

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

46th Sitting

14:12h

Wednesday 5 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

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

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(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

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

The Hon Dr Frank C S Anthony MP

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

The Hon B H Robeson Benn MP

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics

**The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP

Minister of Labour

The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Minister of Human Services and Social Security

The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP

Minister in the Ministry of Education

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

Minister in the Ministry of Health

*Non-elected Minister **Elected Member from TUF

The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP

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Minister in the Ministry of Finance

The Hon Manniram Prashad MP

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

The Hon Gail Teixeira MP

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal MP, Chief Whip

Ms Bibi S Shadick MP

(R# 3 – Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP

Mr Albert Atkinson JP, MP

(R# 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)

Mr Komal Chand CCH, JP, MP

(R# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP

- (AOL)

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

*** Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP

- (AOL)

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Water

***Non-elected Member

***Mrs Pauline R Sukhai MP

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Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of

Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP

Mr Norman A Whittaker MP

(R# 1 - Barima/Waini)

Members of the Opposition (28)

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

Mr Robert HO Corbin

Leader of the Opposition

Mr Winston S Murray CCH, MP

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl MP

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Mr E Lance Carberry MP

Chief Whip

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP

Mr Anthony Vieira

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP

Mr Keith Scott MP

Miss Amna Ally MP

Mr Dave Danny MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Aubrey C Norton MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Ernest B Elliot MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Miss Judith David-Blair MP

(R# 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Mr Mervyn Williams MP

(Re# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Ms Africo Selman MP

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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)

Mr James K McAllister MP - (AOL)

(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 - (AOL)

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

Mr Everall N Franklin MP

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs

Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

PRAYERS

The **Clerk** reads the **Prayer**

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated Honourable Members.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Honourable Members, we welcome this afternoon, students from the Dena Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre from Annai, North Rupununi, Region 9. I would like to ask you to give them a warm welcome. *[Applause]* I am sure you will join with me in thanking them and congratulating them for their beautiful rendition, just prior to this Sitting. Before I call the first Speaker for this afternoon, please be notified that I have made a grave omission, which I wish to apologise for and to correct. There is a large number of students from the Hinterland community that is present here today, including students from the Dena Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre and I will ask you to give them a warm welcome also. *[Applause]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

Government Business

The Speaker: Thank you very much. Honourable Members, we can now resume the debate on Budget for the year 2008 and the first Speaker this afternoon is the Honourable Member Mr E Lance Carberry.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate of the 2008 National Budget. In doing so, I wish to congratulate the young and bright Minister of Finance, the Hon Ashni Singh for his efforts to re-import the substantive content of his office and accordingly, I extend my personal congratulations.

Mr Speaker, there was a time not so long ago when many of us were convinced that the office of Minister of Finance was fictional and it is in that regard that I am happy to urge him to 'Stay on Course'. I read the Budget Speech very carefully and must confess that I had difficulty matching the claim, *Advancing the Transformation Agenda* with the facts, information and experience of *we the people*. In fact, it is clear to all, that particularly since 1998, the better instincts of the PPP/C leadership have predominated and this is reflected in the performance of the PPP/C in Government. It is self-evident that the concept embodied in the word transmogrification is more appropriate than the word

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transformation, therefore, if the Minister is describing the present reality, I recommend that he should rename the sub-theme, *Advancing the Transmogrification Agenda*.

Mr Speaker, I am fortunate to have heard and be enthralled by my alumni, friend and colleague, the shadow Minister of Finance and Development, the Honourable Mr Winston Shripaul Murray ... *[Interruption: Ow, Shripaul!]* ... who provided this National Assembly with an outstandingly excellent and comprehensive review of the 2008 Budget. *[Applause]* All would agree that his presentation was amply evident of his thorough grasp of the fundamental and the necessary conditions for peace, stability, development, focus and prosperity for all Guyanese in there somewhere.

In addition, I am happy to have benefited from the presentations of all of the MP's on the benches of the PNCR-1G. *[Applause]* They have amply demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the on-the-ground realities in Guyana at this time. The Administration, I am sure, would benefit from their review of what has been reported here.

Mr Speaker, you are aware of the level of cynicism which is present in this Act of 2007, that this 2008 Budget Debate will turn out to be no more than a dialogue with the devil ... *[Laughter]* that in the end, the Ayes will have their way, until the beginning of the festival of the

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supplementary [*Laughter*]. I wonder how soon, the season will begin this year. Mr Speaker, I have been intrigued and amused by the vain attempts of Members on the Government benches to respond to or refute the confident assertions of our shadow Minister of Finance and Development. They have only succeeded in convincing me that the Shakespearian observation, *plenty of sound and fury signifying nothing*, is an adequate description of them. [*Applause*]

Unfortunately, the PPP/C Government has imported a new and very active Member, known as 'not me'. Although the PNC/R-1G has been out of Government, since October, 1992, it is instructive that the Government continues to cast blame on the PNC/R-1G for all of the ills and mis-haps they have visited on the hapless people of Guyana. We all know the refrain, *it is not we, is the PNC-R-1G*.

Mr Speaker, the more I have listened to the leadership of the PPP/C, the more I am reminded of that intriguing scene from Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' when he meets the three witches for the first time and because of the predictions that they made to him, he posed the question,

*... in the name of truth are you fantastical
or that indeed which outwardly you see ...*

When I listened yesterday to the presentation of the Honourable Minister Clement Rohee, the question did occur to me. Since I have been spared the need to delve

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into the details and minutiae of the 2008 Budget, I want to devote my presentation to philosophical and conceptual issues which are pertinent on the six broad areas set out by the Minister on Page 3 of the Budget speech. For that, I will use the framework of the environment.

Mr Speaker, the Guyanese people are listening to this Budget debate to hear whether, unlike other previous PPP/C Budgets, they can look forward to

- a secure environment that guarantees their safety and protection,
- an improved quality and delivery of education,
- increased job availability, living wages and salaries,
- lower prices,
- affordable and quality potable water through their taps,
- affordable, stable and reliable electricity,
- better and affordable homes, et cetera

In other words, they are tired of the plenty poor people syndrome. They want peace, stability, development, progress and prosperity [*Applause*]. An annual budget, such as the 2008 National Budget, should be located within an environment for which there is a clearly stated

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vision for the future which informs a coherent long to medium term development strategy of the Government that is fully articulated and publicly known.

Mr Speaker, the Government's incontinences with its Constitutional and moral responsibility to the people of Guyana should stride to win public endorsements and ownership for that vision of the future of Guyana. What is the PPP/C's vision for Guyana? Mr Speaker the economists in this National Assembly would be familiar with the concept of revealed preferences. If we apply that to our experiences, since 1993, it would appear that the revealed preference of the PPP/C Administration is for the perpetuation of the growth of plenty poor people.

In the absence of any explicit PPP/C vision for the future of Guyana or any known PPP/C National development Strategy, though the Administration has engaged in a flirtatious relationship with the National Development Strategy, prepared by, and I quote,

... over one hundred and fifty members of Guyanese society from various walks of life and from various fields of endeavour...

The PNC/R-1G tabled a motion in the Eight Parliament with one of the resolve clauses requiring that this National Assembly accepts the National Development Strategy and the measures and policies therein as an overarching strategy for pursuing the economic and social transformation of Guyana. This motion was passed on 15

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December 2005 as Resolution No. 84. Mr Speaker, as you are aware, due to the dissolution of the Eighth Parliament, this motion lapsed, however, due to our concern for the Nation's well-being, the PNCR-1G reintroduced the motion which was debated and sadly negated by the use of the Government majority on 14 December 2006. What this confirms is that in the absence of a PPP/C-owned National Development Strategy, the Government is happy to continue its present approach which has been elevated mendicancy to the highest altar of economic strategy.

Mr Speaker, the National Budget consistent with the tenets of programme budgeting should represent the programme for the realisation of the Government's long term strategy for the development of the country. However, in the absence of such a strategy, we continue to have an annual Budget that is driven essentially by projects for which the Government has received concessionary points or loans for a bundle of infrastructural projects, that according to the very stark observations contained in the annual reports of the Office of the Auditor General, provide the opportunity for the unlawful and corrupt leakages from the public purse ... in other words, white-collar corruption. Mr Speaker, as my colleague, the Honourable Member Anthony Vieira stated, *never before in the history of Guyana has so much been spent to achieve so little.* [Applause]

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Mr Speaker, permit me to turn my attention to addressing some of the unhealthy realities in the National environment which undermine the achievements of the development objectives of a broad area stated in the 2008 Budget. The first broad area, the Minister of Finance states and I quote,

... we will continue to manage the economy responsibly and avoid short-term actions that can undermine our potential long-term growth...

As my colleague the Honourable Winston Murray has stated, peace and security are inextricably intertwined with progress and development, therefore, it is important to recognise the contradiction between the sentiments in the Budget and the reality of the actions of the Government.

Mr Speaker, the Peoples National Congress Reform has been unequivocal in its condemnation of the brutal murders of 23 Guyanese at Lusignan and Bartica, yet, at a time when the Government should be seeking to bond the Nation together to collectively address our deteriorating and precarious national security situation, the PPP/C has chosen to crank up their propaganda machine, abusing their sole access to State Media, while denying equitable access to the Opposition to sow the seeds of ethnic division and animosity. *[Shame!]* The PPP/C's programme of vituperation and vilification against the

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leadership of the Opposition is certainly not the acts of a Government that wants to promote peace, security and development for all of the people.

Mr Speaker, during this Budget debate, we have had a litany of submissions calling attention to the dangerous practices of discrimination and marginalization being perpetrated by the Governmental apparatus. The Government, not surprisingly, has been in denial, but it is publicly evident that these practices are purely the fires of destructive conflict within the society and this cannot be conducive to positive national development. Following strict, broad areas, the Honourable Minister stated,

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

Mr Speaker, we have all heard and hopefully been educated by the very lucid and cogent presentations from my colleagues and Honourable Members, Deborah Backer and Clarissa Riehl, bolstered by the usual scholarly and frank presentation by the Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Justice Doodnauth Singh. Mr Speaker, all objective evaluations suggest that there is urgent need to significantly upgrade the salary and conditions of service of Members of the Guyana Police Force, to ensure that a better calibre of recruits can be attracted and retained. It is evident that the supply of

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appropriate and adequate technical resources, equipment and facilities by themselves, will not complete the needed reforms and strengthening of the Guyana Police Force. Urgent attention must be paid to training and the rectification of the unhealthy relationship of the Guyana Police Force with the various communities, such as Buxton in Guyana. *[Applause]*

In addition, the forensic and intelligence gathering capabilities of the Guyana Police Force is an imperative. Mr Speaker, you cannot have peace without justice ... *[Applause]* ... and if the justice system is not functioning effectively and efficiently to deliver justice to those in need of such justice, then there is no way that we will have peace and security.

Mr Speaker, for its third broad area, the Honourable Minister of Finance stated that,

We will sustain our significant investment in the most important social services, particularly, education, health, housing, water and sanitation.

I have already alluded to the endemic and pervasive corruption that has befallen this land and become the fastest growth area of Guyana. This is certainly wealth creation at the expense of the public purse with a vengeance. The administration continues to behave as if the mere building of schools, roads, hospitals, many of which are sub-standard because of corrupt practices is the

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same as development. We hope that all of the available reports and recommendations have convinced this Administration that development requires more than new buildings or roads or hospitals. Mr Speaker, it is perhaps instructive that all of the areas mentioned are those for which there is either concessional funding or loans apart from HIPIC benefits.

Mr Speaker, accountability, transparency and strong public oversight by this National Assembly must be strengthened and no longer honoured in breach ... value for money must be the watchwords. *[Applause]*

Let me turn to the challenges posed by global warming and the concomitant sea level rise. My colleagues, the Honourable Aubrey Norton and the Honourable Anthony Vieira have addressed many of the pertinent issues, however, I would like to touch on an area which I do not recall was mentioned and this is the area of crop selection. Sea level rise for a low lying Coastal State like Guyana would result in a significant salt water intrusion into agricultural lands. This would require crop research to develop varieties that are resistant to or able to successfully survive in an increasingly saline environment and I believe that it is an important area which I hope more attention is paid.

Mr Speaker, for the sixth broad area, the Honourable Minister states,

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We will advance institutional reforms aimed at further transforming the business environment to stimulate greater investment and job creation and sustained economic growth.

We have heard of the problems which potential businessmen and potential investors face as they try to invest in Guyana and we hope that the provision for strengthening G0-Invest and increasing its institutional capacity would result in an environment that is conducive to the attraction of investment. I do not know how many people recognise and it certainly appears that this Government does not, that the economic recovery programme, not only included the issue of debt relief but set a time frame for exiting from the umbrella of the International Monetary Fund. Unfortunately, this Government seems to be happy to be cradled by the International Monetary Fund. If you examine what had happened under the Economic Recovery programme, the momentum of growth accelerated and by 1997, it was intended that the Government would exit the IMF umbrella. However, this Government has no interest in exiting from that umbrella. This Government wants to be cradled by the IMF and to continue to pursue policies that are based and financed by mendicancy. The reality is that, I would like the Government to tell us which economy has been developed on the basis of begging bones, on mendicancy? *[Applause]* If they can point out

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to me one economy that has been developed along those lines, I would be really happy and therefore we are asking this Government to reveal for us, their vision for the future of Guyana ... [*Interruption: Intervention, talking man!*] ... Please, if there is such a vision we would like to see that vision translated into a National Development Strategy, which we all as a Nation can buy into. Mr Speaker, I believe that the people of this country are tired of the lame excuses of this Administration. [*Applause*] They are tired of the fact of the *not me*, they are tired of the fact of, *is not we, is the PNCR-IG*. What we want is peace. We want security, we want jobs, we want progress and we want prosperity. *Plenty poor people* will not work. Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Ms Carolyn Rodrigues ...

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues: Mr Speaker, like my colleagues before me, I rise to make my contribution to this debate and firstly, I want to extend my congratulations to the Minister of Finance, Honourable Dr Ashni Singh for a Budget that is inclusive and equitable and also ... [*Applause*] ... for eloquently presenting it. Appreciation is also in order for the staff of the Ministry of Finance who worked assiduously to have this Budget ready. [*Applause*]

Mr Speaker, Budget 2008 comes at a very critical time, both nationally and internationally. We live in an ever

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changing world and while change in itself is not a bad thing, it is agreed to and will bring profits and benefits to the people that will be affected by it, most of the change we see in the world today is not that way. At a national level, the recent events at Bartica and Lusignan reinforce the fact that security of the nation is of paramount importance. The borders of terror have expanded and while even putting more pressure on our scarce financial and human resources, we have to be prudent, in not only the action we take but the allocations we make. Several of the Speakers before me have spoken of the issue of climate change and while there is a view that the proponents of positive action for climate change are exaggerated, we in Guyana have seen this change in very real ways. The floods of 2005 and thereafter have altered our lives in many ways. Many of us before then never paid attention to the weather reports; that has changed.

In the international arena, Mr Speaker, we have seen that the price of oil remains very high, consequently the cost of commodities have increased globally and Guyana is not exempted. The growth rate of our individual countries, especially the underdeveloped or developing countries are not enough to cushion the spiralling cost of commodities and while some of the Opposition Members have been referring to VAT, I think that they are fully aware that the increase of prices for the most part is caused by what is happening globally.

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Mr Speaker, I have pointed to these realities because in crafting the Budget, there must be a balance and this is no easy task, since critical decisions have to be made. How much of our resources are we going to put towards security, in light of the changing face of crime? How much are we going to allocate to drainage and sea defence in light of the effects of climate change? Are we going to reduce what we spend on education, when we know that education or the lack of it is also linked to crime? How do we bring relief to the population of the increased cost of living fuelled by high oil prices, when we need more revenue for the security Sector and sea defence? How do we ensure that workers have more spending power? How do we ensure that we do not sacrifice one for the other and instead of solving a problem, we create bigger ones?

I do not envy the Minister of Finance in trying to answer all of these questions and transforming them into workable allocations in the National Budget, but not surprisingly, he has done this admirably. In my view, Mr Speaker, Budget 2008 caters for that balance. We have seen the inclusion of \$13.7 billion for the security agencies, \$2.2 billion for sea defence, \$3.7 billion for drainage and irrigation and in addition to the allocations in health, education and infrastructure to cushion the rise in cost of living and to further improve our people's lives. More than \$3.8 billion is budgeted for targeted interventions and this would include the increases in the

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public assistance and pensions, spectacles for those that are in need and also, \$105 million for the Amerindian Development Fund. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in addition, we have seen a number of additional items being zero-rated for VAT. We can argue about the allocations because we would always need more but in my view, this Budget has touched in a very positive way the critical areas that we must address and we must remember too, in analysing this Budget and the balance I am speaking about, that this Government inherited a country that was badly wounded *[Applause]*. While all of us would like to see our wishes and our dreams come true, we must see the bigger picture and be realistic as well.

Before, I go further, I want to refer to some of the comments made by some of the Members of the Opposition. The Honourable Member Dr George Norton said that Government has no plan for the Hinterland, policy or strategy for the communities there and I want to refer Dr Norton to the National Development Strategy and there is a whole chapter in there that speaks about Amerindian Development. I also want to refer Dr Norton ... *[Mr Carberry, you have to listen, you know, you will learn something]* There is also the Area Development Strategy which was developed with communities throughout Guyana and that was developed about four years ago. *[Applause]* But, Dr Norton in his heart knows that that is not the case, because he has offered

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commendations to me and my Ministry and the Government as a whole. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, both Dr Norton and the Honourable Member Mr Vieira spoke about the PPP/Civic's approach to Amerindian communities as one of giving handouts. Why is it that when this Government provides much needed items for Amerindian communities, whether it is a tractor or an outboard engine or a demarcated community or brush cutters or vehicles, why do we refer to it as handouts? And when we do it anywhere else, it is not handouts. *[Applause]* I believe and I know, Mr Speaker that we have communities in Hotakwai, in Hobediah that received handouts from the PNCR-IG during elections. So, we have to be careful when we are speaking. I believe that when such utterances are made, it is a sign that we still attach a certain stigma to our people, that they are helpless and that they need handouts and we must stop that and stop it today! *[Applause]*

The Honourable Dr Norton also spoke about the Eschilibar bridge over the Eschilibar River that separates Region 9 from Region 8 and he said that the bridge has not even started. I want to clarify that and probably Dr Norton's sources were not very accurate but I want to indicate that the contract was awarded for \$10 million and that bridge started in December. I was at Eschilibar just two weeks ago. *[Noisy Interruption]* Mr Speaker, the other thing that Dr Norton mentioned is that the regular feature of giving contracts to people outside of the Region

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is something that this Government perpetuates and he was referring to the Eschilibar bridge being given to a contractor from outside the Region but lest this House be misguided, let me say that we have many contractors in this Region. We have Mr Cyril King, Mr Steve Farrier, John Macido, Roger King, Daniel Danny and all of these people did projects in Region 9 last year. I have to also mention that the BBST roads in Lethem that Dr Norton spoke about when he said that we have not started any work, that is not so, we have started work and it is ongoing at the moment. Mr Speaker, he also mentioned that there was a study that was conducted of our Hinterland Scholarship Programme and that none of our children went to Bishops and Saints and let me tell Dr Norton that because of the work that this Government has done, many of our parents, opt to have their children go to school in the Region, at the school that this Government has built. *[Applause]*

In addition to this, those that come to Georgetown, we have an arrangement where most of them attend Presidents College and they have been doing very well. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, Dr Norton spoke about the years when scholarships were granted to Amerindians to study, so that they can make better whatever they are good in at sports, I checked to see what type of sports and what scholarships and I cannot find any but I want to assure my good friend the Honourable Dr Norton, and I know he has a keen interest in sports, that we have had discussions

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with the Ministry of Sports and Culture and we have offered them scholarships ... that's how the children went to town ... [*Applause*] ... but some of their families still prefer them to stay here than to attend school in Georgetown.

Mr Speaker, I cannot sleep well tonight if I do not respond to the Honourable Member Volda Lawrence who referred to the additional list of items that are zero-rated. She said that only wheaten flour, laundry soap and one other item will benefit or have any impact on the people. Mr Speaker, I really hope and pray that she was having a bad day and that she was being distracted because who are the people that use diapers, kerosene stoves and mosquito nets? It will be those with young babies who probably cannot afford pampers and those that cannot afford to buy a gas stove, those that do not have their homes mosquito proof, like Ms Backer ... [*Interruption: 'I can afford gas stove'*] ... it will be the working class of people. Who are the people that would need wheelchairs and crutches and glucometers and hearing aids? It will be sick people, Mr Speaker, who would be interested in hatching eggs, paddy, animal medication and the items associated with the fishing industry; it would be those people that feed us. It would be those people that are interested in diversifying our agriculture. Mr Speaker, the one that disappoints me most and took me by surprise is when the Honourable Member, Mrs Lawrence took time out to question the astute Ashni Singh and asked him

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what was the rationale and how would the zero-rating of cassava bread, farine and casareep benefit this country? *[Noisy Interruption]* I hope that the Honourable Member innocently made a mistake and is not speaking on behalf of the PNCR-IG. If not, then it is time we get worried because the Honourable Member ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Please be quiet Honourable Members. Honourable Members cool it.

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues: Mr Speaker, I understand because it hurts them too. We all know that cassava bread, farine and casareep are mainly associated with one group of people and yes, Mr Speaker, time and time again, I have mentioned in this House about the challenge of finding economically viable initiatives in the communities.

Now, we have a very good initiative started and I brought with me this brochure because it is from North West Organics, where we now have women from Region 1 and they are producing these items and they are sold in the supermarkets. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, the reasons why we have zero-rated these items is because they attract VAT, then the prices would be much higher and we want to encourage economic initiatives. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, if the Honourable Member, Mrs Lawrence in her many protests and threats to shut down the Government and letters did not think about these items being zero-rated, we did. *[Applause]* I know that

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sometimes when people do not have too many things to say, they make mistakes and one of the things that bothered me, is when the Honourable Member Mr Vieira suggested that we do build a hostel in Georgetown because it is not going to benefit anyone.

Mr Speaker, this student hostel is a request that came from the parents and students and that the Government agreed with and we are building that hostel so that the 150 students that we have in Georgetown presently staying with different people could be housed in one place. *[Applause]* But the Honourable Member Mr Vieira did not stop there; he said that indigenous people are not free and that they are oppressed. He is on the side that knows what oppression is, I think even Debbie had a dose of that. Freedom is what we know and freedom is when the people from anywhere in this country, be it the Amerindians or not could elect their leaders, both locally and nationally without fear; *[Applause]* freedom is when they can criticise the Government without anybody doing anything to them; freedom is when they can send their children to school and that is what this Government has done. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, as you are aware, one of the areas of great importance to both the Government and the people of Guyana, especially the Amerindian people, is the settling of Amerindian land claims. Indeed, this is what the National Development Strategy states and I quote,

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All lands legitimately occupied by Amerindian communities will be surveyed, boundaries clearly demarcated and maps produced in a process that would be a collaborative effort among the relevant Government agencies and members of the communities who will be provided with the requisite training for this exercise.

Mr Speaker, you will recall that when we passed the Amerindian Act of 2006, included therein was a procedure to deal with land claims. I am happy to report to this Honourable House that since we started the process of addressing land claims, we have made tremendous progress and 2007 was probably our best year. Eight communities received absolute grants to the lands they use and occupy; these include Whitewater, Yarakita, Three Brothers, Carow, Isinaru, Riwa, Crash Water and Appateri.

In addition, we completed negotiations with Rupunau, Paraquanau and Catoka and the grants are presently being prepared. Two communities that applied for extension, Massiah and Yakarinta, including Kwaimakadota have also been completed. I should note Mr Speaker that an absolute grant is a grant of land that is absolute and forever and in the case of the Amerindian communities, it confers ownership to the community and the Village Council is responsible for managing that land on behalf of the community.

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Mr Speaker, in the space of four years, we have issued 24 grants bringing the total number of Amerindian communities with legally owned land to 96 [Applause]. In addition to that, 8 communities that owned land before 1992 had their lands extended. This brings the total amount of land owned by Amerindian communities to just under 15 percent of Guyana, representing an increase of over 100 percent of what it was in 1992. We have approximately 10 more communities without legally owned lands and based on the criteria outlined in the Act, they are qualified to own such lands communally. 9 of the 10 have submitted applications for legal recognition and these are presently being processed. We are hoping and this is condition on mutual cooperation that we will be able to conclude the negotiations and issuing of these grants in the near future. Parallel to the issuing of Absolute Grants is the demarcation of the communities, that is the physical surveying of the communities and this was also an area identified in the National Development Strategy for urgent action. Indeed, the National Development Strategy stated as follows:

Only Orealla of the Amerindian communities which have received land titles has had a physical survey of its reservation properly carried out.

This was so, Mr Speaker, even though land titles were granted in 1976 and 1991, but the NDS went on to say and I appreciate that a lot of these things probably could

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not happen because as I have said before, the resources were not available and that is why it states in the National Development Strategy,

The dearth of resources to take on as a matter of urgency, the physical demarcation of Amerindian lands is a serious constraint. If this activity is undertaken fears among Amerindians about their land rights will to a large extent be ameliorated.

The Strategy also suggested that in light of these high costs that the International agencies may be willing to support.

Mr Speaker, things have changed significantly today and I am pleased to report to this Honourable House that of the 96 communities that now have legal titles, we have completed physical demarcations for over 75 percent of them. *[Applause]*

In 2007, we completed demarcation in Apatheri, Riwa, Crashwater, Annai, Arakamuai, Kamwata, Kamana, Karow, Cambotown, Fairview and Kurukabaru. The Government is justified in excluding price, since these surveys, which to date amounts to more than \$225 million have been completed with more than 99 percent of local funds. More importantly, communities now have their boundaries marked and can more effectively protect their lands. As we continue in 2008, \$40 million is allocated for the continuation of the demarcation programme and

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communities such as Yarikita, Isinaru, White Water, Three Brothers and Waipa are among those to benefit. Mr Speaker, as a country and I want to emphasise that as a country we should be proud of these achievements in relation to land rights for our indigenous peoples, since this is a problem that is very difficult to solve in many countries. Many Amerindian groups have taken their Governments to court to settle land claims, not only because there are no established procedures to deal with such things but because there is a lack of political will. The PPP/C Government has taken an approach and I must admit that we have had challenges in the beginning and several adjustments were made, but we have remained steadfast in our resolve to address these claims and we move forward. We do not boast to have the prescription for settling land claims, since countries are different, but we sure have something that we can share and from which others can learn. There is more reason for us as a country to be proud because land is a major source at times for controversy and contention and as a people we have successfully eluded such contention and controversy. We do not have to look very far, Mr Speaker, to see the problems that were experienced in one country when they tried to address land claims.

In Guyana, it is my view that there is a consensus that as a Nation, this is something that we must do. At the level of the Government and the communities we have received tremendous cooperation from the natural

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resources agencies and also from the mining and the logging communities for the most part. Mr Speaker, while there has been tremendous improvement in terms of the linkages with the interior regions and the coast in, for example, the Linden-Lethem Road, reasonable access is still very problematic. We are hoping that this year, we will be able to accelerate the process of linking Region 9 to Region 8. We therefore have a situation, Mr Speaker, where the cost of living in some of the Amerindian and Hinterland communities remains relatively high, in recognition of this reality, Mr Speaker, and more importantly in the interest of education, we started a school uniform programme and in 2007, seven thousand one hundred and eleven benefited from this programme. *[Applause]* This would include all of the students in Regions 7 and 8 and when I say all, not only the Amerindian communities, all of them and also students from the Amerindian communities of Regions 3, 4, 5 and 6. In 2008, Mr Speaker, we will extend this to other Regions.

We have noticed that together with the ongoing school-feeding programme, implemented by the Ministry of Education, the result has been an increase in the attendance at our schools. It is my view that you really do not have a problem with coverage in the Hinterland and from the information garnered, we have had improvements in quality, but we have to work even harder to improve the quality of education being provided

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in some targeted areas such as Region 8 and it is important for this reason that the ongoing Teacher Training Programmes that have been introduced in the Regions is so important. Mr Speaker, from 1999, to now we have trained just over a thousand teachers through the Distant Education and the JIBET programmes. *[Applause]* At the moment, in the Cyril Potter College of Education, we have 70 teachers in training from Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 and we have another 200 being trained within the Regions.

Mr Speaker, I have spoken earlier about the dormitory and the reason we are doing this is so that we can reduce the logistical challenges we have for monitoring the upkeep of these students and we want also to offer additional classes and we can do that if we are all together. Another sore issue that we continue to address is the provision of birth certificates. For many years, Mr Speaker, the registration of births and deaths was absent, resulting in a huge backlog. Together with the Ministry of Home Affairs, we started a process to clear this backlog about 4 years ago, and in 2007, we completed the process, that is, we distributed 6534 birth certificates and over the last three years, it would be just over 14,000, however, we still have a lot more to do and with the ongoing National Registration process, it is imperative that persons have their birth certificates so that they can register. As such, we will be continuing the programme and community development officers are in the Regions

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and I want to urge Members of this House to encourage the people to come out and register because there were cases where persons did not show up for the registration process because they were told that you have to do this because you have to vote and so, they need to know that this is important for them to get their Identification Cards and for many other reasons as well. In 2007, we also hosted the National Toshias Council and there were several significant steps taken and I am pleased to report to this Honourable House that in keeping with the Constitution, Toshias elected their nominees to the Indigenous Peoples Commission and one of those persons is Dr George Norton. I know that the membership of the Indigenous Peoples Commission is being considered by the Appointive Committee of Parliament and I will urge the Committee, Mr Speaker, to conclude this process because for everyday that we do not appoint this and the other commissions, I believe that we are short changing the people of Guyana. Let us put aside our differences and demonstrate our confidence of our Guyanese people, regardless of where they are from or what they look like by appointing them to these commissions.

Mr Speaker, another important outcome of the National Toshias Council meeting was the finalisation of the composition of the membership of the National Toshias Council. It was very encouraging to see more than one hundred and thirty of our Amerindian leaders from all across this country, sitting together and deciding how the

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20-member executive will be divided to ensure equitable representation. Not only did they finalise that membership but they elected their members as well. This is a very important body and it has long been called for and the Government looks forward to working with the National Tshao's Council in a collaborative manner. Mr Speaker, we continue to 'Stay the Course' and advance the transformation agenda, which is the theme of Budget 2008 and as we do that, we try very hard to improve the transportation facilities in our communities and in 2007, a passenger and cargo boat was provided to the Orealla community. *[Applause]* While several other communities were in receipt of engines and boats and I noted that the Honourable Dr George Norton listed some communities that we should consider for engines and boats ... no, I was referring to what he said about handouts, but I want to inform the House that the communities of Itabak, Taruka, Kamana, Chiuamau and Kurukabaru also benefited from all terrain vehicles. *[Applause]* This type of vehicle has proven to be very appropriate for the rugged terrain in Region 8 and this year, we would be providing another 5 to Tusinin, Paramakatoi, Monkey Mountain, Karapang and Kaibaru Park. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in 2008, we are hoping that we can complete two boats for the Berbice River communities and that would alleviate the difficulties that they face at the moment. While they have small boats and engines, it is not good enough for them to transport their cargo to New

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Amsterdam and so, two bigger boats would be provided. We would also be providing the smaller engines and boats to Sand Creek, Kwaimaka, Rupunai, Karasabai, in Region 9, Barasaina, Black Water, Saint Anton's, Morokaipuru, Tobago, in Region 1, Bethany in Region 2, Kangaruma in Region 7 and Itabak and Kanapang in Region 8. *[Applause]*

I also want to acknowledge the work of the Private Sector and in particular, GT&T and Digicel in improving our communication in the communities. I am happy to indicate to this Honourable House that the communities of Mabaruma, Madhia, Moruka, Kamwata and Waramuri are linked by cellular communications... *[Applause]* ... while several other communities have another type of telephone service and these include Waramuru, Manawaru, Muritaru, Annai and Sand Creek to name some of them and I am confident that the companies would continue to extend their services to other communities.

Mr Speaker, another area that I wish to point out is the success of the Ministry of Health has had with the reduction of malaria in the communities and just for the purposes of demonstration, indicate that in Kopina, the Medex indicated that about four years ago, they had about 1000 cases of malaria for the year and those numbers went higher for the previous years and to date, last year they had just about 80 cases ... *[Applause]*... and these were primarily persons working in the mining community

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and I know that the Ministry of Health is working with the miners as well, so that we can practice better mining. In Paramakatoi, this is a village of over 2000 people and they have 816 cases just in 2006, last year they had 66 cases. *[Applause]*

As I mentioned some time ago, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, intends to be very much a part of the Carifesta activities and one of the things that we are hoping to do, in fact, we will do it, is to create a model of an Amerindian village and right now as we speak, we have persons from all nine different tribes, at different places in Santa Mission, Moraicabai and so on are preparing the materials for the buildings and they are hoping to start in another two weeks, the construction of those buildings, representing the types of construction of the various groupings. Let me remind this House that the interventions that I spoke about are in no way an exhaustive list of what we are doing in the Amerindian communities and some of my colleagues spoke about some of the things that we are doing. I would be the first one to say that we still have a lot of challenges to overcome as we continue to improve our peoples lives and our country as a whole but I feel very optimistic because our Amerindian people and I speak about them, because I work at the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, they have responded to almost every call that we have made. They have responded to the call to join the Police Force and the Guyana Defence Force ... *[Applause]* ...

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they continue to make use of the opportunity to furthering their education. Several of them will return from Cuba shortly, to serve our country in different capacities. *[Applause]* Many of them are studying right here.

Mr Speaker, history will tell us that they played a major role in the determination of our country's boundaries and today, they continue to provide that protection service in a defacto way. Like all others Amerindians are very much a part of our national responsibility and are not unaffected by the events of what happened in the Coast. The killings at Bartica took away the long held belief that the interior was the safest place to be, however, we have a lot to learn from our Amerindian and Hinterland communities, since whilst their needs are many, they continue to live in a state of peace and tranquillity, making invalid that the poorest are the ones that would normally get involved in criminal activities ... *[Applause]*

In conclusion, I would like to invite all the Members of this House to let us 'Stay the Course' and let us advance the transformation agenda. If we do not do it, then who will? Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Dr Leslie Ramsammy ..,

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, in starting out, I want to say how proud I am of my colleague, the young Minister of Amerindian Affairs who has

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represented our Government, our Cabinet and our people, so well. Let me also take the opportunity, as the students from Dana Hill are leaving to express our delight at being able to host them here for a short time. Let me also take to opportunity to congratulate the Honourable Member Ms Latchman, from the AFC on her debut address in the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, I would like to add my voice to the chorus of voices in the National Assembly that echoed our common condemnation of the massacre that took place at Lusignan and Bartica. If there is one thing that has come out of the debate so far, it is that we echoed a single voice of condemnation and we have reassured with a single voice to our people that Guyana will not succumb to terrorism. There are many theories on crime and some were postulated during these debates, but whatever the theories and causes of crime, there cannot be any justification for what happened at Lusignan and Bartica. We must together in unity stand up and support all the actions that our joint services must take in order to bring the evil perpetrators to justice. One of the other hallmarks of the debate, so far, in the National Assembly on the 2008 Budget, is that our views and our voices have coalesced in terms of climate change.

We in this National Assembly of this Ninth Parliament have already passed a motion acknowledging climate change, as a critical issue. Climate change and global warming are not threats on the horizon, they are crisis that

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we must respond to now. It is not a debate as to whether climate change will have an impact on our lives, climate change is already having an impact on our lives and I am glad that on both sides of this House, we have raised our voices. Guyana, both nationally and globally, must have a strong and consistent voice. We know that climate change can have severe economic impacts but when all is said and done, global warming and climate change are major health issues. Changing weather patterns and environmental conditions have seen a rise in asthma in every country in the world. Vector borne diseases such as dengue are on the rise and even as we are debating the 2008 Budget, dengue outbreaks are occurring in Central America. In the last two years, many countries in Central America and South America and the Caribbean have experienced dengue outbreaks. Malaria outbreaks have occurred in the Bahamas and Jamaica and mosquito vectors are appearing in places where it was eliminated many decades ago. Malaria appeared in Maryland, of all places, two years ago. Mr Speaker, more infectious diseases are emerging in unusual places and I must disagree with my colleague in this House, the Honourable Member, Mr Aubrey Norton ... [*Interruption: He always wrong man!*] ... who says that this Budget does not address the issue of climate change. In fact, climate change was very much on our minds as we crafted the various Sector budgets. The 2008 Budget for the Health Sector takes into consideration and views the subject from the perspective of present-day challenge, not a

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future trend and because of time constraints, I am not going to list all of the things that we are doing in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Mr Speaker, however, out of the health emergency response that we have developed, I must say that for the first time, a Health Emergency Coordinator has been employed at the Ministry of Health. Clearly one area Guyana must look at as we prepare to deal with the impacts of climate change is vector control and that must not be equated the control of the mosquito population, that is just one aspect of vector control. We must also look at the control of rodent population because leptospirosis, for example, can be spread by the rodent population. In trying to respond to climate change, we have to change the strategy for vector control. After Independence and since then, we have retained the colonial system of vector control where vector control is located as part of disease control.

We are moving vector control outside of the ambit of disease control and placing it where it belongs in environment health and so, for the first time in more than 50 years, we are reforming the way we deal with the vector. Whilst we put together strategies to respond to climate change nationally, we must not be timid in playing a role on the global stage. The global response to global warming and climate change has been a divided one and a weak one. The failure of earlier global efforts such as the Kyoto Protocol must not be repeated, whilst Tobali Declaration and the agreements emanating from

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that summit hold our hopes, I believe that global recognition and commitment falls way short of the actions necessary now to mitigate the impact of global warming and climate change, the developed countries must not abdicate their duty. I am not apologetic in pointing my fingers and Guyana should not be timid in pointing our fingers to developed countries have contributed most to the problems and the dilemmas we face today and when we seek their assistance to mitigate the impact of climate change, it is not as a mendicant, it is not begging but demanding our fair share and we should be compensated. Not only that, Guyana represents a net carbon sink and we must demand fair compensation because today we stand in the unique position of being the lung of the world and we must ensure that we take that position as a Nation and we demand rightful compensation.

Mr Speaker, the Budget of 2008 provides for more than \$43 billion for the social Sector, almost 38 percent of the National Budget. So, this was not only the largest Budget ever in our history, but it is the largest allocation to the social Sector ever in the history of this country. *[Applause]* Education at \$19.1 billion has its largest ever allocation, health at \$12.1 billion, the largest ever allocation, labour and human services, youth, sports and culture, housing and water all have the largest ever allocation in our history and I know the mantra, so it allows money, but it is not just money that makes a

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difference, but you are at the age and many of my colleagues on both sides of this House are of the age, we remember the music store cabaret, Liza Manelli singing ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: I do not remember that; that was before my time ...

Honourable Member ... *[Laughter]*

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: ... *Money Makes The World Go Around*, I am sure you know that song, Mr Speaker, but money makes the world go around and yes, money alone cannot change our situation but without money, we cannot start the transformation.

Mr Speaker, we have all agreed that the social Sector, starting from Cheddi Jagan and the PAC in the 1940's and throughout, politicians and political parties in Guyana have never been in discord when it comes to the social Sector. We all believe that development must be a balanced one, such as Cheddi Jagan must be with a human face. In fact, Mr Speaker, the 38 percent that we now allocate in our Budget for the social Sector has a rich tradition. It was in 1964, I think the Honourable Member Komal Chand, made reference to it, in 1964 the Budget allocation for the social Sector was 30 percent of the National Budget and politicians on both sides never disagree on this fact that we must allocate sufficiently, to promote and protect the social needs of our people. The problem is that when faced with financial constraints as

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we did in the 1970's and 1980's and when we are faced with making difficult choices, it is not just our rhetoric that matters, it is what we really do and I have Budgets from those years, but we cannot dispute the fact that when faced with those realities, the then Government made a choice that the social needs of the people must be deferred. And so, by 1991, we were only allocating about 7 percent of the National Budget to the social Sector of this country.

The tradition that we have built up from 1957 to 1964 and that we retained after Independence were abandoned when faced with the economic crunches of the 1970's and 1980's but we returned to that tradition in the 1990's and gradually we have built up that allocation, because for us, we must never defer the social needs of our people, no matter what the circumstances and that is why the PPP/Civic Government budgets 1957, when it was PPP to 1964 and from 1993 to now have always had that one hallmark, we allocate large portions of our Budget to the social Sector.

Mr Speaker, the health budget is one of the beneficiaries of this allocation. A healthy population is an essential prerequisite for the economic growth and stability of any country. Politicians and populations perceive a moral as well as a political imperative to ensure that health gains are continued and not eroded. It is an imperative because the health of people is important for the creation of wealth. There is no gain saying, Mr Speaker, the

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tremendous progress Guyana has made since 1990 and I choose 1990 only because it is the base year for the Millennium Goal. Meeting the health demands of a population is a daunting task for any country and for any Government, we need to look not just countries around us but even if we look at rich countries, many of us may have watched the documentary movie '*Sickle*', this is about the United States of America, we also know, those of us who looked at '*60 Minutes*' this past weekend would have seen that their communities in the United States of America, where healthcare is not easily accessible, where people cannot have access to drugs, where people do not have access to basic medical care, where infant and maternal mortalities are as high as in some developing countries. Forty-seven million Americans are without healthcare because they do not have insurance and becomes further impoverished when there are illnesses. Mr Speaker, today, in the 2008 Budget \$12.1 billion have been allocated to the Sector, this translates into a per capita expenditure of approximately US\$78. Last year per capita expenditure on health was about US\$70. In 1964, the per capita expenditure on health was US\$16. In 1991, the per capita expenditure on health was under US\$7 and this is not being said in comparison to be critical of anyone. We must learn and we must not repeat those mistakes, because we see what happens when we do not invest in health and in the education of people and that is why, when we emerged into the 1990's more than 94,000 cases

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of malaria, infant mortality, maternal mortality and so, were very, very high. We were only reaching about 40 percent of our children, when it comes to immunisation, these are the things that happen when we do not invest in health, US\$78 per capita is not enough to deliver a comprehensive and a high quality healthcare service to any people ... *[Interruption: Of course it is!]* ... But this is a marked improvement and within the capacity we have we are committed to increasing the per capita expenditure on health and I hope that not long from now we can begin to match those investments being made in countries around us. Mr Speaker, one ... *[Interruption: I am expecting in seven months would I be able to go and have my baby in the Public Hospital?]* ... I can guarantee ... *[Interruption: Suppose you are not there?]* ... the Honourable Member Mrs Backer, that if she wants to get pregnant we can provide a safe environment for her to deliver her baby, very safely and I will come to congratulate her with her new baby ... *[Interruption: 'They are killing you!']* "Prince too" Mr Speaker, I think the issue is not just how much money we are spending per capita in the country. Yesterday, the issue came up about the equitable distribution of these resources and it is very difficult to take the Ministry of Health's budget and disaggregate it to all of the Regions but we do have a working formula to do that and if I had enough time, I could have explained the formula and I am sure that people like the Honourable Member Mr Murray and others might want look at that formula because as I

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said, it is a very difficult thing and we would like to have a working formula that has as little weakness as possible. But, using the formula that we have today and disaggregating the Ministry of Health's budget and adding it on to the RDCs budget we have working models and the per capita expenditure per Region and I am not going to go into all of the Regions but let me say this, that the per capita distribution of our resources when we look at all the Regions, varies from US\$46 per capita in Region 3 to US\$124 per capita in Region 8, this is for last year and US\$149 per capita for Region 10 but in the case of Region 10, that is a much higher number than all of the other Regions, because of the large influx for the construction of the Linden Hospital, which will not be there all the time. So, we are equitably distributing our health resources, financial resources, where monies are going and if we look at the Hinterland Regions of Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 we spend US\$78 in Region 1, we spend US\$91 per capita in Region 7, US\$124 in Region 8 and US\$84 in Region 9. I question, is this enough? I can tell you unequivocally and honestly that this is not enough, but like my colleague Honourable Member Rudy Insanally, the other day, as much as we need more we appreciate the works of the Ministry of Finance of them doing and ensuring that our allocations keeps increasing.

In 2001, the World Health Organisation assembled some of the leading experts and economists to look at the cost of delivering basic healthcare in terms of the Millennium

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Development Goals. In terms of the three health goals, directly related to health, maternal and child health, for example, and the control of infectious diseases, such as HIV and malaria, these economists estimated that one needs up to US\$40 in countries like the African countries to deliver just those services and in countries like Latin America and the Caribbean countries we need up to US\$48 per capita to deliver just those services. If you looked at those services, they constitute only about 10 percent of the overall healthcare services we must deliver and that puts it into perspective of the great challenge we have as a Government.

Mr Speaker, it is for that reason that the Government of Guyana has developed a package of services to be delivered at all of our health facilities and Guyana is not in a position in 2008 to deliver this package of service, but this serves as our guideline, that by 2012 we should be able to provide the complete package at all of our healthcare facilities. Here is the problem, this package that we are working on does not include MRI, dialysis and open-heart surgery and these are the things that people still will need and if a country is not in a position to deliver these things freely, such as open heart surgeries, it is an issue of equity. A vast majority of people in our country in spite of the public/private mix that we have created to bring heart surgery, dialysis, radio therapy in our country, the vast majority of people cannot afford to go and pay for even those subsidised services.

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So, the question is, how are we going to provide that? If US\$78 per capita is not enough to deliver this package of service, how are we going to add these other services? These are issues that we must confirm and I say that this afternoon, Mr Speaker, as a signal that these things must occupy some of our time, we need to debate that and health insurance, Mr Speaker is not going to work in Guyana. The 47 million people we talked about in the United States, the reason they are without it, is to the very people, the vulnerable people that needs these services are the very ones that cannot pay for it. So, we have to be innovative, we have to find answers and the Ministry of Health has some proposals and I hope day we can discuss these.

Mr Speaker, this question of equity, and by the way, let me congratulate all those doctors who worked last weekend at the Georgetown Public Hospital with three more open heart surgeries done in our country. *[Applause]* As we continue this discussion on equity, it is not just how we distribute our money, it is other things, for example, accessibility to health facilities. Guyana has 374 public health facilities. When you look at countries around the Globe, you would see that Guyana has a very high percentage of health facilities and every community has access to a health facility, but here is the question, if you look at the way our health facilities are designed, there are five levels. The lowest level is level 1 to the highest, the National Referral Hospital.

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For level 1 health facilities, sixty-one of them are located in the coastal regions of 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10, but there are 160 level 1 facilities in Regions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9, so that the preponderance of the lowest level of healthcare services are in the Hinterland communities, that is an issue of equity that we are trying to address and only five Regions in Guyana have regional hospitals, that is level four facilities, Regions 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10. Regions 1, 5, 7, 8 and 9 do not have level four facilities. In the next two years beginning this year, we have begun a transformation of the Bartica Hospital, so that Region 7 by the end of 2009 can have a level four regional hospital and the three-year transformation process has begun for the Mabaruma Hospital, so that Region 1 can have its own regional hospital and the Lethem Hospital, so that Region 9 can have its own regional hospital.

Another issue of equity is hospital beds, not just having hospitals but a number of beds. In Guyana we have for 10,000 population an average of 29 beds and this is not so bad because other than Barbados really looking to ... you look at the Caribbean and everybody have approximately the same, Barbados has 73 and one of the highest in the world. In Antigua, it is 24, in Trinidad it is 33, in Suriname it is 31, in Brazil it is 26, in Venezuela it is 9 and for greater perspective, let us look at Cuba, they have 49 and let us look at China, they have 22. Let us look at India, they have 7, in Kenya it is 19 and in the developed countries of Canada, the UK and the US, the average is

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between 36 and 39. So, with 29, we are not doing too badly. When we look at the regional distribution, they all come around the 29 mark, excepting for Region 5, which has only 7 and if we leave out the National Psychiatric Hospital, Region 6 has 16 per 10,000.

In looking at the hospital bed distribution, we also have to look at occupancy rate. At Georgetown Hospital, the occupancy rate is over 80 percent, at New Amsterdam, it has now passed 70 percent, but in some of our other hospitals it sometime comes in under 50 percent. We have to make better use of our beds. The number of doctors that we have in our country is another equity issue and I can report to you, Mr Speaker and Members of this House, that presently we have 510 doctors registered to practice in Guyana, but of that number 146 are short-term doctors, they come and go. For example, the doctors that performed the cardiac surgery last weekend at the Georgetown Hospital, the doctors that sometimes come and do eye surgery and go back are short-term. Working everyday in our health system in the Public and Private Sectors are 310 doctors, this averages about 7 registered doctors per 10,000 population, or if we take those that work here everyday, it averages 5 doctors per 10,000 population. In Antigua it is 12, in Barbados it is 12, in Dominica it is 5, in Jamaica it is 9, in Suriname it is 5.

This is an area that we are trying to improve and later this year 68 students are returning from Cuba and then they

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are added to the rafter ... [*Applause*] ... and that would allow us to more evenly distribute the doctor population among the different Regions. Even though we have 310 doctors working in the Sector, most of them are located in the Georgetown and Region 4 area. We have to have a more even distribution across our country.

The Honourable Member Dr Norton talked about specialists and we need more specialists; there are 47 specialist doctors working in the Sector, 35 are working in the health Sector delivering services and 12 are located in administrative jobs. This is an area that we are trying to improve also and I am happy that I can inform the Nation that the first 5 graduates from our locally formulated surgical post-graduate programmes are going to be ready for assignment in May of this year. [*Applause*] And they have already been assigned. Two of them would be assigned to the West Demerara Hospital, one would be assigned to the Linden Hospital, one would be assigned to the Suddie Hospital and one will be assigned to the New Amsterdam Hospital.

Mr Speaker, we presently have for 10,000 population of about 0.8 of a dentist or one per 10,000 and that is in the area that we are lagging severely behind. The dentistry school that we started will help us to improve that situation.

Another area of equity is the supply of medicine and commodities. You cannot deliver quality healthcare

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without medicine and without commodities. Mr Speaker, in 2007, outside of the Georgetown Public Hospital, in the health centres, in the health posts and the hospitals in the Region, the Ministry of Health distributed in dollars worth of drugs the sum of \$2.2 billion, \$800 million, and commodities were distributed to healthcare facilities in Region 4 and that does not include Georgetown Hospital. When we include Georgetown Hospital, the Ministry of Health was able to distribute \$3 billion worth of medicine and commodities. *[Applause]* And this is not enough; that is why sometimes we have shortages.

The Honourable Member Mervin Williams talked about no test kits for HIV in Region 3 and sometimes we do have these shortages. In the case of HIV, it is more because of our success; because the success of our testing programme has exceeded our targets, people are coming forward to be tested to know their status. On the National Day of Testing, for example, when we targeted 1,500, we get 5,000 people and so, sometimes we exceed the use of our testing kits and it leads to temporary shortages in the Sector. I can tell you this, Mr Speaker, that we estimate that in the year 2008, if our estimate is correct we will have to spend a minimum of \$176 million for HIV test kits and we will be able to meet those supplies. The staff of the Ministry of Health has been tasked that if we have any kind of shortages this year, there is one disease for which we must not have any shortage in 2008; the Ministry of Health is looking at diabetes and being able to

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ensure that we have no shortages, so that in terms of the supply chain, Mr Speaker, we are improving the system and for the first time Guyana now has a fully computerised supply chain system, a fully computerised warehouse system, where we have real-time information that will lead to fewer shortages and will ensure that our expiration rate is within the best practice established by the World Health Assembly.

Mr Speaker, three of the areas for the MDC address, maternal and child health, maternal and infant mortality and immunisation coverage. Guyana has a proud history when it comes to immunisation. Guyana has one of the widest menus of vaccines. We provide a minimum of 12 antigens in our immunisation programme and for everyone, Mr Speaker, we have coverage rate exceeding 93 percent. Very few of our children are not getting their vaccines, not because we do not have the supply but often it is a challenge to get families to bring the children out to get their vaccines. Whilst the Honourable Minister was speaking about some of the successes, I heard Mr Vieira talking about what happen to papaloma vaccines. The Human Papaloma Virus has been identified as the major cause of cervical cancer and in 2008 Guyana will become one of the first countries in this Region to introduce the HPV vaccine. *[Applause]* We have already introduced the pneumonopapa vaccine to reduce pneumonia-like diseases and later this year we will also introduce the Roto Virus vaccine to reduce diarrhoeal diseases. That is

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why we are getting some of the successes that we are experiencing.

In 1990, Mr Speaker, Guyana reported an under-5 mortality rate of 88, an organisation such as UNICEF estimated it at 128. Last year the Ministry of Health reported an under-5 mortality rate of 24, a significant decrease, meeting our MDGs long before the 2015 deadline and the recent Mixed Report is confirming the downward trend, not only in under-5 mortality, the same thing is seen in infant mortality and maternal mortality. This is what happens when you invest in the Health Sector. I want to use this occasion to solicit your support and solicit the support of all of the population, because whilst we have paid attention to the communicable diseases, even though that changes, so at one time you are dealing with polio and small pox and measles and these things we do not deal with today, but we deal with TB and malaria still and we deal with emerging ones, like the SARS and pandemic influenza. There has always been a pandemic amongst us, not only in Guyana but globally we are paying little attention and that is to the chronic diseases ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Minister.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Minister be given 15 more minutes to continue his presentation.

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member ...

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Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, the pandemic I am talking about has always been with us and it is present in every country on the Globe, the non-communicable chronic diseases, the cardiovascular diseases such as high blood pressure, heart diseases, diabetes, the various forms of cancer and these pandemics are not stable anywhere in the world, they have been moving in only one direction and that is upwards. This is true in the developed countries and it is true in the developing countries. There is not a single country on earth that can say that these diseases are not on the increase. If we take diabetes as an example, there are 50,000 people living in Guyana with diabetes, hypertension is the same thing and the number one cancer in Guyana is not what everybody has been talking about, that is, the cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is one of the major cancers in our country, but the number one cancer in Guyana is prostate cancer, it is for men ... *[Interruption: 'I am comforted' "Do not get comforted as yet ..."]* The number 2 cancer, whilst both men and women can have is almost exclusive to women and that is breast cancer, and then the number three cancer is cervical cancer.

In the last three years, we have reported, because we have a cancer register of 585 cases of prostate cancer; we have had 545 cases of breast cancer and 525 cases of cervical cancer. As of this year, we would be able to make a dent in cervical cancer because we are introducing vaccines

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and new technologies to deal with the early diagnosis and treatment, so that we can introduce and cure cervical cancer, but we need to continue working.

Mr Speaker, when it comes to the chronic diseases let me say that on both sides of the House ... and then I am particularly going to identify Mrs Janet Jagan who is not in this House ... There are members who have been calling in to say they want to sponsor a child with diabetes. The Ministry of Health has a register of children with diabetes; our register has 34 children right now and we are asking people to sponsor these children and make sure that they have good glucometer sticks to measure their sugar and to provide all the support. We provide hampers and so to ensure that the children are getting all the support they need, but when we look at this pandemic, we see one thing, there is not some wicked god sitting somewhere conspiring doom and damnation on people through chronic diseases. It is our lifestyle. These are uniquely lifestyle diseases and whether we look at New York or Orlando, London or Georgetown or Port-of-Spain or anywhere we go, the major driving forces of the chronic diseases remains the same. It is physical inactivity, it is bad nutrition, it is abuse of tobacco, it is abuse of alcohol, it is high cholesterol, it is unsafe sex, because that is how you get cervical cancer, so these ...

[Interruption: 'Like you know, man' "Yes I know, I know very much"] So these are things that are totally within our control, it is not just our expenditure in here

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and it does not matter how much we spend, if we as a people do not recognise that each one of us has a responsibility, the problems would overwhelm any country as it is overwhelming the developed countries. I say that because we have to support the programme, so I hope all of you walk a little bit and join our million mile challenge, become more active, join in eating well, stop smoking ... and so, I hope to see some of you people outside for the next event.

Mr Speaker, I want to touch on the favourite subject of my colleague on the other side, E Lance Carberry, because he always jokes about the blood donation programmes and that is okay because one of the vital elements of a good health programme is that we must have enough blood to support those with cancer, support those that are giving birth, support those that are in accidents and so on. We estimate that there is a need for about 10,000 units of blood. In the early 1990's we had about 2,500 units, today we collect about 7,500 units and I hope that in 2008 we can meet the target of 10,000 units with all of your support. So, one day I hope that we as a National Assembly can come together and have our own meet where we can donate blood ... yes, I am ready. I am very happy that I have so much support, Mr Speaker, so together with you, we will organise a day for the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, let me say this, as my colleague talked about malaria ... Last year we recorded 11,000 cases, in 2006

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we had about 40,000 cases of malaria and this year we expect to have more than 8,000 cases of malaria and one of the reasons for it is because the Government of Guyana ensured that every family in the Hinterland Regions of 1, 7, 8 and 9 has access to impregnated bed nets. Every family received three bed nets from the Government of Guyana. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, obviously, I am unable to cover the broad scope of health and to talk about the 2008 Budget fully, but the Budget demonstrates that the PPP/C Government understands the links between health and development. Our Budget supports the promotion of better health for the Guyanese people. The National Assembly has consistently provided support for the health services and I thank all of you for the overt and quiet support to the Sector and me over the years, including people like my friend and colleague Dr George Norton and I know that Minister Rohee was saying to me, poor George. Carolyn dealt with him and now the Minister of health comes in, but the Honourable Member and I have our own understanding and I know that Dr Norton over the years has been a quite supporter and has conceded to me that the health Sector has done a good job and in his words, you must give jack his jacket and I can respond for those things that Dr Norton said, but I am, not going to go down that road. The things that Dr Norton and I and others have talked about, we know that it is not just the Government and so on, working with great constraint, the

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health workers of Guyana have delivered excellently and beyond the call of duty and in many instances, and I want to use this occasion, not only to offer my congratulations but to express our gratitude to the hundreds of health workers who continue day in and day out in a thankless job providing healthcare to our people. *[Applause]*

In the same breath, I want to say to the Guyanese people that there are some times that we have let them down and I want to publicly apologise for those occasions that we have let them down. To all those who had to pay someone in the public health Sector, I do offer our apologies because the Guyana Government provides a free healthcare service to the people of Guyana, but there are occasions when people have met me and said that they had to pay for blood. Blood is free in Guyana, it costs the Guyana Government more than three thousand dollars to screen and prepare blood for donation and it is free of charge; except some people are sometimes asked to pay. In the Private Sector, they charge you, in the Public Sector we do not charge for blood, but there are occasions where somebody might ask for payment, that is not a policy for the Government of Guyana. People have reported that they have to pay for eye surgery and other surgeries, but these are not a policy of the Guyana Government. So, we are working more to develop a people-friendly service, not only providing access but providing access for a quality healthcare service.

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Mr Speaker, before I close, the PPP/C Government has a vision of where we want to be. In spite of the often repeated statement in this House that the Budget lacks focus, the Budget is designed to deliver our agenda that was so well articulated in our 2006 Elections manifesto. I hear some of the things people say and I hear from a lot of people that Guyana cannot develop because we do not have investments. We would all agree that investment is a critical component of development and that we must have more investments and we need both foreign and direct investment from abroad, but also, we need investment by the local Private Sector; neither by themselves would be able to do it ... [*Interruption: 'Holistic approach!' "We need both ... together"*]. Mr Speaker, there was a time when we had a policy where the commanding heights of the economy were controlled by the State; today, a paradigm shift has occurred and we all accept that the Private Sector is the driver of the economy. [*Interruption: 'You are driving without fuel!'*] As Minister Webster said yesterday, if you look at the 1980's, the average was under \$10 million per year but between January of 2006 to June of 2007, there was a total of \$564 million invested in Guyana by both foreign direct investment and by the local Private Sector. I hear my friend, the Honourable Member Khemraj Ramjattan and that World Bank report and about accessibility to these documents and I hope that my colleague will not see this as trying to be nasty or so, but when he was speaking, he reminded me ... those of us who are familiar

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with the Pink Panther's finding, you know ... *[Laughter]*
... I started to imagine that somebody went into their house, put on their cap, dark shades and a cloak and ran ... yes, you know the music ... ran into the vehicle, drove there, went into a bathroom, called somebody and somebody took out this paper, put it in there and ran back to the vehicle, sat in his chair, picked up the documents and then it arrived right in front of him on his computer, there is the document ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, your time is up.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Minister be given 5 minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member ...

Hon Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, the fact is that last year alone the local Private Sector, invested \$55 billion. When we listen to the perception they have about what is happening on the ground and what is happening in reality, it is quite different from that perception. Who wants to invest their money in a situation that the Member described? That alone gives you such a risky situation and you look at the loans and grants that the Government gets and people are talking about the international agencies and the donor agencies and the

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countries as if they just come and throw money at us. Those of us who are Ministers know what we go through in trying to put systems together so that we can get loans, so that we can get grants, the fiduciary arrangements that are in place. You know, if I come now and do a study about what people think about the Government's programme of Guyana and I go and I interview Mr Vieira, Mr Williams, Mr Ram and Mr Patterson and then I put a report after those interviews and state it as Guyana's perception ... [*Interruption: 'That is by you' ... 'I know the people who were interviewed. I have the list'*] What is the important point, is that in spite of all of that, people are investing in our country and we need more investment ... [*Applause*] ... The fact is that none of us, no matter what the circumstance is in our country and no matter how we disagree with each other, when it comes to people coming to invest in our country, we should work together so that they want to come, so that they come and invest. Because in the end, it is not going to be PPP/C supporters or PNCR-1G supporters, it is going to be the Guyanese people that will benefit. [*Applause*] Mr Speaker, I commend this Budget to the people of Guyana. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Trotman ...

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: Mr Speaker, before I get into my presentation proper, permit me to say that this afternoon, I was impressed with the contributions of the two Ministers, though at times they did waver. In the

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end, Minister Ramsammy had not given, in my opinion, what was a good review of the health Sector and deviated into dangerous grounds by trying to impugn a World Bank study and he as a scientific person should know best that these surveys are carried out in a scientific manner. In the same way that he goes after persons with HIV/AIDS and finds out who they are, so too, do the World Bank and the IMF and other experts know who to speak to ... *[Applause]* ... and how to write up their reports.

Mr Speaker, Minister Rodrigues, one of my favourite Ministers, and she should know that, also did a fine job, I believe, of stating what is going on in her Ministry. I believe that there were some misconceptions that she may harbour and which unfortunately may have been transmitted to those good impressionable students who sat here earlier. *[Applause]* One of them was the belief that the Opposition does not want or wish or desire a hostel in Georgetown and that is far from the truth. I, myself, had visited the hostel in Princess Street. It has much room for improvement. We support it but what we are saying, however, given surveys and policies, the monies are best spent where they are needed most, in the villages. It is not that we do not agree that there should be a hostel in Georgetown ... *[Applause]* ... the money is better spent where the suffering is the greatest. With that, Mr Speaker, and with your permission I would like to go to my presentation.

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It has become the case recently where many persons are misquoted and because of what it is that I would like to say this afternoon, I need your permission to read for the greater part of my presentation. *[That is plagiarism]* Today, it pains me to debate this Budget, but out of a duty which falls on me as leader of the Alliance For Change, I rise to make my contribution. I have searched through the Pages of the document entitled *Staying The Course, Advancing The Transformation Agenda* and have found little upon which to mount the type of debate that we have unfortunately grown accustomed to having. Truth be told, I am saddened and numbed by the recent carnage and massacres of Lusignan and Bartica which followed those of Agricola and Eccles in 2006. Again, I express my personal and sincerest condolences to the families of the victims, who senselessly lost their lives and again, as I did in Lusignan and as a national political leader, I apologise for my own failings over the years to prevent these occurrences. I am here out of respect for the institution of Parliament or rather what is left of it and to the memory of those who died recently.

Mr Speaker, every year, at about this time, the Government introduces its Budget and the Opposition Members are expected to behave loyally and obediently and faint and parry with the Government Ministers and others in a satirical, theatrical performance that has come to be known as a Budget debate. Every year that I have spoken, I have asked the question, *what is the benefit of*

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this exercise?. I have never seen a debate that adopted any useful suggestions of the Opposition ... [Applause] ... as well as substantive changes in any of the estimates. By the way, I reject now, the usual drivel that this is the way it was under the Peoples National Congress. It is as nauseating then ... [Applause] ... in the 1970s and the 1980s, it was nauseating then, so too today, in the 21st Century, it is just as nauseating as that proposal. This year, I can say without fear of successful contradiction, Mr Speaker, that the people are neither amused nor impressed by our behaviour. *At the end of this exercise what do we collectively hope to achieve?* How is the governance of the country improved? What benefits for social cohesion have been derived by this exercise? Do the national indicators show that the people's perception of politicians has improved and that our overall rating is positive? Last night, Mr Speaker, we heard the Honourable Member Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury say that these were the worst debates in the history of her parliamentary life. She is a lady who has earned her stripes as a politician and to hear her say so, should tell us something that we are not going any place but downwards. This statement should tell us something. [Applause]

What would it have taken to have the Minister of Finance, prior to the presentation of this Budget, contact the Office of the Leader of the Opposition and other parliamentary parties to enquire whether there was anything specific

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that they needed to have included. What would it have taken? Nothing ... [*Applause*]

However, Mr Speaker, last evening Honourable Member Kellawan Lall in his capacity as the Minister of Local Government set out precisely the thought process of the Government and that is, that within the Region, even those that are chaired by opposition chairmen or chairpersons, they are carrying out the agenda of the Government and not the people's agenda; they are there even though elected through what is called the democratic process to carry out the Government's agenda and the Government's agenda only. That is a system that we need to change. Indeed the people expect better and deserve better from these debates, but yet the system that compels our presence here expects us to behave as adversaries and to disagree, and yet we lament when this very behaviour occurs. Why can we not all get along? Why do you not join us on this pathway to development? The system does not allow us to do so. There is not a day that has gone by that we do not witness or have not witnessed some terrible senseless killings. Guyanese lives have become as hobs cells, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short and if I may add my own word, Mr Speaker, meaningless as well. Men are killing women, road users are being mowed down, elderly men are suffering, to me, the ignominy of having to guard someone's property at night rather than being at home with their wives and grandchildren, are being bludgeoned

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to death and worst of all innocent little children have now become appropriate targets for extinction. With this in mind, I will not enter into a vitriolic attack on any Minister or Member on the Government side of this House, though I must say I feel tremendous pity and disappointment for some in particular, but instead prefer to use the very limited time available to me to make a few pertinent statements.

Mr Speaker, at the end of my presentation, I hope, and I sincerely hope that I would have been able to convince those gathered here that the size of this Budget of \$119.3 billion is meaningless, unless we can arrest what is a certain descent into madness and by that I mean no disrespect to the Honourable Minister of Finance, my brother and colleague or to his staff that worked assiduously to prepare this Budget. Relative to the situation that we face now since 26 January 2008 and I suspect that within a few months, unless we dismount and change course and not '*Stay the Course*' as we are being asked to do, this document is not going to be worth the paper it is printed on. *[Applause]* All economic prognoses and forecasts will have to be revised in the near and long term. The events that began years ago and continued on a new plain on 26 January 2008 and on 17 February 2008 have permanently changed the landscape of Guyana, socially, legally, politically and of course economically and I dare say, Mr Speaker, constitutionally as well, whether we accept it to be so or not. What I

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found truly amazing, Mr Speaker, is the ease and the ability of many speakers to express condolences on the events of January and February and then immediately go into boasting about bridges and roads, as if to say that these massacres were mere aberrations or gripping distortions which passed and are not to come this way again and so, we are back to going about our business as normal. In my view, we can never go back to the way we were prior to 26 January 2008. What many of us are not getting is that despite the best efforts made since 1966 this country continues to be divided and because we are divided we are floundering on the brink of collapse. Every Head of State since then has struggled to govern a rich geographical area of 83,000 square miles and to build a Nation from six disparate groups with six cultures, six sets of customs and six sets of morals. Too many continue to slip away and of these, too many have decided that their countrymen and women ... I daresay this that even when the PNCR-1G headed the Government ... that they could and would not allow the incumbent party to govern them; that is the stark reality. With this in mind I wish to proffer the thesis that outside of the increase in the allocation for crime and security in the 2008 Budget, that the remaining heads are now of little consequence because they are meant to be a spoke in a wheel whose hob is disintegrating. Put as simplistically as I can possibly do, I am saying that unless we get our crime and security situation and good governance platform in place urgently, there will be schools, yes,

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buildings, yes and bridges, yes, to spend money on but no people to benefit from it. [Applause] They all would have left or become consumed in the looming destruction and conflagration which I see coming. We will find ourselves stuck in the slush and filth in the bottom billion that my colleague the Honourable Member Khemraj Ramjattan spoke of a few evenings ago. In this context, statements therefore about bird watching and yachting are not bordering on the sublime and ridiculous, so too are the statements about the Government building bridges of friendships and social cohesion in the face of the worst massacres in our history barring Jonestown. So, too, the unfortunate, uninformed and uneducated statements made about the ethological and root causes of crime in Guyana, which we heard yesterday. Nothing was said to tell the soul that there is an understanding of the catalysts, the drivers and the accelerators of crime in Guyana. By way of example, Mr Speaker, I will refer this House to just two Sectors, the first is the tourism Sector. Much has been said about it but have we read the travel advisories on Guyana? I will read from the US State Department advisory issued on February 29,

US citizens should carefully consider the risks of travelling to Guyana in light of recent attacks on Georgetown, Lusignan and the Essequibo River town of Bartica. The disparate locations in which they occurred and the fact that the perpetrators

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had not all been apprehended, additional attacks in other parts of the country cannot be ruled out.

...US Government

The British Foreign Office,

We advise 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 crimes ...

And it goes on to say as Mr Rohee has been saying before that there is now in Guyana a low level threat of what the rest of the world knows as terrorism. What I am saying is that all the allocations have to be revisited in light of what is going on.

Mr Speaker, I turn to my other example on a second Sector of national security and territorial integrity, which is outside of the realms of what Minister Rohee has to deal with. He deals with policing and citizens security. Mr Speaker, you better than I know about these matters having chaired the Border and National Security Committee, where we went down to the type of weapons that the Army needed to have - calibres, rounds, et cetera. That report, since 2001 has never been brought to this House for approval. In that area, I am saying that those events of 26 January and 17 February have again

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jeopardised our territorial integrity. Monies which would have been going to the re-capitalization of the GDF have now to be diverted to fight internal crime. The GDF Essequibo is unable because of high fuel cost and repair cost to even leave the Ruimveldt station.

Mr Speaker, recently we have heard about the discovery of an 1100 metre airstrip in the Corentyne River. We are reminded of the incident at Eteringbang and in the Cuyuni River where in October of 2006 Parsram Persaud was killed and a year later two dredges were destroyed by Venezuelan military attachments. We have the continuous movement of narcotics and weapons across our borders and of course the heinous crimes of piracy which continue on a daily basis. So note that the security forces cannot fight on two fronts at the same time; this should be evident to all of us. They are now diverted along the East Coast and elsewhere trying to find criminals or psychopaths as they are referred to. It is a known fact that following the UN Law of the Sea Arbitral Award that there will be increased activity in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Guyana and we were told by the Minister of Foreign Affairs a few evenings ago that there is going to be an application to extend that zone. We know that REXAL STAID and CGX are scheduled to start exploring and drilling later this year and early next year. We know that in 2000 Surinamese gun boats removed rigs from our waters; we know that there is high piracy activity in those waters and we know that little is being

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done to safeguard our assets and our resources in that area.

We know that over the last two or three days, Mr Speaker, there has been a tremendous movement of troops on the Ecuadorian border by both Venezuela and Ecuador and we know, based on reports that Guyana is not an isolated place the movement of drugs, cocaine and even ... I say, guardedly, but I know what I am saying ... the movement of FARC operatives through this region ... Therefore, we cannot ignore these external and other threats whilst focusing only on the internal.

Mr Speaker, for the remaining portion of my time, I would like to focus on what is happening in Guyana. My views are well known and I have said that in my opinion, I see there are burgeoning signs of an insurgency, perhaps badly organised, ill-advised but still, as I wrote to His Excellency on 4 February 2008,

It is obvious that a group of Guyanese or non-State actors have decided to defy the authority of the State and is prepared to unleash unprecedented mayhem in our society as witnessed last Saturday, 26 January 2008 in Lusignan. This is a serious problem that has serious consequences to the national security, cohesiveness and viability of the state of Guyana and cannot be left unattended. The

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recent events cannot be dismissed as mere criminal activity coming from any particular enclave of our society. The high incidence of dissatisfaction, despair and disgust is pervasive as was witnessed first hand by some Members of the Cabinet who braved the angry residents of Lusignan and Mon Repos immediately after the slaughter.

Mr Speaker, besides holding arms and issuing joint communiqués, we must go further and deeper. This is not merely about power sharing or shared governance but something deeper and more far-reaching, it is about making an attempt to prevent the collapse of the Nation we call Guyana. It transcends issues as to who occupy Ministries, departments and both in the manner in which we educate, empower, encourage and elevate our people, especially our youths to ensure that we do not leave for them a broken legacy. Mr Speaker, the fact that our present crop of criminals, whether they are called psychopaths, terrorists, insurgents, gorillas and whatever label we use, are of the average age of 18 years and that some like Nasty Man are almost babes in arms. Nasty Man was 13 years old when he was held, which tells us that the seeds of this crop were planted within the last 15 years. *[Applause]* For those who do not understand or do not want to understand under the period of governance of the PPP/Civic Administration is when this crop of psychopaths came alive. *[Applause]* These are the

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manifestations of unwanted, or as offensive as they are, of a bad system of governance and sometimes, yes too also of bad governance, but I am blaming the system first and then going on to blame those who operate it, secondly.

Mr Speaker, with each passing year, I am becoming more convinced that Guyana's mal-performance is a function of its colonial past. The greatest paradox about time is that it is to that past that we must return if we are to have a future. Renown professor of political science and international relations, Calesby Holsky, in his work, *The State War and the State of War* was describing Guyana and a few other countries like it and had this to say and I would like to quote it here with your permission, Mr Speaker. He says,

... the colonial state's main purposes had nothing to do with preparation for ultimate statehood and everything to do with economic exploitations, building some infrastructure and communications, settling migrants organising plantations for agriculture and introducing extraction of surplus through taxes, organising some semblance of lower level education and religious activities and providing law and order. From the beginning then, the territorial limits of the colonies had little to do with the economic practices, identification or the political organisation

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of indigenous population. The colonial territorial unit bore little or no relationship to any pre-colonial ethnic, religious, political, social or religious communities or political systems ...

That is a description, Mr Speaker, not of Africa, but of Guyana and so the leader for freedom in the 1960's and after took over the colonial state. Alternative forms of political organisation such as a return to traditional modes of governance, federations or continent-wide units lost all popularity. The colonial state and organism rather than left legacies primarily as arbitrary boundaries, bureaucracy and the military were taken over by leaders, and this is important, Mr Speaker, who believed that they could go on to create their Nations and master the new States. Some succeeded, many failed and it is these failures that have led to the wars of the third kind; and for those who know what happened in the security Sector, the wars of the third kind are the organised criminals, the coup de tat, your insurgencies, your terrorism. That is what is happening in malformed states that were just forced together and who then petitioned the United Nations for recognition would have little within those states that bound them together.

The military scholar Martin Van Pevels in his celebrated work, *The Transformation of War*, said that in these scenarios, there are no strategies and tactics. Innovation, surprise and unpredictability are necessities and virtues.

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The weak must rely on guile in often trying to raise funds for the bombings, assassinations and massacres. Prisoners are used as hostages to extract political gains; terrorist incidents are designed to make publicity, not to defeat an enemy's armed force. Terror is used to clout the timid and the collaborators and the indifferent, the clear distinction between the armed forces and the society that is the hallmark of institutionalised war dissolved in people's wars. That is the manner in which these groups operate and in those scenarios there are four known responses that the people go through, in my view of descending order. The first thing they do is stay quiet and hope that the cloud of death and darkness passes their door. The second thing they do is they migrate by the thousands and those who stay go through a process of transformation by emerging with an underground economy and they exist by remittances, runnings, corruption, graft and other alliances and friendships that may crop up. Mr Speaker, I believe that it was the Honourable Member Africo Selman who gave some figures, but according to USAID studies the rate of migrations in 1992 was 20,000 persons for Guyana. That figure is likely to go up to 100,000 per annum by the year 2010.

Mr Speaker, the third response that countries like Guyana go through is that some people begin to speak out and, according to the security experts, this is considered the most dangerous of the four options ... Government-

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sponsored death squads and special Army units eliminate opposition leaders and a good portion of their sympathisers. Opposition often leads to torture, prolonged detentions and reprisals against family members.

The fourth and final stage ... there is no fifth, sixth, seventh or eighth stage ... Mr Speaker, is that resistance becomes violent. It can take several forms, including conspiracy, attempted coup, rebellion into communal war and lastly, the ultimate challenge to state legitimacy and the right to rule.

I have sought to set out the descent into collapse so I am hoping that we will have a chilling effect. No amount of spin can change what the experts have already determined is taking place. *[Applause]*

To answer the question of the Honourable Member Teixeira, what do we do? ... I come to that now ... No one hearing these words can deny that every stage of descent is palpably present in Guyana. In fact, I make bold to say that we have arrived at stage 4 and there are no further stages. We have to arrest it now and we have to do so together ... *[Applause]*.

Mr Speaker, if you would bear five minutes with me, I will conclude. I can firstly say what has been successfully tried in other countries and then perhaps I will offer some prescriptions for Guyana. In other countries, they say that we should have continuous

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holding of free and fair elections to reinforce the democratic system and practices, but as have been pointed out in some countries, where the society is characterised by strong ethnic and or religious cleavages, elections tend to become no more than censuses through which majorities and minorities become permanent. Equal opportunities for access to decisions and Government allocations then become difficult and as has often been shown in practice, even impossible. Another suggestion is United Nations involvement. Some say that the United Nations was fashioned to take States and not internal issues but there has been a C-change, beginning with Bosnia, East Temor, Guatemala and there is nothing wrong in a nation state requesting international assistance from an organisation such as the United Nations to shore up its democratic systems and architecture. Another way in which success has been found by other countries is by the devolution of power. In Suriname, they have an interesting party system; Brazil has a federal system and so does Venezuela. So, we may look elsewhere, Northern Ireland, Sweden but to not look at all I believe is fatal.

I now come to the Guyana situation and we can discern from Government responses and other statements what is the current plan ... We have held stakeholders meetings which are good; we have the affirmation of the Security Sector Action Reform Plan, the justice Sector reform plan and the Citizens Security Plan. We all agree that these plans are good but in my view, I humbly submit that they

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are meant to function in an environment that is policing- or civilian- oriented. The Chief-of-Staff was brave enough once only to say that his members engaged in urban warfare and then he was told perhaps not to utter that statement again. We have to accept that mere policing methods and technologies are not the prescriptions for our situation. Mr Speaker, statements made recently to commemorate the death of former President Cheddi Jagan at Babu John are very instructive, because many people would like and I believe that they are attributed to His Excellency, the President that many people would like to get political power through the backdoor. I believe someone parroted it a few minutes ago. The President said that the Government should not be bullied into sharing political power, then there is no democratic future for the country, and I agree with him. We should share power if we want to share power and share power because it is the commonsensical thing to do, not to be bullied into it. Our response in answer to the Honourable Member Teixeira has to be both collective and constitutional. Maybe talking in a room and issuing communiqués, though helpful will provide insufficient remedies for us. *[Applause]* My colleague, Khemraj Ramjattan two nights ago had eloquently articulated that unless there is gross and political space created to all and for all, we will continue to spiral downwards into the morass.

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The Alliance For Change is therefore seriously ready to be engaged in talks to transform this Nation whenever the Government feels that it is ready as well. *[Applause]* We will not attend meetings to hear role calls of persons killed or about helicopters borrowed or bought. Last year, and I come to the end, I made a statement and I would wish to repeat it, that is during the Budget debate,

... there can be no development without inclusivity, no peace without justice and no future without cooperation. Guyana cannot afford to experiment further with dogmatic and standard forms of democracy. Where there is a Government and a loyal opposition, we are just not some figures to operate in that manner. We are simply not like other countries and a continued belief or rather pretence that we are is perhaps our greatest strength. We must accept our differences and therefore, prepare for them. In this regard, it is important that we build trust and begin to share equitably and systemically, the economic and political pie. This is the only way of progressing. Mr Speaker, time is upon us and we cannot delay or procrastinate or deny our situation. Those who refuse to change course will become the forgotten people of yesterday and imperil the children of

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tomorrow. We must enter into a new paradigm of democracy and governance and we must do so as a matter of urgency.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member Teixeira has all of our recommendations, both at the governance level and the security level. Such a little thing as going back to issuing national awards, our society has no peers, the young people have no peers to look up to and these things are not only done cosmetically or ceremonially, they are important and help to reinforce nationhood, appointing all constitutional office holders, the Ombudsman and move the acting DPP to a substantive DPP: these are the things that binds the fabric of a country together. I end as other colleagues have ended by quoting from Corinthians,

Now all these things happened upon them as ensamples and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come; wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.

I thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr Carberry, would it be convenient ... you are requesting the meeting at 17.45H or is it convenient now?

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, if you prefer to do it now, then let us go.

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The Speaker: It will be convenient now for me. We can get it over with.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Okay, thank you.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, this is a good time to suspend, but immediately as we suspend, I would like to invite the following Members to the Business Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Supply in my Chambers. It will last only two minutes, so I will ask you to come right away. The Members are, Honourable Members Ms Carolyn Rodrigues, Dr Ashni Singh, he is not here, Honourable Rudolph Insanally, he is not here, the Honourable Hari Narine Nawbatt, Mr Harry Persaud Nokta, Mr E Lance Carberry, Ms Amna Ally, Mr Desmond Fernandes and Mr Khemraj Ramjattan. Thank you very much.

17:10H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

18:15H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Ms Teixeira.

Ms Gail Teixeira: Mr Speaker, the 2007 Budget, *Building A Modern And Prosperous Guyana* and the 2008 Budget, *Staying The Course: Advancing The Transformation Agenda* are linked and integrally involved in the development of Guyana. Having heard

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the many contributions from the Opposition benches ... I heard the usual arguments,

... nothing is good, it is a waste of time, bad governance, no governance reflected in the Budget, corruption, references to unsubstantiated comments about gravy trains, the country will become a country of criminals and I say to Mrs Blair, speak for yourself, lack of openness and inclusivity and spurious claims that the country is the worst in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Sometimes I wonder if I am in a House of Guyanese or foreigners who do not like us at all - do not like Guyana at all and do not worry about us. Not one proposal came from the Opposition benches on their own ideas and views as to why the course on which the Government of Guyana embarked is wrong and what they think in terms of a macro-economic framework that should instead be put in place ... [Noisy Interruption]

The Speaker: I thought Members just had lunch. I did not know that lunch invigorates Members. *[Laughter]* I thought you had got a bit more pacified ...

Ms Gail Teixeira: It is the old hackneyed griping, but my comment is, and I am still looking forward to the day

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in this House, when I can hear a rather well put presentation on the part of the Opposition, which, other than the path that we are on, is the one that you propose. What is the path to progress? What is the path to reduce the levels of poverty in our country? What are the issues that can be brought to bear to assist the Private Sector to be more involved in the development of this country?

Mr Speaker, the process of Budget Debate is actually a process of governance itself and therefore, it is a forum that the Opposition can use if they so desire, to productively and constructively contribute to moulding this society. Unfortunately, they usually avoid this

and get into griping. No one focused on the international contest with which Guyana has operated, in which the alarmingly high world fuel prices are between \$95 to \$100 and which by the way, according to OPEC projections last night, will continue to remain in that range for the foreseeable future.

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No one refers to the impact of this fact on the economies of the world and the increasing prices of food in the world and its impact particularly on this economy. This became so alarming in CARICOM countries that a special meeting was called in January 2008 to address the issue of cost of living and food security in which one of the issues that was dealt with was repositioning the agricultural bases of the Caribbean in what is now called 'The Jagdeo Initiative'. Yet, despite all of these major global developments in 2007, the economy realised real growth of 5.4 percent, sustaining the 5.1 percent of 2006 and above the projected 4.9 percent, which we made at the beginning of January 2007.

If this is not an indication of good fiscal management I do not know what is, especially when one compares it with the super power, United States of America, which recorded 2.2 percent growth and whose economy is in a serious down turn, possibly leading to a recession and whose projected rate of growth declined to 1.5 percent. Certainly this will have an impact also on developing

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countries and on Guyana. The world economy, by the way, grew by 4.9 percent in 2007 and in 2008 is expected to fall to 4.1 percent. Guyana achieving 5.4 percent growth rate was above the world average.

In addition to that, I just thought that I would refer to a number of presentations in the British newspapers about the cost of living. These are presentations done by the Consumers Affairs Correspondent, Mr Harry Wallop:

“Fastest rise in food prices for 14 years” in which he pointed out that in the British economy, I have never seen food inflation like it. What we are seeing is pretty much all of the manufacturing cost increases being loaded straight to the retailers... and it goes on to point out that at Christmas time there was 6 percent alone increase in the cost of food prices in the British supermarkets. It also even pointed out in another article of the New York Times in November 2007 that, food prices increased sharply in China and they jumped to 17.6 percent in October. It goes on to point out in New Zealand, the food prices also increased by 3.6 percent in the last quarter.

So, we are in a situation in which we cannot be like horses with blinders on and suddenly put Guyana out in

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Never-Never Land and not presenting it in a particular context.

Mr Speaker, let me go further and situate Guyana in its historical and international context. The document that many Members of the House refer to on both sides, particularly the Opposition, is the National Development Strategy; and they somehow glossed over Chapter 17 that deals with poverty alleviation in which it begins with showing and referring to the four major studies that were done that show the level of poverty that existed in Guyana prior to 1992. The PAHO study of 1971, a National Food and Nutrition Survey showed that 38 percent of the population fell below the poverty line and also 55 percent of the middle income. Then there was another report of the IADB a decade and a half later by a gentleman called Boyce, which pointed out that 65 percent of the population, had incomes below the poverty line in 1988. In fact, one year later, in 1989 when the ERP was introduced, it was estimated at 75 percent, revealing the impact of the initiatives by the Hoyte administration.

It also demonstrated that the lowest of income shares is 7.5 percent of the total income and the highest 43.4 percent. The SIMAP study of 1991 pointed out that 86 percent of the population fell below the poverty line. Dr Clive Thomas, in 1993, in fact, rejected the poverty line of Boyce and went further to point out that it was 67

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percent that lived below the poverty line, with a tendency for increasing its number because of the inflation of food prices.

The World Bank Study also made the same scathing remarks and pointed out that,

... the drop in living standards during the 1980s was demonstrated by partial data on health and education, that infant mortality rates increased sharply as the diseases spread by vectors and those caused by environmental problems. Between 1978 and 1988, infant mortality rose by 70 percent. It also pointed out that ... secondary school enrolment declined by almost 40 percent from 1980 to 1990, while the percentage of student passes in the secondary school entrance and CXC dropped significantly ...

The same National Development Strategy goes on to point out, that

... assuming the decline in the per capita consumption was similar to that of GDP and that the distribution welfares remain the same, the incidence of poverty would have increased from approximately 26 percent in 1980 to an estimated 43 percent in 1990 ...

and further that

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... it is satisfied, and this was when it was done in 1996, that there were changes and improvements in the state of the economy.

It also points out, the NDS, Chapter 17

... that after an 82 percent increase in consumer price index in 1991, the rate of price increase fell to 14 percent in 1992 and 8 percent in 1993 and remained relatively low;

It also goes on to point out

... the evidence to the effect that poverty had lessened since it expanded to shockingly high levels in the late 1980's.

So, when we look at the NDS, it situates Guyana at that time and it takes cognisance of the fact from what point it commenced. Guyana in the 1960s was the third ranking country in the Region and was considered a fast growing economy. In 1992, it was second from the bottom, sandwiched between Bolivia and Haiti. One only has to examine Haiti's position then and now versus Guyana then and now to appreciate the achievements Guyana has made in this period, *[Applause]* especially, as the two countries share certain similarities emanating from a long struggle for democracy and collapsed economies. As an emerging democracy with a fragile economy, Guyana has

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shown that it has been able to rise above the many difficulties.

Guyana is now ranked as a lower middle-income country in the July 2007 World Bank list of economies and not a low-income country anymore. The latest figures from the Poverty Reduction Strategy Report reveal the following poverty rates in 2006, that extreme poverty has been reduced to 18.6 percent. Need I remind you that extreme poverty in 1992 was at 28.7 percent and therefore the biggest decrease in poverty rates has been amongst those in the extreme poverty group... [*Interruption: 'I wish I could see that'*] ... "*We will come to that. Hold your horses. We will come to that*"

Moderate poverty has fallen to 36.1 percent in 2006 versus 43.2 percent in 1992 and therefore, I want to make a side comment, that there have been many comments on this floor about the etiology of crime, trying to show a direct correlation between crime and poverty ... [*It is not what we say, it is what is happening*] ... but in fact, if one studies and I have had the opportunity of being in the area of Home Affairs ... and after being inundated with many reports and so on ... that there is no direct relationship between crime and poverty ... There are linkages but not direct ... there are sociological factors; there are health factors; there are genetic factors such as a person who is a psychopath, whether he is a rich one or a poor one he is a psychopath and that cannot change. The criminals that

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we are dealing with today, many of them are psychopaths. Therefore, the issue of dysfunctional homes, of abuse and absentee fathers, all are contributing sociological factors to the level of crime in the society. *[Applause]*

It is rather arrogant in this House to have Members try to show that if you are poor then you have a tendency, a propensity to be a criminal and that is a shameful indictment. Honestly! *[Noisy Interruption]* So, get off the band wagon and deal with some reality.

The PNCR-1G must not forget that in 1985, due to its great running of this country, Guyana became the first country to be deemed un-creditworthy in this Region. The Hoyte administration had to swallow hook, line and sinker. The Economic Recovery Programme which plummeted Guyana and Guyanese into the worst state of poverty it had ever experienced when Mr Pollydore, the then Head of the Guyana Trade Union Congress had to point out that the purchasing power of the working class had dropped by 15 percent by 1991... But 1991 started to show an improvement in the growth rate ... the recipe was the ERP, a new liberal model of a market driven economy. The problem with this recipe for economic growth was that it was devoid of the safety net for the poor and vulnerable and it was built upon a collapsed infrastructure, which existed across the country.

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The PPP/C resisted the calls by the International Financial Institutions in those days to implement cost recovery in health and education and went ahead and introduced the low-income housing programme in spite of the donor agencies not supporting it in the first eight years. They do now lend assistance in terms of infrastructural works. The PPP/C administration has maintained a market driven economy but it has included the missing component in the Hoyte administration's economic development ...

Models of development are limited to just a few types: liberal, neo-liberal welfare models, which practically are non-existent now; the China and Vietnam model of socialist framework with market reforms and the socialist like Cuba. Not one Member of this House put forth any economic model that is different from the one that is already being implemented.

Mr Speaker, certainly, there is always space for improvement but not one person on the other side has put forth the case to say that the model and the framework is wrong. The fact that 23 percent of Budget 2008 is dedicated to health, education, housing, water and social protection systems such as old age pensions, school uniforms, public assistance, school feeding, youth skills programmes, housing are testimony to the clearcut and unequivocal policy to ensure that the people of this

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country, especially the poor can improve their lives and the quality of their lives.

Need I also remind you of two issues: the Income Tax threshold, which Minister Webster referred to, has made 36,000 people no longer paying Income Tax. This is a form of relief. In addition to that, a comment was made by, I believe, the Honourable Member Mr Patterson about the housing programme and that so many people could not build their houses. However, in the partnership between the Government and the Private Sector the Government negotiated low interest rates with the New Building Society for house-lot owners to assist people to build their homes and over 6,000 people accessed that with the assistance of the Ministry of Housing and so forth.

In 2007, the total social spending amounted to 21.1 percent, so in this Budget it has gone up. What we would all like to see is a more rapid decline in the levels of poverty in our country. One has only to imagine if these injections of billions of dollars into social spending were not in place what would have happened to the levels of poverty here in Guyana. Hence the motto, *Staying The Course And Building A Modern Guyana*, that is reflected in the Budget. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, governance is about choices and the PPP/Civic makes choices for the people through a process

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of consultation in which we have the PRSP. We have gone to the people on the Constitution Reform and also to create an enabling environment for the development of the economy, trying to work with the business economy and to help them to be able after years and years during which the State controlled 80 percent of the economy and to allow what is the burgeoning, rather fragile and immature Private Sector to emerge.

No one mentioned in this House, although the Honourable Member Mr Murray, referred to climate change; he did not give it credence in terms of what the impact has been and could be in the future, but it is not something to cast blame on. Who can control the climate? We have to be able to take initiatives to be able to improve and to reduce the impact on our society, particularly as we are an agricultural country. The Jagdeo Initiative, in terms of being the first country in the world to offer our country as an experiment for carbon credits is one that should be lauded, because our pristine forests and sustainable development will always challenge us in terms of the future and why should we not, as a country that provides oxygen for the world, be compensated for the way in which we have managed our forests and environment in this country?

It may be of interest to this House to note that the UN study on democracy in Latin America recognises that there has been vast changes at the political levels in

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democracy building after the removal of undemocratic dictatorial regimes, but it is one in the UN studies called *Ideas and Contributions - Democracy in Latin America - towards the Citizens Democracy*, which refers to serious economic gaps and the potential for serious social problems.

Latin America, by the way, suffers from the highest levels of inequalities in the world and so, for example, in 2003, poverty affected 43.9 percent in the entire South American and Central American population and extreme poverty affected 19.4 percent. The Region has the highest level of inequality in the world, and that was on Page 24. Page 48 also goes on to talk about the inequalities and I think that it is an important point that I wish to raise with you, that despite what may be thought of in other parts as having major levels of poverty, it is not only the level of poverty that is important, it is the difference in inequality. In Latin America, the richest 10 percent of the population on the level of income earns 30 times that of the poorest 10 percent. It points out that 20 percent of the population has 54.2 percent of the Gross National Income, whereas 20 percent of the population at the poorest level only have access to 4.7 percent of the National Income received by the Sector.

In Guyana, when we look at the latest figures that are coming out of the PRSP, the figures show that the inequality levels are much lower than the rest of the Latin

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American countries and South American countries. In Guyana, the richest 20 percent of the population accounts for 42 percent of the National Consumption, whilst the poorest 20 percent accounts for 7 percent. The National Average for Guyana in terms of 1992 of the Genie coefficient was 0.44, in 2006, it was 0.35 and therefore we are seeing a reduction in the levels of inequality.

I remember sometime in 1995 Dr Jagan as President calling on the Trade Unions, Economists and some of our Academics and so forth to sit down and to find where the money was that we could expand on the Budget and to have a faster path to development. Out of a long and very well studied and scientific approach, because there was a view at that time that somehow there was money in the Budget that the Government was hiding somewhere, they came to the conclusion that they could not find additional funds and what were available, except by numbers measuring such as taxation and so on. When we look at the issues to do with poverty reduction that is built into the Budget and is built into the heart of the macro-economic framework of the PPP/C administration, you come to the heart of our policy of governance. Reduction of poverty has been found to move slowly but steadily internationally, unless there are major shocks from global or local occurrences and based on economic growth and distribution of wealth, services and resources in a more equitable manner. So, the point that was raised many

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years ago in the neo-liberal model that looked at only economic growth bringing a reduction of poverty and improvement in the lifestyle and quality of life was debunked when they found countries were having high economic levels of growth but they were not having any impact on the poverty. Therefore it is not only economic growth per se, it is the distribution of wealth, services and resources in a more equitable manner.

When we look at the services, which as the Ministers have very eloquently spoken about and factually presented their cases: Minister Ramsammy on health, Minister Rodrigues in relation to the Amerindian communities and what was done, Minister Lall in relation to Local Government, Minister Nawbatt in relation to housing and water, Minister Manikchand in relation to the human services, Ministers Webster and Westford in relation to public service reform and fiscal reform, clearly these issues are there for all of us to see. [*And they were very eloquent*']

Mr Speaker, we have to also look at the issue in terms of good fiscal management that is to do with debt sustainability and the reduction of debt. No one can challenge this Administration for what it has done in reducing debt and being able to get debt write-offs by what was stringent conditionalities but one in which we knew at the end of the road, the country would be able to improve itself. The fact is, in 1988 we were carrying 50

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percent for debt repayment and now we are down to approximately 8 percent of export of goods and manufactured services which take up the entire debt, external and domestic. Points have been raised about the choices that we make in terms of getting out of the clutches of the IFIs and that is a long struggle and one which can only be done with economic performance, reduction of poverty and being able to have a society in which the Private Sector really becomes and takes charge in terms of developing this country. So, when Honourable Member, Mr Franklin talks about the Brazil road, he is right that it requires private investment and most likely foreign investment, but it is this same administration that has attracted investment in this country. I wonder sometimes if people have not read because maybe they just do not want to believe what they are reading or they just do not want to read it.

The point is, that this country is poised to a take off economically in terms of the negotiations going on for an aluminium smelter ... [*Applause*] ... wholly as a result of us having the courage to go to the arbitral award and being able to now be clear to open up our areas for oil exploration and for the increase in bauxite production, after the industry was languishing for 20 years, I think ... maybe, the Prime Minister will correct me on that ... and in which it was baby sat and kept alive even when it was losing millions and millions of dollars every year.

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Bauxite is now in its own right producing and therefore offering hope to the Linden community and the communities in the Berbice River but also for the general society.

Mr Speaker, governance has been the focus of many of the persons speaking here. One person said that governance issues were not addressed in the Budget. I am not sure that person really understood what governance is and how it is reflected in Government policies and programmes, but I would like to just offer a definition of governance, because it is bandied around. The UNDP document defines governance and it is a political term. It is a term that is in an evolutionary stage, because even in its own definition, it is being amended and changed as a political tool. It is defined as follows by the UNDP,

Governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels.

Governance encompasses a State but transcends the State by including Private Sector and civil society organisations.

The acceptable areas of governance fall into about nine categories,

- enhancing grace and accountability

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- promoting social stability and reducing violence
- enhancing inclusiveness and responsiveness
- improving effectiveness of the delivery of services
- enhancing the quality of the regulatory framework
- reducing opportunities for corruption
- enhancing the rule of law
- improving macro-economic framework
- reducing poverty, and
- improving bilateral, regional and international partnerships

The governance framework is that integral part of the Budget preparation and its presentation. I will come back to these nine categories shortly.

The very process of preparing the Budget is a governance issue. Each Regional Administration, which is made up of elected officials, NDCs and Municipalities ... Each department within each Ministry and statutory agencies goes through a process of meetings, evaluating their performance and putting forward, based on their outreach and experience with people and their own knowledge of their areas, and prepares a budget for submission to the

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Ministry of Finance. So, it is not the Minister of Finance or Cabinet sitting there waving a wand that tells Regions, NDCs and Municipalities what they are going to get. Clearly, the process is in negotiations won in many ways, as it will have to be based on the state of the economy, revenue collected and revenue projected, in order not to have the country getting into economic problems.

Dismal reports were also brought here by Opposition Members in relation to Guyana's Status and many of them were looked at. They really showed some inefficiencies, bureaucracy and corruption and lack of freedom and I would like to respond to those.

The Speaker: Well, your time is up, Honourable Member ...

Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member ...

Ms Gail Texeira: Thank you, Mr Speaker. According to the World Bank group in 2008, *Doing business in Guyana*, Guyana ranks 104 of 178 countries and when

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one examines Guyana's profile vis-à-vis countries in the region and OECD countries we are not doing badly, for example, when starting a business the procedures for the number of days ... Guyana – 8, the Region – 11 and OECD countries – 6.

Another indication is dealing with licenses, Guyana is in line with the Region - 12 days for procedures of dealing with licenses and 222 days for the dealing of licenses. In the Region it is 16.9 days and 238.6 days for the licenses, but one of the most telling and when you go to all the indication which are about 10, Guyana is doing relatively well in terms of the Region and the OECD.

But an important indicator under *Doing Business With Guyana 2008* which came out in January 2008, is protecting investors. The Disclosure Index has Guyana at 5 and the Region 4.2 and OECD 6.4.

In relation to Investor Protection Index Guyana is 5.3, the Region 5.1 and OECD 6 and therefore, again, when we do look at trading across the border, cost to export a container in Guyana is USD\$850, in the Region USD\$1095 and OECD USD\$905; cost to import USD\$856 per container, in the Region USD\$1208 and OECD USD\$986.

So, when the Honourable Member, Mr Ramjattan comes with his doom and gloom pictures, I am asking him to go back into his website, look at the World Bank 2008,

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Doing Business in Guyana and tell me if I am lying. The Freedom Report 2008 in the Americas ranked Guyana as 15 of 33 countries in the Americas and globally at 29 and they are considered free, we are considered a free country in terms of our civil liberties, our political rights and freedom of the press. *[Applause]* And again, I challenge those who think that I am talking poppy cock, that you go into the website and do your homework, because in the Freedom of the Press Report, Guyana is listed as free. Free!!

In all the maps ... and if you go back, they have a wonderful thing in this website; I encourage our Members to look at it. They have maps by colour coding, the status of countries in relation to the freedom of the press and freedom in terms of political rights and I challenge you to see the maps where Guyana was considered in 1980, not a free country. In 1992 to 2006, our colour changes and we are free. *[Applause]* We are considered a country that is democratic and that we are upholding the basic tenets of democracy. *[Applause]*

The Honourable Member, Mrs Holder presented that Guyana ranks lower than every country in Latin America and the Caribbean but she never quoted a source and I challenge her, as a Member of this Parliament, let us debate the issue of her sources on Latin America and the Caribbean and Guyana being at the bottom, because these

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are assumptions that she comes to the House with and as a Member of this House she misinforms it.

Transparency International was also quoted by the Honourable Member, Mr Ramjattan, and I want to quote from the Uses and Abuses of Governance Indicators, Development Centre Studies by Christian Hans and Charles O'Mally. These are his OECD documents, analysing all the different survey forms, in terms of governance and this is what he says about Transparency International,

Transparency International clearly asserts that the CPI is a ranking and cannot be used as a measure of National performance in the fight against corruption. It is often misinterpreted by newspapers and sometimes misused by donors as precisely such measures. Changes in the composition of the sources and methodology used from year to year mean that the country's rank scores are not comparable over time.

Transparency International says, it does not encourage the use of CPIs for decisions and therefore we cannot cite these; they are perception surveys, they call ten people in your country based on your population and ask them whether they think that there is corruption or not, that is how it comes. It is not based on empirical data and

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therefore we have to clearly note what we are talking about, we cannot just bandy around data and misinform our people. This House is the National Assembly of elected officials and we must tell the people the truth, not make assumptions and exaggerations.

In governance matters worldwide, governance indicators of 1996 to 2006, there is a comparison of all the governance studies that have been done in Guyana and where Guyana ranks, in terms of the highest scores and the lowest scores and in every one of the governance indicators, Guyana is at the medium level, we are not at the lower level like everybody seems to be assuming.

Mr Speaker, when we look at the Budget and I will just try to quickly go through some things, on the point of accountability, issues to do with points on accountability and having to do with legislative reform, constitution reform and the Human Rights Commission that had been set up by Parliamentary Committees, the Committee of Appointment, the Opposition well knows, both the AFC and PNCR-IG, why we cannot set up the ERC and why we cannot as yet set up the ICC and why we failed to set up the Women's Commission in the last Parliament ...
[Interruption: 'Why?' "You do not know?"] The Budget for Parliament has been increased by \$85 million

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to allow for a variety of functions of the Parliament to more effectively carry out their work and I hope that the Speaker feels pleased with this. There are also additional funds for The Millennium Challenge Account, for the Economic Services Committee and for the Public Accounts Committee, in terms of staff and facilities to allow the oversight of the Public Accounts of Guyana to be done.

The Public Accounts Committee exists in all Commonwealth countries, but what is different about Guyana in relation to the Caribbean is that we are the only Caribbean Commonwealth country that has expanded committee systems with the Sectorial Committees that have oversight of Government and therefore we are open to scrutiny by this Body. Parliament is the main area of voicing accountability, but also in relation to the Audit Office, fiduciary oversight of the Government – transparency. The Public Accounts Committee is now tabling their work on 2002-2003. That is not the fault of the Government, the PAC has its work and they will do it according to its time, I assume, but therefore, it is now dealing with other years and many of the issues, as is acknowledged in the Report, that were raised in that period are being corrected by the introduction of IFMAS and the Financial and Fiscal

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Management Act to allow for better scrutiny and maintenance of transparency.

The other areas of governance, of reducing opportunities for corruption ... points have been made here, the Millennium Challenge Account allows the Government and helps the Government in terms of improving the taxation systems, oversight of the GRA, control of Government spending and of course as I said, the Parliamentary Committees.

Many of the persons here spoke about corruption. I know, as a Minister myself in the past, of cases we charged which went to court and the cases were lost or dismissed. Therefore, it is an unfair accusation to say that the Government has done nothing in cases of corruption.

The Police Complaints Authority is also another area on dealing with abuse of power by the policemen and I agree with the call for the Coroner's Inquest to be speeded up and held. As a Minister of Home Affairs of the past, I wrote letters to the then Chief Justice and the Chancellor begging them to have the Coroner's Inquest in this country so that it could put to rest some of the accusations and give some sustenance to the families of those persons who claimed and if it was found to be true, died in police custody.

With the issue of corruption, it is a situation of reducing the opportunities for corruption by strengthening the

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systems that exist, but every time this Government deals with corruption there is an accusation of discrimination and therefore, you always want to have your cake and eat it. You do not want a system that is working efficiently, so in other words, knock off who you want, but do not knock off who you do not want ... *[Interruption: Yes]*

Mr Speaker, this House talked about supplementaries and their abuse. I just want to ask the Honourable Member Mr Murray ... I know that he is a reflective man ... when he goes home he will look at what the supplementaries were for. In relation to the Cricket World Cup, when we went to have more food for the dormitories in interior areas, because not enough money was put in the Budget or that the students were ... than was required and the cost went up. What do you expect for us not to ask for supplementaries for that? The Constitution and the Standing Orders allow that, but you reduced the whole thing to a level of accusation that was spurious and absolutely childlike and unbecoming of this House.

Promoting Social Stability And Reducing Violence – Mr Speaker, over \$500 million, between the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports and the Ministry of Labour is being invested in youth skills programmes, which some of the Members on the other side spoke of too, but do not seem to know exists and yet these forms are advertised all the time in the newspapers and over 800 children every year apply to go to these programmes.

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Under Promoting Social Stability, they also have the housing schemes, which in themselves, not only in terms of giving people house-lots at a reasonable rate, but also in terms of the access schemes are going to be a fantastic, dynamic intervention in this country in terms of changing the old culture of politics. People are coming from all parts of Guyana and living in these Regions, so that the vestige of the sixties when villages became classified based on race will begin to end, because people would live in schemes from all ethnic groups and from various parts of the country. That is when I believe that the hope of Guyana in building social stability will take place.

[Applause]

Mr Speaker, the Community Development Groups have not been focused on much, but I know and the Honourable Member Mrs Sahoye, this is her pet area and one in which she gives all her energy and love to, but community intervention, in terms of getting people to cross the racial, political and religious divides and to work in terms of improving their communities ... the programmes that have community interventions with grants from the EU and the USA. The Social Protection Programmes which I have mentioned already, confidence in the Citizens Security Project to do with safe neighbourhoods and building safe communities ... these are all provided. So, when a Member says that there is no provision for governance issues in the Budget, they are

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talking utter rubbish. Community Policing Groups are also part of it and even in the Justice Sector Programmes there is a security component and also the component to do with prisoner rehabilitation and trying to train and help prisoners to be able to reintegrate into society.

In relation to inclusiveness and responsiveness, there are several issues ... the National Commission on Law and Order, the National Safety Council, the National Competitiveness Council, which is a Private Sector/Government of Guyana Initiative, the National Working Group on Public/Private Partnership on the Millennium Development Goals, the National Stakeholders Meeting recently held, are areas that we are brokering and really broadening the scope of those that are involved in making changes in this society. Each Ministry does their own partnership and develops their own partnerships, in terms of Non Governmental Organisations in civil society. The consultations to do with sexual violence and domestic violence is a case in point and maybe the Opposition does not know that in fact no Bill brought to this House and no Bill reaches Cabinet until it has gone through a consultative process by the Sectoral Minister with whichever are the interest groups that are related to it.

We also have to include on the inclusiveness responsiveness the allocations in relation to the Non Governmental Organisations who receive subventions. In

the area of inclusiveness also is the issue of GECOM and the Local Government Reform and I join with Minister Lall and other Speakers who spoke about urging the Joint Task Force to get off its butt and get its work done.

There are Bills that have been drafted and amended and I believe that there has been some movement and we look forward to these Bills coming here with the greatest ... and personally, Mr Speaker, I have no objections to AFC coming onboard, if they will help to expedite the matter. That is a matter between the dialogues of the combined Opposition.

Mr Speaker, effectiveness of delivery of services, in terms of the Budget of the Local Government and access to services and certainly this is where there are funds that have been placed in the Ministry of Local Government, Home Affairs, Housing and Human Services, but obviously we have to move more and more towards E-Governance, in relation to people being able to access Passports, Birth Certificates, to pay their bills and to access a variety of services. This will not happen in a short period in the future, but it will come and it will pass but also it has to cater for the telecommunications Sector to be regularised, so as to allow people in the far interior to be able to carry out business not only by travelling and so on but by E-Governance.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member ...

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Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member ...

Ms Gail Texeira: Mr Speaker, on the Regulatory Framework, and this is an important area of doing business, which I referred to, the access to land and the access to permits and licenses that allows for business and foreign investments ... These are important issues that are part of the Competitiveness Strategy and to improve the environment to attract investments and expansion of the economic bases. It also includes on the regulatory framework as the situation becomes more systematically organised and better organised with better-trained people that will also help in reducing opportunities for corruption and abuse.

The Rule of Law has been spoken of in great detail not only at the National Stakeholders Meeting ... the documents were shared with all the NGOs, Political Parties and all the Parliamentary Parties, I should say, but also in this House the Rule of Law has been given greater attention: Citizens Security, the Justice Sector, the UK project and as well as the programme that is in the

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making, with the UN and the UN Agencies, in relation to interventions at the community level, which go back to Promoting Social Stability and enhancing the Rule of law.

Mr Speaker, I have spoken a lot about the issues relating to the macro-economic areas. The future for Guyana holds many challenges, exciting, daunting, frightening, but absolutely fascinating. I sometimes wish that the 16 years of my political life, when I was younger did not have to be spent on struggling to restore democracy, but had been spent more in building a modern Guyana; but that is a regret that is of no use. The younger generation, the younger Members of this House, I hope, will be able to move this country forward and be able to really take it forward in an amazing way. We have to learn to dream and we have to learn to be able to not keep shooting down the dreams of our people. Our people want to see change and they want to be able to see aluminium smelters and Berbice Bridges and Brazil/Guyana Roads. They want to show off their country and they want to be able to see production increase in the national resources, and they want to see diversification of agriculture and they want to be able to live in safety without the scourge of criminals running around and shooting them with AK-47.

But you know, Mr Speaker, I did not intend to get into the issue of what Mr Trotman said, but I believe that as a Member of this House, it would be remiss of me to allow him to get away with presenting what he did and say

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nothing. The gloom and doom that Mr Trotman has painted and that we are descending into madness, unless the Honourable Member knows more than what this side of the House knows about the nature of the criminal gang that he knows ... unless he knows it and if he knows it, he should share it at the highest levels of confidentiality but based on what we know about this particular criminal gang and those who are involved in it and the network of satellite cells all over the place, we believe that the Opposition appears to be deliberately creating an atmosphere that will harm the country and undermine the society. In other words, to find an opportunity to have a negotiated political settlement and it was said recently and I have to remember, having listened to Mr Oliver Hinckson say exactly the same thing but entirely different words from Mr Trotman and I therefore have to be very worried, as I have respect for Mr Trotman.

Mr Speaker, our problems are serious in terms of crime but let us also not lose perspective. The civilian law enforcement of most countries, very rarely have to deal with a criminal gang of this nature; even the Jamacian Law Enforcement Officers do not have to deal with a criminal gang of this nature. They deal with drug related crimes, but this gang is a different one, but if you are saying that this whole country has to be held at ransom by a group of guys, which I understand, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said at the meeting of the

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Stakeholders that it was between 24 and 26 people ... I do not know where he got that from ... [*Noisy Interruption*] ... I am quoting because there are Members of this House who were there, Mr Franklin, Mr Trotman, Mr Ramjattan and Mr Ramotar, were all there and we were all taken aback by Mr Corbin's revelation. However, if it is that the Opposition is saying that this country must be held at ransom by this no more than 24 – 26, well God help us! What kind of political leadership are you hoping to offer this country? Because political leadership is about going through the rough and the ugly and rising above it and giving people leadership, teaching people how to manage under good times, bad times and ugly times. You have to have gumption and they have to have some level of what you call stickability. Not every time something goes wrong, you running to call a descent into madness; it shows the level of fickleness and opportunism on the part of the Opposition.

Therefore, Mr Speaker, I call on the Opposition that once we have serious problems to address in the area of crime and public safety the opportunity and the stakeholders office is something we need to build on, in building the kind of partnerships that as Government, political parties, trade unions, women's organisations, religious bodies and so on ... and I hope, the Honourable Member Mrs Backer, who represents her party on the Committee of Appointment, who violates it and vitriolically opposes

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ILO being a member of the list for the ERC, will be considered opposition ... so that we can move forward, because the ILO is playing an important part in this whole thing ... *[Interruption]* ... You know, the problem is that sometimes you do not like when democracy works. When democracy works and people choose their leaders, you do not like it. When they choose who you like, you like it, but when the last Parliament put up the ERC and the bodies together came up with Bishop Edghill, you had a problem with democracy. Do you have a problem with democracy? You like democracy only when it works for you?

Mr Speaker, in closing, because I know that there are many other bigger guns to come, in terms of the Speakers, that is, I wish to close and to say that 2007 was a good year in terms of our financial and fiscal management and it was a good year in terms of the political and social environment in which we worked. *[Applause]* The year 2008 has started in a rough manner and clearly, there will be many rough roads ahead, but certainly, the accusations and allegations that this administration has not delivered and has not kept its promises and has not been realistic to the people ... you cannot debunk that, Honourable Members of the Opposition. You cannot! I challenge you in a private debate or on NCN ... *[Interruption: 'Ahhh!'* "I challenge you!! I understand, Leader of the Opposition,

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that you now use Sharma as your adviser, so I will challenge you on CNS as well. Let us go to it”]
[Applause]

Mr Speaker, clearly, the 2007 Budget in the period of post election peacefulness gave us hope and we will not let that hope be smothered by a group of men who seems to be headed by psychopaths ... let them not be the ones who kill our dreams. Let us stand together and move this country forward on behalf of all of us. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr Donald Ramotar ...

Mr Donald R. Ramotar: Mr Speaker, I rise also to join in making my presentation to this year’s Budget and first of all let me just add my voice in congratulating all those who worked so hard from the Ministry of Finance, people who worked till late in the night to make note of some of the presentations, so that we can fulfil the mandate of governing this country.

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I would like to begin partly from where my Honourable friend Mrs Texeira left off by saying that Guyana has come a long way in the process of nation building ... *[Applause]* ... since the PPP/C took Office. We are no longer considered a HIPIC country but we are now being regarded as a country at the medium level of development, even though at the lower round in that category. That itself has its own implications, not being a HIPIC country makes it more difficult to access concessional finances, it means that we will have to rely more and more on our own resources and that is why this Budget must be seen as a very important Budget, because it has to enable us to keep our country on firm footing and to accelerate the social and economic development that has started. We have to keep focused. We have to garner more revenues for our country to carry out all the things that we want to do. We have to cut down on leakages and we have to be strong on corruption and in developing human resources generally. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, we are also operating in an international context. Some Members mentioned some of them and I would not want to repeat those but to probably add some that I myself think that are important for us in our country. The international environment that we are operating in is not necessarily a very friendly one for countries like ours. What we are seeing taking place abroad at various fora are struggles to increase influences.

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Particularly the big, powerful countries are continually fighting to increase their influences and increase their influences in different parts of the world. What is dominating those international relations are naked self interests. Many principles of solidarity and help and so forth ... many of those principles have gone through the window and many developed countries are seeking more and more to entrench themselves and increase their own power within the international community.

Therefore, I think that we have to understand this; for instance, if you look at the debate going on in Europe ... Europe has become very hostile to China and to Chinese investment in their economy, an African economy largely because Europe is beginning to see Africa as its backyard and as its area of operation and only to dominate Africa and now that China is investing in there, they have a lot of accusations. I have been in conferences where European leaders were telling African Members of Parliament that they should chase China out of Africa because China means no good for them.

I think that we have to see all of these things taking place and then look at the attitudes of the European Union to the Caribbean and to two important products of the Caribbean, to sugar, which we produce here and even while the Region was negotiating with the European Union, Europe decided to renounce the sugar protocol, showing once again that 'might' is right and they have

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also done the same with bananas. Although Caribbean bananas are a mere fraction of the amount of bananas imported in Europe, because of interest, the United States interest in Chiquita bananas, they have now prevented Caribbean bananas from entering into Europe. We have to see these things and understand that we are operating in an extremely difficult environment and therefore, we have to look at what we achieve within these contexts. We heard the Honourable Member, Mr Komal Chand mentioning how much the price of sugar will be cut in this part of the world for our products, but Mr Speaker, that is not the end of our problems. We have been forced in this Region to grant Europe reciprocity, something that it never had before or never asked for before.

It means therefore, that a lot of our own industries are going to be challenged unprotected by its more powerful companies in the European Union and we signed that agreement. This will pose great challenges to our industries, because Europe, of course, is much stronger than we are and while we are being lectured about the benefits of integration, we are finding cases where integration in our Region is practically being discouraged by the very fact that if our sugar goes into a product in Trinidad and that product goes into Europe, it is not regarded as having any kind of concessionary entry into that country.

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Mr Speaker, enough persons mentioned the rise in oil prices but there is another factor that I want to point to that has a big negative impact on us, and that is the weak United States Dollar. That is also impacting heavily on us. Everything that we import outside of the US area, the Euro area, the UK pounds, in China itself, the prices have been climbing, not because of anything that we did, not because of poor governance and not because of anything that we have done here but because the United States Dollar is very weak, we are importing a lot of the inflation.

Many have spoken about the effects of the prices of food by the use of corn to make ethenol. We are importing that inflation into our society and that is why I appreciate that Political Parties will always want to get some advantage in the cut and thrust of things. I believe that as responsible leaders in our country, we must face the facts because the spike in the cost of living in our country at the end of the year ... and this year it is blamed on the VAT. When the Honourable Members on the other side, I am sure that they know that it is not so and let me just say for the record about VAT, because that seems to be one of the factoring rants that the Opposition has and is using regularly now. First of all, VAT was proposed by the Opposition in this House in 1993. The former Member, Clive Thomas, proposed it and the PNCR-1G

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supported it. We at that time had said, yes, we agree, it is a good idea but we did not have the capacity to administrate that type of tax at that point in time.

We have come here now, and we have passed the VAT, with the full support of the Opposition and the VAT has replaced ... there are complains and they have shifted gears a little bit because they know that their arguments did not hold water for long. I am talking about the rate of VAT, but the VAT has replaced several other taxes. It has replaced the Consumption Tax, the Telephone Tax, the Purchase Tax, the Service Tax, Hotel Accommodation Tax and Entertainment Tax. The Consumption Tax alone was 30 percent in this country. Therefore, it is not a question that the Government has been putting any burden on people. The VAT tax is 16 percent and of course, many essential items have been zero-rated in our society, therefore, I fail to see the case that the Honourable gentlemen and ladies on the other side have been making as far as VAT is concerned.

Mr Speaker, in the circumstances, Government has to do a lot to strengthen the Economy. We have done quite a bit already. We have reduced debts and most people in this House when they talk about the reduction of the debt burden that we had of US\$ 2.1 Billion in 1992, speak about debt relief and debt write-off that we had and it is true that we enjoyed those things, but the fact is, Mr Speaker, that this economy paid back on our own US\$1.4

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Billion in this country in the last fifteen years. *[Applause]* That means, Sir, that almost G\$300 Billion had to leave our coffers in paying back those debts. If we had that money in our possession, then you could imagine how much more we could have done in the period of time we have been in Office. We have to mobilise a lot of our forces at our disposal and we have to work in partnership with everyone. We spoke from the very inception of building a national democracy and we saw that as being in partnership with the various classes in our society, bringing on board not only the working people but also the Private Sector and bringing on board other Sectors of the economy. We do not feel that our country can ignore any form of ownership, that we need all forms of ownership in this national thrust that we have to develop our society

Mr Speaker, despite the fact that we have been accused here on several occasions during this Budget Debate, not one or two times but constantly, we have been told that we are not creating the conditions for the Private Sector to develop. Let me allow the Private Sector to speak for them on this issue. Mr Corbin, I did not know that you are running any business, so you are not in the Private Sector ... *[Interruption]* ... I am quoting from a letter here that was written by Mr Mike Correia, Chairman of the Private Sector Commission, a letter that was

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published on the 30 December 2007 and here is what he had to say ...

Guyana is now better positioned for economic expansion than ever before ... [Applause] ...the 5.8 percent GDP growth achievement in the first half of 2007, following the 4.7 percent of 2006 is impressive and indicative of continued expansion. The reduction of Guyana's national debt to less than US\$700 million and the debt servicing down to only 5 percent of the revenue, suggests that Guyana's economic recovery programme has been largely successful. [Applause] Guyana is no longer a bankrupt country and accordingly, the Government has more latitude to improve the welfare of Guyanese.

This is not Donald Ramotar speaking, that is Mike Correia speaking.

Mr Speaker, not only have we been friendly with the local Private Sector, I remember shortly after we came into the Government, one of the first discussions we had with the local Private Sector was the fact that they were saying that the Government and that is the previous Government, they were giving concessions to foreign capital, much

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more and above what it gave to local capital. We stopped that and we have had one regime and we have been friendly to foreign capital as well and again, I want to quote from Mr Dennis O'Brien, Chief Executive Officer from Digicel:

Guyana is one of the best locations in the Region for investment ... [Applause]

As a foreign investor, you are treated properly. You are treated the same. There is a progressive Government here; there is a reasonably good tax regime and it is a safe place to invest. More than that, Guyana is a gateway to South America ... [Applause]

Mr Speaker, despite the fact that the Opposition always accuses the Government of not being friendly to the Private Sector, here the Chairman of the Private Sector Commission, at one of the foremost international capitals, singing the praise of Guyana, with disregard.

Mr Speaker, I note that the Opposition goes into all ... not all the Opposition but some Members of the Opposition go into all kinds of struggles to find documents to come to quote to us and give us all types of things. I have in my hand here, Sir, the IMF Executive Board's conclusions in 2006 of consultations done in

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Guyana and let me tell you what they had to say in some of these cases.

Growth for 2006 rose by nearly five percent after a decline of 2 percent in 2005, reflecting strong aggregate demand, driven by a recovery in the Private Sector credits, strong private remittances and foreign direct investments. Inflation fell below 4 percent. The overall external position has widened to 28 percent of GDP in 2006 and 9 percent in 2004 as a result of rapid growth in both consumer and capital imports ...

[Applause]

... this was largely due to the increase in fuel prices in 2004 and the ambiguous public investment programme, including the modernisation of the sugar plant at Skeldon, which amounted to about 6 percent of GDP.

Notwithstanding, foreign internal reserves increased to the US\$278 million. Who can accuse us of mismanaging the economy when it is reforming like this? The same programme went on to say,

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that despite the continuation of a very ambitious public expenditure programme, the Public Sector has declined from 13.6 percent of GDP in 2005 to 11.2 percent of GDP in 2006, primarily as a result of the improved performance of the public enterprises, excluding the Government investment in the modernisation of the sugar plant, it is estimated at 5 percent of GDP. As a result of Government's continued emphasis on infrastructure, total public capital expenditure were estimated at about 25.5 percent of GDP in 2006, total Government social spending also remains high at about 23 percent of GDP.

Now, Sir, all I am appealing to the Opposition is to be objective. Let us be objective. These are people who have no axe to grind, they are not supporters of the PPP/C or the PNCR-1G, I hope not then, but here they are giving an estimation of what is taking place in our economy and it is proving that the management of this country is in very good hands. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, let us see what they said about the Social Sector in this same Report. I am sorry Mr Ramjattan is not here because he goes burrowing all over to find these types of Reports.

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Guyana has also made progress with the Millennium Development Goals with the attainment of two indicators:

eradicate extreme hunger and achieve universal primary education.

It is likely to achieve another two by 2015:

reducing child mortality rates and provide access to safe drinking water to more than half the population ...

[Applause]

This is what the IMF has been saying about the country. Mr Speaker, they went on to say,

The Executive Directors commend the authorities for implementing sound macro economic policies resulting in better growth and inflation performances and improved the sustainability outlook.

Mr Speaker, I think that I have made the point that our economy is in very, very good hands, but while listening to some of the debates here, I heard some heckling, sometimes under their voice, maybe they were not sure, but it is something that has been happening here constantly and I would like to clear up as well. Because, this even found itself in the PNC/R-1G manifesto, when they talk about the role of narco money in our economy.

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Mr Speaker, let me just say this, if you look at our economy, if one examines the balance of payment and one observes total inflow into the economy of US \$1.022 Billion, including exports, official disbursements, foreign direct investments and remittances using the 2006 data, if one uses the somewhat higher IDB estimate, they said that we had ... and we are using their ... a figure of remittances of US\$216 million, but if we use the IDB figures of US\$446 Million in remittances, total flows would go up to about US\$1.252 Billion. On the other hand, the outflow total of \$1.03 Million, comprise import of goods and services along with debt repayments. This demonstrates very clearly that our imports are covered by measured flows into our economy ... and all this nonsense ... Sorry, Mr Speaker, we always say, *where is the evidences?* This is our evidence, where are your evidences to say that these things are happening in our society? [Applause]

Mr Speaker, again, in Economics 101, there is a theory that says that savings is equal to investment and if you look at our society, you will see in the figures that we have a savings of some \$14B in our system and the investment in the same period was about \$15B, more or less matching what was said there and the aggregate deposits by residents in the commercial banks were some US\$719 Million of which the Private Sector contributed \$570 Million dollars. You may ask, Sir, where did that

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money come from, well Government alone ... and when I talk about Government, I speak of Central Government and the public cooperation ... [*Interruption: 'Remittances!' "Not remittances"*] In paying bills and putting disposable income into people's pockets, that is salary minus payment of Income Tax ... US\$170 Million have been injected from the Public Sector to employees who have to spend it, save it and generate other demands within our society.

Mr Speaker, if you look over the last 10 years, how much money the Government Sector alone has placed into the hands of people; it far exceeds the money that is in the banking system at this point in time. [*Applause*] So, where is the evidence, when we ask for evidence, it is because of these stubborn facts, that we have here ... where is the evidence to make all the charges that you make against us about all these types of things that you have to say.

Mr Speaker, the Government knows that we have to advance in every Sector of the economy. We have to modernise our economy and we are starting to do so. We cannot neglect the traditional Sector and that is why, although Mr Murray was much more capable than some of his other colleagues, still implicit but came across in his presentation, was ... *maybe you know, Skeldon may be a mistake.* In fact, he concluded by saying, *The Jury is still out.* Mr Speaker, we cannot work like that, we have

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to imbue confidence in our people and you, yourselves, in your own manifesto said, that you would have done some of the same things that we are doing as far as sugar is concerned.

We are building a new factory; we are working towards having a refinery to add value to the product that we are producing. At Enmore we are building a packaging plant. We are moving towards modernising to move away from people just cutting the cane to mechanise the industry more and more as we face the several problems as has been said here several times before, about facing the challenges of global warming which is obviously causing some changes in our weather.

Last year, the Sugar Industry had just about 60 opportunity days, down from about 120 opportunity days. It therefore means that mechanisation is a must. We have to go into that direction in order to maintain the sustainability of the industry. There would be no retrenchments, unlike the PNCR-1G, you used to call it redeployment, but we will have none of that. We will absorb, if you notice, I am saying that we are expanding. We are going to the new Sector and we are even looking at ethanol. That way we can absorb the labour within this society. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, some of my colleagues mentioned the injection that we have been having as investment in the

bauxite industry. We carried the bauxite industry for more than 10 years, at enormous cost, until we now have investment into the industry and the industry is now beginning to prosper ... *[Applause]* ... and we are even looking now to add value to the product there, at this point in time ... *[Applause]* But, our colleagues, of course, never make any concession in their consistent barrage and never see these things and I am getting worried for some of them, that probably, they are beginning to believe their own propaganda.

Of course, very vital to economic development is the need to create better infrastructure within our country and we have had mega investments in our infrastructure in Guyana. We have been replacing all the bridges; we are looking after the highways on the Corentyne, in Region 4, right through to Region 5. We are building a modern packaging house at Parika in order to try to help in the diversification of our agricultural products that we can export. All of these things we are doing, Mr Speaker, because, apart from the fact that these things are challenges, they also offer opportunities ... The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago mentioned that we have to look toward Guyana as a Region in dealing with food security at this time. *[Applause]*

We are trying to build a modern abattoir, to take advantage of the fact that for some years now we have been certified free of foot and mouth disease. These are

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some of the directions that we are going with and we are working very hard on a National Dairy Programme and have our National Competitive Strategy in place.

Mr Speaker, as we have said before, we are working extremely close with the Private Sector and other Sectors in the country to move us forward and as I said, the Private Sector is seeing the benefits of this, because if you look at the various reports that are made public ... sometimes the bare summary of it is advertised in the newspapers ... when they have their Annual General Meetings. Look at those companies. Every single one of them has been making profits year after year. I have not seen any that has advertised where they have made a loss; a very few have made less money in one year, compared to the previous year, when they have been there. So, Mr Speaker, I think that we have been fulfilling our manifesto pledge since 1992 of working with all legitimate stakeholders within the society to move our country forward. *[Applause]*

I want to deal a little bit with corruption. *['What!!']* because I know from the time the Opposition speaks about corruption, they magnify it greatly. I am not saying that there is not corruption in our society. What I can tell you, though, is that, as a political movement, the PPP/Civic does not benefit one cent from any corruption. *[Applause]* Therefore, if there is corruption in Government, who knows if the person supports the PPP/C

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or supports the PNCR-1G or even the AFC or even my friend in the corner, GAP/ROAR? ROAR seems to have disappeared leaving GAP alone. Who knows? We have an open policy.

Minister Benn mentioned that procurement is a public thing; tendering is opening up for public scrutiny ... you know that; and these are some of the things that we use for fighting. It was I, and I am proud of this, at this very forum who brought a Bill at the last Parliament to open the Public Accounts to the media, so that they can see when the Public Accounts Committee are investigating the Auditor General's Report, if they find people suspicious, that people can see a face, who it is ...?
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member; please take a breath every now and again to give me an opportunity to call the time. It takes about five minutes to do so.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Mr Donald R. Ramotar: To conclude ...

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member ...

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker, I am sorry about the speed at which I am going but that is one of the

techniques I use to smother the heckling and it has probably become a habit. *[Laughter]*

The Speaker: Well, it is working ...

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker, we have Tender Boards, we have all of these things and my Honourable friend, Mr Carberry, knows that we could have settled that business long ago, as far as the Public Procurement Committee was concerned but he wants it to go ... he does not want to deal with this in a political way, he wants to go through all kinds of rigmarole and that is why up to now we have not had it fixed up as yet.

I just want to say that we agreed and we want to work with the Opposition. If they know about corruption anywhere and they know about which contractor is taking kick-backs, let us work together and rid our society of those elements and ... *[Applause]* ... enjoy Guyana. As I said, we get no benefits from this and we have no interest in protecting any corruption in our society. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, it is often said that the most important factor in development ... many people talk about the various important factors in development and they talk about gold, diamond and our natural resources, but I think that many people have now come around to that; it is not my original idea, but in many of the literature these days, people are pointing out that the most important factor of development is the people. It therefore means that we

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have to invest in our people and let us look at the trend of this Government at what we have been doing. In fact, if you want to look at a major difference between the PPP/Civic and the PNCR-1G ... you should look at how we spend our money in our Budget at this time ... *[Applause]* You will look at what is the emphasis that we put on social services and on factors that develop the human capital ... *[Applause]* ... My Honourable friend, Ms. Kellman, last night made a very good speech I must say. I must commend her for her hard work and research in putting the speech and her thoughts together but I want to say to her that she needs to be more complete. You cannot come and quote the Honourable Shirley Field-Ridley, the former Minister of Education to say how fantastic our education was under the PNCR-1G; but you also quoted Ceciline Baird in 1974, who said that three quarters of the students leaving school could not read and write properly ... *[Applause]* ... And let me show you why Ceciline Baird was more correct than Shirley Field-Ridley. If you look at PNCR-1G's last Budget in a full year of Government in 1991, you had four percent voted for education, three percent on health and zero percent on housing ... *[Interruption: "Shame!"]* ... and let me mention this: What was the size of the Budget? Your Budget size was \$5.3 Billion. We have a 15 percent of our Budget on education and the size of our Budget is \$119 Billion ... *[Applause]* ... That is why we do not have the same type of overcrowding. I am showing you

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that both in the relative and absolute terms, the PPP/C has been topping the PNCR-1G in the care of our people. [Applause] Mr Speaker ... [Interruption] ... 125 and 200 now, calculate it, \$119 Billion to \$5 Billion, you do the maths. I will leave that to you, Professor Norton.

Mr Speaker, it is important ... [Interruption] [Laughter] ... it is important that we constantly develop our people in a rounded way. We have been spending in health as we heard about. I believe that since we got into Office, we have had a revolution in every aspect of social development, housing, health and education. Not only now, since we have gotten into Office, but now we are accelerating the cultural development of our people. [Applause] We are giving back with the assistance of Government and the Private Sector people; we are building back the Theatre Guild and I would like to see us producing more Wordsworth Mc Andrews, more King Fighters, more Eddie Hoopers', Mighty Inventor, more of those people. [Interruption] We would like to see more of these people being produced like Francis Quamina-Farrier. I remember the times when the schools listened to the "*The Tides of Susanburg*" written by Francis Quamina-Farrier.

Mr Speaker, we would like to see more of them, we would like to see more sports people developing within our society, because the old saying that '*man cannot live by bread alone*' is a good one and we have to give them a

rounded education and something in their heads. These are some of the things that we promised in our manifesto.

Let me say, Sir, that while we have made a lot of achievements, we also stand in danger ... the danger exists that we can slow down that development and endanger it in some ways and that is related directly to the crime situation that we have seen. I must say that I agree with my Honourable Colleague Ms Texeira, in her analysis of these crimes. It is true in a general sense that there is a correlation between poverty and crime, but we are not talking about this type of crime that we are hearing here. This is not the nature of the crime that we can describe stemming out of poverty in our society. These are people who jump houses and jump windows and these things and you need to talk about that and as she said, we have to be careful how we put that argument, because in a way if we extend that logic, we would be criminalizing all poor people in that analysis, so we have to be careful about that.

We have a situation where we have some very brutal killers out there, people who could go to East Bank and kill eight people and that they could go and ... I am not saying that they are, but this type of crime ... it's a set of sick minds involved here. Theirs are sick minds.

Mr Speaker, I think that this is sometimes the attitude that gives gifts to the bill of the criminals. We have to have a

united front on this issue at this point in time. *[Applause]* At the same time, we have to deal with all of these things, Sir, and we have to try to fight these crimes and these criminals. It is very clear that the only solution to this is to bring these people to justice. That is the solution to the problem that we face at this point in time and it is therefore important that we succeed. That brings me to some of the little heckling and some of what was said in the speeches here and even the AFC, who seems to be holding on tightly to some of their own positions.

Last night in his presentation, my Honourable friend, Mr Patterson spoke about discrimination and implicit in that, they are pushing the lines that this Government is discriminating against people on the basis of ethnicity and so on, but that is for your line there. Maybe there is logic to the madness and maybe they are recognising that they are losing more and more support to the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic and that is the only ... *[Applause]* ... method that does not have logic, that is the only field that does not have logic and you cannot appeal to arguments in that case and possibly that is why we hear all these little hecklings here.

But let me say this, Sir, if the PPP/C came into Office and we have put measures in place, I am not saying that we are honky-dory and everything is fine, but we have put measures in place to deal with this issue. I am very surprised ... let me make this point too, that every time

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we try to do this, we have been viciously attacked by the Opposition. You will recall, Sir, that when we first got into Office, we tried to set up a Racial Equality Commission and we asked Bishop George to head it. We came under vicious attack that Bishop George was not suitable to head it. We have now the Ethnic Relations Commission. If you have problems there, why do you not take it there, instead of trying to give signals into our community about all types of racism? *[Applause]*

Moreover, we are the only country in this Region that has signed the Optional Protocol of the United Nations. *[Applause]* Moreover, we are the only country and if the United Nations comes here and makes a report on the question of race and race relations, in the last one, they came here and said that our problems are skin deep, but if you or anyone has a problem as far as that is concerned, we have given you the possibility of taking that to the United Nations and have them come in ... *[Applause]* ... Why do you not take that road, whereby the PPP/Civic Government ... why do you not take that road instead of doing all that heckling and signalling in our society?

Mr Speaker, in closing, there is one other point I would like to touch on here. We know that we have problems in some agencies in the Security Forces and we are all working on them. Many of you know about some of those programmes, but at this point in time, confronted with the banditry that we are confronted with, it is very

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important that we give the Security Forces all the support, not only the material support that the Government is providing, but we need to give them the moral support of this House in order to ... [Applause] ... and I do not think that all the time they have been getting that kind of support from the entire House in this regard.

Mr Speaker, I think that these are very important things and I think that we cannot equivocate. We have to stand beside our people and I believe that sometimes it might be good for us to be ourselves and for us to see ourselves through other people's eyes, because sometimes they are more objective and I just read here from an interview that appeared in the Guyana Chronicle on the 4 November 2007 in which the outgoing representative of the IDB, Mr Vargas Oleah was interviewed and I will read probably three small parts of what he said.

Firstly, he said that he finds Guyana's cultural and ethnic diversity unique and fascinating and he is impressed with the harmony that exists within this diversity, unlike the religious and ethnic violence that engulfs other societies.

He went on to add and I will quote directly what he said here,

I can remember my arrival at the old airport and riding on the long unfinished road, a big contrast. Nowadays, we enjoy a modern Timehri International Airport and a

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smooth ride all the way to Georgetown. A ride looking at new housing schemes, new public schools and a cricket stadium and a four lane entrance to a booming Georgetown ... [Applause] ... It has been a long way, these five years and I have no doubt that the country is moving forward. We have a better Guyana today.

Mr Speaker, I think I will close after this quotation,

I strongly do believe *we have a better Guyana.*

And I strongly believe that if we work together, because I did another little exercise for all those who talk about inclusive governance, and the exercise that I did, Sir, was to try to look at the manifestos of the PNCR-1G, the PPP/C and the AFC and to see what has been fulfilled and I can tell you, we have not only fulfilled our manifesto, we have fulfilled a lot of your promises. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert H O Corbin: Mr Speaker, I have been very disappointed in the last two presentations in this House ... *[Interruption]* coming from such senior functionaries of

this Administration, that they would come so true to form, that even my predictions of what they will say were so correct. At a time when the Budget itself ceased to achieve certain specific objectives, when we come here, Mr Speaker, and hear the kind of analysis which the Honourable Member Texeira and the General Secretary of the PPP/C provide with respect to the crime situation in this country today, one wonders what kind of confusion must be existing in the minds of those who are responsible for this security crisis. I will deal with this matter a little later. First the Prime Minister said that there was a racial problem. Well, I will quote the ...if it is necessary, then the Honourable Texeira in another interview ... [*Interruption*]

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, am I allowed to correct the statement made, attributed to me?

The Speaker: Proceed Honourable Member ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: I said that at Lusignan, the people killed were Indians and half-Amerindians. That is what I said. [*'No, you said it was the black people who killed them'*]

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, I did not intend to reach so early to this matter but I will quote from what the Guyana Chronicle, not the Stabroek News or Kaiteur, says of Monday 18 February 2008 at Page 2, headlined *Lusignan Killers Not The Normal Criminal Gang*, and the

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paper was saying here, according to Ms Texeira, they quoted her extensively and she is saying here,

... the view was proffered by Government adviser on governance, Ms Texeira on Thursday afternoon, shortly after a walk out by the main opposition party in the National Assembly ...

Ms Texeira's remarks were also in response to a question posed to Prime Minister Samuel Hinds by a reporter on whether the Government had already drawn the line in the killings as the Prime Minister had earlier said, *clearly are racial problems*. You have not corrected it in the press ... *clearly a racial problem ... [Interruption]*

Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Mr Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

Mr Robert H O Corbin: It is your papers ... *[Interruption: 'It is not saying that, you are not reading that ...']*

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I hold to the position that I said what was factual and obvious. The 11 people killed who are East Indians and Amerindians, it was a factual position that I said. *[Applause]* I also said that there seems to be an intention to put a sword between our peoples that is what I said. *[Applause]*

Mr Robert HO Corbin: You see, Mr Speaker, the truth always hurts ... *[Applause]* ... they come here and

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complain that the PNCR-1G crying out racial hate to the people, but here it is the Prime Minister of this country, at a time when there are possibilities that the issue at Lusignan could lead into, indeed, a conflict by persons who misunderstood that situation and who might have played, possibly into the hands of the perpetrators of the crime, but the Prime Minister is helping to fuel this by saying there is a racial problem ... [Applause] ... and you are telling us that you are co-operating! [Applause]

You have not corrected this and this is your paper. In the same paper, Mr Speaker, the Honourable Ms Texeira is quoted in the Chronicle, and this is the level of confusion. She is quoted as saying,

... it is, obviously or for the same incident, motivated by political objectives which are those which we have said are diabolical minds. We are not saying that it is Fineman; we think that there are others who are behind this and they are obviously motivated by some kind by racial prejudices

...

Ms Gail Texeira has come to this House this evening and seeks to suggest that others are using these incidents for racial conflict in this House. When your own programmes at NCN for one continuous week after Lusignan monopolised by the PPP/Civic stirred up racial

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smooth ride all the way to Georgetown. A ride looking at new housing schemes, new public schools and a cricket stadium and a four lane entrance to a booming Georgetown ... [Applause] ... It has been a long way, these five years and I have no doubt that the country is moving forward. We have a better Guyana today.

Mr Speaker, I think I will close after this quotation,

I strongly do believe *we have a better Guyana.*

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The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert H O Corbin: Mr Speaker, I have been very disappointed in the last two presentations in this House ... *[Interruption]* coming from such senior functionaries of

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Mr Speaker, the General Secretary of the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic comes here this evening ... I am not dealing with his economics, I think Mr Murray has dealt adequately with that matter. I did not get that far in economics at University, but I think you need to do not 101 but 202 ... [*Laughter*] ... but I would not get into the economics argument; I want to speak to the political. I want to remind the Honourable Member that it seems that he is doing the vacillation, which he asked other political parties not to do. You are seeking to get consensus but throughout your campaign, you are throwing boulders and inferring that there is some political mind behind this criminal activity. Who are these political minds? Where could they come from? There are not many political forces in this country ... [*Interruption: 'Like is you and me' "You want me to quote again?"*] Mr Speaker, I will come to this matter later, as I said; they were predictable and you will see that in my prepared text, I anticipated what they were going to say, but I want to say one other thing. I want to say publicly to the Honourable Member, Ms Texeira, that I accept the invitation offered to me in this hallowed Chamber to be on NCN. It would be a great change because so concerned was this Government about having consensus, having joint support for the security forces, that in the wake of the Lusignan tragedy, I had the misfortune every night to look at the parade of stars from the PPP/C, parading on the programme and I think those programmes did more harm to this country

than anything else, in terms of disturbing social cohesion ... *[Applause]* ... If you do not know it, the propaganda was negative, so put your researchers on the ground ... it was negative.

Mr Speaker, we were concerned about the future of this country and so, in order to put some balance to what was taking place and I want to say here, the Lusignan tragedy took place early that Saturday morning, I knew at 3:00H and I know that the PPP/C believes and I will say this here, I have not said this before, I knew about 3:30H that morning of that incident, because we have a PNCR-1G candidate in that very street, if you look on the list ... *[Applause]* ... she lives just next to the last house, so when Minister Westford come in this House and use as a debate to spew all kinds of ... at persons and create all kinds of insinuations that people are doing charity work at Christmastime must have gone to ... that is the height of recklessness for those people who hold high positions in this land ... *[Applause]* ... I knew early that morning and so, by 6:30, I was at my office ... and I said this thing will cause misapprehension and it can create problems in this country. I did not call the President, because on the morning when Minister Sawh was shot and killed, I called the President at 06:00H and I said, *I convey my sympathy, this is a matter that can cause political problems, I am prepared to go publicly on this matter; we should meet and discuss it.* What happened in the wake

of that funeral? Go back and check the papers, and so I did not call anybody but I knew that one of my own candidates, her cousin's children were victims and so that is why I was concerned. It had nothing to do with race or politics in terms of those circumstances. People were dead and they required sympathy and support ... [Applause] ... and at 10:00H on Saturday morning, I called a press conference condemning the Lusignan tragedy and at the same time, calling the Police Force to move with haste to crack the perpetrators. My press conference was played on every television station, except the National Radio Station, NCN ... [Applause] ... and it was not played because it fitted the propaganda profile, which went on the next week, that the PNCR-1G were the people who were promoting this crime, when we have a candidate who is in deep tragedy and you probably think that all of them who died were your supporters. But I do not want to get further into this matter.

I mentioned this to remove this myth that people in this country are necessarily aligned to Political Parties automatically because of their ethnicity and therefore, all responsible Parties in this country have a duty to promote proper race relations and unity. That does not mean that if there are problems and perceptions of discrimination, they should not be addressed. That is why we raise them, because, if you do not address them you will have more problems that you cannot control ... [Applause] ... but I

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will come back to the crime situation. I had not intended to start this way. I must say that after hearing those presentations, I was completely distracted from what I have to say this evening.

Now I come to the substance of the Budget, Mr Speaker, after five days of debate on the 2008 Budget in this National Assembly, I believe the people of Guyana are still at a loss to comprehend how the exchange used in this forum will improve their quality of life. I sincerely believe that. Notwithstanding all the hot air and the airing of some of these programmes on NCN, I believe that what they are at a loss to know how, with an admitted inflation rate of 14 percent ... and this is the Minister's figures in this Budget, not mine ... since by some strange coincidence, neither the Statistical Bureau nor the Bank of Guyana, published the correct statistics recently, or they perhaps delayed it. That is why the workers are worrying about this Budget. Notwithstanding what the Honourable Member has said, I believe that the businessmen of this country are still perplexed about their businesses in the absence of clear policy guidelines and assurances that their businesses will remain viable. You could remain fooled by that letter in the press but go to the ground and they will tell you how they are even afraid to express contradictory views with the kind of atmosphere of discrimination and victimisation ... *[Applause]* ... so, you are not going to hear the right

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views and I believe ... [*Interruption: 'Who ?' "I will come to that in a minute"*] Businessmen are perplexed about the future of their businesses and the absence of clear policy guidelines and assurances that their businesses will remain viable. Investors of whom you boast about are still undecided, as clearly demonstrated by the recent disclosure on the front Page of the newspaper a few days ago, that a Marriot Hotel is still contemplating whether to proceed with their proposed construction. Am I making that up? As to whether future investments in Guyana make sense, in the context of the security situation, exceptionally high electricity charges and Government vacillation over sound investment policies.

Mr Speaker, farmers in this country are still worried about their livelihood with the regular experiences in the recent floods, rising cost of inputs and the absence of any budgetary measures, real ones to guarantee that their experiences over the past three years will not be a recurring phenomenon. There has been no satisfactory guarantee. The Honourable Member from Region 5 in her presentation spoke at length of the problems in West Berbice and the rice production, when her colleague from the same Region on the other side of the benches could not contradict her. He said he agreed, but that they were trying to do something with the hymac (a machine) and he agreed that the boom was short. So, let us not fool

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ourselves that all is well in Guyana with respect to farmers and they are still worried as to what this Budget will do to impact upon their improved performance in the Agricultural Sector.

The youths of this country are still in a state of amazement, that with the high unemployment rate, the state of joblessness which pervades this society, the only assurance that they could receive from the PPP/C Administration at this time is that *we are Staying on Course ... Staying on Course with unemployment?* Is that what the Budget is saying to them? Ultimately, Mr Speaker, the people of Guyana are still in a state of fear that despite all the talk of plans of the huge expenditure allocated, the crime and security situation will remain unchanged, having regard to the Government's miserable record of performance and non implementation of plans for the past five years now. Despite all we have been told here in this Parliament I will deal with that later. In short, Mr Speaker, most Guyanese believe that the announced goals of building a modern and prosperous Guyana as stated in the 2007 Budget will continue to be an illusive dream. What is more frightening, however, is that judging from the presentation of Speakers on the Government side of the House, over the past days, including this evening, by the last two Speakers, the attitude displayed by them, demonstrate that there is no willingness to listen or even take account of those of us

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who would genuinely wish to see Guyana develop and prosper, thus assuring a better quality of life for all.

[Applause]

For me, Mr Speaker, who entered this House some 35 years ago my disappointment should be obvious and my pessimism should also come as no surprise after witnessing the successive failures of this PPP/C administration to deliver on stated promises and live up to commitments made over the past 15 years. The Honourable Member just mentioned about all these fulfilled promises in the manifesto. Well, I would not go to the manifesto; I will come to what was stated in this Parliament a few moments ago. Mr Speaker, my honest belief ... *[Interruption: 'You want to see them in the manifestos' "I agree with it and support and believe everything in it; I am happy that you delivered some of it but I will deal with what you did not deliver"]*

The Honourable Minister of Finance I believe sincerely should be congratulated on his eloquence and delivery, but if eloquence and good speech was a requirement for success, Guyana would be rivalling the USA, China and India for leadership as the most rapidly developing country in the Caribbean ... *[Applause]* I may add, that after listening to the Honourable Attorney General, two days ago, he would be in high demand by the religious communities as the most sought out Pandit or Evangelist

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in Guyana. I think I must commend him for his sterling presentation in this Parliament.

Mr Speaker, how could the Minister of Finance expect us to take him seriously, when he entitles his Budget *Staying The Course: Advancing The Transformation Agenda*. Advancing what agenda ... the agenda of consultation promised by His Excellency to this Parliament in his address to this Parliament in 2006? He could not be serious? Minister Ramsammy perhaps seriously needs to consider whether the Honourable Minister is in need of attention from any of his new medical facilities. These facilities that he and the Honourable Member Mr Bheri Ramsaran spoke so emotionally about in this debate here over the last two days, regrets that he has not seen much allocated to the medical and mental institution in New Amsterdam and I think that should be looked at. *Staying the Course* means, Mr Speaker, *Staying on Course* in this context, could mean continued exclusionary politics, non-consultation, corruption at all levels; and I will deal with that pettiness, vindictiveness against anyone who dares to offer a different view, contempt for the Guyanese people, arrogance and injustice. That is what *Staying on Course* may mean in this country. *[Applause]*

How could the Minister of Finance and his Government expect us to have any hope for the future when he tells us his plan is to stay on course? What Course, Mr Ramotar? The course of escalating crime and insecurity, rising cost

of living and hopelessness, lack of any significant local and foreign investment ... [*Interruption: 'You have to thank yourself'*] "I will deal with it ... poor performance in Sectors identified by him as essential to Guyana's economic development and the continued outward migration of our most qualified and skilled human resources ... [*Interruption: 'And you want to work with he says/she says'*] ... with the young enthusiastic, but of course, inexperienced, PPP/C MP announced a few days ago as a success story and this Mr Ramsaran considered favourable and in comparison with Barbados.

Finally, the Honourable Inspector Gadget ... I am sorry, the Honourable Minister who found it difficult to understand that a pirate was only a special classification of the manner and kind of theft ... [*Laughter*] ... wants us to come here and pat him on the back for a job well done, oblivious to our responsibilities to the people of this country.

Mr Speaker, according to the Honourable Minister Rohee and I listened carefully and took notes ... [*Interruption: 'Then you can spot it from the back'*] "According to him, he could neither see nor hear any constructive suggestion of usefulness or any point made from this side of the House; that is what he stood over there and said yesterday] That is typical of the arrogance and contempt to which we have become accustomed ... [*Applause*] ... But Mr Rohee should be advised that his inability to

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comprehend the contribution of Members on this side of the House is no fault of ours. *[Laughter]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, allow me to interrupt you for one moment; you are coming around to the period of half an hour and you will need an extension of time but I was wondering if you can round off whatever point you are making now over the next two or three minutes and we can then suspend for 15 minutes and then resume.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Much obliged, Mr Speaker. Well, I will stop at this point just to advise that perhaps Mr Ramsammy could provide some special services for the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs but this time at the ENT Clinic so that he will see here, though I am not sure that will help him comprehend. If he could sit here and say he heard nothing constructive in this whole debate coming, did he not hear the Honourable Mervin Williams emphasise the breach of commitment to the people of Region 3 to repair and build a new school at Bagotsville? Did he not hear the Representative from Region 10 ... *[Interruption: 'But he has to respond* emphasising the great disparity between the requested sums of that administration and the paltry sum eventually approved, thus the impact on the state of roads and so many schools and the adverse effects on the delivery of education in the Region. Then Mr Ramsaran said that we were not representing our representatives here. Did he

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not hear young MP Selman express her disappointment ... [*Interruption: 'No, I was not here to hear the serious difficulties' "He was having coffee at the time" 'Oh, I see'*] They were not addressed by the young people in the Budget and so, Mr Speaker, I will say that it is a pity that one of the very issues that I have identified as a problem affecting the modernisation of Guyana is the attitude, arrogance and unwillingness on those on that side of the House to take constructive suggestions for the future of this country. I take my pause. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, we can now suspend for a few minutes.

20:30 - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

20:50 - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Member, you will need an extension of time ...

Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed ...

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Much obliged, Mr Speaker ... You will appreciate from my earlier expressions why I was so pessimistic of this debate and my expectations. I should tell you that before I left home this morning my youngest daughter sent me an e-mail and I was tempted to take her advice, but I will read the e-mail at the end. I should add to the e-mail one important fact in response to the invitation by the Honourable Member to be on NCN, so that everything can be put in proper perspective because in the height of the Lusignan massacre, when all was happening on NCN, recognising the distortion of the picture of Guyana and its likely harmful effects on harmony in this country, I took the time to write the General Manager, one Mr Sattaur, explaining to him that I have seen these programmes and they were all by Government and PPP/C operatives and that they did not reflect a national view; that my party had views, some similar to ones being expressed and others in grave disagreement and that we would be happy to have an opportunity to either be a part of any panel discussing the situation or be there in our own rights on any programme to express our concerns on the present situation. Mr Speaker, about 5 days later, the General Secretary, this is a letter I sent to him with the Leader of the Opposition letterhead, the General Secretary of my party, Mr Oscar Clarke got a three line response.

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Thank you for your letter to NCN, signed by the Leader of the Opposition. Your letter is acknowledged.

I would like you to draw the inference of the great concern which this Government and the media have, the National Radio Station, but presenting a balanced public view and then you want to know what informs the attitude of the Leader of the Opposition. Well, I think you had better check how the system is functioning.

Mr Speaker, more interesting in this debate over the last five days has been the misuse or use of the Holy Christian Book, many by those who took affirmations rather than choose to hold the Book, when they took the oath of Office in this House [*Applause*] in order, hopefully, to sound more convincing. I do not know if they think that would be making the argument more convincing. It is not that I do not use the Holy Book, I do, but I am an avowed and announced believer. I am not ashamed to announce that ... [*Alright!*] ... So, I do not have to be worried about using my Holy Book. I use it, but I am amused and sometimes worry if it is not blasphemy ... [*Applause*] ... when persons think that they can bring fallacious arguments and by carrying on a quotation from one of the Holy Books, it somehow makes the argument valid. I am sure my good friend Moses would not agree with that. I am not judging, I am saying it is dangerous to use the books out of context, but I want to remind the

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Honourable Member Mr Rohee, who seems worried about my remarks, that when there is spiritual wickedness in high places, not all who say, 'Yea, yea Lord shall enter into the Kingdom' [*Applause*] So many in this Chamber, Mr Speaker, resorted to the Biblical references, but we do not have to go that far, because at the beginning of every session of this National Assembly, there is a most profound prayer that is recited and I think that it is taken from some Indian philosopher, I am not sure of it myself. It says,

Almighty God, we who are here gathered together do most humbly beseech thee to guide us in all our consultations, so that we may together build a land where knowledge is free, where the mind is without fear and the head is held high and where words come from the depths of truth. Grant us thy divine guidance ... grant us, O God, the vision so to lead, so that all the people of this land may enter into that state of brotherhood and unity where the mind is led forward by thee into ever widening thought and action.

We do not need to go to any other book, those words are sufficient to guide the spirit and the morality of the Debates in this House and it is in that context that I want to speak some straight truths here this evening.

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Mr Speaker, our mission here is not picking out book-ears but to deal justly with the issues before us, once we ensure that our words come from the depth of truth, we give credit where credit is due and many Members on this side of the House commended the Minister of Finance for points that they thought were good. I remember the Honourable Bernard saying that was good and so on and so forth and Members commended the House, but of course, they were greeted with rejection at the end and in the responses.

Mr Speaker, the Budget Debate 2008 and the measures outlined in that Budget are inadequate to achieve the stated objectives as outlined in the 2007 Budget of *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*. I therefore want to endorse the conclusions of Ram and McRae in their publication *Focus on Guyana's National Budget 2008* at Page 6 and I quote,

It does not inspire confidence that he (and he is speaking about the Minister of Finance) brings to the job any fresh ideas and approaches. He seems satisfied with taxing and spending with little regard for the state of the economy, the impact on consumers and taxpayers and the absence of strong controls to ensure that public monies are not wasted and are properly accounted for.

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Mr Ramotar was quoting heavily. Well, I am also quoting heavily and I will do some more quotations. That is a different view and I endorse that.

Mr Speaker, for example, why after more than one year in the job, the Honourable Minister of Finance, did not insist after receiving regular reports from the Auditor General and reading them and listening to the contributions of the Honourable Member Mr Murray in the last debate, all the criticisms that appeared in the media, that he has allowed another Budget to come to this Parliament without any accountability for the millions of dollars of lottery funds collected by the Government which is being wantonly spent through a private account managed by the Office of the President.

These are manifestations of transparency stalwarts, so we have a Budget, we are *Staying on Course*, that is its theme, but we do not have evidence in that Budget of a simple recommendation like that being put in the Budget. Instead of the Members on the other side taking that point seriously, one Member replied by saying, "Well, when the PNCR-1G was there, they did not have Auditor General's Report." That was the response to that. So the inference ... [*Interruption: 'That is a fact!' 'It is not an issue of whether it is a fact, it is not the PNCR-1G on test here, this is you, the Government saying that you are going to perform in a certain manner, it is your record under scrutiny'*]. You had a chance to scrutinise the

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PNCR-1G and you boast how you throw them out after 28 years. You still want to examine the PNCR-1G? If that is so, put us back over there if you want to examine our records now. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, at Page 30 of the very Ram and McRae Report, it says and I will quote for the benefit of my Honourable Friend Mr Ramotar, who believes in quotations from other places. It states as follows,

Dr Singh overspent his first Budget by nearly 20 percent and would have lost some credibility over this and his earlier insistence that there was no room for extending the range of zero-rated items. His presentation differed from his predecessors in the endless listing of expenditure and the suggestion that money is a panacea or a substitute for proper management. It would be enormously useful if he would address the expected outcome as well, rather than concentrate only on inputs and the billions the Government is spending, often with little results.

I quoted that because the Honourable Member Mr Murray pointed out similarly that there were certain concerns by the Honourable Members on that side ... one of them

said, he did not live up to standard. We have had several kinds of reactions in this Debate and I was listening carefully and taking notes, but this was exactly one of the points made by the Honourable Member, Mr Murray on Thursday last, which the House failed to appreciate. I guess that Mr McRae's remarks and observations may be treated with the same contempt, if not vilification, because he has dared to challenge this sacred document produced from the Ministry of Finance.

I want to state very categorically my firm belief that the Budget will not achieve its stated objectives, because essential elements for success have either been ignored or not yet fully understood by the PPP/Civic Administration. That is why I was very disappointed hearing the General Secretary speak tonight, because at least I thought he understood the wider context of what was necessary to make this economy tick and it is not only economics. One essential element is consultation to achieve consensus ... *[Applause]* ... I will elaborate on this. Other reasons for failure include some of the points I have made earlier. There is an ongoing myth to accept constructive criticism, suggestions and proposals and there is a lack of political will by this Administration to implement plans that you have announced to us and when we criticise you, you are upset. There are sometimes pettiness, contempt and sometimes, displays of arrogance, which alienates people and a mistaken belief that the

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Government and its political officials are the only sources of knowledge for most things in this country.

Finally, I believe that this Budget will not achieve its objectives because you have continued to squander all opportunities to achieve consensus and build national cohesion and take Guyana forward and I sincerely believe that this evening. The figures may sound impressive and the plans laudable but if the funds are squandered and the plans remain unimplemented, then we will be indeed advancing but on a road to nowhere or to self-destruction.

Mr Speaker, I wish to make it clear that we in the PNCR-1G would wish to see the laudable objectives in this Budget achieved. If Guyana prospers and the wealth is equitably distributed, then all its' people, including Members of the Peoples National Congress Reform-One Guyana and our supporters will be happy because they will be enjoying a better quality of life that economic success will offer. It is therefore out of concern for Guyana that we have taken the time and the opportunity to identify weaknesses in the Budget in the hope that this Administration will take heed if they want to succeed. We can do no more.

An important point is that this Budget has no methodology of either measuring the distance on the 'Course' or whether we are 'on course' at all and the little revealed in this very 2008 Budget shows that we are a

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little off course at this very moment. The 2007 Budget, and I want you to follow me carefully, because Mr Ramotar again felt that 2007 Budget, *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, upon which this 2008 Budget is based, outlines several of the building blocks for prosperity and sets some specific goals. The *Introduction* at Page 1, and you could check it, and I quote from this book, because it is this we are *advancing and staying the course* on,

... the Budget concretises our vision of a modern equitable society for all Guyanese as elaborated in a number of documents, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and individual Sector Strategy Papers. Just recently His Excellency, the President reiterated the vision in his inaugural address to the Ninth Parliament.

In the next paragraph, the Minister continued in this very document,

... a Guyana where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoy greater cohesion and prosperity, a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours and a society that is recognised for the care and

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attention it places on children, women, youths, the elderly and the less fortunate.

Mr Speaker, I do not know which distant neighbour the Minister was referring to but I hope he was not referring to Haiti. However, he continued in his speech in this very book at Page 22 and I would like Mr Ramotar to follow because I am going to be showing you how you are off course.

We envisage a Guyana that is a preferred place to raise children in harmony; a place to do business; acquire a decent and affordable education and advanced healthcare; a caring society in which the needs of the elderly and other vulnerable groups are adequately addressed. It is a vision that will drive our policy agenda for the next five years ...

But he did not stop there and these we cannot agree with. He continues at Page 25 of the Budget and he states,

... the traditional pillars alone cannot support an economy that will need to create thousands of jobs over the next five years and rapidly increase per capita income as

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we keep the MDGs in our sight and make a determined onslaught on poverty.

Well, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* comes to mind, but he did not stop there, he said, for example and I quote again and I want you to follow me, same Page 25,

Four companies will begin oil exploration in the second half of 2007, while a fifth will commence seismic work offshore.

... GGMC will continue its exploration for natural gas in Leguan, Wakenaam and Pomeroon ...

I do not know if Mr Murray can tell us if he saw any natural gas there when he went to the funeral last week, but, Mr Speaker, we have heard absolutely nothing about this in Budget 2008 or from any of the Speakers on the other side. So, I have to ask whether we are still *staying the course* in this area or have the floods which wreaked havoc upon the farmers in the Pomeroon affected the oil and gas exploration? How far are we *staying the course*?

Mr Speaker, with respect to the determined onslaught on poverty, the Honourable Prime Minister Samuel Hinds (I hope he does not dispute this quotation this time) was honest to make a public confession that over the past five years, Mr Ramotar, there has been no significant reduction in moderate and extreme poverty levels

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Stabroek News, 18 January 2008, reported the 1999 Report showed the National Moderate Poverty Level at 36 percent and Extreme Poverty Level at 19 percent. At the end of 2006, a similar Report showed only marginal decline by 3 percent and 1 percent respectively. Is it on this course we intend to travel? Or do we have to accelerate the pace?

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member ...

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, I would like you to grant the Honourable Member another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Yes, please proceed, Honourable Member ...

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. At Page 25 of the same Budget,

... the Government intends to develop a strong vibrant diversified and globally competitive manufacturing Sector. Our facilitative policies have re-energized the Sector recently and if last year's GUYEXPO is a benchmark, then it is

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*evident that investors have been responding
enthusiastically.*

Mr Speaker, I have not heard if we are *staying the course* in this direction, because I too, was very impressed when I visited GUYEXPO that year at the exhibition site. I remember viewing a potential investor who had proposed to build and assemble helicopters in Guyana. What has happened Mr Minister? Has this proposal crashed, as we learnt one of the exhibition products did shortly after then? Why do we have to go cap in hand now to borrow a helicopter from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago? You know, there used to be a character and since the Honourable Member was speaking about culture and development of culture and he would like to see Wordsworth McAndrew and Francis Quamina-Farrier, there used to be a character in the Christmas Magazine television show 'No Big Thing', he always was there lying down with a bottle of rum in his hand and if I were him I would ask now, *I wonder where the helicopter gone?* [Applause] People are responding enthusiastically, but we do not know, Mr Speaker, if we are *staying the course*. Does *staying the course* mean that this vibrant manufacturing Sector is still on course? I would have liked to hear that.

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Now, Page 25 of the 2007 Budget ... Please let me quote again for Mr Ramotar. It states, you can follow with me, you know, as I am quoting the Pages,

... the Government intends ...

Oh, sorry, I read that already. Page 7, Paragraph 3.4 ... [Interruption: 'For which year?' " 2008 ... have some information which I now refer to and I quote; this is the 2008 Report I am at now and this is what it is saying at Page 7, Paragraph 3.4, bearing in mind the background of what was stated in 2007 that I just quoted, about this *diversified manufacturing Sector that was responding enthusiastically,*

... the manufacturing returned a mixed performance ...

It says a few other things,

... and these developments aggregated to an overall growth of one percent in the Sector.

That is enthusiasm. Well, if this is the result of this re-energized Sector, it begs the question at what real rate we are intended to advance. Those are the questions that we

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expect to be answered in a Budget like this, not a lot of figures. In 2007 the speech stated,

... over the next five years, our goal for the Tourism Sector is to see it realise its potential as a major contributor to GDP...

Are we *staying the course* here, Mr Ramotar? The Minister is not here, so Mr Prime Minister, after listening to my good friend the Honourable Mr Maniram Persaud, I have great doubts.

We have heard the story about bird-watching tourists who prefer to use sites to the beautiful city of Georgetown. I hope at least that he is taking notes of the suggestions which have been made by my good friend Mr Danny about the policy framework and the certain climate which is necessary, if we are to promote tourism. I can quote further, Mr Speaker, but I believe that the point has been made about the kind of Budget that should have been presented to this Parliament to enable a proper assessment to be made on the progress of the *transformation agenda* against these announced benchmarks the year before. But looking at the Budget as it is, it is a repetition of a lot of numbers and one has no way of determining, despite all the figures this percent ..., you had to compare it with respect to certain goals.

Finally, I give one more example,

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... we are also encouraging the development of additional pillars, including livestock, seafood and aquaculture and forestry ...

Are we *staying the course* here? The answer lies in examining the 2008 Budget again, but Mr Murray has made a full analysis and consequently I do not want to indulge in repetition, and in the absence of figures, could we be told, and I think that question has been asked repeatedly and we have not gotten an answer ... How many new jobs were created in 2007? That is the only way we could now be *staying the course* having regard to the development of these new pillars that were going to give growth in employment.

The Government said in that Report also at Page 23 of the 2008 Budget,

This year the Government will launch and commence implementation of a \$20.9 Million Agricultural Export Diversification Programme.

Mr Speaker, after announcing the development of additional pillars in 2007, one year later, we are now being told that we are launching and commencing implementation. We will have our way to see this happen and I genuinely hope that it succeeds because as I said, it will make life much more comfortable for the people of Guyana.

With respect to the Forestry Sector, I wish to refer, Mr Speaker, to Page 6, Paragraph 3.2,

... the Forestry Sector however, declined by 11 percent ...

And what were the reasons given?

... reflecting reduced harvesting as a result of weather factors and a tapering in domestic demands for construction materials towards the end of 2007 ...

Well, Mr Prime Minister, the PPP/C has a real passion for the blame game. At one time it was the PNCR-1G as in the case of crime that we heard earlier today. Now, we are blaming the weather for the lack of performance in the Forestry Sector, but I will give the House the real reason, which we have not been told, it is because of mismanagement, political partisanship, corruption in the Forestry Commission and collusion between the Administration and the drug/criminal enterprise and other sections of crime ... *[Applause]*

I know I would have been asked for evidence, so I brought it here, like Mrs Shaddick brought a transport to wave and I have answers for her, too. I refer now, Mr Speaker, to the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006* on Guyana. I think Mr Rohee has ... I am sorry that he is not here. Please note that this is not a secret report, it is not a secret like the Security Sector

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Reform Plan that was not fully laid in this Parliament and I wonder if the Prime Minister will tell us something about that, as to why the entire document was kept secret. This *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006* can be found and accessed on the Internet by anybody. Anyone here can go on the Internet and check to see whether I am misquoting. I will quote what it says,

... drug traffickers appear to be gaining a significant foothold in Guyana's timber industry. In 2005, the Guyana Forestry Commission granted a State Forest Exploratory Permit for a large tract of Guyana's interior to Orieleo's Inc., a company controlled by known drug trafficker Shaheed Roger Khan. Such concessions in the remote interior may allow traffickers to establish autonomous outposts beyond the reach of Guyanese law enforcement ...

So, it was not the weather, but mismanagement in the Sector and distributing lands for forestry, which would not have been used for forestry but to promote the drug trade. That is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, when Mr Rohee comes to this House and instead of accounting for his stewardship, he asked me to account for some 200 guns in 1970 ... There are more ...

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[Interruption: 'No, no!' "That is what he said here; I heard him" 'How many?' "There are more urgent matters for him to address. If he is concerned about guns in Guyana in 2008 ... [Applause] ... not 30 years ago, but now in 2008 ... I will deal with this matter later]. I am not running from it, but I want to refer him to the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2003. This is what it says, under the heading, Money Laundering Considered Large, the Guyana Report, and I quote,

The report concludes that Guyana is neither an important Regional financial centre, nor an offshore financial centre ...

And it goes on to speak about money laundering, but this is the part I want to quote,

The scale of money laundering, though is thought to be large, given the size of the informal economy, which is estimated to be at least 30 percent of the size of the formal Sector. Money laundering has been linked to trafficking in drugs, firearms and persons, as well as corruption and fraud, (but it says something more significant) ... political instability, Government inefficiency and an internal security crisis and a lack of resources have significantly

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*impaired Guyana's efforts to bolster its anti
money laundering regime.*

And it continues,

Finally, the 2006, same narcotics report, states under corruption ... Mr Ramotar was saying that he does not condone, I do not have a problem with that, but you have to wear the hat, you are in Government, you are heading the Administration and this is what it says,

News media routinely report on instances of corruption reaching to the high levels of Government that goes un-investigated and unpunished. The former Minister of Home Affairs who had been implicated with an extra judicial killing squad and who had improperly issued firearms to known criminals resigned in 2005.

So, when you want to talk about guns in the system, now you just have to look behind you, not 30 years ago ... [Applause] ... you have to look under the establishment of the drug trade in this country and practices in this country. So, let us stop playing the blame game in this country, do your job.

Let me get back to the Forestry Sector and the Budget I was speaking about. I hope that I have said sufficient to illustrate that while we wish progress of our country-beautiful sounding words ... the allocation of youth

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resources alone, are insufficient to guarantee that any *transformation agenda* will be advanced.

I conclude this aspect of my presentation by relying on a summary by an appropriate quotation from the very Ram and McRae Report that my friends do not seem to like too much and this is what it says ... well, go to Page 27 of the Report, I can give you a copy, Prime Minister,

... the recurring questions in relation to expenditure generally, it is better that Government is getting value for money, or is pursuing a policy of "have money ... will spend". The obsession with billions spent concentrates on input, rather than output and suggests that a new paradigm is required in public expenditure.

The Audit Act provides for value for money auditing and perhaps the Public Accounts Committee may wish to force the issue of VFM in one or two areas. I would like to recommend this suggestion to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee for urgent action in 2008.

Mr Speaker, before I turn my attention to the other essential elements that will make our Budget not an elusive dream, I wish to say a few words on the National Insurance Scheme. I perused the Budget for some discussion on the NIS, particularly after the national disclosures last year of a review, which involves consultations across the country and public concerns

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expressed about the viability, especially after the last actuarial review. At Page 40, Paragraph 4.7 of the 2007 Report ... if you look at it, Page 40, Paragraph 4.47 of the 2007 Budget Speech, the Minister ... [*Pause*] ... reported that the Government was reviewing the Pension System in the Public Sector and studying recommendations of a consultant to see how they could be implemented. He also stated that a review of the National Insurance Scheme was also conducted. Surely, the Minister must be aware, that as a Party which has the pleasure and pride of introducing the National Insurance Scheme while in Government, we would be interested in being informed of the Government's stewardship in this regard ... [*Applause*] ... So, not only because the success of the NIS is important to us, but because one of the objectives stated in the Minister's vision for a modern Guyana, is one where, and I quote,

The needs of the elderly and other vulnerable groups are adequately addressed ...

See Page 22 of the Budget Speech of 2007. Is there some reason why the Minister has been silent on this matter in the Budget of 2008? It should be noted that no less a person than the Head of the Presidential Secretariat is the Chairman of the Board. The Report of the recently conducted review has been released. I have not had an opportunity to get a copy and read it, but I have been advised by very knowledgeable persons, that it is a cause

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for serious concern. So, I looked in the Budget for 2008, to see whether the Minister of Finance would tell the Nation what is happening with the NIS and I did not see it. Among the recommendations is that there should be an increase in the age for the receipt of old-age pension from 60 to 65, I have also been advised ... that is NIS pension I am speaking about ... [*Pardon? You said old-age pension...*] “*I am sorry, I do apologise; I stand corrected. No, I will correct myself, I am man enough to apologise and withdraw my remarks*]

The Speaker: Your time is up, Mr Corbin.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member 15 minutes to continue his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Please proceed Honourable Member ...

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Thank you, Mr Speaker, yes 60 to 65 years and I have been also advised that a separate study reveals that the average lifespan of males in Guyana is around 68 years. What this means is that a person making NIS contributions for his entire life is only likely to receive benefits for an average of three years, if they implement that suggestion. More troubling is the fact that the retirement age is 60 at the moment. What then will become of the retired persons during the five years

between 60 and 65? Still troubling, Mr Speaker, is one report that the recent report does not seem to address all the concerns raised by the last actuarial study.

Then there were expressed concerns by members of the labour movement and by professionals over the risk involved in investing monies from this fund in the construction of the Berbice River Bridge Project and I hope no one propagandises and say I am saying monies should not be found for the Berbice River Bridge, but from a pure solid investment point of view, and the capability of the scheme, professionals advise that the Scheme itself should not invest as it was very risky for the workers money. This is what I am advised and I would like to hear the Minister treat to these issues, because the Pension Scheme is at risk. So strong were the objections, I am told by knowledgeable persons at the time when the money from the NIS was being used for other investment, that one senior professional resigned rather than sacrifice his professional reputation.

Therefore, in the context of this information, one expects that if we want to believe you that you are *Staying on Course*, this House and the workers of this country require some explanation to know what is the future of the National Insurance Scheme but alas I look and I wonder and there is not a word about NIS here. Perhaps the Hon Prime Minister may be able to point me to where it is.

I wish to deal, not with economic matters now, Mr Speaker, I have addressed sufficient issues that have to do with the first element to achieve success and they have to do particularly with what Honourable Member Gail Texeira said here this evening and to some extent the Honourable Member Mr Ramotar, who endorsed what she presented to the National Assembly.

I wish to say, and I mentioned it earlier that one of the reasons why this programme will not succeed is that there is no consultation to breed national consensus. I want to deal with that and I am not speaking from any figment of my imagination. I want to refer you to the speech of His Excellency President Jagdeo in his 2006 speech to this National Assembly. It is relevant, because again if you look in the 2007 Budget Speech, the Minister says here that this whole Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana is guided by a set of base documents, the National Development Strategy Sectorial Reports and according to him, he was relying on ,

*... the President's vision outlined in his
inaugural address to this Ninth Parliament*

...

So, this is what the President said and I want to quote from the Honourable Member Ms Texeira. The records are in this Parliament and this is from his address to this Parliament, the inaugural speech,

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... consistent with this thrust towards inclusive governance will be the fashioning of a new political culture, one which I have cautioned cannot be for us but be allowed to find a national fit between our body politic ...

It sounds very good.

... my Government will pursue parliamentary and constitutional reforms. It aims at giving effects to outstanding decisions ...

Outstanding decisions ... I underlined

I do not believe that at this junction of our country's modernisation quest, we can lose any opportunity to ensure that these outstanding reforms are tabled ...

Then at another section I give you the final quote from him, Sir,

In addition, I have already signalled intention to join forces with the political opposition and find innovative ways to work together to solve our problems. This will be pursued within an enhanced framework for political co-operation encompassed in the principles of increased meaningful contact, the identification and implementation of an agreed agenda of national issues at a

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greater scope for the participation of civil society in the decision-making process. I would hope to meet soon with all of the Parliamentary Parties, so that we can hang out the modalities of this framework for co-operation.

Well, I do not know if Mr Trotman was involved in any consultation, because he accuses me of secret meetings in the Press. So, I do not know if he has been having meetings, but I was not involved in any Parliamentary consultations. The only consultations that I have had are those in my official capacity as Leader of the Opposition for certain appointments. That consultation that we are talking about has never happened. So, are we *Staying the Course*, Mr Ramotar?

I do not think that anyone with a sound mind would believe that having regard to the actual actions of the Government of the last years, that the procedure used in even the preparation of this Budget, which is the latest example, falls in line with the announced procedure for this *meaningful, new political culture on consultations*, quite out of character and in breach of practice observed by this very Administration in its early years.

Mr Speaker, I am unaware of any consultations and I wish to be advised. Mr Ramotar was quoting from the letters of the Private Sector. I hope he can quote a letter from Mr Correia ... is it Correia? ... [*Correia*] ... Mike

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Correia is telling us that he was happy with the consultations which you offered him in the preparation of the Budget, but you are happy to prove that he is happy with what is going on, but you shut him out of consultations. As far as I know, unlike previous occasions, no one in the Private Sector was consulted and we are told that this Private Sector is the *engine of growth* and we were given a large presentation by the Honourable Members, Mr Ramotar and Ms Texeira a few moments ago.

I do not know of any trade union being *consulted* on this Budget, but I suspect that we will be told, as we were told when the Critchlow funds were withheld that *they have to settle their problem first* before you consult them. I am sure the Honourable Member Mr Komal Chand, Sir, will edify some of his colleagues on the other side of the House that this split in the Trade Union Movement with FITUG and GAWU and ...[GLU] ... GLU, not GLU ... [Laughter] by TUC ... [Laughter] ... You all are stuck in history. With GTUC and FITUG came at a day, since the PNCR-1G was in Government. Ask Mr Komal Chand ... It did not start last week. In fact, the present Secretary of the TUC, Mr Lincoln Lewis was one of the key actors of FITUG at the time when it was launched, and we were in Government. So, for the Government to come and tell us ... and we did not withhold funds from the Guyana Trade Union Congress ... [Interruption: 'You withhold funds from ILO, though!'] "We did not withhold funds from

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anybody going to the ILO] So, to come and use an unacceptable excuse like that, that the division in the Labour Movement is the reason why you are not funding the Labour Movement ... Quite frankly, Mr Komal Chand I am very disappointed in you. Please influence your colleagues, you are a Trade Unionist and for a socialist party that has a working-class base, with all this Marxism, Leninism that you have espoused over the years ... Come on Moses, remind them of this ideology! *[Applause]* Let them understand that the workers interests are paramount!

So, Mr Speaker, I suspect that the Trade Unions were not contacted on this Budget as it may be shown because of divisions. So, I do not know whether the AFC was consulted on the Budget ... *[Interruption: 'No'* "I can say, without fear of contradiction, the Peoples National Congress Reform was not consulted, so the Parliamentary political Parties, pass as old people say, for grass, in this important issue of the National Budget. *[Applause]*

The Stabroek News reported and I do not know if it is true, there have been no denials, that one of the social organisations, the Red Thread, wrote and asked to come and put forward papers and even that could not be possible. I do not know if it is true, but it is in the Papers and since people are denying that these reports in the Papers are accurate, I hope that it is not true and that we will have some kind of clarification. Why does the Minister even refuse to consult organisations that come

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and offer you ... and the President talks about civil society involvement and this is how you expect this Budget to be approved and to get success? So, as one writer puts in Stabroek News,

... to think that people would have been involved in consultations was wishful thinking ...

It never happened. So, we in the PNCR-IG expressed our surprise that we were never consulted because last year, we sought in this House to have an agreement to review the National Development Strategy and I will quote this book, the National Development Strategy. The Honourable Minister and the PPP/C bluntly refused to have participation in the review of this National Development Strategy by this Parliament, in the context of this framework. It is ironic that this document, whose preparation was the subject of wide consultation and aided by the intervention of President Carter, at the time when this country was in crisis, could suffer such a tragic fate, that the Government refused to entertain consultation and discussions on its revision.

Mr Speaker, the objectives of this document stated at Page IX, at Paragraph 3, for the benefit of the Prime Minister and Mr Ramotar are as follows. For a worthy object that has full consultation, it states,

The overall objectives of this National Development Strategy are as follows:

- I. *To attain ... [Interruption: 'Victimise' "I will deal with that just now"] ... the highest rates of economic growth that are possible*
- II. *To eliminate poverty in Guyana.*
- III. *To achieve geographical unity.*
- IV. *To attain an equitable geographical desecration of economic activity.*
- V. *To diversify the economy.*

More than that, Mr Speaker, the section of this document captioned, *Constraints for Guyana's Development*, provides also some interesting readings, a few lines may suffice, Mr Ramotar and I quote and you can go to it in the book, if you would wish. It is at the same Page I told you and it goes as follows:

The major obstacle to Guyana's development is to be found in the divisive nature of its politics, partly because of the prevalence of fierce racial, political rivalling between these two groups ...

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At that time there was no AFC, so do not feel too bad.

[Laughter]

... and partly because, Guyana's Constitution is largely based on the Westminster model ...

Are you hearing Ms Texeira? I am reading from this book which is not the PNCR-IG's manifesto; I am reading from this book and I will continue; it says,

... the Constitution is largely based on the Westminster model which does not embrace inclusivity in governance as one of its main characteristics. There have been little or no meeting of minds, it is evident, however that if Guyana is to attain even a modicum of development in the next 10 years or so, it is essential that a number of decisions that are based on intelligence, objective discussions and consultations between the two parties be made. [Applause]

When the President made his speech, Mr Speaker ... I did not manufacture that ... in this Parliament I felt good about it and I spoke in this Parliament and if the Hansard could be found, Members in the Opposition should refer to the speech I made then ... and commended it and said that that was the correct direction for this country and I reiterated that position on more than one occasion, in this National Assembly. Mr Speaker, what do you think

happened? There was a brief meeting of minds, indeed as the document suggests, when I opened constructive engagement with the President in 2003, shortly after I became Leader of the People's National Congress, which resulted in a signed communiqué. I will read a section for some of the Members of this House, particularly the younger ones and the exuberant young PPP/C MPs who made a very good speech and spoke with such gusto in this debate. So, we should be refreshed on this because I heard Ms Texeira speaking about governance and all of that. So, on 6 May 2003,

... the crime situation in 2003 ...

this was signed. (You quarrelling about document not signed, now?) This was signed between the President and myself. This is what it says, Mr Ramotar,

... the President and the Leader of the Opposition expressed concern over the crime situation in Guyana. They agreed to support legitimate efforts by the Police to fight all forms of criminal activity and they agreed to explore at a subsequent meeting other non law enforcement approaches to this problem.

We signed the agreement ... *[Interruption: 'Who undermined it?']* ... in the same document at Item 9 ... well we can go to a lot of discussions about why things broke up and that is why I have never written about the

talks in 1976 between the PPP and the PNCR-1G, because you will always have different views of which you are partisan and I was a participant and I was the most junior note taker, Sir I still have those notes and I have never written about it publicly because you always have a lot of controversy on these matters. I see a lot of people, including Mr Rohee does not know a thing about what took place there. [Laughter] [Applause] ... I advise you and there are only a few people living on this matter and I advise my friend who is still in the PPP/C, I believe so, who like me, was the official note taker, that perhaps, we should sit down and agree on the truth, because if I write something, somebody else is going to write and say, it was not really so and I might see several versions by people who have not a clue about what took place in those conversations, but I was the official note taker. So, let us not argue about why the communiqué broke down. I know why and if I really get into it, we will get into a controversy. The fact is, that this communiqué was signed and I will read ... I have read the crime section.

... issues raised by the President ...

And this document was printed in the Stabroek News Mr Ramotar and for those who are interested and particularly, the young PPP/C MPs, please go and if you wish, I have it electronically, I can send it to you. Well, if you look at Item 9, this is what it says and these are issues raised by the President,

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The President and the Leader of the Opposition agreed that the issues raised by the President, including the PPP/C's paper on Inclusive Governance and the National Development Strategy will be dealt with at a subsequent meeting ...

[*'What is the date of that document?'*] The 6 May 2003 ... but there was a follow-up meeting on the 19 June, 2003 and I quote from the document that was signed on the 19 June, 2003 on the follow-up agreement. On the very item of the National Development Strategy and this is what it says at Item 3 of those notes,

The President and the Leader of the Opposition agreed that the National Development Strategy Paper should be re-laid in the National Assembly and subjected to debate therein.

Mr Speaker, I make no further comment on the embarrassing situation of refusal to even allow simple consultations on the revision of this document. Members can just for themselves, who are really serious about the modernisation of this country ... last Sunday, and I can understand now, after I have heard Ms Texeira, here; I have heard another provocative speech but now that I have heard this Honourable Member, here, I can see that it is probably inspired by that speech where it was announced and stated that in a speech, that political

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parties have been seeking to use the present security crisis to begin negotiating with criminals to force discussions on shared governance.

Well, listen to the speech at Babu John which was played on NCN and so, I do not know if the AFC made any proposals for this negotiation and thereby, you want to force shared governance through this criminal situation, but I want to assure for the reason, that the PNC/R-1G made no such proposal. I would not be involved in that kind of proposal ... it could be Mr Franklin ... [Laughter] ... Well, I do not want to be unkind but they were speaking of political forces, Sir ... [Laughter] [Applause]

I want to say that ... that was a joke, my friend, do not take it too seriously. As far as we are concerned, once we consider shared governance as an essential element for any progress in this country, we have never made such a proposal that could, and we will never do so because we do not see it as a matter which has to be approached with any preconditions, but that is the kind of irresponsible ... the inference is drawn by the Guyanese society. So, if you want to announce that negotiators have been approaching you, announce the name, so there must be no speculation ... transparency. [Applause] It is mischievous, I do not know that Father Malcolm Rodrigues is a political force, is the point I am making. When you speak on NCN of a political force ... [Pause] ... that is the inference.

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Mr Speaker, I do not want to quote Chapter 3 of this document, which deals with governance because I think that I quoted it here ... on a previous debate to show the origins and development of the concept of shared governance. It was not a brain child, initially of the PNC/R-IG, but a response by the PNCR-IG to the National Development Strategy and the urgings of civil society. So, the picture that emerges is that only when Guyana is in crisis and the PPP/C feels threatened that they are interested in consultations and consensus, this is the picture that I am getting at. *[Applause]* I am speaking words of truth this evening. It seems that only when there is a crisis and the Government appears shaken that there is a concern for any serious discussions in keeping with those ... and I can give several examples.

Mr Speaker, in 2002 Guyana was faced with a serious security crisis, similar to the one that we are facing at this time, though it did not have the kind of tragic proportions of Lusignan and Bartica, but it is interesting to read from a document prepared back then and I hope you will bear with me to read this document, The point I am making tonight is serious,

... the situation in this country continues to be characterised by the fear that circumscribes every citizen's life. Concern for personal safety and family protection are paramount, social activity has been curtailed. Much time is spent by many

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exploring many options for escape through legal or illegal migration, many large and small businesses are responding to the shrinking commercial activity and the flight of savings by cutting costs, suspending investment and relieving staff.

Acts of violence such as murders, robberies and corruption are now part of a broader picture of crime that includes the drug trade, gang wars and kidnappings ...

And I am quoting from this document,

This is not a document that was prepared after the Lusignan, Sir, it was prepared in 2002 and it was not a PNC/R-1G document, it was a background paper by civil society for what was described as the second joint consultation between the President, the Leader of the Opposition, the Parliamentary Parties and the Social Partners and dated 5th December, 2002. It was sent to us by the then Chairman of the Private Sector Commission, who was named spokesperson of the civil society grouping that included, the Private Sector Commission, the Guyana Bar Association and the Guyana Trade Union Congress. Regrettably, it took that crisis (that is the point I am making) in 2002 to bring us together to recognise that there was need to seriously discuss those issues that are fundamental to the advance of this country. It was at a time, regrettably, when I believe the society was

threatened by its stability, it was then you will recall ...
[*Interruption: And I hear a 'but' coming*] ... No, I am making the point. It is only when there is a crisis we get together, because in 1997, the only reason we had the Herdmanston Accord is because the country looked like it was going to be broken up and any body could see that. Why do we have to do that? In 2002, it was the worry about 'Mo Fire Slow Fire' and all of that. [*Interruption: That was you*] ... and I am saying that ... irrespective of whose, I am trying to make a point that if we are interested in genuine purpose for this country, we cannot wait until a crisis brings this about.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member 15 minutes to conclude his presentation?

The Speaker: You may proceed, Honourable Member.

Robert H O Corbin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am saying that the question of the development strategy are used in times to illustrate that all the plans we have about this modern economy, *Staying on Course*, and all of that will be meaningless if we do not deal with the problem in a holistic and fundamental way. And so, Sir, again, that is why I was upset when I heard Ms Texeira earlier, because things are comfortable, she is dancing around the fundamental issues that we must address and unless we

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address this issue of governance in this country, we will have continuous problems. *[Applause]*

It has nothing to do with crime or trysting in crime. Mr Speaker, I am pleased that I see in this Honourable House, my colleagues, the Honourable Minister Maniram Persaud and my Honourable friend Mr Moses Nagamootoo, who are now Members of Parliament. A few years ago, Mr Speaker, they were part of a delegation, of which I was a member that was invited to visit Northern Ireland to help facilitate the cooling environment between Sinn Féin, the IRA and the Ulster Movement. Go ask them. They are sitting on that side of the House ... *[Interruption: 'The Good Friday Agreement']* ... the Good Friday Agreement ... What did I say? *['You did not say anything']* Sorry, I apologise. I have it here ... the Good Friday Agreement.

To learn the lessons of the experience of Northern Ireland, that Good Friday Agreement was arrived at, unfortunately, after a lot of years and you can interpret what I am saying however you want but I am trying to draw reference that Members on the other side went overseas ... this is religion, but it reached the point where thousands of lives were lost and we are talking here about children here which are important to us.

Damaging to my surprise, shocking to the society in Ireland! And I am not underplaying here ... little incidents can cause a lot more lives if we do not handle

them properly and we behave irresponsibly, they can get out of hand; and that is why I have drawn reference to these things because we were there. It was so polarised, Mr Speaker, that Honourable Minister Maniram Persaud will tell you that one night we were going out ... [*“Shall I tell them, Honourable Member?”*] [*Laughter*] We wanted to go to see the night life ... [*Interruption: ‘A night owl?’*] ... [*“No, we wanted to go to see the night life”*] ... and because we wanted to go to a particular part of the city, they had to change the guide because the line was so sharp that nobody from the IRA area could even go across to the night club in the other area. So, they had to get a guide from the other side to take us over to the other side clubs. That is how polarised, Northern Ireland was at the time.

I do not know what we will need to bring us to the realisation in this country and I may never speak again like this in this Parliament but I am speaking words from the depths of truth here this evening. I am saying, are we going to wait to have situations develop like that at Northern Ireland or Rwanda before responsible leaders who know what can happen ... if matters of this nature are handled irresponsibly, treated callously and skirt around the issues and avoid the fundamental issues that should be settled in this country.

Mr Speaker, I sat here and perhaps it is at this juncture that I should conclude by speaking briefly, before I close on the crime and security situations in this country.

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Honourable Member, Mrs Backer has dealt adequately with it, so I am not repeating what she said. She has dealt so fully with it that I almost said manfully, but I will be chastised ... [*Laughter*] ... but she dealt with it womanly and surpassed her colleague on the other side in the manner in which she dealt with it. [*Applause*]

The relevance of the improved crime and security situation in this country has been fully discussed in the context of ensuring that we build this modern and secure society and I do not want to think that I have to explain how important it is to tourism, investors and so on. Therefore, I would like to say, that I resent the kind of analysis that we get from time to time whenever there are criminal activities in this country, that I consider irresponsible; that could not help to create a conducive climate in Guyana ... Yes, and I speak truthfully and fearlessly, because it is my view that on every occasion, that whenever there are crises in this country, the PPP/C has a passion for using every opportunity to score political advantages rather than dealing objectively with the problem.

I want to say to you, and I am sorry that the Honourable Minister is not here, that half of the criminals and security environment has developed because of slothfulness, failure to implement their own plans, corruption, lack of proper know-how, they are not petty and vindictiveness and all of these have contributed to the crime and security situation. Time does not permit me to deal fully with it

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but I want to put this matter in historical context. The Constitution and Laws of Guyana guarantee every citizen the right to peaceful protest, to picket without police permission, to hold a public meeting, after attaining permission granted by the Police to use a noise instrument and attaining an application 48 hours advance of the event. I can also outline other fundamental rights and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution, but I guarantee that most of these are known to Members of the National Assembly. These civil liberties are not unique to Guyana and with the advance of modern technology we view regularly on our television screens the manner in which citizens elsewhere, including in developed countries, exercise those rights.

Historically though, every attempt by citizens in Guyana to exercise those constitutional rights (and I am glad that the Minister of Home Affairs is back) is fraught with danger. Firstly, the Police Force has lost its independence of judgment in those matters and appears to respond only after they have received political directions from the Government of the day and I make no reference to the Government. Secondly, on the basis of that political interference they appear to pander to the political directorate with the aim of nullifying the effects of the citizens' objectives, in effect, becoming partisan political actors, not of the Government, but of the political party of the day. Consequently, they find themselves compromised, when they are allowed by the political

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directorate to brand every legal protestor, who is exercising his constitutional right as a thug and a criminal.

Historically ... I am trying to give you the background, listen ... you see, this is the trouble with you. I am trying to tell you how we have criminalized the society. Everybody who legitimately protests is treated as a thug or criminal and so, they are described as such. It is not difficult to understand why today, you have a self-fulfilling prophecy ... *[Interruption: 'You are in the right place. That is your leader talking there, in the mind of the PPP/C, and I say this seriously to you. Anyone who seems to speak out against you in any protest is vilified and singled out for proper treatment, both in your PR campaign and in your activities'] [Applause]*

Meanwhile, the ill-advised approach to deal with violent criminal developments after 2002 after an unholy alliance was formed with the criminal drug underworld to help to get rid of criminals ... *[Pause]* ... many of whom were involved in criminal enterprises, sometimes rival gangs in this country, despite the grandiose plans announced, deal with crime, Honourable Minister, very little was done to deal with the criminal enterprise, particularly the drug enterprises in this country. I am not making this up. A gentleman ran an ad in a national newspaper here, I hope they have, and he stated that he was involved with the police in dealing with the criminals. I did not hear or see a denial and so, for us to wake up belatedly as if we are

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ostriches and think that the crime and security situation developed overnight in this country and now we are looking for scapegoats to blame this and that motive and not recognise that this has an historical context, is to be missing the boat. There is much evidence ...
[*Interruption: 'Where is that?'*] ... I can bring to support my analysis, Honourable Minister. The venue is not sufficient and the time late, but I am prepared to take this debate at any forum, to show the historical development.
[*Applause*] Put me on NCN one night, equally with all of those persons who have been parading there for three weeks ... one night! ... to give our analysis of the crime and security situation in this country. [*Applause*]

So, I close because I was asked a lot of questions, I am sorry you did not hear some of my other quotations, Sir. It adds,

*... in 2003, the International Control
Strategy Report (INCSR) ...*

["Come and lock me up, man, as soon as we come out of here! Come and lock me up if you know I have them! ... Lock me up out there ..."]

It is you I am speaking to ... I am speaking the truth ...
[*Noisy Interruption*] ... that is why, Mr Speaker, I am so sorry the Honourable Minister was absent when I was trying to explain to him the source of guns in this country ... why they were here and where you have to look to find the guns in 2008 ... not 30 years ago ... right in the

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Ministry of Home Affairs ... [Applause] ... I will read the Report of 2003,

The International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCR)

... expressed commitment to conquer narcotic efforts domestically and internationally. Guyana supported the works of the CARICOM Regional Task Force on Crime and Security. In the spring, at the invitation of the Government of Guyana, OAS, CIC personnel visited Guyana, to assist the GOG in the preparation of an updated drug strategy. By the end of 2002 work on the project was still pending action with material support from the United States of America. Guyana established a financial intelligence unit in 2003

But we have not heard yet of any functioning unit that can deal with the drug enterprise in this country. We have not heard of what was happening to the much lauded drug crime that was launched at Pegasus Hotel, because the 2008 Report has stated that absolutely nothing was done in implementing that Report after much fanfare in 2003. [Applause] So, if you want to know where guns are coming from do not look 30 years ago, look at what is happening at our porous borders, look at the licenses

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issued by your predecessor to criminals, which this report confirms. *[Applause]*

As I said, I am sorry that you did not hear the earlier quotations but I would not repeat them for you, you will read the Hansard, but I would say that if we are genuinely serious about taking this country forward, then we will take steps aimed at following this crime problem.

I want to assure you, Minister, that when I saw you announcing John Jones also known as Mud, Harry Smith – captured ... *[Interruption: 'Unknown!']* ... unknown – shot dead! and I looked at the dour face of the Minister, Mr Speaker. I really was disappointed because the Minister really seemed to have come to the mistaken belief that he will solve the crime problem in this country by just shooting people down, but I want to assure you, Hon Minister that you are only fooling yourself if you do not look at the root causes of crime in this country ... *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, this is the Report of the Security Sector Reform Plan, submitted to the Minister by the British. Instead of this whole Report coming to the Parliament, all we got was this section ... What was the section that you kept back? I printed some of it in the Papers and I do not want to waste the time of this Parliament, but this Report echoed what the Honourable Speaker was bold enough to include ... Sir, you are not only supported by Dr Jagan, you are supported by this document which the

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Government had ... [Applause] ... and if the Honourable Member and Ms Texeira think I am healing with jokes, this is what the document says,

... the need for a holistic approach ...

Why was that not brought to the Parliament? [Applause]

However, the measure is currently on the way, directed almost exclusively, understandably at enhancing operational capacity and emphasizing a surprise-like strategy which will only begin to show results over medium to long term ... sustainability will require a long-term institutional and public support and involvement in the fight against crime.

But it says, strange enough ... *crime reduction strategy cannot succeed or be sustained, unless linked with three other areas, designed by:*

1. *stem inflow of drugs*

So, you will see the relevance of the point I am making ...

2. *protect borders*

3. *control migration, including criminal deportees and small arms proliferation.*

A holistic approach based on comprehensive ... such as the National Security Strategy required to bring together existing Sectoral strategy, drug disaster management and so on and so forth ... [Interruption: 'This is ... Thing']

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... Oh, you were ... Mr Speaker, I do not know why ... the Minister has this document, Sir, let me read to him; I hope you will forgive me, because the Minister seems to be challenging my creditability. I thought that he would have acknowledged ... let me read the report fully. This is what it says, I am reading this for you, Minister. Let us see if your comprehension skills still stand.

... a need to address the root causes of criminal and political violence, poverty and unemployment, racial and political polarisation and deterioration in the moral and social fabric of Guyanese. These require taking on board the broad objectives in the multi-donor projects, improving social cohesion, security and governance in Guyana.

It also states that the PNCR-1G's position is correct and that is why I did not comment, Sir, because this Report is saying, if you are giving Police excess powers, you also have to put special powers of controlling the way they behave, if they do, it says here,

... greater access to the Police, the instrument of force and information, which in turn requires enhanced accountability and oversight to ensure that force is exercised in a manner consistent with the

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rule of law and human rights ... [Applause]

...

This is the Report, so, when we hear officials of the Government skirting around this issue as though this is a figment of some political party's imagination when we say that you have to deal with the questions holistically, you are missing the bus. *Yes! Before I take my seat, at the risk of having my statement misused, I can say to you, you can go out and shoot all of those criminals, but if you believe that will solve the problem, you will be mistaken. You shoot Fineman tomorrow and the next day, that is the only thing that you do, you might have a hundred Fineman on you. [Interruption: 'There will be a hundred police, too' "Well, I cannot help you"]* All these reports, the Disciplined Services Report, the Simon's Report, all are telling you the same thing. You have helped me to conclude my presentation on the note which I started, that I was very pessimistic about this presentation and now I am trying to find the end and I cannot find it, because I did promise ... maybe now that I hear you, Minister Rohee, I should have followed the e-mail that I got from my daughter. She said she called and I could not speak to her this morning, her mother told her, all the way from England that he was working on his Budget presentation, so she sent me a text. She said,

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Daddy, I was just telling Mom that you should make your speech very short, it will shock everybody. This is my suggested speech,

Crime is the fruit of deeper issues. We cannot focus on the kind of fruits but must look at what seeds are being sown. Unless, we as a Nation are willing and able to accept this, identify the issues and look at solutions, we will continue to reap crime, instability, discontentment, et cetera ...

[Interruption: 'You should be a proud Dad']

Yes, I am a proud Dad. I think the Honourable Speaker is aware that I have to be a proud Dad, but I am sorry that I did not use her advice, because if after spending all this time, trying to explain, with all the empirical evidence that there is a need for a serious approach to the problems of this country and the Minister ended up fondling the issues I say there is very little hope for this country. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Prime Minister ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, we have come to the end of our scheduled

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five days of debate on our National Budget for 2008. My colleagues, the Ministers and Regional Representatives have taken the opportunity to speak in more detail about the performance of their Ministries and the development in their Regions during 2007, the opportunities they see at this time, the difficulties and challenges to be overcome and how and why we in the Government have chosen some things and not others to be addressed during Budget year 2008. There have been, as we should expect during this debate, contrary and opposing views from the Opposition benches.

It is in the nature of the democracy that we try to practice, that there be room for the presentation of differing, opposing, competing views but the buck eventually stops somewhere. I would want to console the Honourable Members, Mr Franklin and Mr Patterson that nothing is essentially wrong with the format. If there is to be a concern at all, it is that each of us would make an earnest presentation as true as we know and I am pleased that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition took time out to quote for us all the prayer we adhere to at the beginning of each of our meetings, because I wanted to do it here also. If we stay true to that prayer in our presentation and if what we say comes from the depths of truth and intended for the good of all, I think that is all that we can ask for and that is all that we can give to our country.

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We should be careful as we present because an easy point made at one moment can catch up with us sooner or later. As an example, the presentation of Honourable Member Fernandes, I think he is the PNCR-1G representative of Region 1, was very stinging and I did follow him and I did think that he had to have something wrong, he had to have gotten something wrong, because I know the gentleman that is our representative, the Honourable Member Whittaker, is also from Region 1 and when he had his turn, he completely demolished the presentation ... *[Applause]* ... of Honourable Member, Mr Fernandes. *[Applause]*

All was not lost because the Honourable Member Fernandes had disclosed to us that now that we have begun again regular steamer service to the North West, it is apparent that the efficiency of unloading the steamer needs to be improved. Speaking with Honourable Member, Minister Benn during the break, he told me that the need to improve unloading had been recognised and solutions that are accessible that we had money for and economics that are available are being sought. So, solutions are being sought, Honourable Member Fernandes.

He spoke about the need in Mabaruma for a 24 hour by seven days a week supply of electricity, rather than the limited evening hours, so that schools, the NDC office

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and small businesses would have electricity during the day.

Mr Speaker and Honourable Members, this question of providing 24 hours per day electricity ... when we take that step, we soon reach to each of the isolated, remote communities to which we are taking electricity. Costs are always important, even decisive and local detailed knowledge is encouraged to provide interim solutions. For example, I know that in Mabaruma of which the Member spoke, there are times and arrangements where the local GT&T supplies electricity to Government buildings in times of need, and I hope that I have not put the local GT&T Manager in trouble with his bosses. So, that arrangement is made and I rather suspect that the Honourable Member may know about it too. So, all is not lost.

We have respected the points made and we have thought about it. Twenty four (24) -hour electricity is good to have but there is the question of sustaining it in the particular situation and we are discussing a number of approaches in our electrification programme to get there at some appropriate time in each of the different locations.

Mr Speaker, I want to again address the issue of VAT, three aspects of the presentation of VAT by the Opposition which I hesitate to, but which I think I can properly describe as misleading 'cheap shots' that

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border on being irresponsible. It sounds very good to call for the immediate reduction of VAT from 16 percent to 10 percent or 8 percent, like someone else did as if these revenues are going elsewhere, than to our people, the people of Guyana and I want to speak addressing those three points.

Firstly, the increased inflation that we experienced in 2007 was not due to VAT ... *[Applause]* ... but was 90 % or more due to the high prices of commodities we import, commodities whose prices rose on the world market and we have said it before, food items, particularly wheat and all grains, milk and all milk products and swift increases beyond our ability to cushion. That is where the inflation came from and do not let us fool ourselves, when as a nation we could avoid the inflation inherent in the higher cost of goods we import. There is no way it can be avoided, it has to be paid for in foreign currency, but we have to respond by being more careful and frugal in our use and we have to respond in trying to increase our production and export sales even more. That is the way that we have to respond to this thing ... *[Applause]* ... and to make the kind of presentation that was made of a drop in VAT to 8 percent and 10 percent, misleads people and it gives an impression that this Government is heartless particularly in the area of working people.

Throughout the Caribbean, this issue has been highlighted as the principal Macro Economic

Challenge. At least one sister Caribbean country Jamaica recorded inflation of more than 16 percent in 2007 and this occurred although they did not have the administrative pressure that Guyana experienced as a result of introducing VAT during 2007. Our performance of 14 percent inflation is therefore actually quite satisfactory.

Secondly, I need to reject the claim that we, the Government, sought to mislead the people in presenting VAT as being revenue-neutral. On our Nation's historical declared economy VAT was and is revenue-neutral. *[Applause]*

We all have been of the opinion that the real economy of Guyana was greater but no one knew how much greater it was and where it was and there were speculations as to whether it was twice as much, one and a half times as much, about a formal economy and so on, but such a critically important revenue stream could not be based on speculation. Furthermore, the VAT rate of 16 percent is within the range of VAT figures within the Caribbean and further a field.

Mr Speaker, you know often when you get what we call for, some people want us to turn back. We all have been talking about expanding the tax net. I have heard Honourable Members on the other side talk about expanding the tax base and the tax net and one of the attractive features of VAT was to expand the tax

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net and now that we apparently have this expanded base, a partial step, no doubt the people to whom it matters most are calling for a watering-down, a cutting down of the VAT, when all that is happening, is that some people are now contributing revenue they should have been contributing before. This leads me to my third point about VAT.

It is not a windfall, it is taxes that were being dodged and it is now being put to good use. *[Applause]* I would say that it should not be a secret to anyone. It was perhaps a good thing that we introduced VAT last year and got the extra revenue, so that we could have cushioned the increase in the prices of fuel and all the things coming in and so that we could have supported in a way, the GPL and keep electricity, giving GPL the money that it needs. *[Applause]* Much of the additional relief and benefits in this 2008 Budget are funded by the wider tax catch of VAT. Reduce the VAT from 16 percent to 10 percent as Honourable Member Murray called for and say good-bye to the increase in the Income Tax threshold. That benefit would not be there for us to enjoy. Say good-bye to the extension of items zero-rated to VAT, some of them lowering our cost-of-living and some other items lowering our cost to get into and to maintain production, particularly at the small and medium scale level. Say good-bye to the increases in old-age pension and other social assistance ... Get rid of VAT

and say good-bye to the cushioning of the prices of fuel and electricity. Is this what the people of Guyana would really prefer?

This Government believes that in our current circumstances holding VAT at 16 percent and returning the revenue to the people, the way we have done, is the sensible, responsible, compassionate thing to do. *[Applause]* Do not pay too much heed to the argument that Guyana is an overtaxed place and the upper income tax rate should be reduced from 33 percent ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Sorry, my apologies ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: For many years those of us and the gentlemen sitting across from me, they were around when the PNCR-1G was in Government and we faced the position of upper Income Tax rates of 75 percent. A progressive tax system, where income distribution ... it was a big imposition of 75 percent in the upper Income Tax rate and that is a far way from 33 percent ... a very far way from 33 percent.

Mr Speaker, claims were made repeatedly by the Opposition on the subject of accountability and transparency and corruption. These claims conveniently ignored the absence of substantive evidence and they ignored the Government's strong track record in putting in place institutional mechanisms to improve accountability and

transparency in Government. They always call for procedure and process and we have put procedures and practices ... it may take time to be effective and for their satisfaction, but we have procedures and processes in place. [*Applause*] Examples of the initiatives implemented by the Government have been stated before, but maybe I will repeat them and they include the following:

- the consistent production of audited accounts, unlike earlier periods, when there were no accounts. It is not propaganda, we have also commenced publication of the Treasury Memorandum to respond to the PAC Report and to indicate positive actions that have been taken by the Government and it has been working. Let us work to make these systems and procedures work; they will not happen overnight, but let us work to make them better all the time.
- the introduction of open public tender. The media has been invited to observe the opening of these documents and all bidders have the right to observe the opening of bids, when names of bidders and tendered prices are announced. In addition, large bid awards are announced on the NPTAD website and publicly by the Cabinet Secretary. In terms of legislative

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environment, Guyana has the most modern procurement legislation in the Caribbean by far and they have established and are continually strengthening the NPTAD. It will take time to come into full flower, Sir, as we are progressing.

Additionally, Government has been insisting that the document specifying the job to be done along with the costs or the prices that that document be made available to all stakeholders so they could help in the knowledgeable oversight of the implementation of the project. So, as my comrades before me have been saying, the criticisms that are being levelled by us are based largely on the documentation that we have caused to become available. That is what it is based on and this is a good move ... no, I am not saying we should, but the argument that we want to hide is certainly not there.

Another area that we have spoken about is strengthening Parliamentary oversight, including the work of Sectorial committees, for example, the economical services committee, which have been established and are functioning. I myself have had to go and present myself and to be taken across the coals by some of the Members of the other side, who are on the Natural Resources Sector Committee. There is also widespread engagement of stakeholders, including the political opposition on major legislative initiatives to a

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Special Select Committee mechanism, which has been used in the case of legislation, such as that used to introduce VAT and I will say, I take the opportunity again to thank them for their participation and their support and ask them to *stay the course* of VAT ... do not give it up yet. It is going to turn out to be a good thing for all of us and for Guyana. We want to ... when it is proven that VAT was the best step that Guyana took ... I want to be able to say that the PNCR-1G, the Opposition were with us all the way. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, another area is the dozens of annual reports for various Government Agencies and all the loan agreements entered into by Government, which have been tabled in the National Assembly, and besides that there are all the reports that are available on the web, sometimes even before we get them. This places documents in the public domain and ensures that the Opposition and citizens are apprised of the activities of this Government.

Mr Speaker, a number of Opposition Members, and I think Mr Corbin in his presentation of some two hours, which I followed, gave me some insight into his thinking, but I think he too said that the Budget does not address job creation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Almost everything in the Budget is about creating jobs and equipping our people to do those jobs. *[Applause]* Starting with education ...

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primary, secondary, academic, tec-voc education for livelihood ... all those things have to do with equipping people to work ... self employment and employment for all.

When we speak of modernising the traditional Sectors, for example sugar and rice, we are speaking about securing existing jobs and creating new jobs; *[Applause]* when we speak about working with the Private Sector to establish an aluminium refinery... BOSAI ... I will speak some more about that when I talk about bauxite ... we are speaking about jobs being created; when we speak of the competitiveness strategy we are speaking about promoting investment and creating jobs; we are speaking about increasing our sales, becoming more competitive, selling more and therefore creating and producing more; when we speak about support for agricultural diversification, non-traditional agricultural crops, we are speaking about creating jobs and improving lives and livelihood; *[Applause]* when we speak about maintaining a stable and favourable macro-economic environment, we are speaking about creating the conditions for growth in the Private Sector and the creation of jobs; when we speak about technical and vocational training, we are speaking about equipping our young people to enter the job market; when we speak about emphasising value-added in timber processing, we are speaking about creating jobs in Guyana here for Guyanese and

there is much more that we can speak about ... Information Technology and so on.

So, it is nothing short of misleading or not being able to see when some people say that the Budget has nothing about job creation ... [*Interruption: 'No global competitiveness!'*]

Mr Speaker, the Government has been doing and has done as much as it should do in the current economic framework of a greatly reduced role to the State in the direct production of goods and services, that is, in terms of creating direct employment. The State is no longer to be the direct employer. The days of the Government directly creating jobs are gone. Job creation is now the role of the Private Sector, the leading Sector as we say, but Mr Speaker and Honourable Members, I would like the people of Guyana and all of us to know, that when we use the words *Private Sector*, we should think not just of our historical private companies but perhaps more importantly, the many new ventures which we must attract and create. In these job creation is a matter for private entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial skills and abilities latent in each of us, so it is a matter for each of us.

I speak of the ability in each of us, if we would set our minds to it, to see the needs around us, whether they are needs for items of food or items of clothing or

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buildings or items to help small industries, like the kitchen and bottom-house ones and so set our minds to satisfy those needs. How do I know that each of us has those skills latent in us? Because I was around in the days of banning in the 70s and 80s, when people you would not imagine had any business skill ... they tried and tried and so on ... took initiatives ... and you saw them going into suitcase trading and all sorts of production at home to satisfy the needs around them. Yes, we did that and we also did other things. We produced alum, that was not being paid for and then our administration at the time sent down to the Mayor at the time and said, since we are not getting paid and we are in trouble too, we are going to stop delivering it and then ... one night, about 12:00 o'clock, it appeared, the Honourable leader of the day, Mr Burnham, apparently called the CEO up there and then I got instructions, *get out there and produce alum and send it down by morning*. So, I had to get out there and look for the general foreman, who at that time lived deep down in some valley and get him by 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and we made the alum. So, I know about it ... *[Interruption]* ... I am enthused when I see those skills and that latent initiative still evident in our people and what I speak of ... let me tell you what I am speaking about, I am speaking about the four to five thousand people that I see working in small and medium scale mining. I see it in the speed boat operators and maybe if you check on it, the speedboat

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operators just crossing in Georgetown here at the market; that business probably runs now at US\$5 million a year in total and there are lots of interesting things that come out, that if you go into deep academics you will see. You will see that there are two sizes of boats, small ones, particularly for the off-peak hours and the big ones for the peak hours, it is a good academic fit. If you did all the analyses and maybe Honourable Member Murray may enjoy doing the analysis and come out with much the same results. We see the same thing in the mini-bus operators and we have a good surface in all of these areas, our people are delivering services that have much good about them. We hold to the position that our people's activities are 80 to 90 percent good and there is 10 to 20 percent that we have to manage with them and work with them to remove, like we did ... *[Applause]* ... with the speedboat operators. There is the problem of safety, maybe at the beginning, none of us would have expected that that disorderly bunch of people would ever adopt the order that Minister Benn called on them, that every one of their customers must wear their lifejackets. Now, one of the most beautiful sights, in Guyana if you travel around is to see the boats going with this red band on everybody wearing their lifejacket. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, this is where we in the PPP/Civic place a lot of faith in our people. *[Applause]* Our ordinary

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people out there who see our needs meet our needs and provide services for what turns out to be, if you are starting with the academic studies, a very good fix in our circumstances. That is what warms our hearts and that is what keeps us going. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, lest I forget or I be accused, let me now extend to the Honourable Minister of Finance, my compliments in regard to the presentation of Budget 2008, which entails, as it should a review of the past year, 2007 and which provides the projections for the current year 2008. The year 2007 has been a good year for Guyana with a growth rate of 5.4 percent, following the 5.1 percent growth rate of the year 2006, sustaining the recovery from the negative growth of 1.9 percent in 2005, the year of the recent unprecedented flooding in Guyana. The Honourable Minister, cautious as he is, started life as an accountant, I think, but cautious as he is projects a growth rate of 4.8 percent in the current year, 2008. In support of this, I herein call on each and every Guyanese to support this Budget, so that we can get 4.8 percent and even more. I call on each and every one of us, in spite of the shocking slayings in Lusignan and Bartica to go all out. In production we have to bind our wounds and keep on producing at the same time. So let us go on out and do even better than 4.8 percent and I made a note here somewhere along the line, as people were talking about no benchmarks for how well we are

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doing. We have benchmarks here, a very good benchmark with a growth rate of 5.4 percent.

Mr Speaker, the growth rate of real gross domestic products of which I am speaking is to be found at Item 1.1 at the top of Appendix I, under Selective Socio-economic indicators. In fact, I think someone before me looked to see what was not in this Appendix I, but they refused to see what was in Appendix I, they preferred to see what was not there and did not want to see what was there. If they looked they would see the growth rate figure, a measure of how well we are doing, but if we look also at Item 1.2 in the same Appendix, we see our Gross Domestic Product, which is our GDP, as we know and which is the summation of all our goods and services which we Guyanese, working individually and in different groupings and teams and altogether what we have produced. Contrary ... no, this does not include loans and grants ... to what many Members of the Opposition would like you to believe, even Mr Carberry a few hours ago, when we started, our GDP has indeed been increasing, reaching ... look in the sheets there and you will see the figures. It is way too fine for me to read without spectacles, but if you look there you will see that it reads US\$847.9 million. Still a bit lower than US\$1 billion in the year 2007, this is an increased number that we could use but it is not such a large number.

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Maybe companies and countries count their earnings in terms of hundreds of thousands, billions and trillions of US dollars and so on. A better figure for comparison of where Guyana is, with respect of other nations and countries would be the figure that is contained in Item 1.4, the per capita GDP and there we will see that the per capita GDP increased from US\$992.4 per person in 2006 to US\$1111.0 in the year 2007. *[Applause]* It caught my attention because in speaking with people I usually say, we have a GDP that is not yet \$1 billion and our per capita GDP is still not yet 1000 but we have passed \$1000, a somewhat significant milestone you would say, so there is progress. There is the progress.

Mr Speaker, we do know that these figures reflected in the Budget relate to the formal above the board, declared economy and we all know if we read Professor Thomas's article and some other things, we will read that there is an informal economy and you could judge how much it might be and so on. In some cases, in some of the documents we will come about we may see that Guyana has assigned a greater effective per capita GDP. In quite a few recently, I have seen a figure of US\$4000, about four times as great and it comes about because of a doubling of per capita GDP. Firstly to allow for a more realistic rebasing of the economy and economists tell me that the way to calculate this number you assume a certain

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distribution of efforts which has changed. It is doubled also to include the informal economy to allow for some amount of formal or informal economy and then there is the second doubling when purchasing power parity is taken into account, allowing thereby for the fact that compared with the United States of America, the consumer in Guyana may obtain twice as much goods and services for a given sum of money. So, people also talk about us being a ... house, but Mr Speaker, while we should be proud about getting to a thousand in the formal number or maybe even thinking about four thousand, when you allow for those other sorts of things, our number is still small. Compared with other countries, we are still small and we know that we are a HIPIC country, a poor country because the people in the developed and richer countries for a number of reasons are producing goods and services at an average of US\$20,000 to \$40,000 per person.

In other words, they are producing at an average of 10 to 20 times at least in value that we produce on a per person basis and there are two kinds of things that follow from that. One is that to get prosperous, we have to focus on the way we work, and working to produce much more ... that is what we have to focus on. Most of all, unless we get more productive in our work, unless we focus on our work, like Mr Fernandes was saying, look, we have an opportunity here to improve the efficiency of discharging and reducing lost

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time of many people and pieces of equipment, unless we do that sort of thing and then find a way to resolve it, we will not get to those other places. It has really gotten to that point where they are, US\$20,000 to \$40,000 per capita, is that they maybe had 100 or 200 years before us going through that. So, we must focus on that and that is what this Government is all about.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, the other thing that we should learn from positioning ourselves, with respect to other countries, is that we have so little at this time and we should understand therefore, why we could not all get our particular road built this year and why maybe we have to wait another year or so to get a new school building in a particular place or a new water treatment in another place. For my part, we have many more needs for the money available and this is the point of budgeting to prioritise, sequence and to apportion between the many calls being made on the available revenue stream. This is the approach that we want with people the people out there and the people in Guyana to really understand and this is how we want them to judge us.

Mr Speaker, we can catch up. We have the faith that we will catch up with the developed countries and once we maintain 5 percent or even better growth rate, but we also have to warn that this is a matter of a number of decades even. In the meantime, we must do as well as we can and with that which we have. It is the only

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way for us to have steadily more to share out each year.

I made a note here to respond to Honourable Member Corbin relating to how impressed he was about going to the GUYEXPO and seeing all these new possible prospects and he seems to have been ... he has been struck. He reported that the helicopter assembly got his attention and I hope that was when it caught his attention, when he was there and not when the reports came that it did not succeed and closed and it even crashed.

I want to say to us that many of the Honourable Members on the other side would know that no matter how much one studies a particular venture and everything, there is almost a statistical outcome, that maybe 50 percent of them are closed and closed for good reasons within two years. I am sure the Honourable Members Corbin, Murray and Carberry ... I happen to know them a little more than some of the others. I am sure that they would have encountered that in their readings over the years. The message, Honourable Member Corbin is that you have got to try and try again and try many things. At least half of them would be closed within two years. What we should do is go and list the hundred or five hundred exhibitors there and then follow them all up and see how many are prospering and how many are just limping along and how many are closed and then come

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and report that to us. Anybody could go and find out of five hundred ventures that is very scientific, it is very scientific, anybody could go and find ten or twenty out of five hundred that would have failed, anybody could go and do it. It is empirical.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I want to say too that a particular year's Budget is not a stand-alone document, not an annual stand up magician's bag of illusions and tricks, that might have been in the past, but our Budgets are annual adjustments and refinements along a journey of some decades ... *[Applause]* ... leading to a level of prosperity that we see in other countries today. *[Applause]* That is what our Budgets are about and that is how it must be judged and that is how it must be positioned. I say this with the comment that there is need for over-arching strategies to guide this Budget. We have the overarching strategy and for the Budget to be linked to impacts and outcomes and results. The Speakers before me have pointed to the links for the PPP/C's manifesto, Sector strategies, national health plan, national education plan, ... Sector reform plan and the PRSP, which distil Sector strategies and particular documents and looks at processing and coordination and consultation with stakeholders and also with the donor communities. So, we have many things that feed into the Budget; not one thing but many things, but life is adjusting to many interests, few of which are

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under our control. The Budget for each year, 2008 being no exception reflects those elements of the respective Sector strategies that are projected to be implemented in the current year, so if you see us speaking about something and it does not appear in the current year, it is not that it is forgotten, ignored or passed aside, it is that it will come in the year to come or the next year or the year after that. That is how you should see it.

For obvious reasons the Annual Budget Speech cannot repeat also the entirety of all of the strategies, but if you read it alongside those other things that we have talked about, the Budget will be found to be based on a comprehensive strategy that is supported by strong emphasis on achievement of results. This is confirmed by a perusal to the extent to which targets are set. For example, the national education and health plans are being met and the improvement achieved in key social indicators.

Mr Speaker, I want also to talk to something that was very emotive because I think we will do our ordinary people out there better if we create in their minds realistic possibilities ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Clement Rohee: Mr Speaker, I would like to ask that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Thank you very much, Sir ... and what do I speak of? I speak of one of our Honourable Members on the other side of the House who acted very passionately and emotively ... Which police constable can make about \$34,000 per month? They did not think about it at some other time before, but they are asking now ... *[Noisy interruption]* ... Alright, let us listen. The Government was made to look heartless in the setting of the constable's pay and indeed every other entry level pay but, Mr Speaker, it would be true ... the Government would be heartless if it had a big bag of money where you could put your hand in and pull out. That is what the PNCR-1G kind of felt and did behave like that back in the 60s, 70s and 80s. That is how they behaved. *[Applause]* We know what happened to it. I am going to tell you what happened that same time. Mr Speaker, what would be more heartless and deceptively so is to double or even triple the pay for everybody without a comparable increase in production and create thereby a highly unbalanced and unsustainable Budget. *[Applause]* That is what would be heartless and deceptive.

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The younger Guyanese will not know this but we who are older were taken down that road in the 1970s and 1980s and we do not want to go down that road again. *[Applause]* We paid a high price then, particularly in the case of those persons who earned fixed salaries, like servants of the Government and particularly those whose retirement came at the end of the 1980s. Those pensioners of those days soon found that their pensions of \$300 per month which before was a handsome sum was then worthless but which without the inflation of a factor of about \$200 over his or her lifestyle would have been worth about \$60,000 per month instead of \$300 per month. The mere effort by the Government ... you talk about why we talk about the 28 years, because we are still working to recover from the 28 years. *[Applause]* The mere effort by this Government over the last 15 years, Mr Speaker, has been to take Guyanese and Guyana out of the depths to which the PNC had taken us in its 28 years of rule. Indeed, our major task has been to arrange for the steady gradual recovery of the incomes and pensions of Government employees and other Government assistants. *[Applause]* That has been the major task of the last few years. So, \$34,000 per month as a starting salary for a constable is no doubt small, but it has been growing steadily to the point where it is now, larger than it ever was before and should we stay close to the Budget of 2008, it would be even larger this time next year. *[Applause]*

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Mr Speaker, perhaps more could be done for our policemen but other people also made passionate calls for increased pay for lawyers, at least some of our lawyers, nurses, teachers and I would also make the call to increase pay for my fellow engineers, they usually accuse me of leaving them out, when lawyers and doctors getting pay increase, because the engineers cannot strike in the same way that lawyers and doctors do. The engineers have been usually left out and somebody told me once that he believes that is why I became Prime Minister and went into politics because they give up on engineers. *[Laughter]* But I am hoping to get back to it. We cannot willy-nilly raise some people and not others. We have to strengthen social cohesion. The issue on the question of pay is some equitable distribution of what the Nation has produced and what we get in the Budget. That is the issue on setting pay. *[Applause]* That is the issue.

Mr Speaker, these days a number of Speakers from the Opposition benches and a number of commentators want to make light of our attention to macro economic fundamentals and financial discipline and our disposition towards being prudent and not extravagant. It is a tribute to our successive Ministers of Finance, that macro economic stability is now taken as a given, that people could say to get macro economic is to pay too much attention to it. To us, that is a commendation, because now it is taken as granted, and

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we agree; we want to move on from it. We want to maintain it as we are doing and then we want to move on ... [*Noisy Interruption*] ... Mr Speaker, when Members on the Opposition say in criticising this Budget that health is not hospitals, we did not have hospitals before but we have hospitals now; when they say that education is not schools alone, we did not have schools before and we have school buildings now [*Applause*] ... at least school buildings that we can call school buildings ... we have them now. When they say justice is not courthouses alone, at least we are getting courthouses where the Magistrate does not sit with an umbrella over his head. [*Applause*] [*“That is voodoo economics”*] They cannot have it both ways, they cannot say that we do not give the police enough equipment and then when we do get the helicopters, they say that security is not helicopters alone. We take these criticisms as testimony to the first stage of our achievements. Yes, we still have instances of physical infrastructure that needs attendance, many police stations and post offices that remained ... but there could be no greater testimony than our achievements so far, that the political opposition says that we should forget about infrastructure and move on. For us, we know that infrastructure is an essential requirement and that it needs to be fixed to some degree and in a timely manner and this we endeavour always to accomplish as far as possible. We do not glorify infrastructure and other material facilities, we are only too conscious of

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the limitations of those material things; we are not committed to material things. We are people of the spirit over here, Honourable Member Ramjattan, people used to confuse us as being that. We know, even as we build nice new schools, that education can be delivered from under a tree and justice might flow from under a tree and if that was the test we can do, then that we certainly would do. Nevertheless, we seek to make our people as comfortable as we could. At a minimum, it is a matter too of respect for people. If we do the best that we could but we hold that the best that we can do at any time is to deliver from under a tree, then we can expect people to deliver.

So I say that whatever the circumstances, whether a tree or a good court building, whether pay is little or plenty, we expect the people to deliver good service. *[Applause]* Once you take a job, you deliver the best that you could. I want all of us to maybe tell our young people, that the worst thing that you could do if you stay in Guyana, and you could stay and work with the Government, is to say, I am only getting half pay or quarter pay and I can only deliver half of what somebody should deliver or quarter because that is how you set yourself and fix yourself ... that is what people see of you. So we demand of everybody in the Government whether policeman, judge, doctor or lawyer to deliver. *[Applause]* You have made a

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contract, not only with us in the Government but with the people of Guyana, so deliver! *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I think that we Guyanese belittle ourselves and it grieves me because ever so often we limit our performance primarily to our income and that we speak so disparagingly at times that if you are paying peanuts, you are getting monkeys. I am not a monkey and I have been receiving very little ... *[Applause]* ... I have been receiving, except for when we did raise the pay last year, I may be receiving a tenth or twentieth of what I would have gotten if I had stayed in the States. I have been receiving peanuts, but I am not a monkey ... *[Applause]* ... that is the point. We have got to work from where we are; we have got to build from where we are. *[Noisy Interruption]*

Mr Speaker, I am not without hope because I know of a time, all relatively speaking at least, that my views may be old fashioned but I was both challenged and reassured a couple of years ago when a young lady lawyer remarked to me, and I could say that it was not an occasion where there were many PPP/C people whilst there may have been many PNCR-1G people mainly at that occasion, but she said to me, *Prime Minister, we should not be Guyanese by default* and today, I echo that sentiment. It warms my heart and it gives me hope. *[Applause]* *Let us not be Guyanese by default. [Applause]*

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Let us perform and achieve with what we have. Let us not badmouth ourselves and our country ... [*Applause*]
In this regard, Mr Speaker, permit me to refer briefly to the passionate and, I think, earnest presentation delivered yesterday by the Honourable Member Khemraj Ramjattan. He at that time pointed to various reports wherein Guyana was placed at the bottom of the totem pole, but I wanted to say to him that the countries that are at the top ... and I agree, their systems, the systems of governance and all of that of which each one of us is a part, their systems are much better than ours, today. If you went back sometime, you would see that they were not there where they are, but it took time and it took history for them to get where they are. [*Applause*] Give us some time! We should give ourselves some time to get to a similar level and we will get there faster than they did. It would not take us 200 years to go from the great reform in England of 1832, where people were returning Members of Parliament from areas that had been sunk and gone under the sea. It will not take us 200 years to get to where they are, give yourselves some time, do not throw your hands up in the air.

Mr Speaker, I would have wanted to go and talk about some of the things in my specific areas, Mr Corbin took some time and I would like to crave that I be given at least a similar amount ... [*Applause*] ... I listened to him, as I listened to everyone else and I

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want to say something about this document that was shaken about there in the air quite a lot of times, The Security Sector Reform Action Plan. It was asked why we have not yet signed on to it and put it out as a Government document. We did not circulate it because we have not signed on to it as yet because it has at least one big error. When it says that it was approved by the Government, it was never concluded, it was appraised at the level of the management of the GMC, it was appraised at the level of the Board of the GMC, it was recommended to Cabinet and Cabinet did not approve it ... [*Applause*] Cabinet put it on the ... and it was not only one, there were two others and they may have been okay, but Cabinet said, *look, let us wait until we could understand this issue*. There is a real issue involved in this and the issue is ... listen about the issue.

We recognised the issue and it was how you separate a company from what is known about the person and the personality. How much do you go behind the corporate veil, as the lawyers say? That was the issue that we discussed at Cabinet and we took the cautionary approach and said, we do not want to go forward with this because we do not think we should go forward with this. Let us hold it and keep it on the ice and so as not to appear to be discriminatory, two other proposals for exploratory licenses that came along in the same batch ... everybody was put on hold.

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Maybe it is not the most efficient and effective, but we had a big problem that we did not really know how to handle and we held it on ice. You know, if we had thrown it out like that, some one of the lawyers would have come and said, how could you object, nothing is known against this man and so on, there is no conviction against him, rumours ... why we focused mostly on that is because this same gentleman and another man have been involved in two other deals, buying timber areas but in those cases, they bought the existing companies. Nagassar Sawh sawmills and also what was Williams Timber Company, the companies were bought and the Government was not really involved in the transaction and the Government was unhappy about it or let me say they were uneasy about it and we wondered about what should and what could be done. We agonised about it but this was a purely Private Sector arrangement! Two! I can tell you an interesting thing that happened with what was Williams Timber Company ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Before you move on to that, Honourable Member, your time is up.

Hon Clement R. Rohee: Mr Speaker, I would like to request that the Honourable Minister be given 15 minutes to continue.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member.

Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Some of us may know that the old Upper Mazaruni Road from Itabali to Paruni River had been restored and now you can drive all the way to Bayley Creek, opposite the Kurupung on the Mazaruni. It was done by a miner ETK and we had an arrangement with Mekdeci to repair it, but there is never enough money in tolls to keep these roads in very good condition. So, the owner at the time of what was Willems Timber Company had done the road to Paruni. So, an American gentleman called to ask for an appointment to see me about this road to Paruni, and he is not too happy and so on. I said okay, come along and let us talk about it and as he came in I was doing some other things at my secretary's desk, and he came in and I saw a second person with him, sort of an old friend and I shook his hand, and I saw a third person come along and I shook his hand too and I said, what is your name and he said he was Mr Khan. I think I recognised him. When we had the meeting, I said to the gentleman from ETK, I forget his name, you know we are talking about the road but let me tell you, we have a great concern, where has that gentleman, who now seems to own Willems, been working on the road, repairing the road and everybody is saying how nice it is to get this road done and so on; but I want you to know that we are unhappy about the influence that is coming his way with repairing and managing this road.

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Then I saw the American guy getting uncomfortable and the son of my friend also getting uncomfortable and then the third man said, I am Mr Roger Khan, the man who owns Robert Willems and he said, Mr Prime Minister, do not believe all that you hear about me. We have been as concerned as anyone else about what is happening. You could help us by telling us some of the issues. What can be standard procedure and you could help us by telling us what limitations or tests we should put in when businesses are sold. You should help us to do that.

Mr Speaker, we are having a debate to come on Guyana Power and Light. Allow me to say that the issues of GPL are pretty well known, it is a matter of investment that is required, that has been shortcoming from since the 70s and there is a lot of catching up to do. We did quite a bit of catching up, initially in generation with quite a bit of money put into it, but we have not been able to maintain that rate of investment. Also, particularly over the last four or five years, there has been a ruthless, steady increase in the price of fuel, particularly last year. So, today even though we have been studying and looking over five years of ways to take the next steps of investment, we have not been able to do it. We need to put in some 20 to 30 megawatts of new generation as an interim measure, until we get the hydro we hope to get, the development at Amelia. We need to put in that 20 to 30 megawatts

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and we are looking at US\$30 to \$45 million these days in cost and we need to put in maybe another \$50 to \$60 million in improving transmission and distribution.

Yes, people talk about loss reduction but one of the most maybe perverse attitude that is there is the one it sends. There are great losses, therefore I am saying electricity prices are too high and therefore, I can keep thieving electricity, too ... a most perverse argument. I would have hoped that my colleagues and friends on the other side, particularly some who would have been chastened by the electricity problems before would have been more understanding and sympathetic and supportive in getting a proper view of our electricity situation but maybe we will talk about it. I should tell you one thing that came to me during the period when we sought to privatise the GEC, we had about 45 people who made the initial expression of interest and then we sought to sort them out and put them through tests. Eventually, we short listed some of about five or eight, I am not sure now and there was one group, including a province from Canada and a State in Australia that had come together as a consortium and they went all the way. They were short listed and they went all the way and we were expecting full proposals. It takes money to do these things, maybe a couple million US dollars to go all the way to making a proposal and eventually in the last day or two before closing, they said,

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You know, we have already put a lot of money into this and we have been giving it great thought. We would like to come to Guyana and do this job, but there is something that has caused us to reconsider and that is, that any country and every country where the per capita GDP is less than \$3000 per person, per year, there is always social and political problems to get the tariffs that the company needs to sustain itself.

[Applause]

Mr Speaker that is the situation and it is a serious situation. It is the reason why we are where we are today and when we threw out the British and the Irish, because they did not achieve the reduction in losses that they had agreed to and committed to. The Government sought to generate interest in Guyana to put up some money, all of that money that has to be ... what is the word again? *[Laundered?]* ... not laundered ... *[Laughter]* ... money that we have to sterilise, and put it directly into electricity and almost to ... my Guyanese people say, we put money into electricity to send to them Guyanese! You think we stupid? We know all of them are thieving current and do not want to pay the electricity bill. We are not putting our money in GPL! That is what ... I approached many people and many local institutions,

but I would say again, maybe the Berbice River Bridge may have turned the tide and maybe it is time for me to make another approach to all our people to again consider financing and taking shares with our electricity company. *[Applause]*

So, I have a lot of things here on electricity but time is wasting. Let me say, Members, let me speak a bit on mining. The year 2007 was very good for mining in Guyana ... *[Applause]* ... and let me read some figures, and I am sorry that my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture is not here, because my boys in mining would want me to read these figures and to say in the spirit of emulative competition amongst comrades, I want to say that the boys tell me and the figures show it, that the sale of gold dipped sugar this year. *[Applause]* Our gold production by small and medium scale miners of some 246,100 ounces at the good prices yielded an income for our nation, foreign exchange of US\$153.1 million. *[Applause]* The record production of some 268,925 carats yielded US\$35.5 million and we stayed the course in bauxite. It was a long travail after Mr Corbin, smiling there, he would have been around too, he should have written about it, when the decision was taken to privatise bauxite in 1988 or 1989 and the number of people who turned away then and when we came along, we had two formal invitations, people came along and looked and they said it looked nice, but they did not stay.

Eventually, with the good relations and the good working relations and lack of corruption that we had with OMAI, they said, we are going to make a try with bauxite and that is how we got the Linden operation privatised.

We also had to 'Stay the Course' in Berbice. We stayed the course and then RUSAL came along. We could not predict and write in any report at any time that RUSAL will come or that OMAI will take over, we could not say that. It happened and we are thankful and happy about it ... *[Interruption: 'It had to do with you all?'* "Yes, and bauxite is doing well"] I will get to bauxite and say a little bit.

Bauxite as another mining sale brought in US\$101.5 million last year. *[Applause]* So, mining brought in US\$290.1 million and I think our total imports were about \$890, so, the mining Sector brought in nearly a third of the foreign sales. There is some special name for it, but I am not too good at economics, I only did 101. I did not get past that. So ... *[Pause]* [*"Let Robert tweak the numbers"*] ... at the prices at the time and twenty years of putting \$10 million a year into it, and I will say this, Sir, it is still very close. So, mining did very well and I have already mentioned our local people, the small men and women, who are growing.

I would like to tell you about the hundreds of people who I meet, who operate these small and medium scale

mines, who have applied themselves and I see one of them looking at me from the other side, who worked hard, who rolled up their trousers and sleeves and got down to work and lived under difficult conditions and made fun out of it. I would like to tell you about them and I would like to take you with me when I go visiting in the Hinterlands. I would not need a second invitation, I am ready... *[Laughter]* ...

I must let you know too that the interest of overseas companies is at a very high level. Some 26 foreign companies are prospecting at this time, of which you can get IAM Gold, ARAMCA Gold, STRATA Gold and so on and I am hearing again that they are hopeful that they would be able to discover and develop five OMAI-like mines. So, I remain hopeful about the Mining Sector. Of course, there are difficulties, my small and medium scale miners, I have to rein in some of their enthusiasm. They go raiding where they ... but, I have to rein them in and there are other environmental issues, but we are working at it.

I would also point to sand and stone which is for local sales so far, it sells about US\$10 million in the year of products.

Let me speak a bit to the Environmental Protection Agency. They have moved to their own premises now, in south Georgetown and among its many

responsibilities, it has heightened its focus on the following:

- protection of the physical environment,
- conservation, and
- attention to bio-diversity

The EPA played a significant role in the aggressive 2007 campaign surrounding Cricket World Cup to clean up our environment, momentum is being maintained and environmental cleanliness has become the remit of a special unit created in the EPA to work with the municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils. The Agency has made it clear that punitive measures will be brought against those who litter and the ... to degrade the physical environment. With regard to conservation and bio-diversity, the flagship activity is the creation of the protected area system of Guyana and its financing of funds and there is quite a bit here about how we are working with the Donor Community and the World Bank, UNDP, Conservation International and German State Agency in this area, KWF.

So, we are working in this area and we are working with many foreign agencies and many foreign companies. Mr Speaker, we do not accept that there will be an antagonistic, irresolvable conflict between production, growth and development on the one hand

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and environmental responsibility on the other hand. We recognise that there are challenges to resolve the different interests but we are taking them on and I am sure that we will resolve them.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Fifteen minutes to conclude ... *[Laughter]*

Hon Clement Rohee: Mr Speaker, could I ask that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: You may proceed, Honourable Member ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Thank you very much, Honourable Member Ally for guiding me along ... *[Laughter]* ... I think it is in anticipation of me guiding her along in the Rupununi ... *[Applause]* ... Honourable Member Davis has been enjoying my company in the area next to OMAI ... *[Laughter]* ... and I have been enjoying her company too.

Mr Speaker, this last piece that I have here I have been thinking whether I should present it but, the Honourable Member Trotman spoke so earnestly and passionately and the Honourable Member Corbin

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spoke for maybe fifty percent on this issue about where we are, having had Lusignan and Bartica. I cannot help but take notice of the presentations of the two Honourable Members of which the Honourable Member Trotman spoke of real dangers to us and the Honourable Member Mr Corbin spoke about real things that can happen to us as individuals and in any of our groupings and indeed to our Nation as a whole. The issues spoke to important questions that we must ponder but the matters of the Budget also have to be addressed. All aspects of life go on, not in disregard of the massacres and slayings of Lusignan and Bartica and all that they may imply, but simultaneously and life does not ever stop, it keeps going and we have to work on the Budget, just as we have to keep thinking about what Lusignan or Bartica may or may not imply. I want to say too that the Budget process and this Budget has not been unaffected by the effects of Lusignan and Bartica. We have had two postponements of the reading of the Budget and it would be anybody's guess that those events forced the allocation to purchase two helicopters at this time for the security forces but at the same time we must note that that money would have been available, were we not forced to do it at this time. It would have been available to help with some of the things that people have been speaking to.

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I want to add my thoughts, admittedly, preliminary to the Honourable Member Trotman's presentation and Honourable Member Corbin's talk about things that can happen to us. Mr Trotman spoke about members of these gangs being young, maybe about 18 years of age, plus or minus five or ten or so and that they became what they became during the 15 years that the PPP/C has been in Government. I noticed many in the Opposition cheered as if this Government is the major cause, if not the only cause of Nasty Man and the hundred or so like him. I say that this Government is not the cause of the situation! *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, in the AFC column of two Sundays ago, I think, I read it and I tried to find it in the five or ten minutes I had, but I did not put my hand on it, but I remember the AF column written, I think, by either Mr Trotman or Mr Ramjattan. It spoke about terrorism being motivated by a member of the intelligentsia or few people who think they are the intelligentsia, that are not in power, cut off from broad masses who resort to developing terrorists groups. They cannot persuade the masses to support them in a democratic election and they go looking to find fertile minds to poison and eventually drive to the brutality of Lusignan and Bartica. Our country, indeed, has a number of questions that many people find not settled. We the PPP/C do not ignore those questions but we have always worked with the view that in our people's common efforts to work for and earn a living, guided by presentations and

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considerations, such as presented in this Budget, that in that process of making a living, facing and overcoming common difficulties, our common humanity will enact.

I think the Honourable Member Mr Corbin said we would have a meeting. We believe that in working to improve, firstly the material condition of our country and to make a more prosperous living, that in that meeting our people will have a physical meeting and a meeting of minds and spirit and that our common humanity will be announced.

Mr Speaker, I spoke about unfinished business in our country, Mr Hoyte eventually in 1992, allowed a fair and free election that opened the door for the PPP/C to come into Government, but many people were not happy and not all of the unhappy people are in the PNCR-1G, I would allow that. There are some who are not in the PNCR-1G...*[Laughter: 'Some like who?' ... "Even in the call against the PNC that we had in 1985 to 1992, some of them were in that call to get rid of the PNC and to put in democracy"]* In the GUARD movement, which I was in, one in time discerned two sentiments, fair and free elections and whoever wins, wins, but there was another sentiment that said fair and free elections and God help us and whatever else, not the PPP/C, not Cheddi Jagan. We have to think and I think about that situation ... *['The PPP/C did not win?'] [Applause]...*

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Honourable Member Trotman should look further than the Government to the reasons why a number of people in and from the 1950's and 1960's would not accept Cheddi Jagan and the PPP and later the PPP/C in Government. And, maybe, the Honourable Member should pick up the thought he expressed about some seven years ago, that perhaps the PNCR-1G and any others, perhaps all non-PPP/C persons should start the healing and take the first step by apologising to Dr Jagan, the PPP/C and all our supporters for those years when we were cheated. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Member Corbin, spoke on the one hand that the PPP/C only acts on crisis, but what is the history? The history is that crises have been forced on the PPP/C to extract things from the PPP/C, to extract rights from the PPP/C, starting from the crisis of 1964 meeting in Lancaster House, when there was the promise. When there was the commitment before that the Party that won the 1961 elections would take Guyana into independence ... *[Applause]* ... that is the history, Sir, and then maybe more recently, the 1997 elections when the PPP/C was forced ... rather than the country going into turmoil because ... not to throw it away, but because it was patently clear that it was a fair election in 1997 ... *[Applause]* ... Mr Speaker, yet people refused to accept and we sadly conceded and gave up two years of Government.

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So, Members I will make the case for the PPP/C that the history has been that people and we would not go on to say the PNCR-1G alone, but certain people in Guyana for some reason, would not accept and do not want to accept the PPP/C in Government and thus create the crisis. That is why ... *[Applause]* ... our President called on Mr Corbin and the PNCR-1G who may turn out to be the beneficiaries and who some people may be feeling that they are acting in their favour, that is why we call on the PNCR-1G to dissolve and to disabuse their minds of any sentiment that they are acting in support of Mr Corbin and the PNCR-1G. That is why we called for them ... *[Applause]* ... These people must be isolated and an important step of isolation is that the PNC/R-1G and other Parties too, that all those people who have historically been refusing to accept the electoral victories of the PPP/C should come out and say clearly and unequivocally ..., that is the way to pull the rug from under them and to assist our ... *[Applause]* ... joint forces to quickly apprehend them and bring them to justice.

I am not unhopeful, Sir, I hope that we will soon get the Hansard Report or maybe a tape of some of the statements Honourable Member Corbin made. I have known him for some time and I think that there is a certain amount of earnestness in what he said in the beginning, that he does not recognise the thesis put

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often that you can relate political support to ethnicity. There are several things that he said that I would like to hold on to, so I would like to have a tape, maybe Channel 9 that is taping it or Channels 7 and 28, so I can get his words recorded ... [*Laughter*] ... I am not without hope.

Mr Speaker, in wrapping up I remain cautiously hopeful that we can escape the possible future that the Honourable Member Trotman has warned us about and the things that can happen that the Honourable Member Corbin has warned us about also. I think that for all the charges of discrimination and corruption, many people who may have ever voted for the PPP/C, and they never voted for us, have begun working as the opportunities are becoming available as reflected in past Budgets and in this Budget. I think that maybe, not unexpectedly it may be this same movement of our people away from the old issues that may be exciting the disaffected intelligentsia to even greater extreme action, so that our success may bring even greater danger.

Mr Speaker, Hon Members we as the Government believe that this Budget is appropriate to where we are now, and perhaps not even the best Budget but good enough, taking account of the resources available to be put into the Budget. You know, you could refine and refine a Budget and the whole year could pass ... so you do just enough. You have to do something that is

adequate and enough when you have time limitations. I want to encourage everyone in Guyana, those who will always vote for us, as well as those who may never vote for us, do not hold yourself outside. Do not allow anyone to keep you out, do not discriminate against yourself, put the system to the test. Take everything in the Budget that you can get ... take it, it is yours, you do not have to vote for us. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I call on everyone that has the enthusiasm of our Regional Representatives, Mr Whittaker, Mr Parmanand, Mr Khan and Mr Atkinson. It really warmed my heart and pleased me about our Regional Representatives who will get down to the job and get the work done. *[Applause]* I also want to commend all of you young Ministers and Members of Parliament and I want to say that the future of Guyana is in good hands. *[Applause]* Problems we have, problems we always will have, all sorts of problems. Let us come together with some harmony and let us overcome them. Not only the Honourable Members Corbin, Trotman and Franklin but we too want consensus and cohesion and we want it no less than them. I thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Members, this completes the general debates of the Budget. Before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the meeting of the Business Subcommittee of the Committee of Supply in the allocation

of time for the consideration of the 2008 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply.

ASSEMBLY IN COMMITTEE

The Chairman: Honourable Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met today, 5 March 2008 and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2008 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed a Resolution on the matter copies of which have been circulated.

Hon Prime Minister would you move the necessary motions?

Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Mr Chairman, I now move that the Committee of Supply agree with the Business Sub-Committee in its resolution.

The Chairman: Honourable Members ...

The question is that –

The Committee of Supply agrees with the Business Sub-Committee in its Resolution.

Motion put and carried

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Honourable Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated three days for the consideration of the Estimates. Consideration will begin tomorrow 6 March 2008 and will be in accordance with the Resolution of the Committee.

ASSEMBLY RESUMED

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I would like to thank all Members for their contributions during the general debate on the Budget. I would like to make one comment. This is the first time we have departed from the timeframe and timescale, which has been used by Members over the past years that I have been here and that is not my doing, the Parties decided otherwise. We finished later than we usually do and about half a dozen Members did not speak, so if we had continued at the same rate and everybody spoke to the issue, we would have had to have an extra day in order to complete the debate. So, I just wanted to warn Members that on the next occasion, unless ... I do not know what was wrong with the timing we used for the last six years, but apparently something was wrong with it. If Members want to find a new timing, where Members will take more time to speak, then we will have to have more days for the general debate.

Honourable Prime Minister ...

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Hon Samuel A A Hinds: Mr Speaker, I now move the adjournment of the House to 14:00H later today.

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Member.

Adjourned accordingly At 24:18H