bush Secondary; rehabilitation of the primary at Crabwood Creek, Lietown and the Canje Secondary School.

Region 7 – the construction of dorms at Bartica, extension of Agatash Primary, rehabilitation of dorms and kitchen at Waramadong, teachers' quarters at Isineru and Middle Mazaruni. *Region 8* – construction of teachers' quarters at Maikawagt, dorm at Paramakatoi, education office at Mahdia, school at Maikobi and Morawau. Incidentally, this year we are going to redo the roads and water system that were destroyed by mining in Region 8.

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In *Region 9* – construction of primary schools at Torana and nursery schools at Rewa, Roopanaau and Teperu; Extension of Hotoka Primary

In *Region 10* – Extension of the Kwakwani Secondary, Mc Kenzie High and Amelia's Ward Nursery [*Applause*]

In Health, Mr Speaker, let me give you a few more examples and this is just a small percentage of what we have identified to do this year to improve the quality and access of service to the people of especially the hinterland community.

Health:

Region 1:

- The construction of a waste disposal site, drug bond and mortuary at Mabaruma Hospital.
- Doctors and Medex and nurses quarters at Kumaka and Pakera Hospitals.

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- Region 2:**
- Construction of new corporate building at Suddie.
 - Rehabilitation of Paediatric Ward at Suddie Hospital.
- Region 3:**
- Construction of health centre at Parfaite Harmonie and health post at Zeelugt and Louisiana.
- Region 4**
- Rehabilitation of health centres at Herstelling and Buxton.
- Region 5**
- Construction of doctors' quarters at Mahaicony, continuation of that of Fort Wellington and upgrading of the Rosignol Health Centre.
- Region 6**
- Rehabilitation of Hospital at Black Bush Polder
- Region 7**
- Construction of health centre and port at Imbamadai and Four Miles.

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Region 8

- Bond at Maikobi.
- Construction of drug bond and rehabilitation of x-ray department at Mahdia.

Region 9

- Construction of quarters for dental service - Annai
- Medex quarters at Karasabai.
- A new hospital which I understand that is about to be completed at Lethem.

Region 10

- The rehabilitation of the nurses' hostel.

Mr Speaker I can go on to deal with agriculture extension services, dozens and dozens of roads, bridges and culverts that we did but we would be dealing with those if the other side wishes to know, we can relate to them all the different things that we will be doing during this year.

Mr Speaker, an important part of my Ministry's work is to monitor the work of Neighbourhood Democratic Councils. An important part of the responsibility of the

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Ministry is the monitoring of the work of NDCs and municipalities. These statutory bodies collected their own revenues mainly through rates and taxes and the government continues to assist them through annual subventions. Last year the sixty-five NDCs were given a total subvention of \$185M which was equally distributed among the NDCs. It was estimated last year that the NDCs collected approximately \$300M in rates and taxes which represents just about 50% of what was projected. Unfortunately Mr Speaker, some 50% of the population under the NDCs territories do not pay rates and taxes. While there have been measures put in place including more aggressive litigation, rate collection is far below expectations. This has severely curtailed the ability of the NDCs to carry out their functions and to attract suitably qualified staff to run their affairs. Some of us are not paying our rates and taxes including the PNC owing \$100M – PNC Sophia - \$100M. You've got to pay it. As you know ... *[Interruption: "We are moving to that"]*

As you know, there have been repeated calls for increase in rates and taxes. The government has not agreed so far to any increase in taxes. The six municipalities last year collected approximately \$1.6B in revenue and also benefited from subvention from the Central Government. In these locations there are also many who do not pay rates and taxes and these statutory bodies are under severe pressure to meet the demands of the citizens.

In the city of Georgetown, the municipality and the Central Government continue to collaborate to provide a

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range of services to citizens though at a level which is below expectations. During last year, the collaboration between the Ministry and the City Council has resulted in greater awareness of the fact that the present structures and legal framework in the city are not adequate for the proper management of a modern city. This collaboration will continue this year. I am pleased that measures have been put in place so that this year there will be a total review of all operations of the City Council that will allow for a more appropriate management structure that can deliver a better quality of service and to enhance the city's landscape. [*Interruption: They got the keys but you ain't know*].

The Urban Development Programme Mr Speaker, this has been a very important programme that was contracted by the Government of Guyana at a cost of US\$25M. This programme addresses the following issues:

- o Support reforms to address the institutional constraints, Guyana's capability/capacity to finance, upgrade, maintain and expand urban infrastructure and services on a sustainable basis.
- o Finance the rehabilitation of infrastructure and the reestablishment of municipal services in the country's six municipalities.

Mr Speaker I want to give you a few examples of what was done recently under this programme. Many roads were completed especially in Georgetown and here are a few examples:

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- South Ruimveldt Park at a cost of \$7M
- West Ruimveldt, North and South Ruimveldt at a cost of \$114M
- Castello Housing, Albouystown - \$49M
- Tucville - \$160M
- Meadow Bank, Agricola, Houston and Cummings Lodge - \$114M
- Lot A New Amsterdam - \$218M and Lot B New Amsterdam - \$215M

The Community Enhancement Programme

This Government of Guyana-CDB project has been completed at a cost of some \$1.9B to upgrade facilities in several locations that were projected for targeted for new townships.

I mentioned before, Mr Speaker, the rehabilitation and construction of roads, drains and culverts in Bartica at a cost \$888M and the construction of a new market in Bartica at a cost of \$148M [*Applause*]. We rehabilitated the Parika Stelling and the Admin building in Parika at a cost \$126M which is 100% complete. The construction of a new market in Bartica has been completed and they have the keys. The rehabilitation of the Charity market - \$14M, the rehabilitation of the Supenaam Market - \$15M, construction of the new NDC building at Parika which is

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going to be municipality township soon - \$11M. A new NDC building at Charity - \$15M; a new NDC building at Supenaam which is also going to be a township - \$9M and finally Mr Speaker, the construction of roads, drains and culverts at Parika at a cost of \$463M, that has already been completed. We have already completed last year the construction of roads and drains in Supenaam and Charity at a cost of \$211M [*Applause*] and these monies were not included in the Regional Budget.

Mr Speaker, I want to speak very briefly on a very small project but a very significant one under my Ministry, it is called Replicable Poverty Linkages. The reason why some of the Members of this House cannot make any proper contribution is because they do not want to listen. These are some of the things they themselves can benefit from. The Replicable Poverty Linkages programme Mr Speaker, is intended to strengthen the capacity within depressed communities in an attempt to create jobs for unemployed persons. It involves community-based programmes that will enhance the livelihood of financially challenged people. Work has already started in Leguan, Meten-Meer-Zorg, Stanleytown, Yarrowkabra, Anns Grove, Cane Grove, Calcutta, No. 7 Village and sixteen other communities will be targeted this year. Mr Speaker, what this project does is that ... First of all, we have already spent about \$15M in this project. This project is ... Special areas are identified. Leaders go in these communities and identify young people who have business acumen, given them some

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further training and give them US\$5,000 to start a small project in their communities that is replicable, not only from additional funds from the government but other people in the communities can get additional funds and start subsequent projects within their communities *[Applause]*. This year we will move to Regions 7 and 9 and we are going to seek additional funds and add to those funds from the UN, from the government coffers so that we can replicate these small projects in different parts of the country so that we can meaningfully do something for those young people who are out of jobs. We will create the ability within themselves for them to find employment for themselves, not having to be seeking jobs from the government ... *[Interruption: 'You, you'. "I musn't tell you ... you are from Globe Trust. Globe Trust should have been helping them do it. Why you gone with all the money?" 'That's very good']*

The Georgetown Solid Waste Management Program, Mr Speaker, the collection and proper disposal of solid waste generated by a lot of people including those on the opposite side here and businesses is becoming a serious challenge throughout the country and especially Local Government bodies which were given tasks for the collection and disposal of waste in the various parts of the country. The volume of waste is increasing and the type of waste being generated is becoming more and more diversified and that is hazardous. Over the years the NDCs and the municipalities have been increasing their capacities to deal with the situation but this situation

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remains unsatisfactory ... (Many ... and they have helped the situation). Also private contractors have been contracted by NDCs and municipalities to collect and dispose of waste. Unfortunately, many Guyanese continue to dump waste on parapets or other public places and this is a matter of great concern. In order to deal with the situation the various local government bodies have been expending more and more on waste disposal. A key issue to be resolved is the establishment of landfill sites in various parts of the country. This process is ongoing and by the end of this year we hope a reasonable amount of certified sites where waste can be deposited safely. Of course, other methods of disposal are also being considered especially where hazardous waste for medical facilities. Where the capital is concerned, the Government of Guyana has negotiated a US\$20M loan from the IDB to deal with the challenge of waste collection and disposal [*Applause*]. The general objective of this project is to contribute to the improvement of the environmental conditions and quality of life of the people in Georgetown and its environs that is from Timehri to Georgetown and from Georgetown to Mahaica. Under this project we will be creating a new landfill site at Haag Bosch. This project has already started, we have already set up the PEU and we are about to contact the operator for the landfill site [*Applause*]. It is hoped Mr Speaker, that within eighteen months this project will come on stream, will be completed and we will then bring closure to the La Repentir Landfill Site.

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Under this programme also Mr Speaker, all the households within the NDC areas within the East Coast and East Bank and within the Georgetown municipality will be asked or will be made to pay the equivalent of US\$1 per month to make this project a successful one.

Mr Speaker, the Local Government system provides a very fertile ground for people to be involved in the decision making process of the country. Through the various organs, communities have been coming together to solve their own problems and to monitor the development process. More and more they are taking possession of this process and gilding it to their benefit. We need to build on this culture so that we can deepen our democracy. Local Government is also a place where various forces, political, civic and others sit together at councils and find common solutions to developmental issues. At the Local Government level, people have learnt to put aside petty and political differences in the interest of collective good of communities.

A key and critical issue facing the system is the need for early Local Government Elections. The absence of these elections has put a severe strain on the leaders and communities. It is expected that the current registration process will be completed in a short period so that we can have these elections this year *[Applause]*. The Government of Guyana is committed to having these elections as early as this year and has provided funds for the completion of the registration process. If you are

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going to have the elections this year, the government will find the funds to hold elections this year.

As regard Local Government Reforms, Mr Speaker, *[Interruption: The same scrutineers]*. The Joint Task Force... *[That's a GECOM matter and your matter. Mr Corbin has to deal with your matter]*. As regards Local Government Reforms Mr Speaker, the Joint Task Force has been considering the timetabling of its work because it has been dragging on for too long and there has been a lot of filibustering because some people don't want us to have these elections, there has been filibustering. We have to timetable the work of the Task Force and if they cannot complete their work within that timeframe, let them take the matter back to their Leaders. Let them take ... for consideration and let us bring whatever is completed to Parliament because we cannot go on forever. We have to timetable the activities as they must finish the work within a reasonable timeframe; every time the PNC changing their representative and they have to go over everything again. We cannot work this way. This is not a businesslike approach to the matter. I know this is an important matter but still, at the end of the day we have to work towards the completion of the work of the Taskforce. We cannot go on forever, we cannot go on forever, there is too much filibustering.

At present Mr Speaker... I want to say this and in spite of the fact that there has been delays and I think the thing is dragging on too long, they have made progress, they have made progress and at this point in time they are

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considering the Local Government Elections Amendment Bill, that is the Second Draft provided by the Attorney General's Office and I think very soon they will be considering and completing the Fiscal Transfer Bill. It is hoped that all these matters will be completed within a very short period of time. Mr Speaker, I do not know if people have become so insensitive to what is going on on the ground where Local Government is concerned where actually by doing this, we are destroying Local Government. A lot of people talking about bringing out new leaders, encouraging new people to be involved in... For fifteen years we have not had these elections, we need to have these elections, we cannot continue filibustering on this policy. We need to complete the work of the Taskforce and we need to see that the Registration process completed so that the Elections can be held this year. Thank you very much Mr Speaker [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member, Honourable Member Mr Elliot.

Mr Ernest B Elliot: Thank you Mr Speaker. I rise to make my contribution on the 2008 Budget Presentation. Mr Speaker, the 2008 Budget was presented under the Theme '*Staying on Course Advancing the Transformation Agenda.*' In the context of the economic, social and security situation in Guyana over the past year and even the present period this theme cannot be justified as being relevant. Guyana can be classified as ship which is being tossed by huge waves drifting in the ocean and the captain and sailors are like disciples bundled together.

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Incapable to manage the ship, this country surely is not on course but has lost course.

The introduction and implementation of the Value Added Tax has taken snacks away from children's lunch kits, milk from their breakfast and meat from their meals. The cost of living is so high which has contributed to a noticeable increase of persons living on the streets and begging for help. Mr Speaker, even as we mourn the tragic loss of life of the eleven persons who were killed in Lusignan and twelve in Bartica Guyanese continue to live in fear for their personal safety and security. The government's action in the community of Buxton is not an example of staying on course and it is irresponsible. When a government continues to harass, malign, disrupt the livelihood of the community, detain the young, old and middle-aged women and children under the guise of Operation Restoration – something is dreadfully wrong [*Applause*]. This is an ugly example of advancing the transformation agenda. When a government cannot provide security for the people of a country that government should go; when a government cannot provide security and employment opportunities for the people in the communities that government should go since it is obvious that that government has failed to stay on course [*Applause*]

Mr Speaker, this Budget presented by the Hon Minister is visionless and cannot hold water for the people of this country. The Minister, while attempting to recognise the challenges that lie ahead failed to address most

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importantly the fundamental concerns facing the people of Guyana such as high cost of living, unemployment and underemployment, insecurity et cetera.

Mr Speaker, since 2002 the people of this dear land having been living in fear, in poverty, unemployment, crime and have lost faith in this incompetent government. Mr Speaker, the time has come for the government to examine and address the concerns of its citizens in a fundamental way, for my Party, the People National Congress One-Guyana has a vision and the capacity to address these concerns and is ready and able to take up the mantle for efficiently and responsibly managing and transforming Guyana from this state of hopelessness [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, the Budget Theme speaks to staying on course and this means more hardships, continuous harassment for a number of villages and young people in Region 4 primarily the community of Buxton. This makes life more difficult and contributing to the presence of tension in our society.

Mr Speaker, while the Budget has highlighted the targets for enhancing the transformation of the agenda and millions of dollars to be expended through the Ministries and Regions, the big question is: Are the people of this country receiving value for money spent? The answer is no, no. Mr Speaker, you just have to visit a number of communities in Region 4 and you will see for yourself the substandard works which were done on a number of roads

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over the past two years. In most cases, there were no monitoring of works by stakeholders due to the lack of consultation between the State or the executing agencies and this government boasts of broad-based consultation. Mr Speaker, if you were to hold the Honourable Minister to his Theme it must not be merely words but action for local and regional development and this was alluded to by the Hon Minister (he is not around), of Local Government.

My Party welcomes the holding of the house-to-house registration and the announcement by the Honourable Minister that the Budget has financial provisions for the completion of the house-to-house exercise and the conduct of the Local Government elections. We want to see that. However Mr Speaker, my Party is concerned about the failure of the government for not stating the necessary Bill which the Minister alluded to in this House on Local Government Reform for the Local Government serves as an efficient vehicle for the promotion and centralisation of national development projects and programmes and should be operationalised in a manner which will ensure the impact of development within this society which is done in all modern societies. Mr Speaker, it is time to give Local Government back to the people [*Applause*]. For too long our system of municipalities and councils have been unfaithful to its ideals and mandates – a mandate to empower the people so as to participate in decisions that affect them in their communities. The PNCR(1G) supports Local

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Government Reform since it believes that it will create the conditions that will:

- 1) reduce the role of the Local Government Minister from interfering with the decisions of the Local Authorities.
- 2) implement measures to make Councillors more accountable to those who elected them.
- 3) ensure that Local Government Elections are held as scheduled by the Constitution of Guyana.
- 4) return power to the local people whereby reflecting local democracy.

Mr Speaker, the Regional Democratic Council of Region 4 has been focusing on giving much service as possible to all the residents in the Region. My Party is convinced that Guyana belongs to all Guyanese and every race has a right here to equal opportunity [*Applause*] therefore my Party condemns condignly all efforts to discriminate against people and their communities.

Mr Speaker, the task of providing service has been proving extremely difficult for the Regional Democratic Council of Region 4 because of under-funding by Central Government. In terms of the allocation made to the ten Administrative Regions, Region 4 receives the least and is grossly under-funded when one takes into consideration the size of this Region, the population, miles of canals and dams that need to be kept in good shape, the number and length of roads that must be maintained or

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rehabilitated, the number of schools and centres and government buildings to be maintained and serviced that must be provided to all the residents from St. Cuthbert's Mission to Mahaica on the left bank of the Mahaica River, from Mahaica to Industry on the East Coast of Demerara, from Eccles to Timehri on the East Bank of Demerara and from Kuru Kururu to Moblissa on the Soesdyke-Linden Highway and not forgetting the riverrain areas up the Demerara River. The Regional Democratic Council of Region 4 is responsible for providing the main services to the people which includes Education, Health and Public Work within the limited resources. The provision of potable water is the responsibility of Guyana Water Incorporation while housing and the allocation of lands are the responsibilities of Central Government which made this decision early in 1993. Mr Speaker, a point to note is that this Region is without a Land selection Committee. Mr Speaker, on the question of the Land Selection Committee, when this government came into office, when all the other Regions except Region 4, the government put a PPP Council to head the Committee of Region 4 and put the Chairman, Allan Munroe as a Member on that Committee. What a shame, and as a result of that, Mr Speaker, the people of Region 4 (*'Mr Kumar, you know better than that'*). The people of Region 4 are not in a position to know what is going on where the distribution of land and house lots is concerned. The Regional Council also is not involved in the distribution of ... Our information from the then Minister of Housing said that there is no use for a Land

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Selection Committee in Region 4 because the thing is already at the Central level. [*Noisy Interruption*]. Mr Speaker, the Regional Democratic Council is not only starved for funds but also starved (listen to this) of vehicles to carry out its work despite a request for the last fifteen years, and Mr Kumar was on the Council sat that time. The inventory shows that the Region has one Pick-Up and I can go on. The vehicle that is used Mr Speaker by the Regional Chairman is unreliable and prevents him from travelling as he should. It is obvious that the PPP-C Government is trying to put all obstacles in the way so that the Regional Chairman will be unable to carry out effectively, his duties and he is sensitive to the needs of the residents who live in the riverain areas.

Mr Speaker, while the RDC has the responsibility for providing some bridges to all the communities with the limited resources allocated over the years, this government, this PPP-C Government since 1993 has been carrying out a steady programme of demographic engineering bringing persons from all over the country to settle in Region 4 and the residents in Region 4 can hardly get house lots, they are sending them to Region 3. Mr Speaker, while new housing schemes are developed across the Region, while one can discuss the political implications or ramifications of this plan, the Regional Democratic Council is concerned with the heavy burden since no consultation was done when the Regional representatives in the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils with the addition of a number of areas. I just

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want to mention a few of those housing schemes and squatting areas between 1993 and now on the East Coast of Demerara and the East Bank of Demerara: The scheme outside the hospital at Mahaica, Green Field North, Ann's Grove Housing Scheme, Bell Field Lowlands, Haslington-Enmore, Haslington-Enmore South, Foulis, Vigilance South, Good Hope, East Bank, this is a place named Allen Burden ... [*Interruption: Eastern Emergency*]

I am coming to that. On the East Bank – Eccles Housing Scheme, Diamond-Grove Housing Scheme, Caneville, Timehri, - Airport Timehri and Soesdyke. Mr Speaker, because of the large number [*listen to this*] Linden, Mr Speaker, because the large number of residents and children added to the areas I have mentioned cause so many schools to be overcrowded. There is also a strain on services while most of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils cannot cope with servicing their areas including the grave problem of disposing of the solid waste. Then the Minister comes to this Parliament and says that the residents of the East Coast and East Bank – Region 4 - will pay a paltry sum of US\$1 to dispose of the garbage. That service has to be rendered by the Local Government itself, and if they put systems in place [*Applause*], they would not have come to put added burden on taxpayers of Region 4. Mr Speaker, while the Region in 2007 recognised the difficulties due to serious political interference and the deliberate attempt by the Ministry of Local Government, the Regional Executive Officer to

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destabilise the Council. Mr Speaker, because of Council on a number of occasions failed to carry out the directive of the Council and in June 2007, the Clerk, I understand, received directives from the Director of Budget to expend the sum of \$32.5M from capital to pay liabilities for 2005-2006 respectively without the knowledge of the Chairman and that of the Regional Democratic Council. Mr Speaker, while we are on liabilities, as a result of that interference, the Regional Chairman had cause to pen a letter dated the 27 December 2007 to Mr Neemal Rekha, ... [*Interruption: 'He still working?'*] Finance Secretary in the Ministry of Finance indicating to him what happened as regards the interference by the Ministry and of the REO not carrying out the instructions of the Council. Mr Speaker, this constant undermining of the Council affected the Work Programmes of the Education and Agricultural Sectors. Some contractors are still to be paid for 2007. Mr Speaker, the Regional Executive Officer is to supervise the control or management of funds allocated and to report to the Region under general guidance of the Regional Democratic Council and/or the Chairman, and so no Regional Executive Officer has veto powers over the Regional Democratic Council and is expected to operate within the framework of the Regional Democratic Council. Mr Speaker, my Party condemns the arrogance displayed by the Minister and officers within his Ministry and others in relation to the functioning of the Region [*Applause*].

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Mr Speaker, let us examine the Council's proposals and the allocations set out in the 2007 Budget. The overall allocations are as follows:

	\$
Capital	2,000,000
Current	130,000,000

With a total of Two Billion, One Hundred and Seventy-Eight zero five seven, Mr Speaker, this amount is a far cry based on the positive submissions by the Council and is grossly inadequate. Mr Speaker, the people of Region 4 are looking for service but this government continues to fail to make sufficient allocations to provide these necessary services.

Mr Speaker, under Building Administration for Capital 2007 the sum of \$25M was allocated for the construction of a new administration building at Triumph. This building is still to be completed and it is behind schedule. The Council has recognised the under-funding and the uncomfortable working environment and requested a further \$10M to conclude the works. This request was not granted. Mr Speaker, this is crying out of people under this government and the Council will judge you.

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Land and Water Transportm ... Mr Speaker, once again the RDC requested land and water transport for servicing fifteen LDCs, the Soesdyke-Linden Highway, St Cuthbert's Mission and the riverain areas where it can enhance regular visits to the communities but the RDC failed to grant the request.

Power Supply at Timehri – Mr Speaker, over the years very little progress has been made (*I want you listen to this one*). Over the years, very little progress has been made with the proposed take-over by the Guyana Power and Light of the responsibility to provide electricity to the residents of Timehri. There is obvious foot-dragging. A number of meetings were held with the Prime Minister and GPL. The Regional Democratic Council has been providing this service with little assistance from its current allocation. However, Mr Speaker, the Council made a request for substantial sums to adequately service the electricity system ... For the past three years approximately \$25M was collected and paid into revenue, from the government agencies, for example the Airport which is a major consumer of electricity.

[Interruption: 'Who does collect the money, not the Region?']

Mr Ernest Elliot: Central. The request for \$24M was not granted. Mr Speaker, this government must take immediate action to solve this major problem, if not, the Council would have to abandon this vital service to the people of Timehri.

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Roads: Mr Speaker, the Regional Democratic Council like previous years, submitted a comprehensive list of some forty-seven roads representing a number of villages across the Region which are in a deplorable state for either rehabilitation or construction at a request of \$140M. Mr Speaker, this government allocated the sum of \$26M for the construction of four roads of which one was not submitted by the Regional Democratic Council of Region 4.

Education Delivery: Mr Speaker, earlier in my presentation to this House I mentioned demographic engineering and the overcrowding of many schools and the present state of the secondary top in the primary schools across the Region. To this end the Region has identified some fourteen schools for construction, rehabilitation of deteriorating schools and the extending of schools for more space, all at a total projected cost of \$345M. Mr Speaker, to add further insult to education in the Region the Council requested the sum of \$40.2M for the purchase furniture and equipment to satisfy the needs of the schools. This government allocated a paltry sum of \$8M. Mr Minister of Education is not here. Mr Speaker, for the delivery of education to be effective in the Region the Minister needs to appoint technical officers in the Department of Education Region 5. Mr Speaker, there is a breath of relief for the students, teachers and parents of the Swami Perennial School on the announcement by the Minister of Finance for a new school building to be constructed at Hope, East Coast Demerara under the

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Basic Education Access and Management Programme. The young people of Buxton too will have a sigh of relief for the allocation has been granted with the Department of Education to complete PIC at the back of Friendship which started a few years ago as part of the depressed community project. We hope the government will carry out the extension of these projects within a reasonable timeframe.

Mr Speaker, the Region submitted thirteen projects and requested \$81M. The construction of the Headquarters, the extension of the health administration building at Friendship, rehabilitation of health centre at Victoria just to name a few. The government allocated \$14M. The Region welcomes the \$3M to complete the top flat of the Buxton Health Centre.

Furniture-Health: Mr Speaker, the Region requested the sum of \$40M to improve facilities and working conditions on the many health centres, outposts and quarters. The government only allocated a sum of \$5.7M.

Equipment-Health: The Region requested the sum of \$6M and the sum of \$3M to purchase communication set for St. Cuthbert's Mission and Long Creek Health Centres and Dora-Laluni Sifa Hill and Yarrowkabra outpost but failed to address the purchase of a Stanley generator for Dr CC Nicholson Hospital at Nabbaclis and air condition units for the Beterverwagting Health Centre.

Agriculture Development: Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture during 2006-2007 expended millions of

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dollars in the maintenance and provision of drainage and irrigation structures, trenches and dams to prevent flooding [*Applause*]. Nevertheless a few weeks ago, about two weeks ago, Better Hope... a few weeks ago the Region suffered flooding on the East Coast of Demerara between better Hope and Buxton. The residents are once again faithful and need assurances from the Minister of Agriculture on the state of plane at the Conservancy. Mr Speaker, the Region requested the sum of \$45M and received an allocation of \$30M to execute the following works:

- Rehabilitation of trench at Clonbrook
- Rehabilitation of canals at Buxton-Friendship and
- The excavation of canals at BV.

The Ministry has also identified the following projects. While these projects are welcomed, I urge the Minister of Agriculture to put systems in place for monitoring by stakeholders. From the foregoing it is evident that the government is making inadequate budgetary allocations for Region 4.

The Speaker: Time is up Honourable Member.

Mr Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, please grant the Honourable Member fifteen minutes to complete his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

Mr Ernest B Elliot: Finally Mr Speaker, I firmly believe that this Budget caters for no hope for the people of Guyana since the government has failed to address the issues of poverty, unemployment and crime in a substantial way. For sixteen years this government has shown its ineptitude of solving the problems that challenge Guyana and the Guyanese people have become restless and disgruntled as they grapple with life. The people of Region 4 including Georgetown call on this government to shut up, to pack up and get out. The government has to do much more if it is to get on course of building a truly modern and prosperous Guyana. To speak of a modern and prosperous Guyana, the government has to speak about approaches that will reduce poverty, unemployment, crime discrimination and marginalisation and the inadequate allocation of resources across the country. The government is encouraged to pursue these. Thank you very much [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Honourable Mr Komal Chand.

Mr Komal Chand: Cde Speaker, I rise to support this 2008 Budget, the sixteenth Budget of the PPP/C Administration since the historic victory of the PPP-C at the polls on October 5, 1992. The Budget presented under the Theme '*Staying the Course and Advancing the Transformation Agenda*' reaffirms the Administration overarching objectives of maintaining a stable macro-economic environment, a stable children investment

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climate, sustainable levels of saving and investment and an efficient system while protecting and supporting the vulnerable in our society [*Applause*] - It is on this basis that Budget 2008 was formulated. Since taking office in 1992 the Administration has been relentless in seeking to develop the nation towards enhancing citizens' standard of living. Numerous projects and programmes have been executed during the past sixteen years and today Cde Speaker we can proudly say that our citizens enjoy a much improved quality of life [*Applause*].

In the Housing Sector over \$10B has been spent during 1992 and 2007 thereby allowing thousands of Guyanese to become house owners. According to a 2002 Census Report and I quote: "*The capability to construct homes is an indicator of a rise in living standard.*" The Report goes on to say that between 1998 to September 2002 up to 29,175 households or 16% of the total households in this country completed their dwelling an achievement greater than any other single period in the history of our country [*Applause*]. This is testimony to government's commitment to improve the lives and welfare of its citizens.

One of the Administration's greatest success stories has been in the Education Sector. In 1991 \$181M was spent on this Sector while last year over \$18.7B was spent, a 10,125% improvement. This mammoth increase has allowed for a number of schools to be built and rehabilitated while significant resources are being expended on the provision of textbooks and teacher

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training. The 2002 Census Report stated that the attainment of over 90% enrolment in the primary and secondary school age population realises Goal No. 2.

Universal Primary Education: According to the Guyana Millennium Development Goal Report 2007 and I quote: "*The ratio of students to teachers has improved since 1996 with a more pronounced improvement of students to trained teachers.*" It goes on to say and I quote again: "*There are also more trained teachers in primary schools thanks to government's efforts to deliver a better quality of education.*" [Applause] Cde Speaker, these reports speak for themselves and it is quite clear that these investments have guaranteed a brighter future for many of our young people [Applause].

Water provision has also featured prominently in the Administration policy since coming into office. Over the past sixteen years some \$23B have been spent to modernise and rehabilitate this Sector. The 2002 Census found that approximately 76% of households in Guyana have access to safe drinking water when compared to 50% in 1991. Further the Report says and I quote: "*The decline in access to water through public standpipe has declined percentage wise from 10.6 in 1991 to 3.3% in 2002 and in absolute terms from 16,321 households in 1991 to 5,949 in 2002.*" Cde Speaker, it takes me sometime to list numerous accomplishments of this government. However, I would like to say it is quite pleasing and welcoming to have greater expansion in the social sectors year after year. When one takes

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expenditures in Education, Health, Water and Housing and Poverty Alleviation, almost 25% of the Budget is expended in these areas. This must be painted against the backdrop of the PNC government when Social Sector spending was reduced to a single percent of the Budget, that time it was a mere 8% from where it was in 1964, over 20%.

Looking at the rate of poverty we can see increased social sector spending has had a positive effect on poverty moving from 79% in 1989 to 33% presently. Although we have some way to go, it is quite remarkable that in sixteen years the Administration has managed to more than half the rate of poverty. We look forward to the eradication of this scourge long before the next sixteen years.

Cde Speaker, in Region 1 where I abode... In the Region where I abode, Region 3 the past sixteen years has brought significant improvement to the lives and welfare of approximately 103,000 persons. Since taking office the Administration has expended significant sums in transforming the Region. Numerous roads, schools, bridges, health centres, have either been built or rehabilitated to better service residents. Thousands of house lots have been allotted to residents at Belle West, Canal No. 2 Polder, Cornelia Ida on the West Coast of Demerara and La Parfaite Harmonie on the West Bank. In fact I want to give some numbers. In Region 3 we have distributed 4,000 house lots at La Parfaite Harmonie, Onderneeming, Recht-Door-Zee, Belle West, Cornelia

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Ida and Tuschen. [*Interruption: "As many as 5,000"*]
Squatting areas were regularised, over 5,000 squatting areas were regularised - Anna Catherine, Best Foreshore, Cornelia Ida, DeKinderen, DeGroot, Auclyne, Edinburgh, Goed Fortuin, Meten-Meer-Zorg, MonDesir, Stewartville, Vive-La-Force, Vriesland North and South, Nismes, Belle Vue, Tuschen, Zeeburg, and Wild Bush. Phase II in Housing will commence this year. Some three thousand house lots ready for distribution at Westminster, Parfaite Harmonie and Onderneeming [*Applause*]. Awardees are proud owners of their own houses, [*Applause*] thanks to the PPP/Civic Government which seems to be fulfilling what can be described as an unfulfilled dream of the former government to feed, house and clothe this nation [*Applause*].

Just last Friday Cde Speaker the Regional Health Centre infrastructure received a significant boost in commissioning of the Leonora Diagnostic Centre. The diagnostic centre will enable the provision of better health services for communities along the West Coast to Parika. Cde Bherri Ramsarran – Minister of Health spoke at length on this.

Agriculture which comprises a significant portion of the Region's production and employment has featured permanently in the policies and expenditure of the Region. Last year over \$38M representing 20.3% of the Region's Capital Budget was expended on various drainage and irrigation projects across the Region. These projects will ensure farmlands are drained in an adequate

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and timely manner. It was noted last year that the Regional Democratic Council of Region 3 spent over \$182M on capital works representing 99.86% of the budgetary allocation. Cde Speaker, let us all congratulate Region 3 for its good work [*Applause*].

Cde Speaker, there is no doubt the Administration has high respect of our working class of our country. We need not look far. Just perusing the number of labour-friendly legislations which have been enacted under this Administration and I want to name a few:

The Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act

The Occupational Health and Safety Act

The Trade Union Recognition Act

The Prevention of Discrimination Act

Today workers have more right than at any time during the history of our country [*Applause*]. It was under this government of the PPP/Civic Administration that the right to strike was enshrined in our Constitution [*Applause*]. It is this pro-working class nature of the Administration with which we have witnessed continuous increase in the Income Tax Threshold. Just recently it was increased from \$28,000 to \$35,000 per month, a 25% increase. In the Trade Union Movement it would have been a boon if the threshold would have been adjusted to \$50,000 per month. This increase which is estimated to cost the government some \$3B will result in

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approximately 36,000 persons being removed from the Income Tax Threshold. Cde Speaker, also it would have been more pleasing at the current rate of Income Tax of 33.3% been lowered. We hope that this would be addressed in the not too distant future. In fact Cde Speaker, we need to capture the thousands and thousands of professional line earners who are merely paying a pittance of Income Tax to the Guyana Revenue Authority thus leaving the burden of personal Income Tax on the backs of the ordinary 'pay as you earn' employees. It is hoped that with the reform of the Tax System that the burden placed on the PAYE employees would be severely lessened.

Cde Speaker, it is also pleasing to learn that Old Age Pension and Public Assistance have been increased from 1 January 2008 [*Applause*]. Some 35,000 pensioners and 15,000 persons who are on Public Assistance would benefit from this \$1.3B increase. In fact, between 2000 and 2008 the allocation for Old Age Pension and Public Assistance increased by approximately 390% [*Applause*] \$674M in 2000 to \$434N this year. Increase in wages and salaries of government employees have also been improved. Of course, the government workers prefer to say that the economic constraints restricted the Administration from offering better increases which undoubtedly would have favoured. It is however noteworthy that the Public Sector minimum wage since 1992-2007 had increased by 914% or from \$22,801 to \$28,415 per month or US\$22 to US\$142 per month as

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against a cumulative inflation rate of 124% for the period. Further, if you look at the Expenditure-I wages and salaries for Public Servants you would observe that this has moved from \$3.2B when the PPP Government got into office to \$22B today.

[Interruption: 'What about the inflation rate?' "I mentioned inflation rate – 124%" 'What you could buy with that?' "Eh ..." 'Is a new basket of goods, you know ...' "We are going to talk about it just now"]

I wish to refer to the comment that was made by the Honourable Member, Debra Barker with respect to the pay of newly recruited Constables. She commented that they were merely being paid a sum of \$34,219 per month, and she rightly said small, describing it as a pittance but the point of the matter, we have to look back at where we came from on 2nd October, 1992 and where we are today *[Applause]*. We were competing then with the Republic of Haiti to be at the bottom of the scale in this part of the world. We were a highly indebted nation, our infrastructure was in disarray. When the Demerara Harbour Bridge was in place you had to be careful when you were traversing it, long hours of black out, dilapidated school buildings, homelessness. In short, our economy was in tatters and therefore one has to look where we came from, we have to look at our legacy and we have to recognise that we have indeed travelled a far way; where we have come from and where we are today – that we have to recognise. *[Interruption: 'You are not moving we're talking about now' "Well we have to go*

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back with the 'fire and mo fire' and I have to refer you to Dr Reid's contribution when Burnham died, what he said and go back to what he did in the city in 1962 and 1963"]

The Administration over the years has been aggressively seeking to diversify the economy from its traditional base although we are still very much dependent on these important Sectors for foreign exchange and employment. The Honourable Minister of page 23 of his presentation alluded to this and I quote: ... *[Interruption: 'Ah man, tell us about the subvention for this' " I will come to that just now"]*.

Madam Speaker, this is what I am quoting from the Budget:

While the traditional sectors of our economy continue to grow and show great resilience our government places high priority on activities promoting accelerated diversification of the economy. In this regard, non-traditional agricultural sub-sectors – Tourism, Alternative Energy and Information Technology are among the future growth poles.

(I quote what the Minister said).

Cde Speaker, the support of the government to the Sugar Industry is indeed commendable. The Industry which has been the mainstay of our economy for many decades today, Cde Speaker, I challenge as a result of the 36% cut

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in price received for Sugar exported to the European Union. The cut in price which enters its third phase from 1 October this year will see the price being reduced by a further 14% bringing the total cut to 25%. Already St. Kitts & Nevis has closed its Industry after three centuries of operation, Trinidad and Tobago has significantly contracted its Industry and Barbados is moving in the same direction, while Jamaica is seeking to completely privatise its run-down Industry. In Guyana, however, sugar has a viable and secure future primarily as a result of the Administration's support. This year you will witness the commencement of the operation of the ultra-modern state-of-the-art US\$169M sugar factory at Skeldon [*Applause*]. The factory which is the centre of GUYSUCO's Strategic Plan is capable of producing 110,000 tons of sugar per annum at about eight cents per pound when it becomes fully operational according to the Guyana Sugar Corporation. The low-cost producer estate will bring down the average cost of production across the Industry and will ensure that our Industry is competitive thus ensuring its sustainability.

The Honourable Finance Minister in his presentation alluded to the US\$110M Sugar Packaging Plant at Enmore Estate which is expected to begin later this year. The plant which should be completed next year will be the most modern and hygienic sugar packaging plant in the Caribbean and will allow GUYSUCO to meet the high demand for its highly lucrative valued added sugar in many markets.

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I regret that Mr Vieira is not here, Honourable Member, but I must refer to his contribution with respect to the Sugar Industry. Cde Speaker, it was interesting to hear Cde Vieira's presentation on the Sugar Industry. He sounded as if he was a great expert and analyst of the Industry but Cde Speaker Cde Vieira's Party must be reminded that that Party presided over the miniaturisation of the Sugar Industry although it has ruined the Industry [*Applause*]. Cde Speaker, the Sugar Industry was fully nationalised in May 1976. During the first six years of nationalisation the average production of the Industry stood at 292,911 tons during the first five years of nationalisation ... [*Interruption: 'Who burn down the cane?' 'That is what you got when you nationalised the Industry*]. During the last six years of the PNC government from 1987-1992 the average production plummeted to 180,985 tons. Finally, looking at the last six years of the PPP government ... *I compare six year periods ... 2002-2007 the average production climbed to 288,481 tons almost reaching the average production that was obtainable in the early years of nationalisation.*

Cde Speaker, we have to take Cde Vieira seriously. He is not employed by my politician, he was the Administrative Manager of Versailles and Schoonard Estate, an estate which provided employment to hundreds of field and factory workers. Unfortunately, under Vieira's watch, the Versailles and Schoonard Sugar Factory was poorly managed and was therefore closed in 1978. Cde Speaker, I don't know who had this bright idea [*Interruption:*] this

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bright idea but Cde Vieira was no doubt part of it, it was the construction of the waterway from Versailles to Leonora and to give a good picture of this waterway that they constructed when they closed the factory and want to lead on GUYSUCO's Report and Accounts 1979, hear what they said about the waterway: Versailles-Uitvlugt

The construction of the waterway for the transportation of cane from Versailles to either Leonora or Uitvlugt factories was completed and officially opened by the Minister of Agriculture on the 15th July, 1978 in time for the commencement of the 1978 second crop. This waterway also with some further development also opened up the possibility of serving as an alternative route for the shipment of sugar of Uitvlugt or Leonora factories to the Demerara Sugar Terminals.

Cde Speaker, the factory was closed. This big Czar who was talking about the Sugar Industry closed the factory. You had the waterway excavated. It could not serve its purpose and so that can be deemed a stillborn project; it could not facilitate the movement of laden cane punts from Versailles to Leonora and Uitvlugt Estates much less to facilitate the movement or transportation sugar to the Demerara Sugar Terminal. No sooner than the waterway was dug it failed to serve its purpose it became the white elephant. It turned out the closure of the Sugar Industry was a premature act. The management of the

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estate soon after was forced to cease cane growing since there was no way to grind the canes resulting in the displacement of field workers having already displaced the factory workers. The experiment of Versailles and Schoonard Estates did not end there; rice cultivation was attempted. I believe the cane land was not suitable for rice and therefore another project was abandoned, another white elephant under Vieira's watch.

Cde Speaker, this is not all, to avoid paying the workers their severance pay GUYSSUCO was asked though undoubtedly the relationship between the management of Versailles and Schoonard Estate and the then government to absorb the displaced workers in GUYSSUCO. All but for a service from Versailles to Schoonard Estate the workers had to take their case to the Appeal Court to get their severance pay and indeed the Appeal Court rules in their favour. The management of Versailles and Schoonard Estates appeared as if they were still in massa days in attempting to deny the workers their severance pay. Cde Speaker we could say that was many years ago but now let's look at Houston Estate at which I believe Cde Anthony Vieira, the Honourable Member, is a shareholder. Over the past few years the production plummeted. In 2004 it was 2,057 tons, in 2005 it was 2,187 tons, in 2006 – 2,566 tons and last year it was a mere 1,800 tons and Houston maintained its share of production. The marginal decline in overall production over the last few years would have been minuscule.

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Cde Speaker, there is no doubt that Skeldon is the jewel in the crown of the strategic plan. What is interesting is they are not ... I think the Honourable Member Murray is now questioning the location of the new sugar factory. Before critics were questioning the investment itself now they are questioning the location. Cde Speaker one cannot make a hard decision and change the course at one's whims and fancies. Yes, there have been delays in the completion of the new factory. With respect to the field expansion, there also has been inordinate delay.

Cde Speaker, Booker Tate Management which Cde Vieira glorifies so often ought to account for the delay of both projects. Cde Speaker, at last the new Skeldon factory will be ready for operation by the early part of the second half of this year and we are looking forward to farmers and GUYSSUCO to hasten the preparation and cultivation of another 9,000 hectares of land which would make it possible for a new factory to operate fully in another twenty months. Cde Speaker, certainly, the new Skeldon factory will be fully operable in both crops having enough cane to realise the yearly production of 110,000 tons of sugar. Nothing is wrong with criticism and critical analysis of a project but we have to be aware of the doomsayers especially when the livelihood of some 20,000 workers and their family, making a total of over one hundred persons who would be affected. Let us congratulate the Sugar Industry and the stakeholders including the hardworking sugar workers in taking up this

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challenge towards making the Sugar Industry ...
[Applause].

In the face of the 36% cut unilaterally imposed by the European Union and the new climatic situation the stakeholders are working assiduously to place the industry on a firm foundation to make it sustainable. Cde Speaker, 2007 has reminded us that our country is not isolated from the rest of the world as well as reminding us about our vulnerability as part of the global economic system. The record surge in the prices of many of our imported commodities exceeded all expectations and presented policyholders in Guyana and the world over with unparalleled levels of imported inflation. Today, the average UK family now spend seven hundred and fifty pounds a year more on food than twelve months ago, the world's grocery bill has jumped by 21% in 2007, Russian bread prices have doubled. When one observes the level of increases in many of our commodities we would see that our country feared much better than many of our neighbours for example, the price of a barrel of gasoline at the beginning of 2007 stood at just \$62 and just three hundred and sixty-five short days the price skyrocketed by 53% over \$95 a barrel yet the Guyana consumers facing a marginal increase. The same scenario can be repeated for many commodities.

Cde Speaker I wish to comment on the observation made by the Honourable Member, Cde... on Industrial Court. I think Cde Chairman that the Honourable Member is not aware of the implications of an Industrial Court

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The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member.

Hon Ms Gail Texeira: Mr Speaker ... fifteen minutes to continue.

Hon Mr. Komal Chand: Yes Cde Speaker. Unions in Guyana ... you have many small Unions. Many Unions are unable to get lawyers and this is going to be a very costly exercise to find lawyers with the necessary skill to be able to argue before the Industrial Court but what is important to note and I want to read some of the notes I have made here. It is said that Industrial Relations is seen as a voluntary process and anytime we seek to remove the voluntarism and invoke legal proceedings to resolve this dispute and problems we run the risk of moving away from the concept which has guided us over the years. To create an Industrial Court at this time in our history is like putting workers at a disadvantage since those who could afford the best lawyers stand as a favourite and employees are always in this position. The workers would never have the means to match the workers in the Industrial Court. What was muted about was the setting up of Industrial Tribunal which is not so elaborate. But the point of the matter is at the tripartite level the TUC and CAGI just two years ago disagreed even with the setting up of an Industrial Tribunal and said that the time is not right for that. So here we have a Comrade agitating and supporting without wanting to discuss this issue with the Trade Union Movement without taking into consideration even the PUC which represents only 35% of the organised labour now, what is their view in your

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haste. As I said, only recently a Tripartite Commission disagreed that such a step is necessary at this point in time.

Cde Speaker, I wish to comment on the Critchlow Labour College since my good friend is asking me to report to the Critchlow Labour College. I must say that I was amazed to hear that the Honourable Member, Cde Anna Ally describing herself as an Educator and saying that, Cde Speaker, Critchlow Labour College was set up by the Former President, Forbes Burnham, this is a distortion, this is something recent and it is a distortion of our history coming from an Educator. Cde Speaker, something is wrong. My colleague from the AFC quite rightly point out just now about the level of some of our teachers and one could understand that the comrade who said that she was an educator, coming here to say Burnham set up the Critchlow Labour College. Comrades, Critchlow Labour College was financed by AFILD (American Institute for Free Labour Development). It was the former General Secretary of the TUC, Pollydore after he saw the Barbadian Labour College he lobbied the Americans to get money to build the Critchlow College and it has nothing to do with Burnham. You are doing a disservice to Burnham; you are a bad teacher and you are a school teacher [*Laughter and Applause*]. What a distortion of our history Cde Speaker? We need to sympathise with the pupils of that school. As I said the Critchlow Labour College was built by funds provided by AFILD. [*Interruption: 'What is*

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AFILD?’ “*American Institute for Free Labour Development*”) [Applause]. Forbes Burnham got into the business when he took the Socialist posture and wanted to hi-vault AFILD from the College – he stopped receiving money from AFLD to teach our workers and began to provide a subvention to the College. (‘Who began to do that?’)

That is the important point you must know how Burnham got into it. What has happened over the years ... the College is supposed to provide Trade Union Education, like in Barbados. The Barbados Labour College trains industrial practitioners and remains so largely. The College has moved away from what it was set up for, Cde Speaker, and this was accepted We had discussion with the TUC and I have an agreement here that was signed on 17 January 2001 and I can give you the details of the Agreement ... This is what has been accepted by the TUC and I quote:

It has been recommended that Critchlow Labour College be returned to its original objective of training for Trade Union Leaders.

The College has moved away from its objective; it has moved away. Now, what has happened ... and I am not opposed to workers and to dropouts to get training at the Critchlow Labour College but you want democracy at the College, you want transparency and you want accountability. What the President of the TUC said

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recently, Cde Jillian Burton, a candidate in the last election on the PNC top up list ... She described what was going on at the College and referred to three musketeers [*Laughter and Applause*]. Subvention to College is going to pay the staff of the TUC; subvention of the College is used as Travelling Allowance of some big ones. Nobody is opposed to the College. We need democracy. The Chairman of College by conventional practice always is the President of the TUC. Since Cde Burton has become the President of the TUC she has not been allowed to sit in the chair. The former President Garnette remained the Chairman of the Board. [*Interruption: 'Member'*]

No, but she was exposing non-transparency and unaccountability and the lack of democracy [*Applause*] and that is what is happening there. We want ... What should happen is you should have a new Board with some people removed from the Board. You want the Board to be independent; you want proper accountability so that we could prevent physical and institutional destruction of the College [*Applause*]. I am not opposed to subvention being given to the College. I support workers' education. I want the College to go back to its original objective. We want transparency and accountability, and that is why you must support her. [*Interruption*]

Cde Speaker, in conclusion our economy is exhibiting significant resilience against the backdrop of considerable increases in the prices for many of our imports and adverse weather conditions preventing the optimal level

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of production. Lastly, I would like to congratulate the Hon Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh and his hardworking staff of the Ministry for the excellent work in the preparation of this 2008 Budget and the superb and excellent job in managing the economy in this very testing time [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Honourable Member Ms Latchmin Punalall ...

Ms Latchmin Punalall: Thank you Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker and Honourable Members of this House I rise to make my contribution on the 2008 Budget. The goal of spending money in a nation should be for social and economic benefits across every strata of society. In order to enhance and guarantee this there must be people's participation from the community level to Parliament. The revenue of our country is generated by the working class citizens who labour in field, factories, offices and even the dangerous high seas. Therefore, the government who is tasked with spending these revenues must do so with much prudence, knowing that they have to give an account to the men and women of our nation and also to Almighty God [*Applause*]. This Budget like many others has stipulated billions to be spent in various areas of national activities and development. Over the past year, vast sums of monies were already spent in most of these areas yet hunger, poverty, sickness, crime, illiteracy, immorality and even death linger in our midst. No one spends without looking for returns and as 2008 progresses and this Budget is executed the AFC calls on the

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government to ensure that the people of Guyana visibly benefit from these expenditures ... *[Applause]*.

Mr Speaker, the 2008 Budget estimates \$19B for the Education Sector. In the year 2007 expenditure in the Education Sector amounted to \$17.1B. It is projected in the 2008 Budget I quote:

Over \$728M will be spent on teachers' training to upgrade capabilities and curriculum modules, provide teaching aid to teachers and learning materials to students.

During the year 2007 and previous years, private educational institutions were on the rise and many were forced to resort to these institutions. Even students who attend public schools have to supplement their education by paying for private lessons. Private lesson is big business because public education is deficient *[Applause]*. Will we see our children not having to take private lessons to supplement their education given by the government? Or will we continue to see more private educational institutions establish during this year? I can safely say in the year 1979, 1980 my fellow students and I did not take private lessons and in the secondary schools I had textbooks given to me by the then government *[Applause]*. What we need here Mr Speaker is proper management of the people's money and implementation of these programmes mentioned in the 2008 Budget. The reality is all students need to benefit from their entitled

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education. Mr Speaker, we call on the government to allocate finances to moral and religious education in the 2008 Budget [*Applause*]. There is a need for a balance between moral and material, the secular and religious. The government should spend money to rid this country of the many social ills which have impregnated our society to the point where we have to endure massacres. Due to the massacres in Lusignan and Bartica where twenty-three persons died fear and depression have gripped our country. Many would like to limit this to Bartica and Lusignan but this is a countrywide situation and should be recognised as such. After visiting these two areas where the massacres took place and a number of communities across Guyana I recognise the fear and depression in the lives of people across this land. The AFC is calling for a countrywide counselling to be done with private individuals who are in need of private counselling and reaching those who can benefit by using the media. What is on the government's media is causing more vexation and depression [*Applause*]. Subtract some of that for experts to give guidance and good counselling.

Mr Speaker, the social ills in our country are many. How much money does the government intend to spend to eliminate such social ills and pornography, vulgar music, prostitution, drugs, alcohol, et cetera. The root cause of rape originates from these social ills. Why they are not provided for in the 2008 Budget and addressed in the *Stamp-It-Out* paper proposed by the Honourable Minister,

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Priya Manickchand. Mr Speaker, unless the government addresses these root causes fear will continue in our country. The AFC will not settle for a national campaign against symptoms without addressing all causes of our country's domestic problems [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, social ills and domestic problems continue as women from Grassfield, Lusignan came to visit me this morning with their problems. Drinking and cooking water is needed immediately. They pay \$2000 for four hundred gallons of water although pipelines are installed. There is no access to water. They were asked to pay \$4,000 this morning for the same amount.

Mr Speaker, domestic violence is on the rise in our society. Domestic violence can only be eliminated by dealing with the causes which have impregnated our society. We call on the government to recognise that pornography, vulgar music, prostitution, drugs, alcohol, immorality, et cetera are leading causes of domestic violence and finances should be provided to eliminate these social ills. These social ills largely and substantially are as a result of poor economic situation. Low employment creates heavy poverty and high cost of living. All of these combined cause low morality levels, and an absence of religious value aggravates these social problems. We must, as quickly as possible, solve these larger problems.

Mr Speaker, I close as a servant and a child of God by quoting two verses from the Holy Bible:

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In all thy ways acknowledge Him and he shall direct thy path ... [Proverbs 3:6]

Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people ... [Proverbs 14:34].

I thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Member. I understand ... I wasn't here at the last Budget Debate. I understand this is your maiden presentation and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Honourable Member [*Applause*]. I do and I assure that other Members of the House look forward to many more presentations of this quality. Thank you very much.

Honourable Member Mrs Sahoy-Shury

Mrs Philomena Sahoy-Shury: Thank you. I stand here tonight in this Ninth Parliament of Guyana to express my opinion on the Budget Estimates of 2008 of an expenditure of \$119.3B. The Minister of Finance, Hon Dr Ashni Singh excelled in his preparation so drafting a budget of construction and excellence, preparing for transformation and advancement of Guyana's path to progress and prosperity [*Applause*]. No one in this House can deny the fact that our monetary and economic systems are in capable hands. Mr Speaker, Members of this Parliament maybe forget that budgetary allocations are estimates, projecting expenditure for the year both

Capital and Current taking into its ambit also Regional Expenditure.

Mr Speaker, I would like to deal a little bit on health and what the Honourable Member Dr Norton ... Maybe he was too young or he is suffering from a strange spell of forgetfulness ... Just to mention a few aspects in the Health Sector ... Years ago and maybe many will say that why remember the past but I would like to remind us all here tonight that a man who cannot remember the past, think presently of what is happening because he never ever does anything constructive for the future, he will make the same mistakes again.

Years ago at the public hospital two pregnant women use to sleep in one bed; he spoke about sheets, you hardly had beds much less to have sheets. When the building was in a dilapidated state and how many of us remember that ants use to kill babies and I can go on and on about the hospitals and the health centres, few of them in this country. I would state what happened in those years when the hospitals were not accessible to the poor man. What we have today? Improvement of hospitals, not only the Georgetown Hospital but all Regional Hospitals and Health Centres and today, the health bill stands at \$12.1B.

Let me deal a little also with Education. The PNC should bow their heads in shame. Over the years in Education, the schools – all run down, insufficient teachers especially in the rural areas. How many of the students that the PNC sent abroad returned to Guyana to help in

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development of the educational system? Mr Speaker, many students were sent to the University of New Brunswick and Mount Allison in Nova Scotia. In those years Guyana was declared bankrupt – no foreign currency. There was no money, no foreign currency to pay school fees for these students, no money to pay rent, buy books, travelling and food. They scraped out a living in shame because of bad management of the monetary system and worst of all corruption in the PNC government ... [*Applause*]. Today, the education allocation stands at \$19B because the PPP/Civic Government is committed to the education of our children, so preparing them to take their rightful place in society and building an educated nation. Mr Speaker, I say this is progress so ushering in a new era of overall development. I say also only the PPP/Civic Government could do this because we care, we love our people and our country and we are prepared not only to make promises but to fulfil them.

Drainage and Irrigation: Mr Speaker, Drainage and Irrigation was \$3.7M and \$2.1B. I listened to Members of the Opposition castigating this government on its policy of Drainage and Irrigation, when they are fully aware that the citizens are aware that under the PNC regime there was no plan, no concrete study done when they took over the Sugar Industry to understand how drainage was implemented and how vital these canals and trenches were, not only to the cane-fields but the rice and other farmers. Many of these canals and trenches were

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inter-connected to augment proper and adequate drainage systems. Many of them were abandoned and others filled up for example, in Georgetown ... Bourda, Punt Trench. Water is no respecter of anyone and if the channels through which it flows are no longer there and appropriate mechanisms are not put in place then there will be floods. There is no alternative to the rainfall water. Mr Speaker, to alleviate the trauma that our people experience with flooding this government has spent and will continue to spend millions of dollars every year to buy pumps, repair kokers where necessary, dredge canals and employ our people to maintain trenches in every community throughout this country.

Now Mr Speaker, as to the 2005 floods this government made a conscious decision to employ our people in various communities throughout this country to do drainage work. The PNC said it was an election ploy because we implemented it in 2006. Then why is it that they are still employed unto today? ... Because it has been said here and they want to give the people the impression that this government is doing nothing, that there is no improvement in this country but I would like to remind them and I don't know how many of them remember or even know or even had interest that couple years ago the Government and the Opposition sat together to form the Depressed Community Needs Committee to alleviate some of the problems and they said that we did not do anything in Buxton. I would like to relate here today/tonight that this Committee comprised ten

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members, five from the PPP and five from the PNC. Fifteen Million dollars were awarded to Buxton and I would like to state what was done.

The \$15M was transferred to the Region to be given to the NDC ... [*Interruption: '... because that was a Section in the Finance Committee then'*]

Yes, the components include,

- 1) Desilting all street drains within the township by shovel men.
- 2) In Buxton - Installation of twenty-four tube culverts within the township
- 3) Filling, excavating, building and shaping over 400 rods of crown dam
- 4) Procurement and installation of three irrigation tubes below the crown dam
- 5) Desilting of the Company Trench between Buxton and Friendship
- 6) Desilting the Buxton and Friendship Middle Walk Dam
- 7) Clearing of 200 acres of new farmlands
- 8) Construction of an intake koker at the Buxton-Friendship Crown Dam

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Mr Speaker, it is sad that the Opposition should try to let the Guyanese feel that this PPP Government did nothing for the people in Buxton. But you know it is said,

*Oh what a tangled web we weave when first
we practise to deceive ...*

[Applause].

Housing

What the PPP-Civic has done and continues to do of bringing shelter to thousands and thousands of poor Guyanese is indeed remarkable and we should be commended for this aspect in honouring the wishes and aspirations of the people. These lands, the squatting lands, be it Sophia, be it Caneville, be it Rasville, all the squatting lands and even the lands that we are regularising now ... they did not drop from the sky or were they exported to another country, they were there all the time but the PNC did not see the need to give shelter to their people but what they did, Mr Speaker, in Sophia they took men with guns to chase the people out the lands at Sophia, they took dogs to chase the people out of Sophia but what the PPP/Civic did ... and I could tell you about Wisroc in Region 10. *[Interruption: 'One Region at a time' "Yes, one Region at a time, I agree with you" 'Start from No. 1']*

So much so in Sophia today, be it Section A, B, C D, E, F, R or Plum Park, Cummings Lodge and Cummings Park, this PPP-Civic regularised these areas at a minimum

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cost and the money that these people pay, the government doesn't take this money, this money is for infrastructure works [*Applause*]. What has happened today, [*I have one jet, I should deal with one at a time*]. Sophia has roads, Sophia has lights, Sophia has water and Sophia in every community, every area that this PPP-Civic Government regularised, we cater for playfields, we cater for health, we cater for schools, we cater for day-care centres and we cater for community centres, all [*Applause*], and Sophia has today a public school, a health centre, a police station, a day-care centre and a community centre.

Now Rasville, let us deal with Rasville. The PNC, because maybe the people are Rastas and they thought that maybe the people can't read and write too good, they told them to go on lands, and they did on the train lines. How could a government manipulate a nation by telling them to go on the lands without anything? If this government was a bad or wicked government, we could have told the people in Rasville that they had to move off. What we did? We regularised Rasville.

Mr Speaker, I will now go to Tiger Bay. In Tiger Bay, a society, an area that the PNC was fully conscious, they knew that those people needed help. We are talking about social ... What social amenities did the PNC give the people in Tiger Bay? What did they do to help the people in Tiger Bay? They have many children in Tiger Bay not going to school, begging on the streets in Tiger Bay and they did nothing, absolutely nothing. They allowed them to deteriorate and decay. Mr Speaker,

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today I am proud to announce that a conscious decision was made by this government [*Applause*] to give Tiger Bay one hundred and fifty house-lots [*Applause*] in Diamond, Tuschen and Belle Field-Haslington and not only that Mr Speaker, if you all be quiet, you will learn. What else? This government has allocated over \$15M to buy sand, cement, etcetera to build a 20 x 15 house for each individual that we gave land to ... [*Applause*].

Mr Speaker, this Parliament, and I have been in many, was the most negative Parliament by the Opposition but the PNC continued to print negativism, they don't know anything about constructive criticism, everything is destructive criticism and this is why they are in a negative position at this time. Beware! You would continue to be in a negative position for a long time. The PPP-Civic thinks positively all the time and we will continue to receive the positive vibes of the people of Guyana so advancing the transformation so needed in the interest of all the people.

It will be remiss of me Mr Speaker if I do not deal with the massacres in Lusignan and Bartica. A sad spectacle to be recorded in our history books. In 2008 such a fiasco transpired in our country. The situation is indeed deplorable and inhumane. Certain members of the PNC are attributing these acts to poverty. What a fallacy! Is it that they are questioning the intelligence of right-thinking Guyanese? While the PPP/Civic joins with the families in their grief one point must be made pellucidly clear: Guyanese will not be duped into a false sense of

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uncertainty, restlessness and fear. I do not ascribe to that point that they said because of poverty we are having crime, this is not so. I would like to express that the perpetrators and their bosses cannot win. We must all stand strong unitedly and be determined that we will not let it happen again. There are many fiends in our midst who do not want to see progress, but to all Guyanese I say we of the PPP/C would like them to know and we say to them, all the people in the country who are fearful et cetera, that the struggle might look long and dreary but beyond every dark cloud there is a silver lining and that silver lining will only come under the ambit of the PPP-Civic Government [*Applause*].

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

Hon Mr Samuel Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another fifteen minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed

Motion carried

Hon Philomena Sahoy-Shury: Thank you Mr Speaker I would like to deal a little, Sir, on roads. Irrespective of the Opposition's laments concerning building of roads, vital links in the communities and proper access from Region to Region essential to the development of our country, we will continue to do so. Why is the Opposition so perturbed about the building drive - Schools, hospitals, police stations etcetera? Because we

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have proven to them beyond the shadow of a doubt that with proper management and careful fiscal policies, the days are gone when children used to be taught in dilapidated schools, where patients – the sick no longer have to be care for in unhealthy conditions, where the armed forces – Police, Army and Fire could operate under humane conditions. Mr Speaker, you do not know, but years ago they use to take four hours to travel from Skeldon to Georgetown. Those are the type of roads we had to travel on – Rosignol to Georgetown. Mr Speaker, these are the facts, the PNC fail and they do not want to see the PPP-Civic Government progress. Facts and great writers have said that facts and figures speak without passion or favour but they are irrefutable [*Applause*]. Mr Speaker, I would like to quote from what the Honourable Minister of Finance said: He said:

I conclude by placing on record ... The task now before us is to maintain momentum in advancing the transformation and modernisation of our country. Our government is firmly committed to maintaining and enhancing the physical and institutional infrastructure that is required to increase private investment, create job, improve livelihood and generate wealth.

Mr Speaker, this government is well aware that there is much more to be done for the people of Guyana. We are very conscious but if the wishes and aspirations of our

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people are to be realised then the development and shaping of our country are in our hands – all of us. We of the PPP-Civic are dedicated and determined to commit ourselves to this reality. I ask the Opposition why not walk with us [*Applause*] to achieve this reality for the children of Guyana?

Now, Mr Speaker, in committing and asking everyone to support this Budget, I would like to leave with us and this nation words uttered by the great Martin Luther King Jnr. and I want ... please let us be quiet ...

But there is something I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline.

I thank you [*Applause*].

Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Mr Speaker, I propose that the House be adjourned until later today at 2 o'clock.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member; thank you very much.

Adjourned Accordingly At 24:10H