

National Assembly Debates

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE SECOND SESSION (2002-2003) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER
PUBLIC BUILDINGS BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN**

Part I

46TH SITTING

2.00 PM

Wednesday, 16 February 2005

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (68)

Speaker (1)

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

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

The Hon. Samuel A. A. Hinds, M.P.

*-Prime Minister and Minister
of Public Works and Communications
(Absent - performing the functions of the
Office of President)*

The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P.

-Minister of Parliamentary Affairs

The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P.

*-Minister of Foreign Trade and
International Co-operation (Absent)*

The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.

*- Minister of Local Government
and Regional Development*

The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.

*- Minister of Culture, Youth and
Sport*

The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.

- Minister of Education

The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.

- Minister of Finance

The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.

- Minister of Housing and Water

The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P.

*- Minister of Home Affairs;
Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands/
West Demerara (AOL)*

The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P.

*- Minister of Labour, Human
Services and Social Security*

The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.

*- Minister in the Ministry of Local
Government and Regional Development*

The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P.

*- Minister of Fisheries, Other
Crops and Livestock
(Region No. 5-Mahaica/Barbice)*

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

* *Non-Elected Minister*

** *Elected Member from The United Force*

Members of the Opposition (30)

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

- Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P.
Mr. Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P. - (AOL)
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P. - Deputy Speaker of the N.A
Mr. E. Lance Carberry, M.P. - Chief Whip (AOL)
Mr. Ivor Allen, M.P. - (Region No.2-Pomeroon/Supenaam)
Mrs. Deborah J. Backer, M.P.
Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P.
Mr. C. Stanley Ming, M.P.
Mr. Raphael G C. Trotman, M.P.
Mr. Vincent L. Alexander, M.P. - (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Basil Williams, M.P.
Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P.
Dr Dalglish Joseph, M.D., M.P.
Miss Amna Ally, M.P. - (Region No.5-Mahaica/Berbice)
Miss Sandra M. Adams, M.P. - (Region No.10-Upper Demerara Berbice)(AOL)
Mr. Jerome Khan, M.P. - (AOL)
Dr George A. Norton, M.P.
Miss Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P. - (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. James K. McAllister, M.P. - (Region No.3-Essequibo Islands West Demerara)

Dr Carl Max Hanoman, M.P.
Miss Lurlene A. Nestor, M. P. - (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica) (AOL)
Mr Abdul Kadir, J.P., M.P. - (Region No.10-Upper Demerara/Berbice)
Mr Ricky Khan, M.P. - (Region No.1-Barima/Waini) (Absent)
Mrs. R. Bancroft, M.P. - (Region No.8- Potaro/Siparuni)
Mr Nasir Ally, J.P., M.P. - (Region No.6-East Berbice/Corentyne)
Miss Judith David, M.P. - (Region No.7-Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Miss Genevieve Allen, M.P. - (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)

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

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

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

- Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P. - (AOL)

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Clerk of the National Assembly

~~Ms~~ Lilawtie Coonjah, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

The Clerk reads the Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

(i) Welcome back to Public Buildings

Honourable Members, yesterday was a special Sitting of the National Assembly, and for that reason I was constrained, but I should like to welcome you to our original home, from where we have been absent for a very long time, and to inform you that a great deal of effort went into the refurbishment of our facilities here. Other facilities in the building are still being refurbished to expand the comfort of Members of Parliament, and to make available facilities for Committee meetings, which we hope will be finished shortly. I had made many promises, based on advice, of course, as to when this Parliament Chamber would be ready, and all of those, as you know, had to be extended from time to time.

One of the problems is the age of our building so, when we attempted to change two floorboards which were showing their age, we discovered that we had to change the entire flooring of the Chamber. The original flooring was constructed with two inches thick greenheart planks and those had to be specially made for us. Unfortunately, we could not get two inches, so we had to settle for one and a half inches but, hopefully, it will take the weight of the debates in which Members engage in the House.

(ii) Congratulation to Speaker of Kuwait

I would like to state that I received from Mr Jassem Mohammad Al-Khorafi, the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait, congratulations on the national day of the Republic of Guyana on behalf of Members of the Kuwait National Assembly. I understand that to mean that those congratulations are extended to the Members of the National As-

sembly in Guyana.

(iii) Leave

Honourable Members, leave has been granted to Honourable Members, Mr Winston Murray, up to the 28 February 2005, and Mr Lance Carberry, Ms Sandra Adams, Mr Jerome Khan, and Ms Lurlene Nestor for today's Sitting.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS, ETC

(1) By the Speaker (Chairman of the Committee of Selection):

(i) Minutes of proceedings of the 12th Meeting of the Committee of Selection, which was held on Thursday, 30 December 2004;

(ii) Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana, and on the Accounts of Ministries, Departments and Regions for the fiscal year ended 31 December 2003.

(2) By the Minister of Finance:

(i) The Customs Duties (Amendment) Order 2004;

(ii) The Customs Duties (Amendment) Order No.6 of 2005;

(iii) Financial Paper No.4/2004 - Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$1,458,826,253, for the period ending 2004-11-31

I name 28 February 2005, for consideration of the Paper.

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- (iv) *Financial Paper No. 5/2004 - Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$4,748,096,251 for the period ending 2004-12-31*

I name 28 February 2005, for consideration of the Paper.

- (3) *By the Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security:*

Recommendation adopted at its 86th Session of the International Labour Conference, held in June 1998.

Job creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation, 1998

QUESTIONS TO MINISTERS

Honourable Members, there are twelve questions on the Order Paper by Honourable Member Mr Raphael Trotman, and all of these questions are for written replies. The answers have, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

1. THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY TO FIGHT CRIME

By Mr Raphael Trotman

Is the Government's strategy to fight crime one of providing more firearms to affected citizens, or to restrict the total number of firearms available to civilians?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

The Government's strategy is more multifaceted. It has to do with crime prevention, crime detection, effective patrolling - both in the Hinterland and rural areas, intelligence gathering, public and media relations, improving the capacity of the police force to execute its Laws Enforcement mandate, which includes gaining public confidence and trust through community-based policing and good community relations. The Government alone cannot fight crimes. It requires the involvement of entire communities in cooperating with law and order efforts. This includes the Business Sector, which has a responsibility to invest in security measures to protect their assets.

2. TOTAL NUMBER OF FIREARM LICENCES

What is the total number of firearm licences issued for the years 2003 and 2004?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

2003

2004

2,154

732 up to November 2004

3. CRITERIA USED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES FOR THE GRANT/REFUSAL OF FIREARM LICENSES

What are the criteria used by the law enforcement authorities, and approved by the Government, for the grant, or refusal, of a firearm licence, and for various calibres of weapons?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

There are two (2) basic premises upon which a firearm approval is granted -

- (a) Suitability and
- (b) Need of the Applicant

These two premises are coupled with a prescribed form of identification:-

- (a) National Identification Card
- (b) Government of Guyana Passport

Suitability is determined by:-

- (a) Whether or not the person has a criminal record against his name;
- (b) Whether he is of intemperate habits, or of unsound mind, or if he is found unsuited to be entrusted with a firearm.

The person's good character must be attested to by two (2) persons of good repute and standing in the Society.

Need - The need is determined by the circumstances, as assessed by the nature of the applicant's employment or business.

4. TRAINING IN THE USE, CARRIAGE, AND STORAGE OF FIREARMS

Will the government be providing training in the use, carriage and storage of firearms authorised to be used by civilians and members of the Community Policing Groups?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

Yes, all persons who have been permitted to obtain firearm licences, with respect to handguns, shotguns or rifles, received appropriate training by personnel from the Tactical Services Unit at a nominal fee. The licences are granted upon satisfactory completion of that training. Community Policing Groups enjoy a treatment that is no less favourable. However, such persons must be members of Community Policing Groups who are sworn rural constables.

5. COMMUNITY POLICING GROUPS ON THE EAST COAST OF DEMERARA

Can the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs (Ag) say whether, and to what extent, the Commissioner of Police and the Divisional Commander of the “C” Division are involved in any plan to issue firearm licences to members of Community Policing Groups on the East Coast of Demerara?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

The Commissioner of Police and the Divisional Commander contribute to the implementation of the standard procedures for providing firearm licences to members of the public, and the procedures remain unaltered, even for Community Policing Groups members.

The Divisional Commander of “C” Division has been involved in the formation, resuscitation and strengthening of a number of Community Policing Groups on the East Coast of Demerara.

In this regard, the Divisional Commander ensures the following:

The processes of identification and screening of suitable persons to become rural constables

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- The rural constables are then trained in the use, safety and custody of firearms before deployment in the groups;
- Firearms are only issued to bona fide Community Policing Groups and must be lodged on a daily basis at the police station after patrol duties by the rural constables in their communities;
- Once official approval is given to use firearms, the relevant licenses would then be issued to the Community Policing Groups, with the names of rural constables trained and found suitable to use a firearm endorsed on the licence.

6. WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN GUYANA

What measures are in place to provide a Witness Protection Programme in Guyana for persons required to give evidence before courts, tribunals and commissions in Guyana?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

Possible measures have been studied, and the recommendations of the Guyana Police Force have been accepted. For example, police protection during exposure.

Additionally, the Government of Guyana, in its regional consultations, remains committed to a regional component of measures.

7. SMUGGLING OF ILLEGAL FIREARMS

What measures will the Government introduce to prevent the smuggling of illegal firearms into Guyana?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

This is quite a difficult question. The borders are wide open and it is suspected that illegal firearms are entering Guyana by that medium. So far, stop and search and road-block methodology have been implemented. There is a regular check point supported from Georgetown to Mabura.

The weaknesses at our borders and Atlantic Coast have to be reduced so that interdiction of persons entering the country with illicit firearms can be detected. To do so requires an investment in massive and expensive surveillance capabilities by air, sea/river, and on the ground, to deal effectively with the threat along our borders.

One must recognise that this requires a heavy outlay to provide the Police and Coastguard with the requisite vessels and equipment to enable the services to develop the capacity to interdict the illegal entry of firearms into the country from sea, land and air.

While every effort has been made to enhance the capabilities of these services, one has to be realistic in one's expectations as to what resources could be provided in the immediate and long-term medium.

In the meantime, the Police is committed to interdict illegal firearms on land, using its patrols, roadblocks, and intelligence-gathering facilities.

It might be appropriate to advise this House that, at the recently convened 6th Hemispheric Conference of Ministers of Defence, (16-21 November 2004, Ecuador) this issue of the proliferation of illicit trafficking in arms was a key concern for all countries in the Caribbean, Central and South America due to porous, long borders and open seas with inadequate equipment and vessels. Countries manufacturing and selling arms were asked to intensify their control measures. An appeal was also made to hemispheric financial institutions to assist our countries to be better equipped to reduce/prevent this dangerous threat to national and hemispheric security.

8. TOTAL NUMBER OF NARCOTICS SEIZURES

What is the total number of narcotics seizures per region, per narcotic, per port of exit and/or entry, for the period 2000 - 2004?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

Division	Type (per Narcotic)	Year 2000 - 2004 Amount Seized
A	Cannabis	788 Kg 997.25g
	Cocaine	4Kg 262,75g
B	Cannabis	504Kg 397g
	Cocaine	70Kg 637.75g
C	Cannabis	166Kg 571.75g
	Cocaine	38Kg 652.75g
D	Cannabis	89Kg 595.50g
	Cocaine	558.75g
E & F	Cannabis	5325Kg 254g
	Cocaine	3Kg 493g
G	Cannabis	3Kg 376.5g
	Cocaine	4Kg 100.5g
Narcotics Branch	Cannabis	53.629Kg 637g
(H/Q)	Cocaine	358Kg 142g

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CANU	Cannabis	385Kg 718g
	Cocaine	347Kg 958g

Year	Type of Drug	Ports	No. of Seizure	Amount Seized
2000	Cocaine	Air	9	25Kg 094g
	Cannabis	Sea	2	99Kg
2001	Cocaine	Air	14	39Kg 364g
	Cannabis	Sea	1	15Kg 250g
2002	Cocaine	Air	9	20Kg 118g
	Cannabis	Sea	1	1,871Kg
2003	Cocaine	Air	27	226Kg 241g
	Cannabis	Sea	1	5g
2004	Cocaine	Air	18	138Kg 11g
	Cannabis	Sea	1	3Kg 025g

9. NUMBER OF SUCCESSFUL NARCOTIC PROSECUTIONS

What is the number of successful prosecutions per region for narcotic offences for the period 2000 - 2004?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

Year 2000 - 2004

Division	Type (per Narcotic)	No. of Convictions
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A	Cocaine	7
	Cannabis	70
B	Cocaine	17
	Cannabis	165
C	Cocaine	11
	Cannabis	73
D	Cocaine	9
	Cannabis	72
E & F	Cocaine	7
	Cannabis	105
G	Cocaine	2
	Cannabis	16
Narcotics Branch	Cocaine	113
(H/Q)	Cannabis	276
CANU	Cocaine	10
	Cannabis	10
	TOTAL	963

10. CUSTOMS ANTI NARCOTIC UNIT (CANU)

What efforts are in place to boost the capacity of the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) to investigate and prosecute drug-related crimes in Guyana?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

The short-term objective and strategy of CANU focuses on enhancing operational ability at selected sites and specific circumstances.

Prosecution will remain a collaborative function of allied law enforcement agencies and bodies and the DPP.

11. Seizure of narcotics at the Cheddi Jagan international airport

Can the Minister say why larger quantities of narcotics are being seized at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport and not elsewhere within Guyana?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Home Affairs (Ag)

Cheddi Jagan International Airport is the only International Airport in Guyana. There are also direct links to countries where the demand is high for these narcotics.

In addition, enhanced available resources have heightened the security measures implemented by the Police and Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit, which affect these seizures.

In addition, law enforcement is developing improved methods and strategies to more effectively interdict the flow of narcotics throughout the country.

12. FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA)

Can the Honourable Minister provide an update on the establishment of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)?

Written reply submitted by the Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation - Update on the FTAA Negotiations

Introduction

The FTAA negotiations are at a critical stage given the fact that the January 2005 deadline for the conclusion of the negotiation has not been realised and the negotiation itself remains stalled since February 2004, a situation not unrelated to the post-Cancun gridlock which prevailed in the WTO until the end of July 2004.

The Objective of the WTO discussions in Cancun in September 2003 was to move the multilateral negotiations forward so as to meet the proposed timeframe and conclude the WTO Doha Round by a January 2005 deadline also. The breakdown of the talks, however, halted the process. Two months later, in November 2003, FTAA Trade Ministers met in Miami with the intention of commencing the final year of the FTAA negotiations to lead up to the January 2005 deadline. This meeting was an extremely critical one primarily because of the potential impact of the WTO failure in Cancun and the determination of the hemisphere's leaders to avoid a similar fate to the FTAA process.

In Miami the trade ministers agreed, as a compromise, to scale down the original scope and content of the FTAA negotiations in order to preserve the negotiations and safeguard the political integrity of the hemispheric process. In this regard the key mandates to the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) were to:

- Develop a ***Common and Balanced set of rights and obligations applicable to all countries*** in the following negotiating areas: market access; agriculture, services; investment; government procurement; intellectual property; competition policy; subsidies, antidumping and countervailing duties; and dispute settlement.

- Establish procedures for ***plurilateral negotiations of additional liberalisation and disciplines*** (in the identified areas) within the FTAA.

The drafting or formulating of the *common set of rights and obligations* has proven to be difficult in terms of detailed proposals, et cetera. Commencing with the 17th Meeting of the TNC in February 2004 the FTAA Co-chairs - USA and Brazil - held several consultations with

delegations to resolve the differences.

Key issues/areas of disagreement relate to the *common set of rights and obligations*, the treatment of agriculture and disciplines on subsidies and other supports and the scope of negotiations on services and investment. The difficulties with agriculture (as well as services and investment) are largely specific, though not exclusively, to the opposite views of the US and Canada on the one hand and the Mercosur Group, led by Brazil, on the other. The US has defined services, investment, government procurement and IPR as its *offensive* issues - areas in which the US is pressing for real concessions from other delegations. Agriculture and Subsidies could be described as the US *defensive* issues - in which the US is being pressed to make concessions or trade-offs.

Resumption of the negotiations

In June, 2004, CARICOM, through its ministerial spokesperson on FTAA matters, suggested to the FTAA Co-Chairs, USA and Brazil, to convene a ministerial level (mini-ministerial) meeting to break the deadlock and restart the FTAA negotiations. There was no enthusiastic response to this call by CARICOM, primarily because of the prevailing preoccupation with the WTO discussions in Geneva.

Following the *successful* conclusion of the WTO General Council Meeting in July 2004 to move ahead with the WTO negotiations, several delegations (in Latin America) called on the FTAA Co-Chairs to set out a strategy to restart the FTAA negotiations. In August 2004, Chile, Mexico and the Andean Community submitted to the Co-Chairs that: *We believe that we must take advantage of this new atmosphere at the WTO to also move forward with the FTAA negotiation process.*

On 26 August 2004, CARICOM's ministerial spokesperson on the FTAA matters issued a letter to the FTAA Co-Chairs in which he also called for *a formal update on the status of these efforts, including the prospects for re-launch and proposed schedules of negotiations*. In his correspondence he also reiterated that, *CARICOM re-*

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mains committed to participating in the FTAA negotiations and bringing them to fruition.

The call for a restart of the negotiations is timely and fits the expressed interests of most delegations, including CARICOM. In an exchange of letters between the Brazilian Foreign Minister and the United States Trade Representative (USTR) in early November 2004, it was agreed that the TNC Co-Chairs would meet in late January 2005 to resume informal consultations aimed at breaking the impasse over the scope of the negotiations and eventual agreement.

It is the general expectation that the FTAA negotiations will be resumed early in 2004, though recent policy pronouncements by both the USA and Brazil seemed to place priority on advancing the multilateral negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, if I may digress a bit, since it is first time I too am speaking in this refurbished Assembly, may I congratulate all those who have been responsible for restoring it into its almost pristine condition, particularly the ceiling. I think it is an excellent job and I look forward to even further recommendations by the Management Committee so that the environment in here can be a little cooler for future Sittings of the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, I wrote you earlier today, I think this time I have met your deadline, since I think the letter was delivered at 10:45h, before the 11:00h deadline set by you. In accordance with Standing Order 11(2) indicating that I proposed to request leave to move the adjournment of the National Assembly today to discuss an urgent matter of public im

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portance to do with the present flood disaster. With special reference to the urgent need for a national relief programme to rehabilitate all those who have suffered as a result of the recent disaster. I have to doubt that this matter qualifies as definite, urgent and of public importance. I believe that the definite nature of the matter and its urgency can be discerned from the motion which I copied to that letter and which I believe is available with the Clerk. I believe that it is important since it is directly related to the serious threat that this matter poses for the preservation of life and the rehabilitation of citizens who are suffering, even at this moment, as a result of the disastrous floods.

I did say, Mr Speaker, that in determining this matter you may wish to consider that in a letter dated 28 January and copied to the President and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, I made a formal request for an urgent sitting of this National Assembly on Tuesday, 1 February 2005 to discuss this matter. I have also been advised that GAP/WPA Member of Parliament, Mrs Sheila Holder, also wrote requesting that this National Assembly be summoned to discuss this matter. I am aware that she received a reply, the exact content of which I am not familiar with, but I have been advised that it suggested that the responsibility of calling the Parliament rested with the Government.

The Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, a Member of the Management Committee, Mrs Clarissa Riehl, also by letter, requested that the Parliamentary Management Committee meet urgently to discuss this. At that meeting she urged the Management Committee to request a sitting of this National Assembly to discuss the flood disaster.

My information is that she was not alone in suggesting that the Management Committee initiate action to ensure this urgent sitting of the National Assembly. The evidence before us suggests that the Government never considered it, nor still does not consider it a matter of urgent national importance for this National Assembly. Since the Motion dealing with the flood disaster on the Order Paper today in the name of the Honourable Minister Xavier confirms this view. It seeks to restrict the scope of consideration of the flood disaster issue by the Parliament. I

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am sure that you are aware, Mr Speaker, that attempts by the opposition to have amendments to motions or Bills laid before this Parliament by the Government have not been very successful. Consequently, since the flood disaster is not yet over, and people are still suffering in various ways and there is, in the opinion of several Guyanese, still no coherent national response to deal with this situation, it is expected that my attached motion will bring the urgency of this issue into consideration and I invite the Government to respond appropriately.

I would not attempt to read the proposed Motion, but I think you have seen the contents, which varies in some degree from the motion which is before the House this afternoon in the name of Honourable Minister Xavier. I am grateful, Mr Speaker, for bringing to my attention Standing Order 37, particularly (2) which suggests that *it would be out of order to anticipate a Bill, or a notice of motion, by discussion upon an amendment, or on a motion, for the adjournment of the Assembly*. I wish to submit that this attempt to have the matter before the National Assembly is in no way an attempt to anticipate the motion which is before the House. It is specifically different in character and in content and, moreso, it could not have been in anticipation of this motion because of the evidence which I outlined in my letter to you since 28 January, the letter by Mrs Sheila Holder and the fact that this issue was raised in the Management Committee before such a motion was put on the Order Paper by the Government clearly indicates that there could be no anticipation of this motion. In fact, the Government's motion has anticipated what we would have done today in bringing this motion, and has sought to undermine the nature of the discussions which this Parliament should be having on the present flood disaster.

In these circumstances, I hope that you will exercise your judicial mind to this matter and recognise that, even though Standing Order 37 seeks to suggest that there should be no anticipation, my submission to you is that this is not in anticipation of the motion but, in fact, a response to the national crisis, which the motion before the House does not attempt to address. Thank you.

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The Speaker: Thank you, Mr Corbin, for your careful presentation of this matter, and the motion. I have considered the matter over the period since I have had notice of your request to move an adjournment of the House. It seems to me that it is perfectly plain. The rule of anticipation is a well-known rule in Parliamentary practice, and it is enshrined in our own Standing Orders in Order 37 (2) and is quite clear. It is found that a lot of practices are not specified in our rules. The rule makers clearly determined that this is a matter of such importance, since it was specifically provided for, and it states, as you said, it shall be out of order to anticipate the notice of a motion by discussion upon a motion for the adjournment of the Assembly. I think, in pages 327 and 328 of the Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice, 21st Edition, under the heading *the Rule of Anticipation*, it is very clearly spelt out that *a substantive motion is more effective than a motion for adjournment of the House*. It says here that a motion must not anticipate a matter already appointed for consideration by the House.

I do not agree with your interpretation of what anticipation is, and for that reason I regret to have to rule that I do not find that your motion qualifies. Mr Clerk ...

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUBLIC BUSINESS

BILL - Second Reading

ITEM 1 - REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITIES BILL 2004 – Bill No. 26/2004

A BILL intituled, an Act to establish regional health authorities with responsibility for providing for the delivery of, and administering, health services and health programmes in specified geographical areas, and for matters incidental thereto, or connected therewith.

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Honourable Member, is there an application in relation to the Regional Health Authorities Bill?

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, I would like to ask that this item be deferred – Bill No. 26/2004. Thank you.

The Speaker: You are asking for the Second Reading to be deferred until when?

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Until a later time.

The Speaker: You need to specify a date.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Another date.

The Speaker: You are asking for it to be deferred, but you are not naming a date now?

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: To a later date.

The Speaker: Okay. The Second Reading of this Bill has been deferred.

[Deferred]

MOTIONS

The Minister of Transport and Hydraulics will move the Motion set out in the Order Paper.

ITEM 2 - UNPRECEDENTED FLOODING OF THE COASTAL AREAS

WHEREAS Guyana has recently witnessed an unprecedented

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amount of rainfall during the month of January, with rainfall during the period December 24 to January 16 measuring in excess of 30 inches, the record amount for any similar period in the history of Guyana

AND WHEREAS large areas of the coast in Administrative Regions 3, 4 and 5 have been inundated, with the East Coast being the most severely affected;

AND WHEREAS, as a result, there have been incalculable personal and commercial damages suffered by thousands of households, with many members being confined to their homes;

AND WHEREAS many of these households have been unable to access food and potable water, and have been exposed to public health hazards - a consequence of which has been evacuation of homes, hospitalisations and fatalities;

AND WHEREAS Guyana now faces the worst natural disaster in its history;

AND WHEREAS the Guyanese people have rallied to the victims of the disaster in their thousands, offering help in many ways;

AND WHEREAS religious bodies, private sector entities and organisations, trade unions, businesses, individuals and many others in Guyana and outside of Guyana have contributed, and are continuing to contribute, resources of various kinds to the relief effort and have pledged additional resources;

AND WHEREAS Guyanese and non-Guyanese organisations and overseas residents from many countries have pledged and donated goods and materials and have raised funds and continue to do so;

AND WHEREAS many Governments and international organisations have allocated or sent resources and assistance in many forms;

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AND WHEREAS assistance and offers of assistance are continually being pledged by all of the above;

AND WHEREAS the Government has committed itself, in partnership with specialised international agencies, to a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the disaster on the socioeconomic status of households, communities, and national sectors devastated by the floods;

AND WHEREAS the Government intends to take action for the recovery and rehabilitation, using the results of the assessment.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly -

1. Expresses its deeply felt sadness and sympathy to the victims of the disaster;
2. Expresses its gratitude to the people and organisations in Guyana, and out of Guyana, for the assistance they have given and continue to give;
3. Expresses its thanks to those Governments and international organisations which have contributed to the relief effort;
4. Urges all Guyanese and friends of Guyana to continue their efforts on behalf of the victims;
5. Supports the efforts of the Government of Guyana, the Opposition, and all other political organisations which have contributed to the relief efforts;
6. Urges the people of Guyana, including the victims of the flood, to continue their valiant and courageous struggle against this disaster.

Hon C Anthony Xavier: Mr Speaker, colleague Ministers and other Members on this side of the House, Honourable Members of the Opposition, I wish to move the motion, No. 176, published on 9 February

2005, under my name, in relation to the unprecedented flooding of the coastal areas.

The motion sets out, in brief, the results of the flooding, the steps taken to eliminate the suffering of those affected, the proposed assessment of the impact of the disaster, and the socioeconomic status of all areas affected, and the action for recovery and rehabilitation, using the results of the assessment as a guide. Mr Speaker, 2004 was a fairly dry year up to the third week in December when unusual rains fell, flooding various parts of the city of Georgetown.

The rainfall recorded by the Hydro-Met department was as follows:

During the period, December 2004 to 8 January 2005, there were 17 consecutive days of rainfall. The rainfall during this period totalled 497.2mm and averaged 29.2mm per day. On 30 December 2004, 141.9mm of rainfall was recorded. This was the maximum one day rainfall for Botanical Gardens for 2004 and the 16th largest maximum one-day rainfall since 1888. There were then three consecutive days without any rainfall, followed by the second period of rainfall, which started on 12 January 2005 and ended 22 January 2005 - a period of 11 days, with heavy rainfall totalling 793.2mm and averaging 72.1mm per day. This session of rainfall started off with two relatively dry days totalling 8.7mm, then the daily rainfall drastically increased, peaking at a total of 166.1mm on 16 January.

After this the following new records were established, since data collection started in 1888:

- Maximum two days rainfall, January 16 and 17 of 293.1mm;
- Maximum three days rainfall, January 16 to 18 of 429.1mm;
- Maximum four days rainfall, January 15 to 18 of 517.7mm;
and
- Maximum five days rainfall, January 14 to 18 of 649.2mm.

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The rainfall total from 24 December to 31 January, recorded at the Botanical Gardens, GT, was 1448.7 mm. This amount was never recorded before. This January rainfall was a new record for any January, the average for the period 1888 to 2005 was 297.4mm. In that period, only in the years 1949 and 1950, did the amount come close, and the recorded value then was 1103.6mm, which was the period 24 December 1949 to 31 January 1950.

Mr Speaker, this was the worst flooding the City of Georgetown had ever experienced in recent times. As you know areas which have never been flooded for twenty years and over were under water.

The indiscriminate dumping of garbage in drains and canals, and the lack of maintenance of these said drains and outfalls had compounded the drainage problem. As a consequence of the flooding, a taskforce was set up to examine the causing of the flooding and to make recommendations.

The report that came out recommended that G\$200 million be allocated for emergency drainage works in Georgetown. A major cleanup covering 5 square miles, including major roads in the City, was embarked on and the areas covered were:

- Lacytown, Bourda;
- North and South Cummingsburg;
- the repairing of the hydro-flow pumps;
- the replacement of culverts to improve drainage;
- fixing the Sessex Street sluice and outfall;
- desilting sluices at Vlissengen Road and Irving Street;
- desilting canals at Cummingsburg, North, Church and Lamaha Streets

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Following the completion of phase 1, Mr Speaker, a total sum of G\$100 million were to be spent on maintaining streets, desilting alleyways and drains in Kitty, North Ruimveldt, North East La Penitence, Lacytown, Stabroek, Werk-en-Rust, South Ruimveldt Gardens, Campbellville and Kingston.

In addition, the following works were also recommended to maintain streets and alleyways and drains in Wortmanville, Bel-Air, Atlantic Ville, Alberttown, Queenstown, Cummingsburg and Bourda.

The Mayor of Georgetown, in alluding to the flooding, said it resulted from excessive rainfall, blocked culverts and closure of some of the sluices during the high tide. He noted too that many pumps in the City were unable to cope with the excessive water, he further added and I quote:

It will be wrong for the Mayor and City Council to suggest that we are blameless. We have not been as diligent and effective on maintenance in the City, but it is unfair for us to be accused of negligence.

He concluded that a massive public relations programme was needed to stop citizens from dumping garbage, which is a main reason for the blockage of many drains. He also added that the City Council was working in association with the Solid Waste Management Group to curb the problem.

While residents in Georgetown and its environs were reeling from this flood, the Indian Ocean Tsunami swamped South Asia on 26 December 2004, leaving 220,000 people dead, hundreds of thousands homeless, and untold damages and suffering. It is estimated that over one million people are without the means of making a living. As the world was responding to the affected nations and persons of the deadliest undersea earthquake, in which Guyana was doing its part by setting up a Tsunami Aid Fund, lo and behold, unprecedented rainfall from the 12th caused massive and large scale flooding in Georgetown and the

East and West Coasts of Demerara.

Mr Speaker, the amount over the years, in a normal January, has been 7.3 inches of rainfall. The rainfall figures according to the Hydro-Met office has been astounding and mind-boggling. The intensity of the rain - I am sure everyone is fully aware. As the country faced this most devastating natural disaster, flooding, which was unprecedented, an unprecedented response was launched.

The President convened a Cabinet meeting at State House on 17 January to address the implications and outline Government's response. Present at that meeting were also officials from the Mayor and City Council, the D&I Board and the Hydro-Met Office. Subsequently, Ministers were dispatched to several areas including the East Coast and South Georgetown to assess the situation and to put up reports with recommendations. The President then hosted a meeting with Ministers and the Chairman of Region 4, Mr Munroe, representative of the PNC/R, including its leader Mr Robert Corbin, the Guyana Defence Force, the Guyana Police Force, M&CC and religious organisations.

Five committees were set up with responsibility for the following areas:

- food;
- water;
- healthcare;
- infrastructure; and
- shelter.

And two other areas were also programmed and there were donor support and information. The PNC/R was invited to name a representative on each of the committees.

An initial sum of G\$20 million was allocated for relief but this sum

was subsequently increased to \$200 million for the provision of healthcare, hot meals, dry rations and shelter. The State House, at first, was being used as the Government's relief centre to coordinate the emergency response to support the actual effort. Afterwards, the joint operations centre became functional and subsequently the Civil Defence Commission became operational. The President himself, had been having regular press briefings and had also been updating the relevant agencies in relation to the flooding. As the rains continued, certain areas were so flooded that persons living on the ground floor had to seek shelter elsewhere and those in two storey buildings had to move upstairs and were locked in, particularly on the East Coast of Demerara.

Georgetown and surrounding areas were declared disaster zones and the following regions as disaster areas; Regions 3, 4 and 5.

As a consequence, massive arrangements had to be made for distribution of hot meals - lunch and dinner, dry rations and water to the affected areas. In many cases boats had to be used to reach the remote and difficult areas.

In addition, those who had to evacuate their houses stayed at family, friends, hotels and shelters set up by the Government. Some of the areas where shelters were located at were:

- St Paul's Primary School;
- Grahams Hall Primary School;
- LBI Primary;
- BV Community High;
- Mon Repos Primary;
- Annandale Secondary;
- Buxton Primary;

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- GUYSSUCO Compound at Coldingen;
- Enmore Primary;
- Paradise Primary;
- Haslington Nursery;
- Golden Grove Primary;
- St Andrews Primary;
- Victoria Primary;
- North Brook Nursery School;
- Anns Grove Primary;
- Clonbrook Primary;
- Lusignan, Gibson, Supply and Sophia Primary Schools.

These were all manned by Guyana Defence Force personnel.

Mr Speaker, while these things were going on a massive effort by the Ministry of Health to deal with health issues in the various flooded areas commenced. Centres were set up in different locations to which residents could seek assistance. There was also a massive sensitivity programme to sensitise people about the need to take precautions against certain water-borne diseases, Leptospirosis was the most common form from which some persons unfortunately died. There have been constant advisories in the press from the Ministry of Health in relation to precautionary preventative measures to be taken.

In addition, strenuous efforts were being made to get the water off the land, 54 pumps were in operation; 36 were in the system and 18 were brought in from Regions 2 and 5 and two came in on loan from OMAI. Additionally, rice farmers from Regions 2 and 5 responded

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positively and lent us their pumps, these pumps are still being used, even though the said farmers have been affected by the floods. Further, three 42-inch diameter, 475 horse power pumps which can each discharge 45,000 gallons of water per minute and an 18 inch pump with a capacity of 10,000 gallons a minute arrived over the last weekend. One of these 42-inch pumps was donated by the people of the United States through USAID and the others were brought with a grant from the Trinidad and Tobago Government. Because of the critical state of the conservancy, water had to be released in the Mahaica Creek, which caused some flooding and damages and losses to farmers in the Mahaica and Mahaicony areas. This was necessary to save the position on the East Coast of Demerara in a number of villages, since the possibility of the conservancy dam collapsing would have caused more serious damage and loss in those villages on the East Coast as well as in Georgetown. This action was supported by the two Dutch engineers who had visited Guyana to assist in the flood situation.

As I address this House this afternoon, the water on the East Coast of Demerara has receded to a large extent. There are some areas in some villages that are the lowest and still have pockets of water but there is no water on the roads and you can clearly see most of the roads now. The residents of Mahaica and Mahaicony are also under water, as you know, and it is now expected, with these two pumps in the system from Trinidad and Tobago and USAID, that this situation should improve over the next few days.

Mr Speaker, this crisis has brought out the best and worst in people. The best in those who showed compassion and sympathy, and helped others in the time of need - the worst in those who used the situation to thrive on the misery of those who suffered from the floods by raising their prices for goods and services, jacking up prices for food-stuff, and raising the price for transportation – even, in some instances, vandalising the homes of those who had to remove because of the flood situation.

A taskforce has been set up to carry out an assessment, in relation

to the damage done and losses suffered and, after this exercise is completed, the Government will be in a position to seek further assistance and strengthen our course of action in the recovery process. This taskforce is with the support of UN and its specialised agency, ECLAC, who undertook the main responsibility for doing the requested socioeconomic impact assessment. In the meantime, UNDP has launched an international appeal for about US\$3M to help meet the immediate needs of the Guyanese population while preparing the way for recovery. Also, former President Jimmy Carter, from the Carter Centre, has been lobbying for international agencies to help Guyana at this critical juncture arising out of the massive floods.

Mr Speaker, the two Dutch experts, Olaf Van Duin and Nisa Nurmohamed, who came here under the auspices of the United Nations, in the wake of the devastating floods, have examined the drainage system, in conjunction with local engineers, and have put up a report. They recommended a three-phase approach:

- the short-term - two to three months, to strengthen the structure of the conservancy dam, inoperable sluices to be reactivated, and outfalls repaired and they are saying this should be done before the May/June rains. The cost is estimated as between US\$2 to \$3 million;
- the medium-term - that the entire drainage and irrigation system to be repaired over a period of two to three years, and the likely cost of this is in the vicinity of US\$200 million;
- the long-term - over a period of 15 years, the entire system could be revisited and an outlet constructed to discharge excess water from the conservancy directly into the Demerara River.

Mr Speaker, steps are being taken to strengthen the conservancy, to rehabilitate and repair sluices, and to clean drains and canals in the

short-term, taking into consideration the May/June rains.

It is clear that drainage and irrigation would have to be looked at in a more comprehensive way in the long-term, having regard to our bitter experience, and taking into consideration the vast expanse in housing areas established in what were formally cane cultivation lands. In relation to the City, steps will be taken to ensure that all outflows, canals and drains are cleared, and all sluices made operational. We cannot afford another recurrence of this nature to take place.

Flooding is not a new phenomenon. In Asia, for example, countries like India and Bangladesh, this seems to be an annual feature and, in spite of what the government of those countries have been doing, it is still happening, and large numbers of people continue to die as a result, while thousands are made homeless. Recently, floods and mudslides killed close to 360 people in Pakistan and left over 20,000 homeless, something which has not happened in 25 to 26 years. In Venezuela, torrential rains have killed over 50 people and left thousands homeless. In Columbia, flooding and mudslides have killed over 33 people and forced more than 40,000 people to leave their homes, while over 5,000 homes were destroyed. Even in some of our sister CARICOM countries there are regular flooding and mudslides, apart from the hurricanes, which they have to face annually during the hurricane season.

The number of people affected by the flood has been tremendous in Georgetown, Regions 3, 4 and 5 - and there have been some glitches in the distribution process of hot meals, dry rations and water. This was understandable in light of the magnitude of the task. However, whenever cases were brought to our attention, in relation to non-distribution, immediate remedial action was taken, and members of the Government were intimately involved in the process.

Mr Speaker, I am indeed overwhelmed, and tremendously grateful, for the kind, ready and great assistance given to Guyana in our greatest hour of need - from both local and overseas agencies and people. The People's National Congress/Reform and other members of the

Opposition also played a role in this exercise, and I must say, while there might be some disagreement in the way things were done, I believe we all had a common objective, which was to help those affected and to bring the situation back to normal. The Guyana diaspora in different countries of the world - Canada, UK, USA and the Caribbean, have made great contributions to their suffering Guyanese brothers and sisters. I was also greatly satisfied with the inter-religious organisations of Guyana which participated in a national inter-faith service at the Umana-Yana, where the top political leaders joined hands in prayers and pledged to work together to pull the nation from the flood crisis.

Mr Speaker, my other colleagues will deal with some other issues and provide some statistics in relation to the areas of responsibility, particularly in the areas of health and agriculture, et cetera.

Finally, as the Secretary General of the of the United States indicated, regarding the Indian Ocean tsunami, and I quote,

It is not enough to pick up the pieces. We must draw on every lesson we can to avoid such catastrophes in the future.

This, I believe, is most appropriate in our situation, and we must be so guided. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr Robert Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, after more than one month after Guyana experienced its worst disaster in history, this Parliament is finally meeting to discuss this matter. I referred, earlier in this House today, to a letter written since 28 January and copied to the President and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, urging that this National Assembly meet since 1 February. I am also reminded that the Honourable Member, Mrs Sheila Holder recognising the magnitude of the problem which we face nationally, even before my letter, wrote asking that this National

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Assembly meet. The Parliamentary Management Committee, one of the new committees established in our constitutional arrangement, was urged to meet, and it did meet, but yet that Committee could not persuade the Government of the people of Guyana to meet urgently to discuss a matter which affected over 200,000 of our citizens in this country.

We are left to wonder about the benefits of the many constitutional amendments we have made to ensure that Parliament becomes efficacious when the Management Committee was impotent in ensuring that this Parliament meets to discuss a matter of concern to all Guyanese. What efficacy of this Management Committee? The evidence before us clearly suggests, even now, that the Government does not consider that the flood disaster was a sufficiently urgent matter to require the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana to meet and discuss the issue. When one looks at the issue before the House today moved by the Honourable Minister, this view is confirmed, and while the Honourable Minister, a few minutes ago in his presentation, sought to paint a beautiful picture which suggests that everything was smooth - ran like clock work, there was great consultation in the establishment of taskforces, involvement of the Leader of the Opposition, donor community and so on. The reality is that the people of Guyana suffered immensely over the last four weeks because of a lack of a coherent national coordinated response to a serious crisis.

On Monday 17 January, Mr Speaker, in my capacity as Opposition Leader, I called the President of our Republic urgently that morning and urged him to treat this matter as a national emergency, and I offered the full support of the Opposition to the Government in any national effort to deal with the crisis. I was invited to a meeting on the said Monday 17 January at 14:00h ... I think the Minister referred to this a few moments ago, with several others at State House, where a number of taskforces were set up to deal with various aspects of this crisis. PNC/R Members of Parliament were named to serve on these taskforces except one, that is the one dealing with donor assistance and media, because it was evident that that would be politically controlled. Regret-

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tably, despite appeals by several in Guyana, no national disaster taskforce that could coordinate all relief efforts is yet functional in this country as I speak today. No national relief taskforce has been established as I speak to this Assembly today, but several non governmental organisations and public spirited Guyanese developed separate initiatives to bring relief to various communities around the country, and we must commend them.

The Government, using their right as the Government, manipulated decision-making of relief efforts and has been using state resources and contributions from overseas groups in a partisan way to provide aid to communities. [*Interruption: 'That is a shame!'*] The lack of transparency in such operations naturally gave rise to even more serious allegations by members of the communities in question who did not know what was happening. Decisions were being made at State House by a small group of politicians, led by the President himself, directing where relief food and other supplies should be sent. Obviously this exercise has not been equitable for various reasons. Consequently, there have been several allegations of political discrimination in the manner in which the relief effort was managed by several people but since there was no transparency, and there was no clear plan outlined, one has to accept the various allegations from various communities. Notwithstanding this, Mr Speaker, in the interest of harmony, the People's National Congress/Reform continued to support efforts of the Government, but recognised the need to continue its own flood relief operations to deal particularly with those areas that were neglected.

We had hoped that that would have been unnecessary. In fact, that should have been totally unnecessary since, if a national disaster taskforce was established, areas of responsibility would have been assigned to various agencies and bodies and would have voided the need for many of us politicians, technicians and so on to give aid without any coordination, all out of a desire to bring relief to people. The overall effect of it is that, while there were several efforts to bring assistance to people in need, people who were suffering, and this included Members of the Cabinet, we saw them very regularly on the State-run Channel 11 - daily going through water, wading taking relief to the suffering. We saw them

travelling around the country helping to bring relief, and so did many other people. I had to go out there myself, out of the need to do it. So it is not that these efforts were not commendable. The point I am making is that if there was a coordinated national response, the ministers and people like myself would not have had to do that in the way in which we did it. We would have been in a better position to coordinate a more profound response to the people so that areas like Dalzel Housing Scheme and Area JJ Better Hope, which waited for weeks before they got help, would have been helped earlier, because there would have been a strategy to try to reach out to communities as quickly as possible. [Applause]

Today, however, Mr Speaker ... [Interruption] ... the truth hurts sometimes ... we must use our time here wisely to ensure that this does not occur again, and that our citizens are not exposed to danger. We must use this opportunity to nail the lie of consultation and inclusivity, and we should strive to ensure that there is a united response to problems affecting our country in future. This is not a partisan affair. It is a national one. Our President is on record, publicly, as stating, and I quote, *this is my people, I must go to help them*. The word *our* does not seem to exist in our vocabulary any longer but it is our citizens who suffered, and who are still suffering. It is our friends and comrades who have died. It is our citizens who have been subjected to subhuman conditions, all because of the inept, narrow, and visionless approach that this Government took towards the great disaster that befell our nation and our country. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, it is the people's innovativeness, which propelled them to salvage old fridges and freezers from garbage heaps and to construct makeshift rafts from old boards and water containers in order to provide means of transport around flooded villages, that saved lives in this country; not any national coordinated taskforce. It is the innovativeness of the people which made that possible. Those are the people, above all others, who deserve our heartfelt congratulations today in this Parliament. [Applause] Those who carried the elderly on their backs through the flood waters to safety, the women who carried their babies on their

backs and rushed them through rising, deadly waters to makeshift shelters, leaving their entire worldly possessions behind. Fathers and mothers who braved the flood waters daily - struggling and fighting for basic necessities to keep their families alive. Families who, I believe the Honourable Minister recognised a few moments ago, had the good fortune to live in upper flats of buildings, and who willingly and unselfishly provided shelters for others not so fortunate.

Indeed, Guyanese showed their true mettle and courage to survive devastating conditions ... *[Interruption]* Well there is no disagreement there. The disagreement is in your inept response. *['What did you want us to do?']* We must therefore, Mr Speaker, commend the victims of the flood disaster for being their own saviours and for escaping the perils of flood waters by being innovative. I commend and congratulate them all. These are the people who deserve our highest commendation here today. *[Applause]*

As the Parliament of this country and representatives of the people, we also need to thank all those who helped us in this time of need. We must thank the donor community and international organisations for responding readily to our appeal and, in some cases, without being asked. PAHO, UNDAC, OXFAM, the governments of Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, and many others. I have a long list here which, I think, should be placed on record, of various initiatives by various groups and organisations compiled by the Citizens Initiative Group - another group that had to respond, without invitation, to try to do some coordination and fill the gap which the government created in such a national situation. And they have compiled statistics of all those who contributed to save this country from further disaster, such as the local and international Red Cross. We must thank the many Non-Governmental Organisations that responded, even when there was no central coordination and directions. Most of all, Mr Speaker, we must thank the ordinary citizens who rose to the call, giving time, energy and resources to assist their brothers and sisters in need.

As I said, their names are too many to mention, but I think that we

ought to try to compile a register and place that on record. I do not know all of those who assisted, but as I travelled through the areas, I saw people bringing food in carts, in trays on buses, in vehicles - all moving to assist. Some I did not know, but all recognised that there was a national need. Marjorie Kirkpatrick, who provided breakfast to the people at the St Paul's Shelter when, in the initial stages, no arrangements were made for these things at some of the shelters until much later on, and many others who did the same thing. I do not want to blow the trumpet of what we had to do at some of these centres, because it was not for publicity or cheap politics. We were only concerned about trying to fill a need, but many others helped Members of Parliament on both sides of this House, regional officials in Region 4 who heeded to the call - Earnest Elliot, Hendy, Lambert are some of the names I know, and many others - Thomas Sandiford, who lost his life in this effort, and whom we laid to rest a few days ago. These persons did not work for a salary, as do some Government ministers, or all Government ministers and Members of this Parliament. They did not work just for photo opportunities - to be paraded on Channel 11 - the national television station. They were not working for that kind of publicity on Channel 11, which we were paraded with for one month, rather than having information on the flood [*Interruption: 'You were parading on Channel 9'*] they were out of common love for the people [*Interruption: 'Real love!'*] and they must be commended.

We must thank those citizens who continuously made contributions without seeking any recognition. We must thank the Regional Chairman, Mortimer Mingo, and the people of Region 10 who moved swiftly to bring aid to the victims who sought shelter in that Region, and I have no doubt that there will be people in many other regions, even in Georgetown, who readily responded and provided shelter to those persons who became sudden victims of this flood disaster. We must thank the GDF officers and ranks that managed and assisted at shelters, with little or no resources to work with. I sympathise with some of them as I saw them trying to do their best at some of these shelters with no adequate material resources to make their jobs an effective one ... [*Inter-*

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ruption: 'That letter did not say so'] ... they did their best. The Coast Guard ranks who provided transportation and helped some people in various villages to have some means of transportation throughout the community. These people must all be commended. The brave ranks of the Guyana Police Force who kept the peace during this difficult period. They all, I believe, deserve our commendation.

The truth is, Mr Speaker, and I shall keep returning to this theme - with so much goodwill out there, with so many people ready and willing to throw their weight into this exercise, if there had been just a little vision, how much more assistance would we have been able to provide to suffering people in times of crisis? This is the point I am trying to make. We lost, as a nation, a glorious opportunity to make a tremendous impact, in a timely way, to our suffering citizens. My grave disappointment, however, was the Government's approach, at the recognition of the extent of the disaster, and the initial lacklustre response in the absence of a proper assessment to the situation and their reluctance to heed advice, even from competent persons within their own ranks, and so what you had was a haphazard approach.

I do not want to deal with details, but since the Minister mentioned a meeting on 17 January at State House, I was present and I heard the Chief-of-Staff of the Guyana Defence Force, the first speaker at that meeting, outlining the readiness of the Guyana Defence Force to respond to this crisis. He started by outlining that he had put his men in line, that he had reserved troops, and had moved them from certain places that he was prepared to set up soup kitchens to provide meals, and as he was presenting this to this meeting, Mr Speaker, he was virtually told to shut up. I was present, I am not giving hearsay information ... [*Interruption: 'Shame!'*] ... He was told, *we do not want to hear that!* Let us hear your assessment in the field. So he promptly sat down and then another officer proceeded to outline his aerial assessment and what they thought was the area's need, et cetera, and at the end of it we were told, *we will tell you what the Government will do.* In other words, the information which was necessary to be gathered at that forum to enable that body to make a coherent and intelligent response was not provided, and the environment was not an enabling one in which responsible suggestions could have been made so that they could have a proper response. So the

technical people, who were in the pay of the Government, could not make recommendations because they were not being listened to. At that said meeting another suggestion was made. I said that we should declare a national emergency. I was immediately told that that was not necessary because the powers which vested in the President at the time being were the same as that which could be vested in a national emergency. So there was no need for a national emergency. Ask those who were at the meeting, Mr Belgrave, they will tell you. I made a suggestion at that very first meeting to let us have a state of national emergency and that too was thrown aside. There was another suggestion made at that meeting - that we should involve, very quickly, persons in Guyana who have experience in national disasters. A few names were mentioned, I think it was Mr Ming who was there with me and suggested that we call in [*Incaudible*]. We sent him to Grenada to look at the hurricane disaster, so why do we not call in these people, and there are many such people in this country ... Some have training in disaster response. Is the Government unaware of this? There is an official I know whom is working in the Ministry of Agriculture. I do not know if Minister Shaw knows about this. I am not blaming him because I do not know whether or not he knew, but I am saying, had investigations been done, we would have found people, even in Guyana, who had the requisite professional training capable of responding and helping us to respond more competently to this matter. There is a gentleman right in the Ministry of Agriculture who used to be a senior official of the US Government, dealing with disaster response to floods – a highly competent individual. I do not know if he was ever used, because one day I saw him trying to take relief to some people, somewhere at the back of Good Hope. Both him and his wife were working very hard. They were working with the relief effort, and I asked him why he was not working at the national level - giving some advice? He did not respond because he is a worker of the State, so he did not want to say anything strange to the Opposition Leader lest the consequences follow. So he did not say much, but he did not have to say anything. The fact that he was at the back of Good Hope with his wife distributing food, when he should have been in State House helping to manage the affair, alone told the story. I do not mind the

location of the operation station. It could have been in State House. It could have been anywhere, so it is not about the location of the operation centre. It is the organisation's capacity to respond to a crisis. I speak here today, Mr Speaker, on these matters - not because I would like to make an issue of incompetence, but because I am concerned that the future of our citizens is at peril. If nothing is done to correct the situation ... because we have heard the Minister himself say that we have had reports from the Dutch Engineers, but I could tell you that we had those reports from the first three days of the flood. The same Engineers in Guyana made the same report ... [*Interruption: 'But you never tell anybody!'*] ... sought to have ... Do not let me open my mouth, I can tell you a lot more about what they did. I have the information that they made the same reports, but they were not even properly consulted until long after great fuss had been made. So these technical, competent people were left on the sidelines while our people suffered. I recall one day having the opportunity to travel with some private citizens, some of them competent engineers who, on their own, chartered an aircraft to fly over the conservancy dam to make their own observations with maps - drawing out plans in the hope of making suggestions as to how they could contribute to the solution to this problem, but they were not listened to. These are facts. Some two weeks later when the citizens initiative tried to pull this group of engineers together to say, *well, even though we are not being listened to, our people are suffering, so let us try to make an effort to deal with the situation*, and so they summoned a meeting, which the taskforce responsible for that should have been doing. They sought to involve even the Government engineer, and I speak here now from second-hand information, but I believe it to be accurate, that, when they attempted to have that meeting of all the technical persons and sought to invite the State engineers so that the engineers would benefit from their advice, they had the devil's own job to get the State engineers to attend because they had all kinds of red tape, including clearance from the Head of the Presidential Secretariat before the engineers could attend the meeting which was held at a time of crisis.

I make these references to illustrate the point that, when I speak of

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the neglect, or the refusal to involve competent people in this national effort, I am not speaking wildly or without information. *[Interruption: 'Because you are second hand.']* Mr Speaker, our national media, NCN radio and television, instead of being used in a more effective way to support disaster efforts, became a propaganda instrument for the ruling Party, while the Government made an assault on press freedom in this country by closing down Channel 6 and breaching the constitutional rights of Mr CN Sharma, that was our response. I do not have to provide greater details for that. As I speak, Channel 6 ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us leave out Channel 6 for a while. There are several cases in Court, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: I am not pronouncing on the merits of the case. I am just pointing out the factual information that, as I turn my station to Channel 6, sir, I get no signal. *[Laughter]* So instead of using this opportunity to maximise national support, to get our television cameras to go out in the field, as many of us were doing, and it could not be said that the Government ministers in the Cabinet were not aware of what was happening in the field. I commend them for that. They were out there, as they should be. I am not saying they should not be out there. We all have a responsibility, so do not misunderstand what I am saying. I am saying we all should be out there, but being out there without a plan is like doing nothing. That is the point I am making. As we were out there ... *[Interruption: 'Ask Basil, he was out there']* ... I understand you have a little ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Mr Belgrave, please allow Mr Corbin to speak without ... *[Interruption]*

Mr Robert HO Corbin: He has a little difficulty understanding the point, Sir, and I do forgive him. *[Laughter]* It is not that the ministers of Government, who were in the field, were unaware of what was happening out there because I saw them on Channel 11, when I had the limited time to look, wading through waters. Of course the Minister of Health had not given the leptospirosis notice as yet. I hope they had

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their vaccines at the time because we were all doing that without any proper warning at that time of the health dangers we faced, which came much later. I hope that all of us remain in good health, so that we can carry on the business of the people.

So as the Ministers went out into the field, they must have observed the number of Non-Governmental Organisations that were providing assistance - people who were going out ... You mean to tell me the national television cameras could not pick up any of this? That station is owned by the people of Guyana. This was an opportunity to show the people of Guyana how the national media could be used to expose their individual initiatives, and we failed miserably in this exercise.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Mr Corbin.

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, I rise to ask that Mr Corbin be given 15 minutes to continue.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: You may proceed, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: So, Mr Speaker, our national media, while putting out some notices, and I do not again want to be misunderstood, I am not saying that the national media did not eventually have advisories but at what time did they come in the flood? At what stage? Two weeks later! At what time did we get the Leptospirosis ad? The point I am making is that we did not, again, make maximum use of our media, and I hope we learn from the experience, and that those who control our national State media, whether or not they implement the communiqué decision of equitable time for Parliamentary Parties or not, will recognise that they have a national responsibility to the people of this country to ensure that that national television station reflects the national will and not the will, of the political directorate of this country. *[Applause]* Yes, he was doing that on a private television station just as you do on Channels 65 and 69. We are talking now about the national media. The

result of all of this, Mr Speaker, and the approach in which shelters were set up, especially after public invitation by the President to break the locks of doors and go into any building, which was our response to the situation of setting up shelters initially. To think that some of the people who responded to that public invitation and went into shelters were ignored for a major period of the flood, some of them could not be found. If we had a coherent response, we could not have missed them. Some that were neglected were within sight of the Public Road. I am not making up these stories.

I am sure that my goodly Minister friend, Jennifer Westford, will back me up on this, if she is permitted to do so. Take, for example, the Vryheid's Lust shelter, where, for prolonged periods, no assistance went to them. I am not blaming the minister, because we were in the field too, and we discovered that centre some ten days after the flood; so it just shows what could have happened if there had been a coordinated response. In that centre people were living in real substandard conditions, lying on cardboards without any facilities, many children who had to be rushed out of the back of Better Hope and Vhryeid's Lust were there, and it took days before some relief could have been taken to them. That is the effect of an inappropriate response. A health team eventually visited and they left two black tanks. When I visited they told me that one tank was to be used to dispose of waste matter, human waste and so on and the other one will be kept there for water supply for the building, but when I visited some three days after the health team had deposited those tanks, the water tank was still empty and no member of the Guyana Defence Force or anybody, apart from public spirited citizens, had as yet gone in to give some support.

Now the reality is that those citizens, many of them ... I think there was some 53 children when we counted heads in that shelter, were exposed to all kinds of health dangers, and I hope that Mr Ramotar, who is giggling there, understands the point I am making. We are talking about the safety and health of our citizens and children. This is not politics, we are dealing with critical issues here, and I am trying to point out that, when we have tragedies of this kind, political partisanship is inadequate

to deal with it. We have to have a united response. That is what I am trying to tell you, and I am trying to point out some of the defects of it. Some people were in a centre, Mr Speaker, right behind the Plaisance convent, I think it was in the Plaisance Community High School. They were there for an even longer period before they were discovered. Of course the area was flooded. There was some three feet of water all around the area, so to get to the centre, both of those that I mentioned, one had to wade through four feet of water, as the case may be, and therefore, even if there was to be a response to that, one recognises that, if after 20 days of the flood, the CDC that we were told was being reorganised and established, and the JOC, which we were told was in operation from very early reports, that they had only released 37 boats in the area at that time, you do not need an expert to tell you that we did not have the logistical support on the ground to cope with the challenges, because there were 53 villages in the affected Coastland areas. So even if you were to put one boat in each village, which would have been inadequate, supported by initial efforts, you do not even need to get out into the field to know that the logistical support to service the flooded areas was inadequate, and that is why the Plaisance Community High School, this is just behind the convent, remained for so many days with people there huddling before they were rescued by the good help of, I think, some nuns from the Catholic Church and some goodly gentleman whom I commended, and I think we all ought to commend him, who I think was running a centre there for drug rehabilitation purposes. I did not even know we had such a centre in Guyana. The flood has enabled ... Yes, I did not know, I am telling you truthfully, I did not know there was a centre at the back there, and there were students from Trinidad and other places who were stranded behind there, and some of you may boast, but many people whom I spoke to, including people in the Government, expressed surprise when I told them that I discovered that there was a drug rehabilitation centre right at the back there. I did not know, and I am not going to profess I knew before. I discovered, in the midst of the flood, that this gentleman, who was coordinating this drug rehab centre, recognised the need of the persons in the Primary School there and sought to provide some help until help came from other sources.

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So here we are debating a motion to commend those who worked and helped to say that, some months from now, we will get a response to hear that an assessment will be done, but we have heard nothing yet to show that the Government has recognised the great weakness in their approach to this strategy, and that they are prepared to reconsider that approach and have a more inclusive approach in the future. What should be our major focus at this time? Our concern now must be the rehabilitation of citizens. What is the plan for this?

Minister Xavier proudly announced to us, a few moments ago, that an assessment is on the way. Is this also a private matter? Is this a top State secret? Who is doing this assessment? How is this assessment being done? Who is involved in it? If he, or whomever is the agency responsible, had consulted, they would have recognised that many agencies are in the field doing all kinds of assessment. You ask the Citizens Initiative. I requested a meeting with them, I think it must have been two weeks ago, to find out what it is they were doing because I was concerned about the coordination of these efforts, and when I visited their offices at that time ... I think they were somewhere in Quamina Street, I was able to see forms and information sheets that many of the NGOs had already begun to use in the field to obtain information and do assessment in the flooded areas. What did we discover? When I looked at the information that some of the organisations were collecting, I recognised that our own flood relief centre was in some of the same communities collecting the same type of information. I have no doubt that, when the Red Cross went out, they had to get their forms and they collected the same information. When the World Food Programme went out, it went back to the same people to collect the same information. I know of those, but I do not know of the one Mr Xavier spoke about. That is why, I am saying that as we speak, there is no national coordinated plan, unless it is a top secret, to coordinate our efforts in order that we can have this information in a timely manner, and have an adequate response to this crisis. It is not too late to have this thing done, since our task must be rehabilitation. Do not let me talk about State House, you are going to be embarrassed.

Persons have had to reoccupy their homes with the full realisation of having suffered major losses but, despite a lot of talk like the one we heard this afternoon, there is still no transparent plan for these people to be rehabilitated. Where is the plan? What are you going to tell the people who have begun to move back into Lusignan pasture? What are you going to tell the people who are moving in at the back of Better Hope, or the back of Plaisance Squatting Area? What are you telling them? So where is the plan for rehabilitation? Are we going to wait until June for us to hear of some plan to rehabilitate these persons who are, at the moment, suffering? Persons whom were already underprivileged and marginalised have been pushed over the edge because they have lost the meagre possessions they once had. Many have gone back to depressed conditions with absolutely nothing. That is the gravity of the situation out there. What about the squatter areas where the Honourable Minister of Water and Housing, Mr Baksh ... [*Interruption: 'You finally give them water boy'*] ... who sold those lots for some \$72,000 in some areas; \$72, 000 some people told me ... [*Interruption: '\$58,000'*] ... \$68,000?

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: \$58,000.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Oh, my, you are going to make ... He is making a boast between \$58,000 and \$72,000 but the point is that he did say that they paid, and that is what I want him to admit. At \$58,000 even, although there are some who said they paid \$72,000, but even if it is \$58,000, and he boasted about it, he has the gall to boast to this House about these house lots being sold, but how many thousands of house lots are out there without any infrastructure at all? We have now seen the effects of it. [*Applause*]

The people in these areas now have, perhaps, suffered the worst effects of this flood. What about Dalzel Housing Scheme, Bare Root, Lusignan Pasture, North Vigilance, North Bladen Hall, Buxton backlands, Annandale, Good Hope? Some of these areas are still in water as we speak here and talk about June rains. I was in North Vigilance on Sunday when residents called me to their home and said *come and see, we*

are being flooded out further. I said it could not be, because the ministers assured us that the flood is receding. They said no, that the flood effort itself is flooding us more. So I went to North Vigilance on Sunday at about 13:30h and found that there was three feet of water in the area. They took me through where I waded through with them. They were concerned because a pump was installed by the Honourable Minister, I believe, or some other body at Strathspey they told me, or at Bladen Hall ... somewhere there, because I did not see that pump. I saw one when I was going up on day but I do not know if it is that pump that was installed, and they were pumping water from one side of the main road to the other side of the main road, but as they pumped this water towards North Bladen Hall ... the water was going through to a canal, where there was, I think, a sluice, but what happened is that, once the tide was in, the sluice door had to be closed. So the holding area, or the pond, which I think GUYSUCO had built some time ago, I am told it was a regular GUYSUCO pond built to hold water in such circumstances, which, incidentally, has squatter houses there, Mr Baksh, I discovered that, in the pond that was reserved for draining water ... you did not see it? I do not know if the Minister of Works saw it. The pond that was reserved by GUYSUCO for drainage purposes has houses inside.

So here the pumping water from North Bladen Hall ... [*Interruption: 'Shaik sell that house lot'*] ... no, south over to the other side into this pond, but this pond is now building up and eroding the dams, running into Bladen Hall North area, and breaking down the dam, which it did in North Vigilance, and Vigilance was being flooded. I got around and they were eventually putting sand bags, I think, to try to restore these dams. Again, if there was a proper response with a technical plan ... and I will leave Mr Ming to deal with that, because he was supposed to be on this alleged taskforce to deal with this matter. I do not know whether the Minister had produced a transparent plan which would have shown how they were going to drain that area to avoid what was happening. So I got in touch with some of the officials, I mean I did not quarrel on the ground because people were suffering. I did not seek to

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aggravate their conditions. I instead tried to encourage them to bear with the problems and so on. I did not seek to incite anybody politically. I told them that it is a national disaster and to let us try to do our best, and I got in touch with the necessary officials to see what they could do to avert continued flooding, but the point is that if there had been a transparent plan, those people who are in water today, as we speak in this Parliament as though the flood disaster is over ... The flood disaster is far from over. The crisis exists right now. Water is still in people's yards. Some people cannot reoccupy their homes, but we sit in this Parliament and treat this matter as if it is a finished deal and now we are going to do something for the future in June, but we want to know what is being done now.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Mr Corbin.

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, I rise to ask that Mr Corbin be given 15 minutes to conclude.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, having outlined these graphic examples, it leaves me to wonder whether this rehabilitation programme that we are hearing about is going to follow the same pattern of the alleged disaster response, and that is what is worrying me as I speak to you. Is the rehabilitation going to be the issuing of three cutlasses and three pitchforks, which the Prime Minister graciously gave to the residents of North Sophia last week through Philomena Sahoye? I am glad Mrs Sahoye is here, but I am sorry the Honourable Prime Minister is not here, because I was in North Sophia on Sunday at about 17:30h, and as I walked around there, the people were complaining that what they needed now was not so much of food items, even though they were glad for that. You know, everybody is glad to get food items. They said *look, right now we are cleaning up and we want cleaning instruments and so on*, and they heard on the television that now the Government is giving

these things, what are they going to do? One person told me, and I had some people who are here that were with me, that they met the Prime Minister, either that day or a few days before, and explained this problem to him and he went there and then sought to respond and he told them that they should have six cutlasses, six pitchforks and six rakes, or something like that, and the Honourable Member Mrs Sahoye was there, and he gave her the instructions to get these six forks, or whatever it is. *[Interruption: 'You verify whether this story is true?' 'I sell it as I buy it.']* I am told that the people were so upset because they said that, when time came for the actual distribution from the Honourable Member, Mrs Sahoye, she said that they could get so much, that they were going to get only three. *[Laughter]* She is here, I am not speaking what I did not ... This is what they told me, and there were Members of the Parliament present. Miss Ally was with me. Who else was there? My wife was with me, as were a number of other people, and the people were very incensed. Mr Speaker, I, who allegedly am supposed to be on the consultation list, have seen no document, have seen no plan, and have not been informed of anything that is being done to provide these instruments to help to rehabilitate flood victims. So maybe the knowledge of where these things can be had are in the exclusive preserve, or knowledge, of the Prime Minister, I do not know, and that is why this Parliament should be discussing these matters. These are serious matters, because I believe these are State resources that are being utilised, or resources donated by others.

So I come to the next question - what is the plan for the use of resources coming from donors overseas? Are these resources going to be managed in the same way that the flood relief operation was managed? Where is the accountability for all the resources received? These are serious national matters of which this Parliament must be informed and have some say. Imagine, Mr Speaker, the callousness of this administration that, even in the state of a disaster, that instead of bringing in pumps freely donated by the Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they choose to delay the shipment, just because they were dissatisfied with the company that was identified to ship in these pumps.

These pumps were delayed for one week, either because of bungling, or attempts at corruption right at the Office of the President, and this matter must be exposed and the people of Guyana told ... *[Interruption: 'That is not true']* ... Well, let me give the facts.

The Speaker: I want you to be circumspect ...

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Yes, I ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: ... in accordance with the rules, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Yes, that is why I said the Office, which is a ministry. I did not say the person, I said the Office of the President and I will, since you have asked me, tell you a few details, which I have studiously recorded for publication. When I get a sworn affidavit from the people involved, because it is callousness in the highest degree, and when I speak of negligence, I am serious, Mr Speaker. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago donated to this country, I am told, three pumps - it was publicised - a mobile pump and two stationery pumps. These pumps were available some two weeks ago for shipment at a location - not Miami, 53 miles from Miami. I have the details. They were there and ready. The company that was contacted to assist in this shipment was ready to ship these pumps but suddenly they were told - the people who held these pumps were advised not to worry, that other arrangements were being made. A C130 was arranged to fly into this country, leaving Miami at 3:00h on the 4 February, and that arrangement to fly pumps in to help us in this flood disaster had to be cancelled. We must hear what happened and then the ... oh, you want me to tell what I know? Okay, I will tell you. So, Mr Speaker, having bungled with the arrangement ... *[Interruption: 'This information is first or second hand?']* ... and there must be some truth in it, because the Minister of Works is here, and he can clarify whether he called Miami that day to find out whether the plane would arrive at 15:00H that afternoon because, obviously, he had knowledge that some arrangements were being made to fly these pumps in ... I am not making up these stories, and then he was told by the shippers that they had other instructions; so the ship-

pers found this very contradictory. I am told one of the shippers made contact to explain that all these things were not followed through, so he was asked to see what he could do now to put the arrangements back in place. All this while the people were suffering, and then information was further presented that the pumps could be here by 8 February, because the C130 that was held in abeyance had obviously gone on other business. So the pumps would be here on 8 February. So they were told not to worry anymore because other arrangements had been made. Meanwhile, the government of Trinidad and Tobago, we must thank them, Mr Speaker, had already transmitted the cost of the freight, some US\$82,000, to the company to fly this thing in. What must the Government and people of Trinidad be thinking about a government that is asking for assistance in an emergency? These things must be explained to this Parliament and not swept under the table. When I make public remarks and get angry publicly, it is because these things are bothering me and I can no longer stay silent. So the pumps, which should have come in to aid people in serious trouble, came in long after. According to the paper, they came in two or three days ago with an American carrier, or something like that. I think it is from the Air Force, and at a time when I am told the waters in some areas . . . where they could have helped at a time when we were really needing them. They cannot even be used now, because they are too powerful. That is the effect of bungling. So when we needed it most it was not available. Where is the involvement, Mr Speaker, and the consultation with other leaders of our country? This is our country and we, in this Parliament, must have a responsibility to chart its development. We must be given the fullest opportunity to act as one body in any national effort. The approach being used will be to our peril. I commend all those people who have worked tremendously to ensure success. I do not have time to deal with the taskforces that the Minister spoke about.

The Speaker: Mr Corbin, if you would not be much longer, we can wait, because it is 16:00h but, if you will take some more time, then we can suspend for tea at this time.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: As it pleases you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, it is now 16:00h and it is an appropriate time for us to take the suspension. So we can do that now and then return at 16:30h.

16:00H – The Sitting is suspended

16:46H – The Sitting is resumed

Mr Corbin, at the time when we suspended, your time had just been up, so Mrs Riehl can ask for an extension at this point.

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, may I request that Mr Corbin be given ten minutes to conclude, please?

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Yes proceed, Mr Corbin.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: I express, Mr Speaker, my gratitude to the Honourable Members of the Government for supporting this motion.

When we took the adjournment, Mr Speaker, I had taken time to illustrate one specific incident to really point to some of the weaknesses in our approach. There are many other details I could have given but it is not necessary to do so. What I want to do is to bring to the attention of the administration that, in times of crisis, we have to respond in that way to deal with the situation, and to seek to have an approach which would help us to deal effectively with the situation.

Now the Minister, in his presentation, finally spoke about the taskforces which were appointed. Indeed, as I pointed out, Mr Speaker, the PNC/Reform offered its full support and cooperation to deal with this situation. I pointed out that I attended a meeting on the 17th. On the evening of the 17th at 20:00h, we were told that we would have the first report of the taskforces that were appointed to deal with these various aspects of the crisis. I returned to State House in full expectation that we would have been presented with a plan of action, and that those who

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were appointed to head the taskforces would seek to involve people who were competent, who were professional, and that, together, they would have mapped out a plan of action that would have been helpful to this common approach to our problem. Unfortunately, at 20:30 that evening, we could not get a report. In fact, one leader of the taskforce, we were told, was already in the field taking relief to persons out there, and so one could not have a coherent approach to the problem. Unfortunately, since then I have been unable to see any report of any taskforce's formal meeting, nor an outline of the strategy.

In fairness to Minister Ramsammy, he was the only person who reported promptly [*Applause*] that he had pulled a meeting of health professionals together that night that, having put the professionals together, they were going to do a number of things like get out in the field and so on and so forth ... [*Interruption: 'You were there?'*] Yes, I was there, that is why I can report accurately, and that is why I know what was done in some areas, and what was not done in others. So the point is that, after that meeting, a number of professionals started to operate and health services commenced. I must commend the health professionals who went out into the field in difficult conditions and really tried to save lives. [*Applause*] But still, even at that taskforce level, I do not think that they had the kind of policy coordination, but I could be wrong here, I will leave those involved to speak more correctly. We still could have achieved more, and what we must do is have a post mortem, since the Minister of Health deals with death and post mortems regularly. He must conduct a post mortem to see what were the weaknesses of his little taskforce, and to seek to correct them. The food taskforce, under our goodly Minister Westford ... I think I read a report the next day at State House, but I would leave those involved to speak. I must commend Minister Westford, because it was obvious to me that she had been given a basket to fetch water. She may not want to speak, but I am speaking. [*Laughter*] I sympathize with her ... [*Interruption: 'You cannot speak for her!'*] ... No, she may not want to speak, and I know she will speak on her own behalf but I am speaking as an outsider looking on, and I am saying that, as Chairman of the taskforce, she was

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given, in Guyanese parlance, *a basket to fetch water*. She was placed as head of the taskforce to handle food and food distribution, but when I observed problems in the field, I arrived at State House, Mr Speaker, to find that the real operations centre, and directions for what was happening in food relief operations, was taking place there, not at the CDC. They were taking instructions and orders from State House.

I was sitting there when Mr Lumumba ... and I am sorry that he is not here today, was there, Bishop Edghill was walking up and down State House. I never heard that he was named a member of the taskforce for food but he was there walking up and down State House, with Mr Lumumba taking direct instructions there. Trucks were outside State House, containers with food were inside the State House compound. People were piled up there because they had to make direct representation to the President of our country for relief in their various areas. As the people made representation, instructions were being issued - *send a truck there, send a truck of supplies there, and send a truck there*. I am not questioning the authority of the President to make on-the-spot executive decisions.

What I am saying is that we were invited to a meeting in which he appointed taskforces, and I expected that the head of that taskforce would have pulled together my representative and they would have coordinated ... Yes, they were meeting every day, but they were not making decisions of every kind. Do not let us stifle our conscience, and I will understand if the Minister does not answer me ... [*Interruption: No direction, man!*] ... but I am saying what I saw. I am not speaking about what the Minister said. I am saying that I was at State House and saw her functions being usurped by others at a time when my representative on the task force had no knowledge of what was taking place. I am not saying it was bad to send truck loads of supplies of food, or that it was wrong for any minister to go with it, if it was felt that the minister could provide protection, I do not know. I am not saying that it is wrong. What I am saying is that, if that operation had been properly coordinated by a taskforce, and the operational plan had been transparent, then some of the allegations and criticisms which you received would never have

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been made because there would have been a plan which everybody would have known about. So if villagers saw a truck full of food passing their community and going to another community, headed by a minister, and they did not know what was happening, they were certainly going to come to the conclusion that their village was being bypassed. If there was an operational plan, published for everyone to know, which said that *today we are going to be bringing food to Enmore, tomorrow the truck will go to the next village, the next day it will go to the next village* and it had been made public, then those communities which were initially bypassed would have come to the conclusion that, well, it is known that everybody cannot be supplied in the same day, but their turn will come tomorrow. The absence of that kind of coordination and information led people to come to obvious conclusions, so you must not be worried or confused when you get allegations of discrimination because you caused it by the manner in which it was organized and therefore, what I am saying, is that the taskforces ... While there is this talk about the taskforces were never allowed to function as taskforces and I do not want to go into details, I will just make those two references.

Insofar as my involvement is concerned, I need to make it pellucid that I was fully available at all times to give support to the Government, to the President, and to the people of Guyana during this crisis. In fact, I attended those meetings on the 17th, notwithstanding all the other problems, Mr Speaker, of which you are aware. I put all of those aside because here was Guyana in trouble. I went and I met the President, sat with him and spoke because I wanted us to work for us to solve this problem, and I am not making up these stories. I quietly sought to give advice.

After we did not get the reports of the taskforces on the evening of the 17th, that morning of the 18th at 6:00h, I dispatched an e-mail to His Excellency, urging him to do a few things, saying – *look, our response is still very ad hoc, let us get this taskforce together, urging him quietly, let us get the professionals*. The correspondence is there. I even pointed him to a weather site that I had picked up the night before on the net which showed that there was a lot more rain coming to Guyana. So

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I was worried that, if we did not put our response mechanisms very quickly in place, we were likely to be confronted with a lot more rain. That was my concern and still nothing major happened about putting a taskforce together, so I wrote him another letter on the 19th, urging the same thing because, by that time, I was aware that a number of NGOs were clamoring to be involved. Members of the Private Sector, who were eventually involved, were not initially called but I did not make an issue. Gradually, through different means, they were called in, and eventually a number of people were gradually called in, but a plan to respond to this situation was never put in place and I therefore want to set the record straight, lest it be said that the Leader of the Opposition did not cooperate, that I have documented all my suggestions by e-mail and by letter, and I even spoke directly to the President.

I think it was splashed on the front page of the Chronicle, with not a word of what was discussed. So it gave me the impression that the whole thing was a photo opportunity, because here I was discussing with the President of this Nation serious concerns about the weaknesses of our relief efforts, and pointing out areas of concern, saying, *look, people out there are clamoring and saying that there is discrimination in this distribution, but if you make this thing more transparent, let us get a plan* and he offered then that he would give me information at midnight, or at 22:00h of what was decided the night before. Not to meet at 22:00h with the might to participate in any decision-making, but that I would have advance information, Sir, at 22:00h in the night that what was decided would be done the next day. I want to clarify this so that there is no misunderstanding.

We look at the Motion that we have here today, and which is being discussed - the Motion which is being presented to this Parliament, which seeks to ask this House to deal with unprecedented flooding of our Nation as though this flooding is something new to Guyana. It is not new, the Government knows.

This is the Hansard, sir, of 2000. Your predecessor had cause to deal with the issue of flooding by an Honourable Member on this side of

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the House - Mr Allen, I think, seeking to have this House discuss, as a matter of urgent public business, flooding in seven of the country's ten Administrative Regions. I picked this up just by accident while looking at the Guyana Review of August 2000, where it says,

Speaker of the National Assembly, Derek Jagan, refused an Opposition request to debate the flooding in the country, saying that flooding was not unusual in Guyana. Seven of the ten Administrative Regions were flooded and the Government allocated \$100 million as flood relief. President Jagdeo said that the flood situation in our country is bad, but we are lucky that we have not lost lives.

It goes on to speak about the conservancy and so on. That was 2000, so we had warning, and I have the copy of the Hansard which reflects that the report in the paper was accurate - the Hansard of the 52nd Sitting on 20 July, 2000, at page 52/5. [Interruption: 'This here was an act of God'] No, it was not. It was an act of man.

So we look at this Motion, Mr Speaker, which seeks to have a number of Whereas Clauses, but when we look at the Resolved Clauses ... and that is why I sought to move a new motion ... We have not seen in the resolved clauses any resolution that could remedy, or suggest courses of action, that would remedy some of the deficiencies which will be pointed out in this debate.

I express deep-felt sadness, well we have done that - express gratitude to the people of organisations. I agree with that resolve clause and I have done that, expressed thanks to the Government and international organisations - I have done that. We agree with that - urge all Guyanese friends to continue efforts on behalf of victims. We do not hear that it is going to be now coordinated quickly - support efforts of the Government of Guyana, the Opposition, and all other political organisations which have contributed to the relief efforts. How are we going to support these efforts if there is still no mechanism, Sir, for it to be done? That is what I am trying to point out in this debate, and, of course - urges

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the people of Guyana, including victims of the flood, to continue their valiant and courageous struggle against this disaster. I have already done that, but I maintain that the Motion before this House is inadequate to deal with the issues which we are confronted with and what we need, hopefully, is an open mind on the part of my colleagues on the other side of the House, to seriously examine the weaknesses in this Motion and, hopefully, when my colleague, Mrs Backer, moves some amendments to this Motion a little later on, since my attempt to have a new motion by adjourning the House has not succeeded, we will attempt, in areas we have failed before, to make some valuable amendments that will take us forward.

I close, Mr Speaker, by quoting from what I said in my New Year address to this Nation. [*Interruption: 'You quoting yourself?'*] Yes, because I want to show that I am consistent, and not playing petty politics, as the State media seem to have presented in propagandizing during the last flood disaster, rather than seriously working for collaboration. I quote:

It would be arrogant for any political Party to suggest that it alone has the solution to the country's pressing problems; yet solutions there must be, and solution is within our grasp; but it is only by releasing the vast energies of our Guyanese people - those here at home, and those in the diaspora, that we will turn the situation around and Guyana becomes the country our children deserve. We must act together to combat fear, to combat distrust, and to combat despair. Let us face the challenges of the New Year with hope in our hearts, and yes, with love of our fellow citizens.

I hope, Mr Speaker, that Members of the Government, who may have worked tirelessly in this crisis, and I commend them all - Minister Xavier, Ministers Westford, Ramsammy. [*Interruption: 'Say Belgrave!'*] I am looking at those I saw in the field. They may have been elsewhere, and all whom Channel 11 has ably publicized. I do not

think the people of Guyana are in any doubt as to who were wading through water. I saw Minister Sawh taking grass to cattle farmers, and so on. *[Laughter]* We were fed with a diet of all of this on Channel 11. I commend all of them for their efforts but I hope that, after my presentation, they will understand that, while that was good as a Nation we have a duty to do better if we are to take this country forward. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr Corbin.

The Honourable Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: Mr Speaker, I rise, together with my colleagues on this side of the House, to associate ourselves with this Motion standing in the name of the Honourable Minister Anthony Xavier - in the Whereas and Resolve Clauses expressing deep felt sympathy and sadness to the victims of the flooding disaster, gratitude to the people and organisations in and out of Guyana for the assistance they have given, and which they continue to give. Thanks to those governments and international organisations which have contributed to the relief efforts, urges all Guyanese and friends of Guyana to continue their efforts on behalf of the victims, support the efforts of the Government of Guyana, the opposition and all other political organisations which have contributed to the relief efforts and urges the people of Guyana, including the victims of the flood, to continue their valiant and courageous struggle against this disaster.

Mr Speaker, it seems that there is a tendency across the world in which we live, whether you are big, strong and powerful countries or small countries, as in the case of Guyana where disasters and sufferings to peoples have been following us in the past two or so years. Only recently, and Minister Xavier alluded to this in his presentation, a dam that was built only two years ago broke and brought death to several people and displaced thousands more in Pakistan. Even closer here at home in our Region - in Trinidad and Tobago, we read of landslides that dislocated people - in our neighboring Venezuela, of mud slides that

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brought suffering to people. Of course, who can forget Boxing Day? The tsunami that, without warning, took its toll on thousands of innocent lives.

Mr Speaker, everyone is aware, here in Guyana, that we have had unprecedented rainfall during the month of January, in fact, starting from the end of December. The average for the period 24 December to the 31 January for the years 1888 to 2005 was 297.4 mm, or 11.7 inches. The rainfall total from 24 December to 31 January recorded at the Botanical Gardens was 1448.7 mm, or 57 inches, or nearly six times the average. This January rainfall, Mr Speaker, of 1108.2 mm, or 43.6 inches, is a new record for any January, and this is also the record now for any month of the year since 1888, and this is from our Meteorological Office here in Guyana.

So I have sought to put in perspective, Mr Speaker, the tragedy that has unfolded upon us here in this poor developing country of Guyana. As I have alluded to, countries with many times the resources as we do are subjected to the realities of nature and, despite their best efforts, lives are lost, people are dislocated, and suffering is a result. Notwithstanding the installed drainage capacity in our drainage and irrigation system is one and a half inch per day, this obviously could not have coped with the volume of water that inundated our lands, as I just explained. Added to that is the new phenomena of the environment that has thrust itself upon us here in Guyana, as it has done in other countries. We are seeing all of these plastic bottles clogging up our drains, our waterways and, undoubtedly, Sir, this has also served to compound the problem of a mass of water on our land.

As I said, our drainage and irrigation system, built by the Dutch and serviced by the British, simply did not have the capacity to discharge the water from the land in a timely manner. Through this period of suffering for our people, there have been many unsung heroes who have emerged. How can we ever repay those poor humble families that opened up their hearts and their homes to their neighbours, their friends, and, in some instances, total strangers, to come in and live - four and five families at a

time in some instances, during the worst of our crisis. They are the unsung heroes in our society. What about those people who organized cooking at road corners, in shelters, and other places to feed strangers and their neighbours? What about those unsung heroes who came from far distances, as far away as Regions 2, 6 and 10 bringing food to share with their friends, their families, their fellow Guyanese? What about our brave men in uniform, our armed forces, who maintained law and order and assisted in this hour of crisis?

Mr Speaker, these are the people, more than anyone else, who deserve our appreciation and our thanks, and the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government goes on record in saluting all these unsung heroes in our country. *[Applause]* I do not wish to forget our rice farmers, even though suffering by the same floods, donating their pumps to be used in the more critical areas on the East Coast, knowing fully well that their livelihood is also threatened and, despite my friend, the Honourable Member Mr Stanley Ming, asserting that the rice farmers pumps will not help much, we accepted all the help that we could get - big and small, and those rice farmers who contributed are also unsung heroes. *[Applause]*

It is with a sense of not wanting to be overly critical that one listened but could not have helped taking note of some of the remarks made by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in his presentation to the National Assembly a few hours ago. I do recall, Mr Speaker, during one of several appearances on Channel 9, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition describing ... *[Interruption: 'I am happy that you look at that Channel']* ... I was flicking through, just as how you were flicking Channel 11, and heard the Honourable Leader of the Opposition describing this operation that was undertaken by the Government during the first natural disaster to have engulfed us, in a true sense - describing President Bharrat Jagdeo as the shopkeeper and his ministers as the delivery boys and girls.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: On a Point of order, Sir, I have never, and I would never use such words. I challenge the minister to produce that. I

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have publicly criticized the Government for incompetence, as I stated in this broadcast, but I would never so describe, so let him produce ... I have never said *shopkeepers and shop boys*.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: I have no reason to doubt the Honourable Leader of the Opposition ... [*Interruption: 'Well, why you say so?'*] ... but, Mr Speaker, this is the content of which the remarks were made - that we were just delivering food, and being directed by somebody in charge, without any idea of where it is we are going, and what it is we are doing.

I am saying, Mr Speaker, that, if in the sense of going out and delivering hampers and foodstuff to people in need at a time when they need the help the most, then this Government can be called whatever name they wish to call it, once we are associated with the interest of the working people of this country. [*Applause*] Sir, this is what the whole notion of democracy and freedom of expression is all about ... [*Interruption: 'That is why you shut down Sharma?'*] ... going out identifying yourselves with the people for, at the end of the day, Sir, we are the servants of the people. We have been elected at a free and fair election to run the administration of this government, and the people appreciated it when members of the Government, as well as members of the opposition, I daresay, would go out into these flood waters and identify themselves with the plight of the people [*Interruption: 'Shop boys'*] you said it, not me. Identifying themselves, Mr Speaker, with the plight of the people. This is the essence of democracy. This is how our democracy has involved, that it encapsulates this kind of relationship between an elected government and its people.

continued in Pt II

National Assembly Debates

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE SECOND SESSION (2002-2005) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER
PUBLIC BUILDINGS BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN** Part II

46TH SITTING

2.00 PM

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cont'd fr. Pt 1

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, in his presentation also alluded to the fact, as he claims, that many technically competent and qualified people were around, but were not being recruited in the national effort. I cannot speak for every single competent person, Sir, but I do know that, not only in my ministry and other ministries ... and I am glad that, at the end of his presentation, the Opposition Leader alluded to the work of the Ministry of Health where he specifically said, many professionals were engaged in doing the work of the Ministry of Health and going out to the people. *[Applause]* Not only in the Ministry of Health, Mr Speaker, but many other ministries, and I can quote an instance - the infrastructure sub-committee, which both myself and Minister Xavier co-chaired, convened a meeting at which several engineers were present - Members of the Association of Professional Engineers, GAPE and others were discussing the strategies that could best alleviate the sufferings of people by removing the amount of water on the land. As I said, this is not new in the thinking and the positioning of our Government. We believe in all-inclusive approaches to solving the people's problems. We recognize that we alone, Sir, do not have a monopoly on knowledge or problem-solving, but we have to be accountable, in a very professional way, in terms of how we go about solving the problems of people, in the fastest of time, to bring about the quickest of solutions. I thought that I should make that point, and I do not myself, personally, know of the gentleman the Opposition Leader spoke about, but I would hope that he was one of those people who were present in my boardroom no so long ago.

The Leader of the Opposition also said that he did not understand or was unaware of the methodology being used, in terms of assessments that are being taken. The Government of Guyana is involved with Economic Commission for Latin America, along with several other international organisations, doing assessments across the areas that were affected. *[Interruption: When are you going to get that report to the National Assembly?]* They are going out to ascertain the losses, and I have no doubt, as the Leader of the Opposition said, that other Non-Governmental Organisations, as well as the opposition parties are starting their own assessments as to what is going on. As I said earlier, Mr Speaker, there is a methodology, when one is engaged with international organisations, about how you go about applying for relief, and how you go about getting the relief, and that has to be done with care, with objectivity, and in the way prescribed by those who are prepared to offer you the help.

Again, the Honourable Member alluded to a scenario whereby water is being pumped from the south to the north, and then into the Atlantic Ocean and, in his terms, causing more flooding to the communities. While that may be so, because I think, logically, if there is a mass of water in point A and you move it to point B, then it is quite reasonable to expect that there will be some amount of dislocation for those people living in point B. We have to find innovative ways and means, Mr Speaker, to get the water off the land. Those were the two main planks of our approach as soon as we began to respond to this scenario.

1. getting the water off the land; and
2. making sure that people had enough food to eat.

So if you move from A to B and eventually pump from B into the Atlantic Ocean, is it not better to do that to get the water off the land rather than waiting and hoping that somehow it will go away? We are conscious, Mr Speaker, as happened in the conservancy, for example, when we had to make a deliberate choice - of pumping into the Mahaica river because of the overtopping of the conservancy and the crown dam.

The decision was very clear, the question that we had to ask and answer was whether it was more important to save lives at that particular time, or to save the crops? Sir, this Government, even though with great regret that peoples crops had to be lost, decided that lives were more important. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition made a very startling revelation to this House coming to the end of his presentation, and he told us that he had information, which somehow conveyed the impression that this Government and, more particular, the Office of the President, because of their inaction, caused delay in shipping pumps which were donated by the Government and people of our sister country, Trinidad and Tobago, to Guyana – that, because of the actions of the Office of the President, these pumps were delayed. Sir, I wish to state that information that I have runs contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition has just told this House. The facts of the matter are thus - the manufacturer was not quite ready with the delivery of the equipment, even though the shipping agent and the aircraft were ready, so the pump simply could not have been sent because of delays by the manufacturer, and this had nothing to do with the Government of Guyana, nor the Office of the President.

Secondly, Sir, when the pump was eventually ready to be sent, the cost was approximately US\$83,000. The other pumps which came along were just about ready to come and they were all brought to Guyana for approximately US\$40,000, or just about half the cost it would have cost us to bring that one.

Sir, these are the facts of the situation that we have gathered, and I thought it was important and necessary that we make this interjection so that the Nation would not be led to believe that the pumps did not get here earlier because of something not done by the Government in time.

If I can stay with the presentation of the Leader of the Opposition - in the call for the establishment of a national commission of inquiry, the motion referred to that which was circulated, not the one under discus-

sion but the motion coming across from the Opposition, and I happened to notice the call for a national commission of inquiry. Mr Speaker, this operation has been one that was democratic and accountable.

I recall the President himself inviting the Office of the Auditor General to be involved in the whole process. Sir, even after three decades, maybe we can all still agree to have a commission of inquiry into how those foreigners came to our country and put Guyana on the map as the Jonestown massacre. *[Applause]* But today there is no need for a commission of inquiry, because we put ourselves to the scrutiny of the people - this entire operation, from day one, saw our President organize, mobilize and rally his troops from the front to deal with what, as I have said before, was a situation that has never occurred before in our country. I happened to notice, on several occasions, that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Mr Corbin, is perfectly correct ... *[Interruption: 'For once!']* ... when he says that on several occasions, he was in State House having discussions. I am not privy, of course, to those discussions, but they were engaged in discussions with Non-Governmental Organisations, the religious community - all kinds of people were there involved in discussions, planning strategies, and delivering on those strategies. We will eventually hear from other Members, on this side of the House, about how the food was delivered - the strategy that was engaged, and how we mobilized communities, and even offered that, if the Opposition was aware of any community that we may have missed, we invited them to contact us and we would ensure that that community was served. How much more open, democratic, and willing for the opposition to be involved, and for us to be transparent can we be?

The Speaker: Honourable Member, your time is up.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Minister be given 15 minutes to continue his speech.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: I thank you, Mr Speaker, and I also thank you, Minister Reepu Daman Persaud. What was the response of the Drainage and Irrigation Board and officials to this issue, Mr Speaker? As early as 17 November. *[Interruption: 'You not talking about Monroe's letter?']* Oh! I will tell you about Mr Munroe's letter. As early as November 17, my ministry convened a meeting with all the stakeholders from Regions 2 to 6 to review its work and preparedness for the upcoming rainy season. Allow me, if I may, to quote from the Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Directors, held at the Ministry's Boardroom on Wednesday, 3 September 2004, under Heading 5, Progress Reports.

Regions 2 and 4 submitted written reports. In addition, the Regional Chairman of Region 4 wanted to record the gratitude of his Region for the very good cooperation and collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the National

Drainage and Irrigation Board, which produced very satisfactory results ...

This was the Chairman himself in September, and again, Mr Speaker, on 17 November, in a meeting that I called and chaired in preparation for yearend and May/June rains, in part, this is what transpired, I quote

Mr Allen Munroe, Chairman, Region 4. Of the 23 sluices, 16 are working. Of the 7 pump stations, 5 are working. The Region can handle any situation now for next month, that is, December, if there is no increase in rain, all will be well; but work needs to be done for the May/June rains. Some canals are not cleared because there is no money. Some work needs to be done now to be safe.

Present at that meeting, Mr Speaker, was Mr Clyde Roopchand from the Ministry of Finance, and this is what he had to say,

Parties should cement their 2005 budgets and present them in January, relook at some issues by Tuesday,

that was next Tuesday and see if additional resources are required and see if you need to reprioritize your budget. There will be releases of one-twelfth of your programme each month before the National Budget is presented

All the Regions were there, and all of them complied. Mr Speaker, let me read you one more letter, and I heard my colleague - she is not here, the Honourable Member, Mrs Deborah Backer, talking about the conservancy and seepages just now. The Honourable Chairman of Region 4, Mr Allen Monroe, in a letter dated 2 November 2004, addressed to my Permanent Secretary and copied to myself, wrote,

Last Saturday, on my visit to the backlands of Cane Grove to Victoria, I took the opportunity to visit the conservancy dam. The lifting and strengthening of the dam undertaken by the National Drainage and Irrigation Board was very well executed. I was totally satisfied and happy with this work, of which the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Drainage and Irrigation Board should be justly proud. However, I noticed that, in the adjoining areas, a little more work needs to be done to raise the level of the dam, which is low in some places ...

[Interruption: 'Read on']

I am reading on, Mr Speaker.

... this would enhance the work already done and make the dam safer against overtopping during the upcoming rainy season. As a consequence, I wish to recommend that the Chief Executive Officer visit the area to verify what I am reporting, and to take the necessary steps to increase the benefits of a project which was well done.

Mr Speaker, the point is that these works, which were recommended by the Chairman and done by the D&I Board, held its own. The fact is, Sir, we had overtopping of the conservancy but, despite all the rumors and calls and all kinds of things, the dam held its own. This is what the two Dutch specialists, who came to Guyana for an assessment of our conservancy dam, had to say in their preliminary reports, and I will make two points as it relates to the discussion that we are having. The specialists said, and I quote,

Releasing water from the conservancy to the Mahaica area was a wise decision, despite the misery it caused to inhabitants of that area. Otherwise the conservancy would surely have breached into the coastal zone.

Before that,

This will result in numerous breaches and the release of in the order of 100 billion gallons of water into the coastal zone. This will bring a water layer of around two feet in the area from Georgetown to Mahaica River. The disaster will be far worse than the current flood situation ...

It goes on to make two recommendations, and I think it would be appropriate for this House to be told, in the spirit of openness and cordiality and cooperation and discussion that has been evident during this epic journey that we have traveled for the past four weeks or so.

Recommendation 1

-Substantially upgrade the emergency works on strengthening the dam, using contractors with floating equipment. This will improve the most critical stretches and create extra freeboard, which may be critical in the case of more intensive rainfall.

Recommendation 2

- Limit the speed of small boats in the conservancy as their waves eat away the fragile top of the dam.

[Interruption]

Mr Abdul Kadir: Mr Speaker, I have before me the report, and I am wondering if the Honourable Minister is reading from the same report that I have in front of me, if it is the Geotechnical and Hydraulic Assessment - Concept dated 8 February, 2005 by Nisa Nurmohamed and Olaf Van Duin. Could you quote the report, please?

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: Mr Speaker, I indicated to you, in my presentation, that this is the preliminary report, which is two pages. There is a final report which, unfortunately I, myself, have not received as yet ... *[Laughter]* ... but these are the two major recommendations that came out.

Mr Abdul Kadir: Mr Speaker, I have the very report here, and if I can read the verbatim of what it says ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: A point of order relates to a breach of the Standing Orders.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: I will be happy to lay this report with your office if you so wish. The question is, Mr Speaker, that we had to take a deliberate decision, as I said, to pump the water from the conservancy into the Mahaica River, knowing fully well that the farmers there would suffer losses which, regrettably and unfortunately, they did. I ought to point out to this Honourable House that we did inform the community. We put advertisements on the television advising them that we were going to do what we had to do, and to let them prepare; and I will tell you, Mr Speaker, that as we journeyed through these communities - from Cane Grove to Vereeniging to Supply to Big Biabu, Little Biabu, Handsome Tree and areas around the Mahaicony River, and all these communities, it is to the credit of our farmers, and the people in poor, rural communities, who clearly understood the reason and the need for us to do what we had to do.

President Jagdeo himself was in the Mahaicony Creek last Saturday, and the Mahaica Creek as well, and he spoke with the farmers, who fully understood the need for doing what we had to do, but we have to help these people get back on their feet again. This Government is committed not only to farmers in Mahaica/Mahaicony areas, but throughout the Regions that have been affected. We are committing, as best as we could, as much of our resources as is possible to allow us to help these hard-working people to restart their lives, in terms of getting back to their crops. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in terms of our rice situation, as you are aware, Guyana is an agricultural country, and rice and sugar play an important role in our national economic survival, if I may say so, rice farmers have suffered. They have lost their crops. In some instances, they have lost their entire crops due to the flooding. Permit me, sir, if I may to share some statistical information in the House as it pertains to the rice sector. The total rice planted this crop was approximately 157,418 acres, so far we have lost about 5,000 acres, and we expect about 7,000 acres altogether to be lost, and that will be approximately 4.4 percent. However, while the national total will be about 4.4 percent, when it comes to those farmers in the Mahaica and Mahaicony area, it is almost 100 percent in some instances, because their entire cultivation would have been lost. I want to say that I have been advised by both the Rice Development Board and the Rice Producers Association that, despite the suffering and the losses, there will be no shortage of rice, domestically, or for our export markets.

In relation to sugar, I have been advised by the Guyana Sugar Corporation that the East Demerara Estates were the hardest hit by the flooding, which was extensive and prolonged, and some fields are still inundated with flood waters. At West Demerara, the rainfall in general was less and the flooding levels were less severe, and for a very much reduced period, so the loss is less severe. The younger canes, that is, those up the two to three months of age, suffered severe losses, and on much of this area there has been a total loss of cane shoots. So these fields will have to be reestablished. The damage declines with increase

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in cane age, and the mature canes have suffered very little - about 800 hectares or almost 2,000 acres is the total loss. All the plants on these fields have died and will have to be replanted.

Mr Speaker, in terms of our livestock sector ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Before you move on to the livestock, Honourable Member, your 15 minutes have gone.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I wish to move that the Honourable Minister be given 15 minutes to continue his speech.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: Thank you, Mr Speaker and Minister Persaud. I have been called *the Minister of Crops, the Minister of Fish* and all kinds of things but I want to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for adding a new designation to my title - *Minister of Grass*.

The Speaker: I think the Honourable Member is saying that you alluded to that.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: And make sure we do not leave out the tree and grass. Mr Speaker, our livestock sector has also suffered in this regard, and I do not think I have to convince any one of our colleagues, on both sides of the House, about the sight of our animals - our cows, sheep, pigs and other small ruminants littering our major highways during the crisis now are under discussion. As the flood waters recede, and as we get more access to places south of the railway embankment, we are able to reach many more farmers who were not fortunate to be able to bring their cattle to be on the embankment roads. Here I wish to recognize the contributions made by the IICA people in veterinary medicine. We have organized teams from the Ministry, each team with a vet, and we have been taking in things like wheat middling, molasses, grass, salt blocks and other things of that nature. We have been moving - village to

village, deep south, to ensure that all cattle farmers at least get a little of what we have in order to help them help their cattle rally through as much as we have to help the people that we have been helping. This exercise will continue and we will take the campaign also into the Mahaicony Creek, Mahaica Creek, and yes, also to Abary Creek, where we have a large concentration of cattle that have also suffered because of what has happened.

As I said earlier, President Jagdeo has committed to help all those farmers - rice farmers, cash crop farmers and others, and indeed, the President has told these farmers in the Mahaicony Creek that they ought to do whatever they can to save any amount of rice that can be saved at this point in time. The Government will help, in terms of providing equipment, fuel, and other things. I am pretty sure that when all of this is over, we will have to get our farmers going back to the land by providing help - things like seed paddy for our rice farmers, seeds for our cash crop farmers ... I do not know what the nature of the assistance will be at this point in time, but I do know that we will be assisting, as I said, based on what we have. I have no doubt that the resilience of our farmers and the resilience of our people will shine through, just as how we faced this calamity as true Guyanese, and I know every Guyanese would have been proud of the way our people rallied together. It would be an injustice for me to conclude without recognizing the contributions of the Guyanese diaspora outside of our country - in New York, Toronto, London, in the Caribbean and everywhere our people are living. They have read of our crisis with astonishment and pain and have rallied to the cause, they have raised millions of dollars and have also sent equipment to help their suffering brothers and sisters here in Guyana. *[Applause]* The statement that *wherever you may roam, there is no place like home* is proven true, and I know in the diaspora, wherever our people are physically earning their living, a small corner of their heart still has that warmth and glow for us Guyanese who reside in our land. So we thank them, and the governments, also, and as I said, just as how we rallied together in times of disaster, our farmers, with their resilience, will come again and will make us proud and put Guyana in the position we were aiming to be where we can produce good, wholesome food, not

only for our people, not only for the Region, but for the world at large. I wish to thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. Before you start, Honourable Member Dr Joseph, may I inform Members that I understand we are going to go some distance this evening. We will suspend at 18:30h or thereabouts, and then we will resume shortly thereafter; and I have a suspicion that we will not be able to finish, at least that is my information, this evening. So I will ask the two sides to converse on this matter and inform us in due course.

Honourable Member Dr Joseph.

Mr Dagleish Joseph: Mr Speaker, as I listened to the speakers who have gone before me, it dawned on me that I should request of you that we observe a minute of silence for the Guyanese who have lost their lives as a result of this flood. I crave your indulgence if you will allow us to observe a minute of silence.

The Speaker: At an appropriate time during the course of the debate, Honourable Member.

Mr Dagleish Joseph: I thank you, Sir. Sudden disasters ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Thank you for the suggestion.

Mr Dagleish Joseph: ... are known to cause massive social disruption, outbreaks of epidemic disease, famine, death, and consequently causes survivors to become heavily dependent on foreign relief. The recent flood disaster in Guyana has not deviated from what I just said but, in essence, if nothing else is sure, it is that the current flood disaster that affected us, and which continues to affect us, caught the Government unprepared. If ever there is anything here that one should punctuate and historically learn from, is that the Government failed to have a well-orchestrated disaster response plan, knowing this country's vulnerability.

Now, most countries of the world have been persuaded by the World Health Organisation that they should go through the exercise of vulnerability and, having come out of an exercise of vulnerability, they should be in a position to determine what is their disaster plan response, should any of those natural disasters should befall them. I speak with knowledge that Guyana has a rich legacy of disaster preparedness under the People's National Congress/Reform period ... *[Interruption: 'PNC itself was a disaster'] [Laughter]* ... when I came back to this country, history will absorb you, my comrade. People die in this country and you are laughing.

During the early 1980s the Pan Caribbean Disaster Preparedness Project, with its Head Office in Antigua, played an important role in the Regional coordination geared towards disaster preparedness, and I have been a participant in training exercises conducted by the Pan Caribbean Disaster Preparedness Project. At that time, and many of my health colleagues were actively involved in the recent flood disaster, we remembered how active we were in local disaster operations during the 1980s. It is essential, therefore, to reiterate that a country that fails to prepare for disaster is failing its people, and this is the situation that occurred in Guyana only recently.

On the one hand, Mr Speaker, if you were unaware of what your vulnerability is as a government, then one can excuse you, but when you are fully aware of your vulnerability, then your unpreparedness must be sanctioned. I repeat, if you were unaware of your vulnerability, then you can be excused but if you were aware of your vulnerability and failed to have a disaster plan, then you should be condemned, and that is the situation with the current administration. They were unprepared. Now, within the context of what happened over a month ago, it is fair to say that all efforts, which include the health efforts, which was applauded by us, would also have been affected by unpreparedness.

I wish to allude and to educate this Honourable House that the Government has no excuse for not being prepared, and here I speak from a document from an organisation called CDERA CDERA is the

Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, of which Guyana is one of the 16 signatories. CDERA came out of the Pan Caribbean Disaster Preparedness Project, and I will share with you reasons why the Government cannot give you any excuses as to why they did not have an organised disaster preparedness plan.

Functions of CDERA, or let me read, Mr Speaker, and I quote,

This Regional Governmental Agency, established in September 1991 by an agreement of conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM, is to be responsible for disaster management. There are presently 16 States within CDERA's membership. Functions ...

[Interruption: 'Give the source.']

They will have that.

CDERA's main function is to make an immediate and co-ordinated response to any disastrous event affecting any participating State, once the State requests such assistance.

Now, I emphasize here, *once the State requests such assistance.*

Other functions:

- *Securing, collating and channeling to interested governmental and non-governmental agencies and organisations comprehensive and reliable information on disasters affecting the Region;*
- *mitigating or eliminating, as far as possible, the consequences of disasters affecting participating States,*
- *mobilizing and coordinating disaster relief from gov*

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*ernmental and non-governmental organisations for
affected participating States.*

Therefore when one speaks of CDERA, one refers to a regionwide organisation that is prepared and well-oiled to respond to regional disaster situations. I need to reflect a little on the organisation so that you can have a clear idea that even the Head of State cannot be excused from being disaster-prepared. The coordinating unit of CDERA has a Secretariat Headquarters in Barbados. The National Disaster Organisations are in each of the participating States, the Board of Directors comprises of 16 disaster coordinators or head of every participating country's coordinators of disaster activity. There is a council which is the supreme policy-making body, and it comprises of Heads of Governments of participating States and meets annually ... I repeat, meets annually to work out review of work activity of the agencies, approve its work programme and administrative budget, and make any other policy decisions required. This actually states clearly that if Guyana is a member of CDERA, and CDERA is a CARICOM body established through CARICOM, and if Guyana is a Member of CARICOM, then there is no way that we could not have had a proper disaster plan of CDERA's coordinated response, because it is an agency that came out of CARICOM. This tells you clearly that, from a governmental standpoint, there is an annual review, and therefore all the 16 countries in the Region are fully aware of their vulnerability and is fully aware of what have been the activities towards disaster preparedness for the previous year, and they are fully aware of what are the current activities; so it is therefore clear that the fundamental issue here today is the fact that we were unprepared as a nation, knowing the vulnerability of this nation for flooding, and therefore no way can we excuse our colleagues over there for allowing that vulnerability to affect thousands of lives in one of the most densely-populated areas of our country.

Mr Speaker, in every disaster plan, health plays a very pivotal role - whether it is an earthquake, a tsunami, flooding, or an air disaster, and therefore stewardship in government must take into consideration these

elements. As healthcare professionals, we know that our approach to healthcare is dual, our approach is based on both prevention and curative services. Prevention means that you need to anticipate and put in place policies and programmes to avoid.

In terms of disaster preparedness, and the health impact of disaster preparedness, if we had a clearly-orchestrated disaster plan health would have been properly coordinated, as it was in the past under the Peoples National Congress. *[Applause]* I am not here to go through the details of the health response. I need to, first of all, say this that it is ludicrous, or foolish ... *[Interruption: The Americans clean up Jonestown for you!]* ... to dismiss the active participation of your premiere professional health agency, or organisation in your country, especially at a time of disaster. As far as I know, no one invited the GMA to be actively involved in the disaster response. *[What?!]* What happened, however is because we took the Hippocratic oath - not to any administration, or government, or president, but to humanity, and we therefore felt that our obligation was to the people of Guyana so we did all that was humanly possible to respond as the need arose in this disaster situation. It must Therefore be clear that, in a disaster situation, one of the things which you do not want to do is to criticize, downplay, and convert into uselessness the role, advice, and comments of the medical fraternity, on which you will rely now that the flood water has receded, but we are from the noble profession of medicine, and we can do what we know has to be done.

As I prepared to make my presentation on this disaster, I took pains to go through what is considered here the National Health Plan, and I wanted to find out whether, by some means, the Government may have included in this plan a health response to national disaster, but nowhere in this plan is such a response which clearly reflects the way in which Government has, in general, treated the issue of disaster preparedness. I only downloaded today, from CDERA's website ... and the only information that CDERA published on Guyana in the website is information that was provided by GINA. This is a Caribbean Agency with premiere responsibility to respond to situations of disaster in Mem-

ber States and CDERA has said nothing about what really has been the situation in Guyana. I know for sure because, in the news media, it was made known that the presence of operatives from CDERA were in Guyana but it appears as though we have had, so far, a news blackout on what they did, what they suggested, et cetera.

I need to allude to something since I heard about the pumps that came from Trinidad, which I think may be very important here. In terms of CDERA's activity, the Caribbean countries that are involved in CDERA's responsibility have been grouped into four groups. Guyana has been grouped with Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago, so I am not clear whether what was sent to Guyana from Trinidad was a response to CDERA's defined role for Trinidad in the Regional Disaster Response, or whether it was a response from the Trinidadian Government ... *[Interruption: 'Nah, from the Trinidadian Government']* It means therefore, that if that is from the Trinidadian Government, then CDERA has played no role in Guyana's response. We therefore need to ask a frontal question to the Government today - *what is its participation in this Regional body?* Our representatives have been meeting annually to caucus with other Heads of State on the situation of national disasters in our territory, have our local coordinators for disasters been meeting with other regional coordinators on an annual basis so that we can have proper disaster preparedness plans? The Government needs to tell us clearly what has happened.

What I know for sure, and I heard the President say, is that while he was looking for CDC members they could not be found. That was sad. I have reviewed many documentation on natural disasters and a very fundamental part of disaster response has to do with information. I found it sad that the Minister of Health ... You could have lies or misinformation being put out into public domain when ... I will be specific, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Members ... *[Interruption]*

Mr Dalglish Joseph: I will be specific.

The Speaker: ... right throughout this debate Members have been using words that are not appropriate for Parliament, and I urge you to maintain our good traditions and do not lapse in ...

Mr Dagleish Joseph: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I will take back the word lie, but I would say non-truths, if you are going to accept that. Nevertheless, it was not true that the first information came out from the Ministry of Health as it relates to the rise of Leptospirosis as a result of the floods. It was after the information was in the public domain that the Ministry of Health came out to acknowledge that, in fact, there were cases of Leptospirosis, but that they did not want to cause an alarm. Now, in almost all the documentation on disasters, one of the fundamental issues, in terms of information is that information to the population must be timely and precise, because that is the only way you can have the cooperation of the population.

It is essential, therefore, that information that goes out to the public must be clear and precise and must not be ambiguous. So to say that there was not, and then to afterwards say there was, obviously creates the possibility of people out there not really believing in what comes out as information from the Ministry of Health, or for that matter, from any agency that is responsible for disaster response. Therefore, though health professionals played an important role in the health response, that was one of the low points in the whole health response.

Secondly, do not make promises that you cannot keep. I repeat, do not make promises that you cannot keep. The Minister of Health made it public that the testing kits would have been in the country on a particular Saturday. They never came then, and I believe that if nobody has a gun to your head to say it is going to happen today, then do not say it is going to happen today. I am saying that information is very important, especially at a time of national crisis and national disaster, and you do not want to have a situation where people look at your information with ambiguity. People must be confident that, if we are going to have information coming from the hot source, then that information must be clean, clear, and precise, and I would hope that this is a lesson that we

can learn from for the future.

Now that the floodwaters have receded ... [*Interruption: 'Are receding'*] ... or are receding in many parts of the affected areas, and it has come at a time when we are unprepared, I sincerely hope, and this is from the People's National Congress/Reform standpoint, that the necessary environmental work will take place to render the affected communities free from possible communicable diseases that will affect the population, once they start to reenter in those communities. I sincerely hope that Guyanese are ... and I speak here about Guyanese professionals, especially in the Health Sector, who are actively involved in disease surveillance ... and that we do not leave disease surveillance to foreign agencies but that Guyanese must be actively involved so that we can learn a lesson from this whole disaster situation. This is our disaster and we, if anything else, must learn a lesson from this, and I sincerely hope that our professionals have been allowed to be actively involved in all aspects of disease surveillance.

Thirdly, we have had problems in the past, and even during the pre-disaster period, in terms of sanitation and waste disposal in many of these affected areas. In many of these areas they have not had proper sanitary facilities, proper waste disposal and, more so, Mr Speaker, it is urgent that we accelerate the process of solid-waste management - not only in the affected areas, but in all of our country. Right now it is a priority issue in the affected areas. Floodwaters bring, or move, a lot of solid and other waste from one community to the other, and therefore a solid waste management programme should be well-oiled and managed effectively so that we can have a reduction in the possibility of communicable and other diseases.

On our routine television programmes, having identified that many of the communities which have been under flood, have been exposed, or been in very close proximity with burial grounds, et cetera, one of our principal preoccupations has been [*Inaudible*] would there be any information to the public as to which burial grounds that have been affected are now safe for burial resumption? I think the population needs

to know what are those issues, as they relate to burial in those grounds that have been affected, and we also need to watch, in terms of disease surveillance, very carefully, those communities that are in close proximity to burial grounds and other solid and chemical waste disposal places.

I know that my other colleagues who will follow me will speak on other aspects of disaster preparedness, but, so far from the other side, it is disappointing that no one there has acknowledged that they were not prepared for disaster. It will not help you if you do not first acknowledge that you failed. I take this from the Bible. They say that you cannot go to God if you do not accept that he is. *[Laughter]* You have to accept that you have failed to prepare, and that your failure has caused the deaths that we have had so far, and your continued failure to prepare will further create problems for communities that have not yet been affected.

Mr Speaker, no one can smile as I spoke just now - smile in the wake of such an unprecedented flood disaster. No one can smile. There is no way one can go back to how many years to talk about nonsense when you have people who have died, and may continue to die because of this flood. Now you, in Government ... This is a time when you need to show your commitment to your people, and that is why this is no time for smiling. There may be a joke here or there, but this is a serious disaster that has struck us, and all of us have been affected. It is because of the Government's illpreparedness that my house was flooded, and that other persons houses were flooded, so this is no time for smiles. I am not happy. History will have served us. I hope that a lesson is learnt by the People's Progressive Party administration. Disaster plans are void of disaster preparedness while we already are a member of a disaster agency in the Region. I would sincerely hope that we maximize our membership and utilize the resources that are at our disposal to prevent another impending disaster.

In closing, I want to tell my Honourable colleague Hon Dr Ramsammy, that it was not the health team that was really responsible for the low incidence of diseases in children; it was their parents. The

parents protected their children. They kept them at home and they moved them out. It is not because of our actions, but it is because every single Guyanese who knew the danger decided they were going to protect their children, and therefore they should be the ones commended for taking that action and not us. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Members, supper is prepared, and I think this is an appropriate time for us to suspend for that purpose. We will resume in half an hour.

The Sitting is Suspended 18:30H

The Sitting is Resumed 19:20H

Honourable Members, you are keeping the National Assembly waiting. Is there a speaker from the Government's side? Honourable Member, Dr Ramsaran.

Dr Bheri S Ramsaran: I will have to speak without the microphone. Alright, technology has corrected itself.

The Speaker: You are permitted to speak with the microphone, Honourable Member.

Dr Bheri S Ramsaran: Mr Speaker, colleagues, today has been a very interesting day. As has been said, this disaster has brought out the best in us, and it has also brought out the worst, and as I listened to some of the contributions, I realised that yes, while the Government might have tried, and while some commentators are praising us and telling us what we did do well, there are some others who are saying, *yes, you did well*, but they do so sometimes grudgingly. Before I get to the grudging part *[Laughter]* it is natural, I suppose. During the break I was speaking to one of our visitors and he intimated that that is the job of the opposition, so I think we will take that into consideration.

Mr Speaker, Dr Joseph indicated that information is a key part to this process to making it successful. Before I get into the meat of my

discussion today, I would like to concur with him and tell you that, unfortunately, in his little intervention he was not quite accurately informed and, since I might very well be one of the last speakers today, because we are getting a bit tired, I would like to deal with his criticism about our involvement with our Caribbean brothers and sisters - to say how informed, or rather, uninformed he seemed to have been, and why I lament this is because I do know that Dr Joseph has been part of our team at the Ministry of Health - the team that was gathered by Dr Ramsammy from the very inception. I would like to inform you that Dr Joseph seemed to be looking at one tree and missing the entire forest. CDERA was here, but I would like to go a little beyond that to say that CARICOM was also here. They came to specially support us at this time and they brought along their constituent organisations, including, for example, the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute, which came to do some work here, collectively with CDC, which was already in the country. What I want to point out is that we have been aware, as a country and as a nation, and we have been maintaining these contacts quietly, so while you might not have seen the headlines announcing the acronym CDERA, definitely the CARICOM delegation was here towards the end of last month and did help us in a significant way. As a matter of fact the CHI, the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute, the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute, and CAREC, that is, the lab network which supports epidemiological studies in CARICOM countries, were all here. As a matter of fact, even before CHI, that is the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute, was here, we were having an ongoing relationship and we were relying on one of their manuals in disaster management. When they learnt, or when we informed them of our further needs, they expanded that support. So I just thought I could open by informing you of this, and I did note that Dr Joseph held on to two organisations. CDERA and the Guyana Medical Association. I would like to tell you, Mr Speaker and Honourable Members, that our Ministry has been in touch, not only with the GMA, but also with the BMA, the Berbice Medical Association which, from the inception, was put on standby, and they did support us - with members coming to Georgetown to help with teams as was necessary. I would like you to know that the Medical Association is

organized, not only in the Guyana Medical Association, but a very strong coherent and focused group called the Berbice Medical Association. I see Dr Joseph smiling, it is always difficult to read him through his dark shades. I hope there would be a rule asking him to take it off. Let me inform him that we did touch on these organisations and probably the support could have been greater, but as regards the Berbice Medical Association, that was fairly satisfactorily.

Mr Speaker, that was just as a matter of information. I would like to get to the meat of my discussion today and point out that, from the very inception of the rains, even before the flooding started on the East Coast, the Ministry of Health ... before the dilemma really came to the fore there, the Ministry of Health had already visited certain areas on the East Bank. If you would throw your mind back, there were reports that there had been some flooding in Craig so, even at that early stage, the Ministry of Health had a taskforce in the field, headed by Dr Shamdeo Persaud and the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Cummings. That task force had already started to prepare advisories to the public, for example, to parents asking them to keep their little ones out of the floodwaters. So we do not want to share blame here, nor do we want to take too much of the credit, but indeed we could say that the populace responded, and the parents might very well have kept their young from danger in response to a very vigorous and robust PR campaign by the Ministry of Health. I would further like to tell you this, that from the beginning of the crisis, there were certain things that might have been overlooked; certain things that might have been the basis of some of our initial successes, especially in stopping the wide spread of water-borne diseases. I would like to remind you of certain things that you might take for granted, and the value of which we might not fully appreciate. The Ministry of Health started, very early, with the distribution of bottled water. Distribution of bottled water was started in the very initial stages of this crisis. Further to that ... *[Interruption: 'So what?']* Well my dears, if you say, *so what*, it definitely means that our PR has failed with the Opposition. Sharing of bottled water is touted in all disaster conditions as one of the things you must do ... *[Interruption: 'Yes']* The Ministry of Health was able to motivate other agencies to help and organised the distribution

itself. Further to that, bleach was being distributed at very early stages of this crisis ... *[Interruption: 'Tell us about medicine']* ... What I would like to tell you too ... *[Interruption: 'Tell us about the medicine']* ... we will get there slowly. Do not hurry.

Further to that, Mr Speaker and Members of this Assembly, I would like to remind you of the investment of this Government in the social sector - water! This Government especially, according to the recent study by UNICEF, has been able to expand the potable water system on the Coastland - potable, from pot, drinkable water. We will forgive you, you seem very euphoric now. In this crisis time, you are finding it funny ... *[Interruption: 'Yes']* ... but potable water was one of the things that one of our former Presidents, to be exact, Mrs Janet Jagan, made it a directive to this Government and the party in power that water would be one of the things to be emphasized because she saw it as empowerment of our women, who had to be fetching water for hours in the day ... *[Interruption: 'So how that come in?']* ... now, how does that come in? In the very early stages - and I see some people who are informed shaking their heads, water was provided by this Government in the initial stages, before the standpipes and the pipes in the bottom houses got dysfunctional, and this contributed, in a large extent, to our successes in curbing the spread of waterborne diseases. The Members on the side of the Government should congratulate themselves on that vision. *[Applause]* To say that this Government did not put in infrastructure is a fallacy. There are deficiencies. The roads might not be all tarmac or all pitched, but there are certain things that they are speaking about water, an integral part of dealing with the flood. There could be, in a flood, water here, water there and water everywhere, but if you do not have proper water, you will get sick! The PPP/Civic made sure that you and your constituents who, years ago, had to fetch water on go-carts *[Applause]* that investment has paid off.

As a matter of fact, it is interesting to look at some of the reports of reputable international agencies. For example, UNICEF in their recent report that they did on core for the young, indicated was that there has been a significant increase in water security. That is the context, or that

is the bigger canvas against which I would like to make my contribution. These little things are being forgotten, and we must praise our teams and our theoreticians in the Ministry of Health who realized that in a certain crisis situation there will be stages ... For example, *[Interruption: 'Maybe Baksh will']* ... I hear a voice in the wilderness. What did it say? This is serious business ... and the Ministry of Health knows that, in a crisis, not only a flood, but any disaster, there will be certain stages. In a flood there will be the challenges associated with the actual water on the land. When the flood recedes, you will have the challenges of emerging diseases, and as that goes on, you will have the problem of putting back into order your destroyed or damaged infrastructure. The Ministry of Health has taken care of all of that ... *[Interruption: 'All three?']* ... All three, and in a very accountable and judicious fashion. All of the things that I speak of can ... bear scrutiny.

The Ministry of Health has, at all times, state auditors checking, even right now in this crisis. We are very cautious with how we deal with the people's money. This is not a Globe Trust kind of thing. This is not a Globe Trust activity. The monies will be properly accounted for. Even as the kits of medicine ... someone said let us talk about the drugs ... so even as the kits of drugs to go into the field are being assembled, they are being checked, every single one, by the auditors. Here I would like to emphasize, and hopefully shut up some people on the other side, that this is not a Globe Trust activity. It is transparent ... *[Interruption: 'Who you want to shut up with that?']* ... if the cap fits, pull the string.

Mr Speaker, I pointed out the successes, or the foundation against which the Ministry was able to function. The Ministry has several programmes, including one called Disease Control Services, that was quickly put into operation, and the head of that, in conjunction with the Chief Medical Officer, was able to advise the Minister and his senior technical officers on certain things to do. What is interesting is that the Ministry did not only rely on in-house specialists and in-house capacity, the Ministry of Health has been relying, as it has been in the past, on one of our main technical support organisations, that is the Pan American Health Organisation which, over the years, has proven to be one of our main

support organisations. I would like to point out to you, that while there is the criticism that resources, namely qualified human resources, were not mobilized, I would like to point out to you that this was not so. PAHO was able to, from their office, and in cases where their local office was weak, to quickly import into the country specialists in epidemiology, environmental health and sanitation, and what I would like to point out to you, and this is to come back to Dr Joseph's uninformed state, is that CARICOM, through its Environmental Health Institute, has actually provided a specialist to work along with our water company here – GWI, so that their workers now confronting challenges in the field will be advised on workplace hazards and other environmental issues. That organisation is an arm of CARICOM and is actually providing such a specialist, whom is right now working in this country. Why I make that little diversion is to emphasize that work has quietly been going on, and in those instances where the Government, or the administration, or the Ministry, has not got in-country resources, they have been mobilized. Mobilizing them would have been difficult had we not diligently, over the years, forged good relationships with such organisations as PAHO/WHO.

Mr Speaker, with the help of the teams from the international organisations ... I have mentioned PAHO but I would also like to mention, especially, the Cuban brigade, which this Government was able to mobilize, and I will come to that later. *[Applause]* Beside the Cuban brigade, Mr Speaker and colleagues, we have had others, who came at their own expense, or at the expense of an organisation formed to give flood relief to Guyana - an organisation formed with the active participation, or the lead role, of Mr Danny Doobay, our Consular General in Canada. *[Applause]* As a matter of fact I can say that Mr Doobay is stepping in illustrious footsteps because he, of course, took over from Minister Sawh, so we do have capacity that is being sent to this country, that is being mobilized by the diaspora, in a very quiet, focused manner. Mr Speaker, incidentally, this has only cost the Government, so far, a few lunches and a few dinners to support five qualified nurses. I would like to point that out to you that because of the success of this experiment with Guyanese nurses now coming back to serve - and not only

Guyanese, but there was one foreigner whom has forged a relationship with the Guyanese community overseas, and she also came too to serve.

I would also like to point out that, due to the diligence of the diplomatic office in Canada and its intimate links with the community there, and its proactive approach, this programme of support by Canadian-based nurses will be continuing for the next 90 days. *[Applause]* This is in recognition of the fact that the Guyanese health workers have stretched themselves. We have had to take nurses from the hospital off regular duties and send them into the fields ... *[Interruption: 'I hope you all pay them now']* ... Now, Mr Speaker, I would like to point out, and I would like to recognize, the ongoing contribution which will be given from this international brigade of nurses, and I would like to point out to you that yes the Ministry of Health has difficulty with training and retaining but not only in this country - look at the reports from India, look at Jamaica. Patterson has challenged the Americans in the following manner. What has he said, Mr Speaker? He has told the *Americans that, instead of coming to Jamaica and enticing my qualified nurses away, let us work out an arrangement. Let me train nurses for you officially*, so yes, this Government will not deny it. We have difficulty in training and retaining personnel. Nevertheless, I would like to point out that it is a success story - that we have been able to touch the conscience, the hearts and the minds of our fellow Guyanese overseas to come back and help us in this time of need. That was an experience. I hear some voices in the wilderness. You should have seen that interaction, Mr Speaker, of these foreign-based nurses in their rubber boots going into the waters and helping Guyanese ... *[Interruption: 'Wellington boots']* ... Wellington boots, in our local language, long boots. Well, that is some of the things that the Ministry has been able to organize, and I think that this interaction ... the Ministry is positioning itself to take the best out of this period, the interaction of those international professionals inevitably will have a positive impact on the quality of our personnel. For example, we are having a very interesting relationship with the Cuban brigade. Let me inform you that some 40 odd souls came from Cuba. Cuba responded with doctors and general practitioners who were initially deployed in the teams that were mobile, and now they have

actually started to settle in our reopened facilities. Some of these people speak language practically as good as some of us, in terms of English. Why? Because they are from the Cuban International brigade that went to the Caribbean and went to Africa ... *[Interruption: 'What is the relevance?']* ... what is that? *[What Max do?]* Max belongs to the Guyana Medical Association, so he will speak about that. Yes, the Honourable Dr Max Hanoman will speak on what he has done. Frankly speaking, I have not seen him at the Ministry of Health. I have seen other members of the GMA, and I have seen Dr Dagleish Joseph. I have seen him contributing at the Monday meetings, especially in the initial stages ... *[Interruption: 'What about Max?']* ... I do not know where Big Max was. As a matter of fact, colleagues, the only Big Max that I have been seeing regularly now is the chicken burger that I get because we have to stay in the Ministry the whole day and so we cannot go home and get a decent meal. So that is the only Big Max I go and buy. I have not seen the other Big Max, but we would welcome him aboard to the effort. I would like to give you some human interest stories about who does what and who blows their own trumpet. I have not seen Max. *[Interruption: 'The burger?']* No, I am not talking about Big Max the burger.

However, I would like to tell you a little story about a little old man ... *[Interruption: 'Again?']* ... This little old man, who lives in Clonbrook, recently had a triple bypass. He is a Medex named Nandgobin Ramgobin. The first day of the flood I was looking for experienced people for us to send out teams - let me call this body, let me call that body. I called Ramgobin, and I said, *Ramgobin are you at work as yet?* Mr Speaker, Ramgobin works at the Palms. He was already at his job at 7:30h - an old man who comes from Clonbrook. I called him over in the pouring rain. On the phone I asked, *Ram, should I send a vehicle for you?* He said, *no, no, I got my umbrella and my rubber boots.* Within 10 minutes that old man, who came from several miles out of the city, and who had a triple bypass mid-last year, came through the rain with his umbrella and with his rubber boots. I hope that some medexes and other doctors who find it easy to be vociferous can take example from Nand, and those are some of the unsung heroes of

whom Minister Sawh spoke. They do not have the option of sitting in the National Assembly, and of sometimes not coming here while collecting their salaries and perks! *[Laughter]* They are at work from 7:30h in the morning and then, when you call on them to go the extra mile, Nandgobin Ramgobin was there. Further to that, Mr Speaker, and I am using this as an example to weave a bigger story that will have to be told sometime soon, that Medex spent the entire time in the Sophia area, and during the entire period he never complained, and came back to the Ministry at 18:00h, or 18:30h every afternoon, and the head of that team which was mobilized - one of the teams, because on some days the Ministry of Health had as many as 52 teams in the field equipped with drugs and medical personnel. What I want to tell you is ... *[Interruption: 'Where was Max?'] [Laughter]* ... I cannot tell you that one. Mr Speaker, I want to finish off this little story about this little old man. In Sophia, where he went, that team which had been mobilised by the Ministry, was being headed by another foreign consultant working in this country, a man by the name of Dr Abdalla from Somalia. In many cases it would have been good if other big men, big doctors, well known, famous doctors were to take that example. Those are some of the examples that have come out. I opened by saying ... let me take a sip and give them some time to let off some air ... *[Laughter]* ... allowing them to let off some steam. Mr Speaker, I opened by saying that this crisis has brought out the best in some of us, and the worst in some of us, and that is why I used that example. The example of this international team - a Guyanese and a man from Africa going to a poverty stricken, flooded area and doing wondrous work. That is why I became a bit annoyed when there was an intimation that resources were being distributed in a partisan manner, because I can tell you that Sophia did not vote PPP, and some of the biggest efforts in health and sending resources, happened in Sophia. It was spearheaded by such teams as I have referred to, headed by Dr Abdalla and Medex Ramgobin - remember those two names all the time. For example, I have a list, Mr Speaker, and this would be an indirect indication of how resources were spread. To equip a team to send it into the field, that team had to have a medical leader - a doctor. It had to be provided with transportation. It had to be given

drugs. It had to be fed. It has to be given water. In other words, it is almost as if you have a battle you are fighting, and you are putting troops in the field to roll back disease and suffering. I can tell you that, quickly looking at it, we had teams in such places, from time to time, and in all of these places, frequently during the relief period, places such as Plaisance, Buxton, sometimes the average patients being seen in Buxton was 450 souls per day. In places like Melanie, Haslington/Grove 500 souls were seen one day in - Victoria, Sophia Central 268 souls, just on one day, and that is only counting one point. It is not counting the shelter. So, Mr Speaker, I was somewhat disappointed to hear the leader of the Opposition ... I was expecting this from Mr James McAllister, but not from the leader of the PNC/R. I was expecting something bigger, but here the leader of the Opposition ... sometime ago we used to refer to it as leader of Minority but we have magnanimously changed it back to the Leader of the Opposition. I was somewhat pained to hear the leader of the opposition trying to drive wedges in our community by referring to some fallacy that resources were not adequately spread, or not equitably spread. What was more distressing is that I looked around and I noted some foreigners in our august hall. I hope that they will be disabused of this misinformation and this mischief. If we were only to take the list of places where teams were deployed, and the resources needed to support these teams, it would make interesting reading. I recommend that, for example, to our foreign observers so that they can see how resources were distributed. Unfortunately in health, because health is not a net producer, we do not look at it as an economic factor, but if you were to take the cost, in terms of effort and monies being used to deploy these teams, you would see that great effort was made, and that resources were equitably used.

As a matter of fact, flicking the television one night, I came across a news item and decided to stop. Why? I saw some familiar doctor faces ... *[Interruption: 'Max?'] [Laughter]* ... No comment. I saw them relating what they were doing in the field. Many, or most, of these persons were associated with the opposition forces. One of them, neither here nor there - just a busybody. He gets into any action, but what happened is that, although they were speaking of their effort, they never

mentioned the fact that the large quantities of drugs seen over their shoulders in the footage came from the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health integrated with those doctors and gave them the opportunity to render service ... No, I must paint a proper picture because, Mr Speaker, certain television crews would emphasize certain things in certain communities. So if those doctors were being interviewed there, I would like it to be known that resources from the Ministry were getting into those communities. Yes, those were some of the interesting things we noted at this time.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, your time is up.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker ... [*Noisy Interruption*]

The Speaker: Honourable Members, let us have some order, please.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: ... I move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue presentation.

Question put and agreed to

Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr Speaker and Honourable colleagues. Mr Speaker, I spoke of the support given by international agencies and the high quality of personnel they brought to these shores to help us. That resulted in daily, or should I say in nightly analysis of data drawn from the findings of the teams sent into the field. Every night PAHO, UNICEF, the Ministry of Health, Red Cross and other agencies gathered at the Ministry of Health to analyze what the computer room had generated, based on data sent in from our medical teams. That informed us as to the disease patterns, trends ... and it gave us the capacity to forecast and realize that what we had started to do in the beginning was indeed correct. Remember, when I opened I told you that the Ministry understood that, in a disaster, there would be certain phases, each phase with its own challenge and we, as predicted by the disease patterns, were expecting certain trends; so that is why, suddenly, you heard of Doxyday. The Ministry brought Doxyday. It was not prompted. It was not pushed unto us, but because of the scientific data

and the scientific analyses compiled from the field teams - the fever, diarrhea, and indeed, yes, the deaths ... there were deaths - no joke about that - it is serious business so, based on that analysis ... and I forgot to mention CDC, the American premier health organisation. They, too, were part of our nightly teams. As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker and colleagues, the teams started to return around 17:30h to 18:00h, and by 19:00h the computer room and our epidemiologist from PAHO and other agencies were able to generate enough information, in the form of graphs and other formats to, allow us to have a good picture of what was unfolding. The gathering of this team of specialists, their deployment and equipping, and the use made of information they generated says a lot to the vision of the Ministry. We were preparing ourselves for all eventualities and, from time to time, you would see the teams being deployed as needed, based on many of the graphs that we were seeing, information that was being generated everyday. The different data that was being generated ... and for those who know better, and I suspect that Dr Joseph does know better, they would realize that such epidemiological data, giving you the trends and the expected roll out of disease patterns, is a powerful weapon in the armory of the Ministry. I would like to underline that point, and I would like to underline that it is one of the silent successes of the Ministry. We have learnt a lot from that exercise, and we have also learnt a lot from the data gathered, and it has taught us that while we indeed might not have been prepared in some areas, as we should have been, we must not lose all of the gathered information and knowledge, but build upon it.

Mr Speaker, before my next 45 minutes run out, I would like to point out that many agencies - commercial and non-governmental, in the society voluntarily came forward and offered their services which, in many cases, were successfully integrated. One that stands out that came to my notice, and came to my office, was a certain private company which does spraying and exterminating of vectors and pests - one Mr Periera from that company called me once in the very early stages and offered his services, and we were able to utilize them at our shelters, first and foremost, at the shelter opposite Banks DIH in Ruimveldt, and that was able to address some of the mosquito nuisance that the inmates of

the Uncle Eddie's Home, who were then being housed by Mrs Hinds at that facility, were experiencing ... *[Interruption: 'By Mrs Hinds or by the Relief Council?']* ... My, I have gotten your attention. The Relief Council indeed, but the initiative was made by none other than Mrs Hinds to have that done. So here again I would like to bring out to you, and to this audience that, during this period, the best was brought out among some of us. It was so interesting and so pleasing to see a private entity actually offering, unsolicited, to do services, totally free of cost. Those are some of the unsung heroes and unsung contributors to the success of the multi agency functions and activities of the Ministry of Health. Colleagues, speaking of multi agency activities, let me spend a few minutes on that. We are told that there was no plan and that there was no integrated action. I would like to point out to you, Mr Speaker and Honourable colleagues and visitors to this House, that frequently, and from the very inception, the top level leaders of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Local Government, and the Ministry of Human Services gathered practically on a daily basis to work out strategies on how to deal with certain issues. This is separate and apart from the nightly meetings of the specialists sponsored by PAHO, UNICEF and other agencies which supported our Ministry. I am speaking of local government or, Guyanese government agencies, meeting and seriously looking at challenges and looking at gaps and addressing them.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, headed by Minister Nokta, and the Ministry of Human Services, headed by the Hon Dale Bisnauth, sent their Permanent Secretaries or senior officers to work out strategies with us to address such issues as environmental health, sanitation and how to do the clean-up campaign. For example, the distribution of material in the field to practically every home in certain parts of the East Coast was a collaborative effort of these three Ministries, and those meetings went on continuously for a protracted period. The Nation should know these things, especially since there is the impression, and sometimes I think, specifically created, that the Ministry of Health does not know, but is acting on its own and in isolation. That was simply not so.

I would like to recognize, at this forum, the contribution of such people from Mr Nokta's Ministry as Mr Pooran Persaud, and the Permanent Secretary from Dr Dale Bisnauth's Ministry - people who spent hours into the evening helping us craft approaches as to how we should do the clean-up campaign on the East Coast. Mr Speaker, I spoke of inter-sectoral or inter-agency activities - the Ministry of Health also had recourse, or had to engage, the support of civic and community organisations to help get its delivery of health service to affected communities in many instances. The Ministry of Health, especially in the very severely flooded areas, has suffered damage to its facilities, its delivery points - mainly the health centres. For example, that one at Met-en-Meerzorg, which services a fairly large community of some 8,000 persons. Health centres such as that at Campbellville, which until now is closed, and which will remain closed to repair the considerable damage done there. As a matter of fact, in the aftermath of the floods, or while the floods were still in progress, and just after the closure of that facility, a fire broke out as a result of a short-circuit caused by the floods. That facility will take some time to repair. Similarly on the East Coast - Lusignan and Enterprise have suffered severe damage to their health facilities.

The Ministry of Health has, in a timely fashion, located alternative venues in those cases where it was necessary. For example, in Campbellville, we were able to hammer out an understanding with members of the Campbellville Environmental Development Association. They are based at the Campbellville Community Centre. I think it is sometimes known as Campdown, and they are a collection of several NGOs, including a steelband club, a football club, and some other clubs there. We were able to get their permission to utilize that building, not far away from the original health centre, and that is up and running. Incidentally, the Ministry of Health has expended considerable resources in putting in temporary features, or temporary structures, in the yards and in the buildings of these organisations. In other words, when we would have left, when our original health centre would have been repaired and we would have left, the community centre would be a net benefactor of that activity ... *[Interruption]* ... Thank you. I tell you definitely some of them are

not sleeping. Thank you, Vincent.

Further, in Lusignan, which has been one of the very severely hit health centres, we were able to get, free of cost, a new, well-appointed building to use as a temporary health facility. I am using this forum to point out to you that the Ministry of Health was on the ball from day one, and I would like to point out another little experience with the Lusignan facility. It is now being housed temporarily, with the permission of the owner, in a store. That activity began initially when two private practitioners, living in the said village, decided to come to the Ministry and get on board with our activities. They took a team, with kits from the Ministry of Health, and stationed themselves at that said commercial facility to extend help during the height of the strike. Building on that, the Ministry of Health has ... *[Interruption: 'What strike?']* ... sorry, the flood. At the height of the flood two practitioners in that area, Dr Ram and his wife who is also a doctor, started that enterprise, and the Ministry of Health wishes to officially thank them, using this forum. They started to help without any fanfare, without blowing their trumpets, and they were able to help their fellow East Coast citizens. Building on that initiative, the Ministry of Health has now secured the permission of the owner to modify, in some small way, that building to adapt it to the purposes of a health centre.

So these are some of the things that the Ministry has been able to do because, over the years, it has secured itself, or has ensured that it has the capacity to do so. First of all, by having the in-house expertise, secondly by recognising that, when we do not have that expertise, we can rely on the broad shoulders of our international partners like PAHO and like UNICEF, and by, quite humbly in the period of crisis, calling for that help. Further, we have been able to hammer out satisfactory inter-agency arrangements and satisfactory arrangements with community groups. For example, Camptown and the gentleman at Lusignan. Mr Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Time is up, Honourable Member.

Dr Bheri Ramsaran: ... in closing ... *[Pause]*

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

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed.

Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In closing, I have spoken a lot about the help being given. In passing, I spoke about the Cuban doctors, and I promised that, before the end of my speech, I would elaborate a bit more, because I have seen in the press some coverage, but that coverage, I think, is inadequate, and the extent of help that we are getting should be more recognized. Those 40 odd doctors are now allocated to the Georgetown Public Hospital, six or seven of them are working there. There is also a small group allocated to the West Demerara Regional Hospital, and they are being sent on a daily basis to health centres that need services of a doctor, and further, they are being deployed at health centres in Georgetown and on the East Coast, including some of our temporary sites, such as the temporary site at Lusignan and that at Camptown. I would like to point out, too, that we have been able to deploy two of these doctors to the Mahaicony Hospital. The aim of that is to prevent the spread of the problem should the floods spill over more to Region 5. Despite some disadvantages of language these doctors have well integrated into the system and are expected to do well.

In closing, I would like to point out, too, that some ... *[Interruption: Again?]* ... In closing this 15 minutes, I would like to point out to you, Mr Speaker, that this brigade, from the very first day that it was deployed, that is, on the next day after arriving here, have been working from Monday to Monday. They are a good example of volunteers and sacrifice. I cannot close my intervention without recognising the continuing support that we are experiencing between the peoples of Guyana and Cuba - that mutual support. And may I also remind you that, while

we are having that support here with Cuban Nationals in Guyana, we are currently preparing several score Guyanese youths in Cuba to come back in the near future and, hopefully, take the place of the Cubans whom are now deployed. I have tried to touch on many issues ... Well, they have been listening very intently. They have even stopped heckling, so I must have touched on something, Mr Speaker, with that I would like to thank you for your attention. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member, Ms Peterkin.

Ms Myrna EN Peterkin: Mr Speaker, before I address the topic that I really want to address tonight, I would like to ask the Honourable Dr Bheri Ramsaran where and when was this bleach distributed? I would like to have that information, and I want him to also know that we, as women, are still fetching water *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, I rise today to speak on a topic that never should have been. This PPP/C Government administration took heed to the word given to them by the Haslington/Grove Neighborhood Democratic Council, and the Regional Administration. The competent Haslington/Grove Neighborhood Democratic Council sent a report to the Minister of Agriculture, and to the Chairman of the Drainage and Irrigation Board on 23 and 29 July 2004 respectively ... *[Interruption: 'You take after Mr Henry']* ... Listen and you will learn. Stating their concerns about the D&I intake structures on the Crown Dam at Nabaclis and Golden Grove, which were not in order; hence the waters from the Savannah was flowing freely into the township. The NDC also indicated that there was a rupture in the Company Dam, causing waters from the Cove and John area to flow into the Nabaclis and Golden Grove system. *[\$7 million was given in 2000]* Mr Speaker, I would like this Honourable House to know that the New Year broke the villages of Victoria, Nabaclis and Golden Grove with flood waters. It was not on 17 January, but on 3 January. That is what I want this Honourable House to note. In some areas the water had risen to one foot, and in other areas it was 2 feet 6 inches. This was reported to the Minister of Agriculture by the Haslington/Grove Neighborhood Democratic Council but no action was taken.

The Region 4 administration, through Mr Mohammed Deen, REO, appointed by the PPP, sent a letter dated 15 November 2004 to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, literally begging the Minister for a release of \$32 million to settle outstanding accounts and continue the cleaning of primary drains throughout the Region before the rainy. Mr Deen wrote:

I am appealing to you to assist this administration in presenting this case for adequate funding. These Drainage and Irrigation canals have been dug several years ago. As a result heavy vegetation grows quickly ...

I am quoting:

... so there is need to have a regular maintenance programme in place, but this is difficult with the present funding, which was always inadequate.

The Government had no regards for the regional administration when allocating funds. *[Hear lie!]* The funds budgeted have been inadequate. For example, in 2004 a supplementary provision of \$20 million was requested to complete maintenance work, but n-o-n-e was granted. Mr Speaker, it is clear that this massive flooding was as a direct result of the incompetence and inefficiency of some government officials. *[Applause]*

No human hands could have stopped the works of nature, thus no one could have stopped the excessive rainfalls. However, had proper provision been made, we would not have had prolonged flooding in this area. The waters would have been able to be drained off the land at a quicker pace. *[Applause]* The floods came and brought with it chaos and confusion. We saw the true nature of the PPP/C Government, that is, discrimination in a national disaster. The first discrimination, in Region 3, where there is a PPP/C administration, they were allowed to function in cooperation with the relief ... *[Interruption: 'Ask Mr McAllister']* ... the administration was allowed to play an integral part in the overall administration of the flood relief. Whereas, in Region 4, Mr Speaker,

the PNC/R administration was in total confusion. I was clear that the PPP/C caused confusion. They jumped like grasshoppers.

The second discrimination, the PPP/C Government took the opportunity ... *[Interruption: 'They knock you out']* ... You cannot do that ... in my opinion, and in my colleagues opinion, to start, to my mind, an election campaign. *[Applause]* For instance, in the PPP/C areas, their supporters were given well-organized hampers of eleven items and even more, but when they went to the areas that were not supported by the PPP, they gave four items. *[Applause]* That was a fact, and I can attest to that ... *[Interruption: Lie, lie!]* ... That was a fact, and I have it, so it is a fact. We on this side ... *[Interruption: 'Tell them Myrna, do not worry with him!']* ... We on this side of the House thought that at times ... *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Have some order, Honourable Members. Let us have some order. The Honourable Member is unable to proceed with her presentation.

Ms Myrna EN Peterkin: Mr Speaker, we on this side of the House thought that at times we should have been more cooperative with each other, but that was far from the fact. We tried to put our efforts together in some areas and that was shunned ... *[Interruption: 'And them men give you a whole set of food which you had ...' "it was not Government's food" 'Do not answer him, he is distraction']* Instead, Mr Speaker, the chaos continued. Ministers were handing out food relief in the name of the Government, and in the name of the PPP/C and the President. Well, if that is not politicking, I really do not know what is politicking. *[What was happening at Paradise?]* The flood has also brought out how disorganized and confused this Government is. For example, at a time when there was an outbreak of disease in this country, and there was a need for the service of doctors, as Mr Bheri Ramsaran said, this Government, with all its wisdom, had the Honourable doctor, Minister Westford, sharing food, instead of engaging her in the medical relief. *[Applause]* What a joke.

The Guyanese people are still to know how the volunteer specialist doctors were allocated to the various areas. What is apparent is that, in some areas, we never even saw them, and just now, hearing from my Honourable friend that they were all over the country, well, they surely was not on the East Coast Grove/Haslington area, so maybe they were in other areas and I could not have seen them.

Mr Speaker, we also need to know why the drug, Doxycycline, was not equally distributed. In the Mahaica area, one PPP/C supporter was given the drug to distribute among the supporters. However, although the Haslington/Grove Neighborhood Democratic Council requested their quota, none was given to them. Our inquiry revealed that certain CDC groups were given this drug to distribute it, and these CDCs were affiliated to the PPP/C ... *[Interruption: 'How many hampers you sell?' "You give me any to sell?"]* It is true, there were mobile medical units posted in areas, but it is also true that many times they did not have the required drugs to treat the ailments that were existing at the time. For example, the diabetics and the hypertensive had to suffer because they could not make their way to some open drugstores, paddling through the water, and for the asthmatics it was worse. The Georgetown Hospital was filled to the capacity with just two doctors working at the emergency room. I just do not understand why proper temporary clinics were not set up in communities, as it was set up in Lusignan.

Mr Speaker, it will take all day if I were to highlight all the monkey politics that were in operation during these disastrous weeks. The people of this country deserve to be treated with more respect, regardless of race, religion, party affiliation, or otherwise. In concluding, I would like to remind the Government that region 4 has a regional administration, just like Region 3 and the other Regions, as such the Government should not disregard the Region 4 Administration when it comes to activities that fall within the ambit of the administration. The Government should also exercise fairness and good judgement when it comes to allocating monies to the Region for the infrastructure development works. Similarly, the Government needs to know that there is a time for every-

thing. There was a time for the flood waters, there was a time to run and share hampers, and now it is a time for compensation [*Applause*] and we hope that the compensation will be done in an equal manner. I thank you, Mr Speaker. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. Since we have no other speakers, I think this, perhaps, is an appropriate time ... [*Interruption: 'No, no!'*] ... Mr McAllister.

Mr James K McAllister: Mr Speaker, before I come to the issue of blocking roads and so on, I wish to address some other matters, because the issues leading to blockage of roads are issues that flowed from the fact that water was on the land. These are issues that resulted from the fact that people were suffering, because they were flooded, and we must therefore go back to address the issue of the causes for the flood, and why it happened, and what and who is responsible. We need to have a clear understanding of this. Earlier, I listened to the Honourable Member Mr Xavier, and indeed the Honourable Member Mr Sawh, speaking to us about unprecedented, record rainfall. In fact, the Honourable Member Xavier gave us full details of the rainfall that occurred from 23 December to 8 January. He said 497mm on 9 January, 141 mm, from 12 to 22 January and then 793 mm, and then he gave us a long list of more records, of maximum two, three, four, and five-day records. I would want to suspect that the Honourable Members were reliably informed by the Hydromet Department, and they got the information from data collected at the various rain gauge stations around the country, and so I will not question this information.

We had record rainfall. I want to point out one thing, though, and maybe we might want to separate this thing somewhat, in the sense that, if my memory serves me correctly, on 12 January, at least in Georgetown, there was no water on the land. I know that in Region 3, there was no water on the land, therefore this additional rainfall that came after 12 January, is the rainfall that we must be speaking about when we speak to flooding in Georgetown, and when we speak to flooding in Region 3.

I have noted that my colleague from this side, Honourable Member Myrna Peterkin, did mention that there was some water on the land on the East Coast since 3 January, and so this separation might not hold for sections of the East Coast but I am quite sure we must ask the Government side to be very careful about how they are presenting this 1000 excess mm of water coming on the land since 23 December. We need to be careful of that bit of information but, even so, the rainfall that came from 12 January to 22 January was still significant, and it was still sufficient rainfall to cause a problem, and this I must concede. So I am not trying to disregard this thing to say that the rainfall was not a problem but what I would want to go on to look at, Mr Speaker, is the issue as to whether this thing was totally unexpected, and whether we had no inkling that it could have happened, and therefore, we were totally unprepared because, you know, we did not have a tsunami. It is not something that happened in eight hours somewhere thousands of miles in the Atlantic, and then we were unaware that it was roaring towards us at 600-plus miles per hour, because the volume of rain that is based on scientific advances can be predicted to some measure of accuracy.

Mr Speaker, my understanding is that the Hydromet Department got it wrong, at least initially. I cannot speak with any degree of authority here because I am getting it through second-hand sources, because everything in relation to this flood is now a State secret. So therefore, I am saying that my information is . . . and I hope someone from the Government's side can either confirm what I am saying, or produce evidence to refute it; but my understanding is that, initially, the Hydromet Department had an estimate of rainfall in January of 38mm. Then, through certain processes, I would not say what those processes are, they upgraded it to 450mm, and that was the estimate and it was transmitted, and piped into the system. So it was therefore information that was available at the Ministry of Agriculture. It was with the D&I Board, and it was available at the Conservancy Board. They had the information where the Hydromet Department predicted 450mm. Now that is around 33 percent of what we eventually got, but by any stretch of the imagination, if one is to take what the Honourable Member said, 450mm is about 100 percent greater

than the average in January, and therefore that should have occasioned special responses. Therefore, the Ministry of Agriculture should have been doing certain special things, because the Government Hydromet Department had informed and alerted them that 450mm was expected. We must now ask ourselves what happened? What did the Government do with the information?

Based on my little understanding, I would expect that an immediate response should have been to blow water out of the conservancies in order to ensure that this higher than normal rainfall did not catch us with the conservancy at full supply level. I want the Members from the Government side to deny that the rainfall came and caught us at full supply level, and if that is what happened, then they must explain. How could you know that you are going to have 450mm and yet we can still be caught with the conservancy at full supply level? What are the consequences of that? The consequences were that there were no storage capacity and so water came into the catchment area aback of the conservancy, flowing into the conservancies and had no storage space, so therefore we know, and we heard the talk, of all the things - about serious overtopping. Later in my presentation I will establish that even the full supply level that we were caught at was in fact higher than the recommended level of 56GD that was put in place after the 1998 El Niño effects on the dam. It was higher, and so we will have to ask ourselves who was responsible for this? Why were we caught in such a situation? Why did we not reduce the level in the dam to ensure that we had the storage capacity - one, and two, that the dam was not under undue stress? Mr Speaker, E and A Consultants, in their report - and this is in 1998, titled *Report on the Study of the Effects of El Niño Weather for West Demerara Water Conservancy and Mitigation Effects*, in fact recommended that the full supply level should be at 56GD. We must ask ourselves why this advice was not taken, because we had a very serious situation. It is not one in which we could have just ignored. If we were to go, and if you permit me, Mr Speaker, I would like to quote from Section 2 of the report presented by E and A Consultants:

Fires have burnt relatively deep holes in the dam where

pegasse was more predominant in the dam structure, fires have also damaged timber revetment works at the toe of previous slips, the wing walls to intakes, and the timber of abandoned structures have now become unsafe

This is a situation that existed that caused E and A Consultants to recommend that the full supply levels be reduced to 56GD. E and A recommended a number of other things, Mr Speaker, and we know that some work was done by BKII in response to the E and A report. What transpired thereafter is now a matter of public record. The work, based on my understanding, was not properly supervised, and maybe, again someone from the Government side might want to clarify to say whether it is true that the person supervising this important piece of work, in fact is not a qualified civil engineer. I would like that to be clarified, and this would cause me to allude to a point I would wish to develop a bit later on, the point as it relates to the Engineers Registration Bill, because the fact is that all sorts of people are running around this country undertaking serious works that can put the lives of Guyanese in danger, and they are not qualified to do so. *[Applause]* For many, many years the engineers in this country have been pushing and asking for an Engineer Registration Bill to ensure that the people of Guyana are protected, the same way they are protected as you list the medical profession, and the same way they are protected as you list the legal profession, to ensure, as relates to the engineering profession, that the people of Guyana are protected. *[Applause]* Maybe this is the time for us to look seriously at putting the Engineering Registration Bill on the front-burner to ensure that what happened here ... because what we have here confronting us right now, and this is not over ... we are being confronted by what we can consider our most serious engineering disaster. We are being told that it is a natural disaster, but what is looming largely before us is an engineering disaster, because of engineering considerations we were forced to pump water out of the conservancies and we were forced to release water into the villages so that the dam would not fail. So it was an engineering disaster, and therefore we might want to look carefully and we, on this side of the House, are ready to work with the Govern-

ment, as relates to bringing the Engineers Registration Bill in order to have it passed. *[Applause]* For instance, Mr Speaker, it was established that the work done on the dam by BK International was done using material that was substandard, and that the dam failed as a result, even while it was being constructed, flooding a number of areas on the East Coast. I am quite sure the Members of the Government side remember this, and they must remember it, because a Commission of Inquiry was established. You remember that, Donald? The Commission of Inquiry was established, and this Commission was chaired by Dr Harold Davis (Jr) ... sorry Dalglish *[Laughter]*.

Mr Speaker, the terms of reference, for this Commission were to:

1. *Identify factors and establish the circumstances that contribute to the failure of the conservancy dam at the Good Hope site.*
2. Assess the role of the dam design.
3. Assess the role of the rehabilitation of the dam.
4. Suggest remedial action to be taken.

And this is an important one, because when we come a bit later on, we will see that a number of suggestions were made and none were carried out.

5. Produce a comprehensive report by 31 January 2004.

They came in a bit late, the report is dated March 2002. Did I say 2004 earlier? If I said 31 January 2004, Mr Speaker, I should have said 31 January 2002, because the report was eventually completed and submitted in March 2002, and the title of the report ... I want to place this on the record, Report on factors which led to the breach in the East Demerara water conservancy dam at La Bonne Mere.

A number of recommendations were made, and I will read these

recommendations:

1. *The breach should be permanently sealed without delay*

I wish to state here that the breach was sealed but, from all reports, it is not being considered as permanent, but it was sealed.

2. *The 8.3 miles section between Annandale and Cane Grove ...*

And here is what they said about this section,

... that geotechnical survey, topographical survey, and proper engineering design should be done and the dam should be rebuilt between that section.

3. *Intensive procedures for dam inspections should be put in place*

This was not done, and I should say, as relates to the 8.3 mile section, this also was not done. Now, following up with the E and A report, this Harold Davis report also said,

4. *That water levels must be maintained at 56GD until the dam was repaired.*

Since the dam was not repaired, we want to know how is it that we are now operating at levels above 56GD, because if we go to some of the official releases, we will find that the Government side is speaking to a full supply level of 57.5GD, and so therefore we must now go on to the next recommendation.

5. *Canals in the conservancy should be cleared*

This was not done.

6. *Replace equipment in the conservancy - that is draglines,*

trench cleaners, back hoes, et cetera

Again this was done.

7. *Upgrade the Badini sluice so that the Mahaica farmers would not be flooded*

Again this was not done.

8. *Increase the release capacity into the Demerara River*

Now say it for me ... *It was not done!* ... and then, Mr Speaker, I should mention too, that the report did allude to what appeared to be a conflict of interest, whereby the Chairman of the Conservancy Board and the Chairman of the National Drainage and Irrigation Board was the one and same person ... *[So what?]* ... and they said that this is a no, no. It should not happen. Who is watching who? Again, nothing was done about this. The Honourable Member, Mr Xavier, will have us believe that the rain, and only the rain, caused this flood. It was only the rain - we had record rainfall, unseen rainfall. Record two, three, four and five day rainfall and therefore it was only the rain.

I wish to posit that is not the case, that it was a combination of rainfall, poor conservancy management, and a run-down drainage network that resulted in the flooding of the Coastland. *[Applause]* It was a failure of the Government to act on numerous recommendations of the Davis Commission and this, by no stretch of the imagination, can be considered an act of God. How could it be that we failed to act on the recommendations, where people pointed out to us that these things must be done to avert certain situations, and when we do not do them, and the things happen, we say it is an act of God? We cannot say that ... *[Interruption: Ramotar first!]* ... but, Mr Speaker, this thing is even more serious than we thought. The Commissioners were of the view ... Honourable Member, Mr Ramotar would listen because I know that he is growing a beard in protest of the flood. *[Laughter]* So this thing is about you too. The Commissioners were so moved by the issue related

to the Annandale/Cane Grove section that they did not wait on the completion of their report. By a letter dated 28 January 2002, they wrote the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, and I am quite sure the Honourable Minister of Agriculture would be able to confirm this. They wrote him because I saw the letter, and if I am to quote that section, it stated:

... this section of the dam is in a precarious condition and requires urgent attention.

They did not wait on the report because it was so serious that they should send off a letter immediately and they said,

The team's view is that a new dam should be constructed on the landward side of the existing dam

That was in January of 2002. We have come three years after and nothing has been done, and we are being told that it was an act of God. The only thing that we can connect with God here, and any acts of God, was the act of God not to deliver competence to some people. *[Laughter]* So what was the result? Well, for one, I know that the Honourable Member Mr Ramotar was flooded out, so much so that he started to wear his beard in protest, but after 12 January, the East Demerara conservancy began to overtop. Initially, I am told, at a rate of 10 million tonnes per day, overtopping into residential areas.

Even when overtopping stopped, water continued to pass through and under the dam, based on estimates, at a rate of 2 million tonnes per day. *[Interruption: 'It is a guesstimate']* Well, they would say that it is a guesstimate but, Mr Speaker, recently a clandestine operation was mounted by certain technical people to observe what is happening at the dam. Let me tell the Honourable Members on the other side some of the things they had to say about what was found:

1. Enmore - They said the Enmore intake is the worst case. The intake has a minimum diameter of 4 feet. It

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is flowing full and, in addition, it is leaking around the top of the structure, which in turn is adversely affecting the stability of the dam.

Enterprise – In the vicinity Of Enterprise, about 4 miles to the West of the Enmore intake, piping is evident. A natural tunnel, which is flowing full, has been found in the dam. It is about one foot in diameter. Intense seepage is evident by boiling of water in the general area of Enterprise.

Buxton - At the location of Buxton Company Canal, which starts at the Conservancy dam, heavy leaking around the intake, and intense boiling of the water, which suggests the presence of a well buried tube which must be leaking substantially.

General - The team has information that suggests that similar conditions as those that existed at Enmore also existed at LBI. It is suspected that similar situations occurred in BV/Triumph area, and at Ogle.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member Neendkumar is contending that is speculation and that it is not true, et cetera. It was clandestine, but it had to be because, I regret to inform this Honourable House that, as of this date, the Guyana Association of Professional Engineers has not been given permission to visit the dam. *[Applause]* How do you expect them to make an analysis in the open if you prevent them from accessing the dam, all because the people have ...? These gentlemen, who are not being paid for this in any way, could have decided this is not our business and they could have just sat somewhere twiddling their thumbs, and they could have said - *okay, let the Government do whatever they want, let them try.* But these gentlemen are patriotic engineers, and they decided that they must do something to get information, so they took steps. I hope that, given the attitude of the Government side to the clandestine acquisition of information, that maybe tomorrow, or very soon, they will

write to the Guyana Association of Professional Engineers and say that they have clearance to visit the dam and do all the analysis they want so that they can report to the nation of what is the true state of the dam if you do not want clandestine operations.

The situation that resulted from the clandestine operation is an indication of the lack of integrity of the dam. I wish to ask any Member from the opposite side if this is an act of God. All these things that people have been reporting happening on the dam, is this an act of God? The two million tonnes per day that are passing through this dam and flooding the villages, is this an act of God? Now, it is not, and so we have to look at the situation and we must understand that what we have confronting us is mere negligence.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: I rise to ask that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

Mr James K McAllister: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Specific reference to preparing the conservancies to avert flooding - I wish to turn to the Mott McDonald Report of June 2004 - some six months before the flood. Before I go to the Report, I wish to divert a little with your permission.

The Speaker: You have my permission. *[Laughter]*

Mr James K McAllister: Mr Speaker, as Chairman of the Economic Services Committee, I wrote to the Minister of Agriculture requesting a copy of the Mott McDonald Report because, in the course of its work, the Economic Services Committee had asked the Minister of Agriculture for a copy of the Drainage and Irrigation master-plan, which he supplied. The Committee wanted to have experts look at the master-

plan so that the Committee could inform the Parliament of the situation. However, having received the master-plan, the Committee was informed that that document was dated, and we were told that there existed a document that was called the Mott McDonald Report which was prepared by consultants, Mott McDonald. On 9 August 2004, I wrote to remind the Minister that we had asked for this report and we were subsequently informed that the study was in the preliminary stages. In August we were informed that the study was in the preliminary stages. I now have the report, Mr Speaker, Guyana Drainage and Irrigation Systems Rehabilitation Project, and I was surprised to look at this report dated June 2004, and I would want to know why the Minister of Agriculture would neglect, or omit to act, on a request from the Economic Services Committee to have a report when the report was already completed. Is it because it was already known that there was no intention to act on the recommendations? Is it because it was felt that it was not the business of Parliament, and therefore the Economic Services Committee had no right to this report? Why is it we were told that the study was in the preliminary stages in August when the final report was submitted in June of 2004? This is something we might have to clarify, and this is something I hope that the ... I do not see the Honourable Member Pauline Sukhai here, which I hope the Economic Services Committee will be following up on to find out why is it we never got this document.

This report is very comprehensive, and one of the areas addressed is designing flood evaluation, and page 80 says: Mr Speaker, that:

A range of floods has been synthesized for both conservancies ...

They are speaking here of the East Demerara Water Conservancy and the Boerasirie Conservancy. One, two, four and seven day rainfall events for the return periods of 100, 200, 500 and 1000 years have been used to create tables of peak water levels and outflow rates. So when we hear in this Honourable House that the rainfall we had, we never had it in 100 years, engineers design for 100 years return periods, 200 years return periods, and so on and, so it is not sufficient to tell us

that it never happened in 100 years because, dependent on the severity of the consequences that would follow, engineers would decide that they can go even on to a 1000 year return period. So this is something that was done here, and if we go on,

... it is unknown if any policy exists for the standard of flood protection to be provided by the conservancies. It would certainly be expected that flood relief facilities should be capable of dealing with up to a 1000 year flood and perhaps even a 10,000 year flood ...

I want you to listen to this, Honourable Member Ramsaran,

... the latter has not been stimulated as results indicate that the conservancies at present do have difficulties dealing with more frequent events.

That was [Inaudible] even unable to deal with the 100 year return period, and so it makes sense for them to try to do any simulation of a 10,000 year return period. That is what the report stated.

The report went on to recommend a number of things, and firstly, for the Boerasirie conservancy, and here again I wish to read from the report:

It is clear that measures must be taken, as a matter of some urgency, to improve free board in the Boerasirie conservancy. Overtopping of embankments does occur at present, and conservancy staff are aware of the problem. It is ... [Inaudible] ... of embankment raising an increased flood relief capacity is required perhaps through the introduction of an additional gauge structure lined to the 8,000 feet weir.

and they go to speak of some technical matters here, Mr Speaker. They then said that,

... detailed investigations are required to determine the following:

1. The influence of downstream, hydraulic conditions on the performance of the existing sluice, the appropriate design standards for flood relief facilities, the appropriate combination of increased discharge capacities and embankment heights required to meet the determined design standard

That is for Boerasirie, Mr Speaker, and for the East Demerara water conservancy, and I quote from the report here,

It is recommended that further investigations be carried out and that includes determining the hydraulic characteristic of the flood relief channels downstream of the conservancy, such as discharge characteristics can be defined with much confidence. It is also appropriate to investigate flood conditions downstream of Maduni sluice. There are reports that operation of the sluice exacerbate flooding downstream and, because of this, there is a reluctance to use the sluice...

Since 2004, and they go on to speak of a number of other things, these things were not done, because, even as we were trying to respond to the present situation, they were blowing water through Land of Canaan. The water was flowing there at 2.5 feet above the weir, and full capacity, if the channel was well maintained and so on, would have been four feet. Therefore, Mr Speaker, this brings us clearly to a situation where the system was not properly maintained, and we must ask ourselves the difference between the design four feet at Land of Canaan and [*Inaudible*] how much water did that result on the East Coast. Was that difference one foot of water? Was that difference one week more before water came into somebody's house? Is that difference that 50,000 more people were flooded as a result? These are things that we need to understand.

I know that the Members from the Government side will get up and they will attempt to debunk everything that I have said, and they will try to discard it as if it means nothing, but it does not take us to the core of the problem. It does not give this Nation an understanding of what really

and truly transpired and so, therefore, one would have expected that, after the worst disaster to have affected Guyanese in our history, that we would have at least come to this Parliament with a motion seeking some process to allow us to understand what happened. We should have been allowed to deliberate on something and, Mr Speaker, there are certain amendments to be moved, and I hope that the other Members from the opposite side would find favour with these amendments. It is necessary for us to understand what happened so that, we could prevent it from happening again.

From the Mott McDonald Report we can see that rainfall, which seems to be the 100 year return period, should be, in ideal situations, adequately handled. However, the Government failed to act on technical recommendations since 1989 ... *[Interruption: 'Since 1989?']* *[Laughter]* ... since 1999, sorry. I noticed that the Honourable Mr Neendkumar would have to wait on slips to score points, and I think that is your forte. You stay there. This situation, because of the failure to act since 1999, this is what allowed the record rainfall as it was told, to devastate us in the way in which it did. If we have done what we were supposed to do, this situation would not have been as bad as it turned out.

Mr Speaker, I wish to turn to the Mission Report of the UNDAC Mission to Guyana 2005 ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Before you go there, Honourable Member, you need some extra time.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I move that the Member be given fifteen more minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr James K McAllister: Now, Mr Speaker, before I go to the report, I wish to address something said by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture when he was quoting from the report. He was challenged by

the Honourable Member, Mr Kadir, and he said he was not reading from the final report. He was reading from the preliminary report. Well, I have the final report here, and in fact he was reading from the final report because I can go exactly to the page, page 211, word for word of what he said. So therefore, having looked at the other one ... anyway, I would not press the Honourable Member on this, Mr Speaker. I just want to ensure that he is careful in future because he must not assume that Members on this side of the House do not have certain documents.
[Applause]

If I am to very quickly look at the findings of the Geotechnical and Hydraulic Assessment, firstly, it has said that,

... the dam is a fragile construction ...

Which I think by now all non-technical people have been educated of that,

... built on peat and clay soil layers constructed out of the same material.

Very weak indeed, but what is of more significance, and this is the point I was making earlier - about failing to act on recommendations because this team comes now and here is what they have to say,

The eastern section of the northern dam, about 30 per- cent of the dam is in critical condition ...

This is the same section that the Harold Davis (Jr) Report had recommended should be rebuilt. It was not done, and maybe it is because of this critical section that should not have been that we had to pump water into the Mahaica Creek and flood all those farmers. So what are we going to tell all those farmers? That it is to save lives and that it is an act of God? When if we had done what was supposed to be done we would not have been in this situation? This is what we have to look at.

If we are to look at some of the findings, they speak to maintenance

of the conservancy, using floating equipment. They speak to strengthening sections of the conservancy dam, and they talk about increasing, or improving, the drainage functions of the outfall structures. They talk about increased social capacity and water flow in the conservancy by dredging the channels in the conservancy and, if you go back to the Harold Davis (Jr) Report, we are going to see those same recommendations. So while we are grateful for these foreign experts to come in at a critical time to look at the dam and make some reports and recommendations, I think we, in this Honourable House, must note that Guyanese engineers made the same recommendations years ago and nothing was done about it. So this points to serious neglect.

Early on, when the Honourable Member Dr Dalglish Joseph was on the floor, there was a lot of talk about evacuation and there was talk that the talk of evacuation was not well grounded. I wish to go again to the UNDAC Report, as we would know - the Dutch engineers report. They prepared a disaster management plan for the conservancy, and it is noted here that they say that, when the elevation in the conservancy is 58.75GD, we should prepare organisation for evacuation. They go on to say between 58.75 and 59GD we should prepare inhabitants for evacuation. When we go to page 211 of the report ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, please be quiet.

Mr James K McAllister: Some things are difficult to swallow, Mr Speaker. When we go to page 211 of the report, there is a graph here showing the water level in the conservancy between the period ... I think it appears to be 5 January into February. We can see here that the water level in the conservancy went beyond 58.75 approaching 59GD, the same level that the Dutch engineers said that, once it was reached, we should have moved all the people off of the East Coast and from Georgetown. Yet during this disaster period, at no time did the Government ever inform the people that they have to move, or that they should prepare to move. Instead we were like sitting ducks waiting to die. How could we have this happening? Because the Lord smiled upon us and the worse did not happen, someone is to come here with a very

smug face and tell us that evacuation was not necessary, and that people did not have to be prepared for that. We cannot have that happening, and this was not Guyanese engineers. It is very bad and then for us to come here with a motion, Mr Speaker, to say that we should not have an inquiry to find out what really transpired. We are failing the people of this country. How could we ask those people to continue living on the East Coast. How could we ask the people to continue living in Georgetown and then, at a minimum, tell them that we have investigated this problem and that we understand it, and that we have a plan, your lives are safe; or we are just going to tell them, *well, look when the water comes and you are under two feet of water, we are going to come in boats and give you food so we will ensure that you will not die with a hungry stomach.* [Laughter]

This is totally unacceptable, and we will not accept it. There are a number of other recommendations, Mr Speaker, I would not go through them, but if I go to them we would see that many of these things were recommended before. This document is a very, very important document, because it forms the basis for even more detailed work to be done by local engineers. It has a number of recommendations which we cannot fail to act upon and therefore, I wonder how confident we can be, given the fact that three reports were not acted upon, to put this one here in the same place, and maybe the right place, for this report to rest in this Parliament - for some Parliamentary Committee to monitor the implementation of the recommendations contained herein [Applause] not for us to wait when nothing is done and when disaster strikes the Government comes to tell us how they were able to organise to give food, and how they are organised to carry out Doxycycline, and how they are organised to do this, and so on. We do not want to hear that ... [Interruption: 'What do you want?'] We want to hear that the thing did not happen at all. We want to hear that everything that was required to be done was done. That is what we want to hear. So when you come out to us, you must tell us that everything that was required to be done was done. That is what you can boast about, not about coming and sharing food in a partisan way and constricting the whole apparatus to political

persons.

This is something that we cannot accept. I mentioned before the issue of GAPE, and GAPE visited the dam already. I mentioned already also the Engineer Registration Bill and the need for us to proceed with it quickly to ensure that our people are no longer in danger.

You know, when you go into the engineering class, one of the first things the lecturer will tell you is that a doctor may kill one person but the engineer can kill thousands and therefore, it is important that we have some standards for the engineering profession to ensure that people are confident that things are safe.

Mr Speaker, based on my responsibility, I should now be turning to Region 3 [*Laughter*] I was there as the Regional MP for Region 3. I can tell you that, across the Region, as this situation unfolded, there was widespread fear as people were getting reports of the situation on the East Coast and the rains kept falling and so on. Everywhere you went there was naked fear, because people had no idea where the situation was going. Therefore, I thought it was necessary for all political persons to come together to work, to manage the situation because, in fact, we were preparing for the worst. Even though I was not invited, I attached myself to the taskforce. I wish to repeat, even though I was not invited, I attached myself to a taskforce because I thought it was necessary, not only to ensure that I was there to represent my constituency but also to ensure that I was there to lend a hand, and to be there to give the impression that there was one cohesive effort, and that we were all working together. Because there was a lot of talk from the Honourable Member, Minister Teixeira, who spoke about internal tsunamis and the things that could confront us and so on. So it was a real serious situation.

We worked there for some time to ensure that relief was delivered to people, and you know, in the early days ... and the record will show, and I said this on national television, there was a misunderstanding, because of a lack of communication about what is happening, as the people of Bagotsville and Stanleytown saw stuff heading past them, heading

into Canal No.2, they, because of the record of the Government, said immediately that this was discrimination. I said on national television, and you could go to the ACB and check it out. It is just a lack of communication, because it was clear at the time that the situation was graver in Canal No.2 and so it was therefore necessary for it to be given some focus. I said that on national television. It was therefore necessary for people to understand, and for them to await communication. That is what we said because we are prepared to work in the taskforce and to be part of it. I wish to say that, after attaching myself to the taskforce, I was never invited to go back, and everytime I turned up to a meeting it was because of the intelligence network I set up in the RDC office, so that whenever they were going to meet, I barged in. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us hear the intelligence story in the next fifteen minutes, Honourable Member. Yes, Honourable Member?

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr James K McAllister: It is only because of the intelligence system that I put in place, was I able to barge into the meetings, and many times when I marched in there, there was total shock on the faces of the people there. *[Noisy Interruption: 'It is not true']* ... Mr Speaker, I hope it is noted that the Honourable Member Teixeira has taken one minute of my time. I will claim it back from you.

Now, the situation went from one where there was free entry into the room, to one where a staff member was put at the door, to one where, when you reached there, you found the door locked. You had to knock and you had to stand up for five minutes, and then the door was opened. They had a situation where one member of the taskforce, John Adams, reported to me that when he was attempting to enter the room, hearing the taskforce was meeting continuously at the operations centre, he was told to *wait outside, you cannot come in as yet*. So I wanted

to know what was happening at the level of the taskforce, and there was also the case where I sat with the taskforce, of course I must clarify this. I had a very good and amicable relationship with the Honourable Minister Teixeira, personally, even though, on one occasion, well, I would not say what she did to me on one occasion, *[Interruption: 'What?']* but the fact of the matter is that I had an amicable relationship with the Honourable Minister. The fact also is that many times when I sat there in that meeting I would look around and suddenly recognise that all the senior functionaries of the region were out of the room, when this meeting was supposed to be going on and people in different backrooms were seen talking in twos and threes, and I wondered to myself what kind of taskforce is this, where the decisions were being made outside on certain issues, and certain other issues are brought to the table? And the Minister can confirm that there, and publicly, I said to her that all the resources coming to the Region were not being placed on the table. I said it to her there and she denied it, but how could I know? Because, on one occasion when I requested a global picture, I said I wanted to see everything in relation to food distribution. I was told it was being prepared and that it would be ready by 12:00h, but when I went there at 19:00h or 20:00h and asked the Honourable Minister about the document, she turned to another comrade and gave me the impression that it was finished, and she turned to another comrade and asked where the document was, and he said that it is not finished, but then he proceeded to give me the information on Goed Intent, Stanleytown, Bagottsville, Den Amstel, do you understand? The situation was that the whole perception ... I am not there as a Regional MP representing all the people of the Region. We are not there as one cohesive taskforce, all of us were looking across the board at what was happening. The impression that I was being given was that they were only concerned with things for those villages. Therefore as much as the Honourable Minister would wish to say how equitable the system was, I must say, here and now, that I regret that I cannot concur, because I do not know. There was no access to across-the-board information. The wider taskforce did not have an indication of the resources available. We did not have an indication of how it was being distributed, and I therefore cannot comment

on equity. I have heard a number of rumors about half bag of rice being shared at certain places, but I knew in other places butter bowls of rice were being shared. I know about that. I have heard about that but, unfortunately, I cannot confirm anything.

The medical team working in the Region, I would say from day one, worked well, although on day one, they did report that there was a total shortage of medical supplies. I would hope that that situation was eventually corrected and this was the medical team before the arrival of the Cuban squad. I want to point out to you that, in the height of the Leptospirosis outbreak, I got numerous reports that people were being turned away at the West Demerara Hospital on Saturdays and Sundays, and people were being told come back on Monday. If the Honourable Ramsaran wants to investigate, he will find out that it was the Cuban doctors who were turning people away, and maybe this was because there was no proper briefing of what was supposed to be done. I am not blaming the Cuban doctors. I am blaming the people who are responsible because people were turned away. I have that confirmed.

In relation to food, Mr Speaker, I did mention that there did not appear to be equity, and there was a clear effort on the part of the whole operation to try to ensure that this appeared to be a PPP thing. So even then when you go in to give reports, you find that the whole system was so arranged that then they would try to go around and *[Inaudible]* ... the Honourable Member Minister Teixeira at another forum contending that the people preferred to deal with her, not with McAllister. Obviously, if you have the Government, and if you have the food, and you have all the resources, and you prepare to operate in a partisan manner, people are in dire straits and they are going to go where they believe the food is. Maybe I should tell that, you on every occasion when they went to you and they felt that they were not dealt with in an even handed way, they came to me. I wish to tell you that. We also had the issue, and I wish I had time to expand on this policy of non-emphasis on crops and animals. But I wonder how we have no emphasis on crops and animals, and yet the Minister of Agriculture was seen on television walking through water with grass for animals. Animals died in Region 3 because there

was no emphasis on crops and animals. In other places we were hearing about the rice farmers and the cattle rearers and so on, but in Region 3, official policy, no emphasis on crops and livestock except one man. One farmer was deliberately flooded by the blocking of a dam. It is not that the drainage system was not functioning properly, but people went there and blocked the dam so that water would not drain off of his land. As the water was coming in from the conservancy it just piled up on him - 2 to 3 feet of water. I now wish to move quickly on emergency drainage works, because we started quite nicely, but suddenly there arrived the Minister of Home Affairs on leave. So at some point in time, after a certain date, the taskforce itself was not in charge of the drainage operation, and I saw this Honourable gentleman in the field and I said to him - *where are you? What are you doing here?* And he said to me that he was not there in official capacity, but that he was making his own personal contribution, but yet still he had commandeered all the Government equipment and was there at every site, everywhere sharing money in the villages and doing all sorts of things. The taskforce was no longer responsible for the infrastructure works that was necessary, so therefore, where I was supposed to be sitting, where I was supposed to be representing, where the PNC/R was supposed to be, the decisions were not being made about drainage and about digging canals and so on. It was out in the field under some tree with rum drinking and so on. That is where it was being done. I know that for a fact.

Mr Speaker, I would have liked time to go to the Stanleytown koker and the confusion that took place there, and the incompetence that resulted in flooding of the village of Stanleytown, even after we have gotten over the flood situation. If you look, Mr Speaker, even while we suffered from the flood waters, as I speak to you right now, we do have situations where there is overtopping at La Retraite, I understand the Minister of Home Affairs on leave was there. Den Amstel situation occurred, which is being addressed as we speak, but right now - at Ladestein, Orangestein, Parika, Hyde Park, Salem there could be situations at any time where water can flow into homes, and I would hope that we would have some kind of speedy response. I hope that the

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Government understands that Guyanese people cannot take water into their homes in the foreseeable future. Please act on this situation.

Mr Speaker, the RDC has not met ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, if you are going to go into a new topic ... *[Interruption]*

Mr James K McAllister: No.

The Speaker: I think this is the time that you should get some more time. I also think this is the time that we should adjourn for tomorrow.

Mr James K McAllister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, can you ...

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: I move, Mr Speaker that the National Assembly stands adjourned to Thursday, 17 February at 14:00h.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the National Assembly is adjourned to Thursday, 17 February.

Adjourned accordingly at 21:45H