

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 CONVENTION CENTER
OCEAN VIEW INTERNATIONAL HOTEL LILIENDAAL** Part I

51ST SITTING

2.00 PM

Wednesday 2 March 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.	<i>-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications</i>
The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P.	<i>-Minister of Parliamentary Affairs</i>
The Hon. Clement J. Rohce, M.P.	<i>-Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation</i>
The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Local Government and Regional Development</i>
The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport</i>
The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Education</i>
The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Finance</i>
The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Housing and Water</i>
The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Home Affairs; Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara (AOL)</i>
The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P.	<i>-Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security</i>
The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.	<i>- Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development</i>
The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P.	<i>- Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock (Region No. 5-Mahaica/Berbice)</i>

*The Hon.S.Rudolph Insanally, O.R, C.C.H, M.P.	-Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs
*The Hon. Doodnauth Singh, S.C., M.P.	- Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Absent)
The Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.	- Minister of the Public Service
The Hon. C. Anthony Xavier, M.P.	- Minister of Transport and Hydraulics
The Hon. Bibi S. Shadick, M.P.	- Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara)
**The Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.	- Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce
The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P.	- Minister of Amerindian Affairs
The Hon. Dr Leslie S. Ramsammy, M.P.	- Minister of Health
Mr S. Feroze Mohamed, M.P.	- Chief Whip
Mr Cyril C. Belgrave, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P.	
Mr Husman Alli, M.P.	- (Region No. 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Mr. Komal Chand, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	
Mrs Indranie Chandarpal, M.P.	
Mr Bernard C. DeSantos, S.C., M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mrs Shirley V. Edwards, J.P. M.P.	
Mr Odinga N. Lumumba, M.P.	
Mr Heeralall Mohan, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)
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

** Electal 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/Supermain)
Mrs. Deborah J. Backer, M.P.	
Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P.	
Mr. C. Stanley Ming, M.P.	- (Absent)
Mr. Vincent L. Alexander, M.P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Raphael G C. Trotman, M.P.	
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.	
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)
Mrs. Rajcoomarie 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 Takumi/Upper Essequibo)

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

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P. (Absent)

OFFICERS

Ms Lilawtie Coonjah, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

Mr Maurice B. Henry, Head Committees Division

Wednesday, 2 March 2005

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

(i) Leave

Honourable Members, leave has been granted to the Hon Member Mr Gajraj up to 31st March 2005, and Mr Murray for today and tomorrow.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET 2005

Assembly resumed the debate on the Motion for the approval of the Estimates of the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 2005.

The Speaker: The first speaker today is the Honourable Member, Mr Deryck Bernard. You may proceed, Honourable Member

Mr Deryck MA Bernard: Mr Speaker, outside of the House, my profession causes me to be in constant contact with young people, and they often freely express to me their views on the political process, on Government, and on the future of the country.

However, it is very interesting that, although some of these young people confessed to have voted in the last elections, this, nevertheless, does not affect their cynicism and, indeed, contempt for a way the country conducts its business, and I believe that history will have a very harsh judgement on those young people who succeed us; will have very harsh

judgement on some of us who have been at the helm of affairs, because those who analyse our actions in 2005 will find it very difficult to find a rational explanation of some of the things that we do.

I find it very difficult to justify to young people who have studied economics, studied the Constitution, and studied administration why it is that we think it is a good thing for good administration, good governance, and for democracy to debate a Budget, which the Government knows is now a work of fiction, and the country knows is a work of fiction, because it relates to numbers that have no relevance. I find it very difficult to accept the rationalisation that it will take six months to have a Budget, or a supplementary budget, or a new budget, that could take account of the things that we have before us.

Apart from everything else, Mr Speaker, the budgeting and planning technology is available, even to our Ministry of Finance, and the technicians there have long since improved since the days when Budgets were prepared and forecasts were done manually. The wastefulness, therefore, of this process is something of which historians of our time will find very difficult to understand. They will also find some of the presuppositions of the Budget, as far as some of our difficulties are concerned, very peculiar.

If I might refer to pages 2 and 3, paragraphs 1.6 and 1.7, where the Minister points out that the details of *acute disaster response is about to give way to one of impact assessment, recovery, and reconstruction and revitalisation*, and where, in paragraph 1.7, he makes the point, which I already referred to, that we need the benefit of external assessments before we can come to this House with a Budget.

You will note, Mr Speaker, that in none of these statements is there any room for a proper inquiry and public, open, and professional assessment to be conducted within the context of Guyana. I confess that I am not very excited about what ECLAC has to say about Guyana and its flood. I am excited to find out what professionals in the field of drainage, and irrigation, engineering, social welfare, economic development,

and community development have to say about the impact of the flood. I understand, and if I am incorrect I will accept correction from Government speakers who come after me, that the Government has announced that it does not believe that it is a necessary or sensible policy to have a public inquiry into the flood disaster. If this is true, then I must register my consternation. It should be obvious that, as a matter of urgency, there should be a public inquiry, if only because there are conflicting technical interpretations, even by the same technicians in the same department, as to the causes and the consequences of this disaster, if only because some of the information that is necessary to understand what has happened and what needs to be done is not yet clearly in the public domain.

It is a coincidence that, just before a flood, I was studying the 1934 flood for professional reasons, and the reports in the Legislature, which were tabled, are very interesting, and one of the comments that my students tell me that it appears that we have not learnt anything from 1934 and, if we persist with this assumption that we do not need a through public inquiry, we seem to be preparing to make that mistake sometime in the future. Therefore I want to register a call from our side of the House, that a public inquiry into the floods on the East Coast of 2005 should occur. It should occur quickly, and it should have broad enough terms of reference to allow a public and complete analysis of these problems. It is in my judgment and a belief of the judgement on our side of House, bad governance and it is irresponsible to believe that we can just move straight from the stage of acute assessment to sitting down waiting for an assessment from an international organisation.

Mr Speaker, in this Debate, we have sometimes tended to stray from the reality of our circumstances. I would like to spend a few minutes before I get into the second part of my presentation, reminding us of what Guyana is, where it is in international context of development. For example, we need to remember that, in its ranking of countries according to development status, Guyana ranks 104. That is the lowest in CARICOM, apart from Haiti, the lowest in Latin America, apart from Bolivia, Honduras and Guatemala, even El Salvador, with all its prob-

lems, civil war, and problems of a very complex nature ranks above us.

Our GDP per capita rank, depending on whose calculation we use, is either 94 or 95. It is admitted that our US dollar per capita is in the vicinity of 900, in some calculations less than 900, and in some a little more than 900. Again, in CARICOM we are the lowest, apart from Haiti. Everybody else - St Kitts, Suriname, are above us.

Essentially, we are the bottom of the Western Hemisphere, and we can only compare ourselves favourably with some of the former eastern republics in Siberia, and some of the worst sub-Saharan basket cases. Now it is not my intention to dwell on this from the point of view of blame, or from the point of view of challenging the situation. I am making this point to say that this is in the context in which, over the last few years, we have had Budget presentations; this is the context in which we have had policies adumbrated and explained in this House, and we must therefore accept the fact that we are dealing with a situation in which our country is in a bad way, and whatever gloss you might put on the situation, the people of this country look for better and therefore, as we know, they vote with their feet. Our average migration rate over the last ten years has varied between 10,000 per year to 30,000 per year of legal, known, and accounted for migrations, so therefore we should treat our Budget debate about what are the directions and the policies that are necessary to get Guyana to climb up, or at least to be able to compete and to deal with the levels of development and the levels of welfare of our CARICOM neighbours, if not other parts of the world. Then we must accept that we live in a world in which the opportunities and the possibilities for third-world countries to make turn around are the best than they have been for a long time.

Ideologically, I would not be content with some of the constraints and problems of the global environment, of the world trade environment, of some of the limitations and problems, but the fact is that countries with sensible policies . . . I was going to use the words *clever policies*, but I will save that for a quotation later on. Countries with sensible policies are able to make use of the opportunities of trade and invest-

ments that exists and therefore, despite all the problems and issues of trade and development and inequitable trade, the fact is that a large number of countries all over the world, including underdeveloped countries - some of the very underdeveloped countries have been able to make progress.

When we look at the global environment, we must take into consideration the figures which tell us that, for 2004 and 2005, for all developing countries, the growth rates are between 6.1 and 5.4 percent. In fact, the projection for 2006, which was 5.1, has now been revised upwards. Of course, the East Asia Pacific Countries - their growth rates are in the order of 7 to 8 percent. Europe and Central Asia - the countries that are coming out of the iron curtain, their growth rates are in the order of 6.5 to 7 percent, even Latin America and the Caribbean, which is the slowest region, in terms of growth - the growth rates are between 3.7 and 4.7 percent for all but very few countries.

Interestingly enough, sub-Saharan Africa, which includes most of the world basket cases - civil wars, destroyed countries, countries like us that are still tied up with export of primary products, with no semblance of democracy of any kind - not even a pretence, the average growth rate for those countries in 2004 was 3.2 percent; in 2005 it is expected to be 3.6 percent, and the projection at the World Bank at this time, it could be revised to 3.7 percent, and figures for developing countries, minus India and China, which are obviously special cases, in 2004, 5.4 percent, and in 2005, 4.6 percent, and for 2006, 4.3 percent. Now these are the official figures available to all of us.

Mr Speaker, what is Guyana's performance over that period?

- 2000 -1.4 percent;
- 2001, our best year - 2.3 percent;
- 2002 - 1.1 percent;
- 2003 - -0.6 percent; and

- 2004, the year of the great recovery - 1.6 percent.

The average growth rate for the current PPP/C administration; the average performance of Guyana during this period of time, is 0.52 percent - half a percent.

What a wonderful record at the time, I repeat,

- when the opportunities for development;
- when the opportunities for direct investment;
- when the opportunities for joint ventures;
- when the opportunities for technology sharing;
- when, in fact, the nature of that development is in areas of economic activity in which Guyana could very easily acquire competitive advantage.

Mr Speaker, I will resist the temptation to get into a partisan analysis of this, because I believe that that is not going to be helpful, and I will try to be constructive. My only sensible interpretation of what these figures have told us is that, for the last five years, in fact we could go longer, but let take the last five years, Guyana's development policy has been completely mistaken.

Insofar as we do have a policy, because every time you raise the issue of a development strategy policy, which would enable us to take advantage of international circumstances, you are told one of three things;

Firstly, that we do not need a policy, sometimes we are told that we have a poverty programme and that is our policy, sometimes we are told that a mix of the poverty programme and the NDS is the policy, but the truth is we either have a bad policy or no policy at all. There are some harsh realities of life in the third world in 2005.

Firstly, there is no evidence that any single country in the world, in

Latin America, Africa, anywhere - Asia, has been able to transform its economy to sustain development on the basis of dependence on official aid. That is a fact. Look at the countries that are making the turnaround - the countries that are doing well. Not one of them has done that on the dependence of official aid. I do not believe that I am being partisan or overly critical when I say that the development policy of this country, at the moment, is inextricably tied to the link between overseas investments through official sources.

Secondly, there is no single country over the last five years, or the last ten years, for that matter, which has relied on the combination of plantation tropical agriculture and development aid that has made a successful turnaround. Every single country that has made a turnaround has done so by some mix which involves a heavy reliance on private investment in large quantities and on developing new areas. In fact, there is a direct correlation, which is well-demonstrated in the literature, both in development and economics, that those countries which are linked to exporting coffee, sugar, rice, bauxite and raw iron ore are the countries that are continually locked into a dependence.

It is interesting, Mr Speaker, that, during this Debate, I heard many vituperations against the old colonial masters and their rigging of our political process, but the truth is that that process is still in action for those countries that have tied themselves to the aid apron strings. It is my view, and I believe that most of us who think correctly think that the modern plantation economy is not necessarily always a plantation, but the nature of the relationships remains the same, and the interesting thing ... and this, for me, something that historians, after I am gone, will try to explain how politicians, who spend most time, and the most noise, talking about their anti-colonial positions and their leftist positions, so comfortably, find themselves in bed, as tied to the strings of the official aid of their former colonial masters. This is something that I confess I do not understand.

For example, the analysis of UNCTAD tells us that -

- countries involved in traditional manufacturing have slower growth, but they have growth; countries involved in new forms of manufacturing have excellent growth rates;
- countries involved in heavy ICT and knowledge economy have high rates of growth; countries having heavy dependence on tourism and service economies ... and those are the more vulnerable and volatile of the industries you can think of those countries with the off-shore banking and the tourism, and similar related service industries, are all having high rates of growth; and
- countries locked into the plantation and into primary product export are stagnating, and even some of the largest exporters of minerals, even some of the countries that export petroleum and petroleum products, if they do not have downstream manufacturing and knowledge industries connected to their oil resources, are also lagging.

Perhaps it is not appropriate to call on ... but take a look at Nigeria. Nigeria is the greater source of oil to some countries that produce good quality oil in large quantities but, because there has not been the filtering down of that resource we into appropriate downstream industries, Nigeria is still poor. What does that have to do with Guyana?

Guyana had a choice to make, and we have consistently made the wrong choice. Whether we had a choice to make between going the routes that give us the opportunity to give us a chance to diversify, we have consistently and fearfully return to back to what we know - the plantation and the minerals.

Mr Speaker, I have gone through the Budget Presentations, particularly those of the current Minister, to see how we made that choice, and it is a very interesting linguistic trick. Every year there is a line or two, never more than that, never more than about twenty words, which pays lip service to go into the direction of the new economy but, at the

end of the day, it returns to old plantation - the old mining forms, and the old, outmoded lagging, poverty-producing order so that, for example, in 2002 my good friend said, on page 22 of the 2002 budget;

The Government's policy agenda to stimulate growth and to generate jobs will concentrate on programmes that generate quick supply and labour responses,

good,

and support increase in private sector investments

and even better, how can I complain?

In this connection the Government will maintain a stable macro-economic framework, adopt sector policies to stimulate production, and restructure and modernise traditional sectors, target growth areas, and provide systematic support to the private sector.

He said that in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005. If we were to give him a chance he would say that again in 2006.

Go-Invest, as we reorganise and we identified as the one-stop agency.

He said that in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005.

In technology we tend to aggressively target this sector.

It dropped off in 2003.

In 2004, it came back as ITT.

In 2005, I believe there is a line of ITT somewhere hidden, but the formula is that of stable macro-economic environment, modernising traditional growth sectors, and promoting new growth areas.

Mr Speaker, the fact is that trio, which appear in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and is in 2005, will not work, and I am not saying that only because - I am your political opponent, Mr Minister. I say that because I live here. I would like to see Guyana growing into this new economy with all the ITT sectors and the modern sectors and a serious tourism industry, not the comedy that we have at the moment. But, Mr Speaker, even if I am in opposition all my life, and I would never stay in politics if I could live in a country that is growing and be content. But as long as I have to face a government that contentedly said that every year, without failing ... in fact sometimes there is not even a change in the wording, stable-macro sector environment, adopt sector policies to stimulate production, and restructure and modernise traditional sectors, I have to be worried, because I say it without fear and contradiction:

1. it will not work.
2. it has not worked anywhere,
3. it is outmoded; and
4. if we continue to stick in that narrow path, that narrow understanding on what a development policy is, we are going to find that we will continue to stay at the bottom of the development league.

In 2004, the Minister said in his Budget, *the PRSP sets out a matrix of policies, strategies of programme*. Well, I went to see what matrix of strategies of programme was there, there is nothing in the development strategy containing in the PRSP, and it is very inconsistent with the National Development Strategy. These are aimed at addressing the structural and other bottlenecks, which have acted as binding constraints on increased growth, investments, and incomes. The implementation of these reforms will result in an economy that is more resilient and capable of competing in the regional and global economies. That, Mr Speaker, is really a reformulation of the same outmoded formula.

As Mr Rohee mentioned in 2004, our services - tourism, non-traditional

agriculture, petroleum exploration, et cetera, but I came to this House as an optimist and, as the budget was being read. I heard something which filled me with hope, warmed the cockles of my heart as I heard the Minister say, on page 22:

We will need to re-orient our thinking strategies and tactics and review our social policies - consolidating, strengthening and updating them and, where necessary, developing and implementing new ones.

I resisted the temptation to say that we should have done that ten years ago, thirteen years ago. I could have said that, but I said to myself *no, no let us be optimistic, at last new thinking will come over in a budget of this Government*, so I listened with bated breath, and then my heart fell as the same old worn out formula came again, our strategic interventions in 2005 will centre on the maintaining of macro-economic stability, expanding the economy to enhance the performance of traditional industries diversification, and development of new activities. I confess, Mr Speaker my heart fell, because I knew that I had nothing to tell my young people. More of the same, and I say it dogmatically, that that approach to development, if it was ever relevant, is outmoded and will not work. I understand completely why he used that formula, because it is one that provided comfort and happiness to people in Washington. That is what they want to hear you say but, believe me, there would be no need for development banks if all countries developed, so therefore it is not in their interest to devise the right approaches. We can open our eyes and see what is happening, even in our own region - countries which take away our teachers and our doctors because they have better standards of living, because their economic policies are more flexible, their economic policies are more imaginative

I want to digress for a minute to make this important point - we are grateful for the external aid that we get from our friendly countries, but the fact is that we live in a world in which ... and the Minister knows this better than I do ... overseas development aid is small as a proportion of international investment and dropping. The last estimate I saw was be-

tween 45 and 50 billion and dropping, whereas direct foreign investment was 400 billion and rising rapidly, and direct foreign investment is now 20 percent of Global GDP. The harsh reality, therefore, is if a country wants to get in on the business of real and serious development, it will do what other countries in the CARICOM region and Latin America have been doing - get serious in attracting foreign investment in massive doses, not in the piece-meal, project by project, selective thing that we are trying to do here. Because direct foreign investment is 20 percent of Global GDP. I saw on the net an article called Billstone, or Milestone, I am told, in the local papers, which talks about what aid does to you. It says that red tape, inefficiencies, and nepotism means that only one-fifth of aid actually gets to the people who need it; 40 percent of aid is spent buying overpriced goods and services from donors, and paying consultants from the donors. Donors spent 70 percent of the aid roundtrip, and that means getting back most of the aid they give to you back to themselves. International donors impose impossible conditions, tying up recipient nations in a bureaucratic quagmire. In fact, in Guyana there is of course also a political quagmire. You could always tell when Guyana has to sign a new aid document - the Government become very conciliatory, shared governance becomes the order of the day until it is signed, and then it comes back to normal and they use it for political leverage.

Mr Speaker, I want to suggest, therefore, that the Government, if it is capable of doing that, opens its mind to the reality in the world outside. The people of Guyana know that reality and that is why they are leaving. That is why, in very many departments, every single senior officer has an application to work somewhere else. It is interesting that I was talking to a Minister of Education from another country and he showed me the file of applicants from the Ministry of Education for jobs, I do not think that there is any person at any level of the Ministry of Education whose file is not over there. The problem I want to mention is that choice... The point I want to make, Mr Speaker, is that we must accept the harsh reality of the world in which we live. We have a choice to make, and that choice, as far as I am concerned, is an obvious one, and I cannot understand, or I pretend not to understand, why it is that we have been consistently making the wrong choices.

The relationship between all of that and our education policy ... and again, if you look at our Budgets:

- In 2002, the Government vote for education is to reduce illiteracy rates, obtain university and primary education, increase enrolment, and improve the quality and relevance of education for all, especially children.
- In 2003, we will commence doing this - improving curriculum, technology, teacher improvement, teacher training, teacher support, and so on.
- In 2004, priorities by the budgetary reforms, teacher training, recruitment of auxiliary personnel, reducing overcrowding, et cetera.

The point I want to make, Mr Speaker, is that here we are playing with the nuts and bolts of education and not recognising that education is not just a social good to which people have a moral right. It is also an important sector, which is directly linked to development. There is a very instructive graph which the World Bank likes to give you when you get into argument with them. They would point out to you that, in 1960, South Korea and Ghana had exactly the same GDP per capita but, because of the nature of Korea's investment in knowledge and education, they are now economic powerhouses. But there is a catch to that. We must understand the relationship. It is not just a matter of new schools. It is not even just the matter of reform. The interesting thing is, as I was researching this matter, I decided to check the speeches of the Honourable Minister so that I could criticize his views on this matter, and I found that he was far ahead in the understanding of this matter: In the budget debate of 2004, the Minister of Education said:

Education, though important, is secondary to the institutionalisation of appropriate socio-economic policies

He also said:

it is even arguable that, without proper socio-economic policies, educational expenditure may become excessive.

He quoted a World Bank public sector review, which says:

more training, at best, is partial solution.

In fact, training at University may have led to increasing migration.

And he concluded his speech by saying:

the situation has nothing to do with policies and everything to do with the general state of the economy

I did not believe it would happen, that I would have to quote, with approval, what the Honourable Minister of Education said in a Budget debate. I want to know why he said it, and why no one in Government, least of all, the Minister of Finance, has listened to him, because everything that we do, even in our a social sector investment, is a misunderstanding of the nature of the development process - that throwing monies at social sectors, policies of revision, aid projects, consultants, all it does is to tire you out. You owed the consultants, you approve the projects, they bring in the money that take it back out and the consultants and the purchasing and, at the end of the day, we do not have the knowledge base to compete. We do not have the knowledge base to compete in ITT. We do not have the knowledge base to even support some of the industries that we already have. Every single sector in this country is complaining of skills-shortage and, therefore, we are in a cycle - a cycle that gets us nowhere. That is a why, Mr Speaker, our growth rate is 0.5 percent. That is why, compared to other countries, we cannot go into the new world of investment and compete, because they come to our country and they recognise that there is a shortage of skills in every sector, and they recognise that, if they come here, they will have to bring people, so they leave and they forget about us. For us to compete, we have got to understand ... I will give you a simple example. We could talk how much we like about tourism, but we do not have the level of training in the management, or even at the ground level - even

the cooks or the maids or the room service, to compete. It is not a position that we had programmes. The fact is if you want to get tourists, you have to get them from somewhere. You have to be able to compete. It is that competitive edge in the knowledge base in the industry that is important. People are not going to come and invest in your country because they like you. Those days are long since past. And they are not going to come and spend money in your sectors because they like you, those days are long since past due. You have to have the bait

The Speaker: You have gone five minutes overtime without my noticing it.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Thank you very much. Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Mr Deryck MA Bernard: Mr Speaker, you flatter me. You were so enthralled in what I was saying that you took off your watch. I am honoured.

Mr Speaker, we have got to make a serious choice in this country. Are we going to remain a plantation economy, with the variation of some bauxite or gold, that is way of 0.5 percent, or are we going to put ourselves in a position where we make the really hard decisions to make our country competitive? One of the problems we have is that the view of the social sectors and the knowledge-based sectors merely has focus for large-volume investments. It is something that I confess has become a very boring thing every year I say that you are not going to get change in the economic system, nor on the education system merely by spending money, and whom ever is the Minister of Education will laugh and say that, *you know, I do not know what I am talking about*, and, at the end of the day, we find ourselves in a dilemma of our own creation. We have spent millions, in fact, in Guyana's terms - billions of dollars on

the training and education and development sectors. At the end of the process, our levels of illiteracy and innumeracy on the basics have not shifted substantially. In some parts of the country it may even be worse, and that lack of solid literacy and innumeracy pass into our secondary system, and unfortunately for those of us who associate in higher education, some of the illiteracy ends up at the university. Now the fact is, Mr Speaker, if we had been trying to fix the basic problems in our system, and understanding what needs to be done to transform our systems, and hence our economy, all the monies that we have spent from 1992 a student who started school in 1992 would now be a university student today, and the benefits would have come through but, in fact, what we did was to end one basic education programme without doing a proper evaluation as to what was the effectiveness on the vast quantities of loan monies that we spent and started another one to do exactly the same thing and make exactly the same mistakes. The fact is, no amount of loan that comes from anybody; no amount of consultants from anywhere can fix the basic problems in our training and our education systems. For example, one of the sector that depends upon professionalism for its basis - the education profession, it has not been proven possible in any part of the world to have an education system that is successful and vibrant if you have teachers that are de-professionalized, either because they feel de-professionalized or/and they believe that the system, and the way they have been treated, have robbed them of their professional pride. It is interesting that, when you look through the Budget Statement - the Ministers' statements and the documents, the emphasis on fixing the education system by strengthening the profession of teaching is absent and, in fact, it is my judgement that the professionalism, which is necessary for the education system, is lower than it has ever been in the history of this country, and we therefore are in a position where any money that goes into the education system will come in and be spent. We will have a loan to repay, but the transformation of the process in the school system will not take place.

There are many aspects of this system. The way we check and inspect schools ... I have been reading some documents on the new monitoring mechanisms, which have everything to do with a superficial

evaluation and nothing to do with the evaluating of the actual learning and teaching that goes on in classrooms. I could predict with confidence that that system would be a waste of time. At the end of that process they will not tell us, really and truly, whether children are learning or not.

We must look objectively at the educational and vocational system. The Government has been far too dilatory, in my opinion, in modernising the technical and vocational systems, because that is one obvious way in which we have to compete. Investors in any sector in a country will pay close attention to the quality of skills that are resident in a country, and in the quantity of skills and the range of skills that are available. It is a fact that none of our systems can produce the quantity and quality of technical and vocational skills that we require. We are way behind in that area, where we were once in the lead countries, and now our competitors in the region, and our competitors in Latin America, are far ahead of us. I happen to know that the Minister has very enlightened ideas on this matter, but the fact is that the Government's consistency and emphasis in the area has not been there. There are some other areas in the system. In fact, the source of producing the skills we need is almost falling apart, and yet we are not going in the direction in which we need, and I give three examples:

We are talking of the importance of science and technology in Guyana, and I believe that, at the moment, the University produces about one or two physics graduates per year. It produces one or two maths graduates per year. The fact is that, at the present rate, we will be incapable of sustaining a science education programme with any level of content in a few years, and yet we said, *oh, Guyana is going to be going in the direction of science and technology* and we are going to compete in the knowledge economy, we are going to deceive ourselves.

Another interesting one - we are talking about Guyana getting involved in tourism in a serious way, and about Guyana being a part of the continental destiny and interacting with our neighbours in Brazil. My recollection is that there are two or three Spanish graduates per year, no French graduates, and I believe that the Portuguese Department of the

University is closed down and that neither the University nor the training college have any serious plans for this programme. My point Mr Speaker is this, that it is not a matter of casting blame, but if we are serious about competing in the world of the knowledge economy, it is not just a matter of having graduates, because producing bilingual professionals is an important part of that competition. If we are serious about getting involved in international tourism, bilingual tour staff is an important part of that competition.

If we are serious about competing in the world of science and technology and information technology, then a range of available physics, mathematics and engineering graduates is a vital part. What the investors tell us is that the attraction of India is not the climate or the resources, the attraction of India is that they found out that a mathematics or an engineering graduate from an Indian University is as good as from an American University, and he will accept less pay, and so, in six years, India came from nowhere to becoming the world's number one producer of software. Now we do not have to compete at that level, but we cannot compete at any level unless we recognise that we have to see education as part of the economic structure.

Another example is one of the easiest industries is publication and printing, relatively speaking, which generates a lot of money and which has become very globalised to compete and make an impact. I discovered some interesting things. If you write a book in Guyana, it is typeset in India, printed in Singapore, and brought back to Guyana at a price that is competitive with a book that is produced in Guyana. In an industry in which the actual knowledge-base that is required is not beyond us in Guyana, but we have made a mark, not as a country anxious to get into the competitive world and the profitable world of printing and publishing, but as a country anxiously getting on in a world of pirating, and I say no more.

Another example, if we are serious about development in the service area, we should recognise that one of the most profitable and one of the major areas of development is cultural property - cultural produc-

tion, recording, music cultural brands. I was looking at a document that the Trinidadians have produced to sell their new knowledge park and their science park, where they are going to be tying up the university with industry with knowledge-bases and so on. The brand that they were selling was their cultural environment in the steel pan and the kaiso as the thing they were selling their knowledge economy for, but the fact is that many, many Caribbean territories have recognised that cultural patrimony, the cultural base, is very profitable, never mind that it is something that you should be proud of, true - never mind it is something that you should enjoy. It makes money, but we have not gotten into that business. Our recording artists and our producing artists are extremely frustrated because, if you are an artist, you will find that other country protects your property, but in Guyana your \$2,000 CD is sold for \$400, and so we have missed out on an industry that is profitable and in which, in my opinion, we have a competitive advantage.

Mr Speaker, I want to return to my original point, Guyana has to make a strategic choice, into the kind of development model that we want to do. It is interesting sometimes that, in our debates in the House, when you say that some people find it funny, I believe that we have a sentimental attachment, and we feel that if, perhaps, we stay in the present economy, there is something sophisticated and morally good about the present economy, but our vision for Guyana is not a country of 0.5 percent, our vision for Guyana is not a country that depends solely on traditional sectors, but a country that is competing in the modern world; a country that could go with confidence into the modern world and sell our ideas, our talents, and our resources at profit and growth.

It is a disgrace that, in terms of growth, we should be behind all those poor and suffering West African countries with all those problems. It is a travesty that we have not been able to organise ourselves to have a convincing development model that anyone can believe.

Mr Speaker, I noticed that, during the Budget Debate, I have never seen a Government look so depressed during its own Budget reading, and I started to count the amount of applauses. I counted five half

applauses, two quarter applauses, and one full applause at the end, and it puzzled me, but then I recognised the problem. The truth is, most of my colleagues on the other side already know what I am talking about, and they themselves cannot understand why it is that their Government and their Party do not understand that that is the way that the world works. That these are direction of opportunities - that serious cultural development, serious tourism, serious education, serious information technology, serious services would put this country on a different path. We should be one of the countries with the five, the six and the seven and the eight percent growth. We have not had growth since 1989, I believe, or 1990 but that is another story, Mr Speaker. I am trying not to be partisan today.

They understand and therefore, as I listened to the Budget, and they waited to hear, they were encouraged when they heard the Minister say that *for the first time, and I ought to use those works again, we need to reorient our thinking strategies and tactics, review our social policies, consolidating and strengthening them where necessary, and developing and implementing new ones.* Mr Speaker, I have an embarrassment, I could not say what is needed, what is better than this. I could not find words to say it as clearly as this, but we have, as a country, to get out of the depressing circle, a new circle of plantation economy to which you are tied between selling products which would only sell if people buy them at concessional prices, and then getting aid from the same people to invest in the same industries to sell the same product at concessional prices. While we are in that new cycle of poverty other countries are going into offshore industries.

There was a conference in Geneva on information technology and development, so I went to the list of countries to see what Guyana sent, but Guyana was not there, and it had nothing to say. Trinidad was there, Barbados was there, Jamaica was there, and they have already got versioning information technology sector industries, Mr Speaker, we have to examine these new industries seriously and to change our mode of thinking because our generations to succeed us will never forgive us. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Minister of Education

Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey: Mr Speaker, I stand in support of Budget 2005, so ably and admirably presented by my colleague, the Honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, the Budget, including its growth elements, is of course reflective of our national and international conditions. Of course, some progress has been made, and the macro economic framework has, to a large extent, been maintained. However, here I agree with the Honourable Member Mr Bernard that, if we are to acquire the standard of life, the quality of life we require for ourselves, we will have to do much better. Of course, this does not require any flights of fancy. What it requires is clear thought.

Mr Speaker, I have a Budget to manage and to report on. Therefore I would be able to be as wide-ranging as my colleague on the other side. But let me briefly try to see if I understand what he said. He is saying that Guyana is a poor country. The GDP growth is very low, even lower than some of the problematic countries in Africa. Of course, if he looked at those countries, he may well find that the ones with the real problems are not growing, but the ones that have just come out of those problems, such as Angola, are the ones that are getting the 10 percent, but average out, yes - it is about 3.6 percent. I think he will find that, but the ones with the real problems - they are not growing either. He is therefore overall calling for growth and he mentioned it. He said that we will only have growth when we can attract direct foreign investments and so forth and, if he looks at our numbers, he will also see that capital formation in Guyana has been good, more or less, since let us say 1996, when capital formation was 30 percent of GDP. Today capital formation is about 24 percent of GDP, when capital formation is that low development is difficult, large-scale development is difficult. Even China - if you look at the numbers, you will see that China has a capital formation of 32 percent of GDP today. We understand this whole question of

capital formation, but then it begs a larger question. How are we to attract this investment? We can go and talk about the need for the new economy. We can go on and we can say that we must do various things in education and that we must ... what there is a word that somewhere ... He said that we must open our minds to new thinking, but I do not know particularly what that new thinking is all about, and perhaps we will have a discussion on it [*Interruption: 'He said that you said so.'*] No, no. I am saying to you that I explained my new thinking. I am not certain that his new thinking is my new thinking. The important point is that you have to do what Mr Bernard does not want to do, and did not want to ask the hard question, why is it that Guyana suffers from the necessary level of investment? Because he knows that that will immediately become a great political problem and all this issue and all this talk of plantation economy and a new framework and all of these sort of things. I mean, we have been hearing this from what? Since Dr Clive Thomas wrote about this plantation economy, it has all been there. George Bedford before Clive, so we know this, the important thing, the issue is why we do not have the level of investment that is necessary to drive us on. That is the question, and that is the question that was left unsaid. I have a feeling that I should leave it unsaid, because I do not want to get into the long political quarrels. What I said here, what the demands ... I wrote this before the Honourable Member Mr Bernard spoke. I said what it demands, most of all, is a realisation by all concerned that there must be a national consensus as to how we live and work. That is what it requires. There are all sorts of macro-issues that you know was timely investment. You can go all over the place and talk about the right incentives and you could talk about the judicial system, whether or not people will put their money in a country where you can lock up their money for years in some judicial process, and in all that sort of thing, all those things, can be dealt with, but, at the end of the day, it is political quiet, political cooperation, political transparency that will move us forward. [*Applause*] But as I have said, I have a budget to manage and a process to move on with. [*Interruption: 'How is that to be achieved?'*] Ah, you hear Mr Corbin is asking how that is to be achieved and all that kind of a thing? Those are the issues. We cannot. One of the things that

Mr Bernard did say on passing is that we must look for what? A new model. That is dangerous, because I could remember well, during the World Social Summit, myself and Dr Jagan travelling to the summit in Copenhagen, and there were people who were encouraging us to look for another model outside of the IMF, World Bank, and all that kind of a thing. He told me to go to the meeting and I went to the meeting on his behalf and I said to them, *listen what is going to happen, we will be quite pleased to move away from all this IMF, World Bank, strictures, et cetera, but you pay for three economists and let us choose two of them and you take one and let them come up with an alternative that is viable for Guyana.* Well, that was the end of the discourse. Because there might be economists that might come up with it, but they do not have money and it was not the PPP that took anybody to the IMF, I mean that I do not want to go there, but that is reality, you had to go. By the time 1985, one just had to go. I do not think that the PNC went there because they love the IMF. They did not have to do that. They went there out of necessity. The country was in ruins. You had to borrow, so we cannot talk in this way about what needs to be done, but at the end of the very day we have to gain investments. We have to put our house in order. I mentioned the word reality - not the sort of thing that the Honourable Member Mr McAllister took all those projects out of the Guyana 21 project and recommending that all these umpteen projects be done and telling us that infrastructure development can be a catalyst to growth and development. It is hogwash. Infrastructure development is a catalyst to development where the cost, the entire cost, is more or less facilitated by the country that is doing the infrastructure. But when you take a country like this, where you are importing 70 percent of your infrastructure needs, you tell me if infrastructure development cannot become a drain and if it is not responsible for most of the debts that must be left there [*Applause*] and then he did a funny thing too. He then moved along and then picked up a document and quoted from the Jamaican experience and, without saying to us that Jamaica has an economy that is ten times ours, and a per capita income that is twice ours, one or two or three times ours. I am saying to you... [*Interruption: 'Why are you building the cricket stadium?'*] ... But my dear

friend, building the cricket stadium... You may soon ask me why we buy potatoes, or tomatoes, or pianos [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: I want to hear this argument, Mr Khan, please be quiet.

Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey: We are building a stadium, but that is just one infrastructure, not a litany of Christmas presents people are talking about. I mean, let us be real ... By the way, I am not saying that infrastructure is not a catalyst, but it is a catalyst if it piggybacks on medium, long, or short-term results from other industries. So I am not arguing against. Mr Speaker, we have a country here to run, and there are difficulties, but it is because of people like Mr Bernard, who make positive statements ... and let me tell you, many of the things he said are quite positive on which we hope that we can sit down and work something out and move forward.

Mr Speaker, I would like to move on to the education sector, for which I have some mandate. Mr Speaker, 2004 saw some improvements in the education sector, although, of course, many challenges remain. Much of the work in education, as all of us know, is ongoing. It is not just stop/start. It is something that goes on and on and which is rooted in our strategic plan. We have seen developments in almost every area - curriculum reform, training and support, and especially on the old issues of literacy and numeracy. We have attempted efforts of community participation but, in 2004, we started with three important projects - many projects, but these important projects:

- Health and family life education,
- Physical education, and
- Special needs education.

Members, this year education received \$14 billion from this Budget. This is about \$2 billion more than in 2004. This funding is important for the continuation of our projects, but we should bear in mind, as we consider this sum of money, that although we talk...

The Honourable Member said *of the billions that we have spent*, although we are talking about all these billions, translated to the individual child, it is not much. One of these billions will go to the University of Guyana and three-quarters is going to tertiary education. When you come to the individual child you are talking about US\$200 per child per annum.

Now that is the reality, and if you want some comparison for that figure, well, just go over to Trinidad where it is about 500. If you go to Barbados it is almost about 700. When you go to Cayman Islands it is about 6000. You see, these large sums must be properly garnered and utilized, and we realise that there is one way to do this at present, and that is to draw the community into the school process. You have to work hard on community participation Mr Speaker, as is traditional, I will have to speak a little bit on infrastructural development, of course, as a concession to Miss Amna Ally, who said that all we do all the time is to talk of buildings and buildings and buildings and buildings, and yet, when there are no buildings, or the buildings are in disrepair, we are not doing it, we are not doing it, we are not doing it, we are not doing it, but ... *[Power Failure]*

The Speaker: Honourable Members, let us suspend until we restore the power.

15:27H

THE SITTING IS SUSPENDED

15:45H

THE SITTING IS RESUMED

My apologies for the delay.

Hon Henry B Jeffrey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, we took a break when I was saying that there is a concession to the Honourable Member, Miss Amna Ally, and now that she is here, maybe that

is why we took the break. I will stay away from this whole issue of infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure, because that is what she said, that all people always talk about is infrastructure. In any case, my dear friend Mr Lumumba yesterday did a decent job on it, although he failed to point out that the Ministry of Education, that is, the central Ministry ... our budget is only for Georgetown and the central institutions such as the Teacher's Training College and the Technical Institute; so it is not for the entire country. So, more or less, we spent, at the central Ministry, as part of the central process, some \$387 million last year, and we did work on Kuru Kuru College, Critchlow Labour College, The National Library, The university of Guyana, The Guyana Technical Institute, the Presidents College, NCERD, and so on. Of course, last year we also completed ... earlier in the year it was definitely completed - the Industrial Training Centre for the Upper Corentyne, I am certain that will now provide much more opportunities for the your people in that area.

Under the IDB Project, that is, a \$7.2 billion Basic Education Access and Management Programme, eight secondary schools will be constructed, or rehabilitated ... *[Interruption: 'List them.']* ... and work has already commenced on Bladen Hall, North Ruimveldt Multilateral, Lodge Secondary, Charlestown Secondary, Tutorial High, Bartica Secondary, Parika Salém Secondary, and Aurora Secondary.

Mr Speaker, the first order for the day for anyone who wants to improve education in Guyana must be the issue of management and accountability. The regions and the local communities must be empowered to play a major role in this process. After decades, and I mean actual decades, of extremely loose legal and administrative arrangements, success here is of course easier conceived than accomplished because, for far too long, the education sector has been operating without clearly identifiable and monitorable goals and roles. An important initial step in this direction is the creation of a new Education Act to partly clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various actors in the sector. This proposed Act is now being drafted by a task group of which the Honourable Member, Mr Vincent Alexander, is a member, consisting, of course, of all various stakeholders' representatives. This new Bill, I hope, will

come before this House sometime by December 2005.

Mr Speaker, 2004 saw us focusing more upon monitoring and going to the various Regions, intensifying and systematically monitoring these regions, in order to improve decentralized information flow and enhance effectiveness, and especially the effectiveness of the regional administration. We have appointed ID officer to all the regions.

In 2004, many seminars were held for regional administrators, and much emphasis was placed upon the development of regional and school improvement plans

Mr Speaker, as a result, I was therefore most surprised at Mr Alexander's suggestion that there might well be some conspiracy to undermine the Constitution. Now I did say, in passing, that Mr Alexander is a member of the task force that is looking into the Education Act, which means that Mr Alexander has access to all the information that the Ministry has on regional administration. Here it is that Mr Alexander has access to this document - Management of Education in the region. Mr Alexander has access to this. And Mr Alexander also has access to another document we provided which deals with the old issue of management of education in the region. What this document says, and what the other document says clearly, is that the Regional Democratic Council will be in charge of education in the regions

We have been working with the Council. We have had numerous seminars to improve the Council. We have walked the length and breadth of this country. I, myself, more than once went from region to region, trying to improve Regional Education Committees in every region. These committees are sub-committees of the region. I was therefore ... *[Interruption: 'What did the 1998 draft say?']*. This is not 1998. I am telling you, here is the paper - 2003, the April 2, 2003 - available to you. That is danger Mr Speaker. This Parliament cannot be the Chamber for first access. It cannot be a Chamber where we can speculate, particularly when we are in a position to have the information. Mr Alexander is on the Committee, and it is not right for him to do so. *[Noisy Interrup-*

tion] You saw the legislation. You saw it and you called it a draft legislation. This is no draft anything [Noisy Interruption] What I am saying to you is that this is what occurred, and this is our intention. It is here. It is set out, not by me, but by Mc Adam. The education sector sent it out. If the consultation comes up otherwise, we are also on that committee, and we can change it, but do not say that that is out intention now, because you will see our intentions now. Yesterday he said that you have to come up with a concept paper. What is this? 1998 - establishment of Regional Health Authorities in Guyana Scope and Issue Paper. Mr Speaker, I find that this paper states, quite clearly, that the idea is to rationalize the system. The regions do not have to run health systems to be in control of them, or to monitor them. This whole idea is that the regions should have memberships on the Board. In any case, the paper is coming here and you will have your input to say which changes are necessary. But do not say that anybody is trying to undermine, because he has no evidence. He said that it appeared to be a conspiracy, when he did not even look for the information. Mr Speaker, I must say that I was disappointed, because I expect people to go for the information and move on, but let us move on.

Mr Speaker, of course, access to acceptable secondary education has increased tremendously over the last decade, moving from 30 to 80 percent today. Yes, we must recognise that 20 percent of our young people are still denied this access. In order to provide universal secondary education by 2006, the Ministry has continued to work to increase secondary access. We have continued the process of converting the secondary, top and community high schools, to general secondary schools. Approximately fifteen community high schools have been converted to general secondary schools, and 120 teachers from 28 schools were given training to enable them to operate in the secondary environment.

Mr Speaker, again I must agree with the Honourable Member, Mr Bernard, when he said that technical and vocational education is most important, but I cannot find the evidence for what he said - that at one time Guyana was the leader in this area. I am certain that I cannot find the evidence for that, but I agree with him, we should be the leader if we

could. I mean, with the kind of money that we have, I doubt whether we should ever be the leader, but we should have a decent technical and vocational education system, and therefore technical and vocational education remains an important focus of the Ministry of Education.

In 2004, we introduced and passed the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education, which we hope will develop, monitor and continue adjust a national framework for the area.

As I have indicated, at the post-secondary level, we will increase access by opening of the Corentyne Training Centre. We have developed a national modularized competency-based training system for the post-secondary institutions, and this year saw the introduction of the diploma in computer studies. Of course, there is little doubt that the TVET sector needs a major infusion of resources. We have been having loans over the years to deal with all sectors, but not the technical and vocational education sectors. We must bear in mind that many of our children, many of them are not going through the classical system. They leave school and they must be given some alternative. We must create an alternative framework. Lecturers in specialized areas need to be trained, libraries upgraded, resource centres developed, and adequate materials - tools, equipment and machinery for the classroom workshops and laboratories acquired. We also need to rehabilitate and enlarge the existing technical instruction centres and enhance the teacher training facility of the Government Technical Institute. For some time now, I came to this House before and said it. I think I said last year that we intended to work with the CDB for a loan to deal with this sector, and we are still doing so. It is taking long and the loan is important and we are somewhat impatient.

Mr Speaker, in keeping with this trend to deal with the soft side, 2004 saw the curriculum being revised at every level of the school system. At the preschool level - what we call nursery, the Timehri reading series is being reprinted, and the Easy Path series in English, math, science and social studies, from grade one to six have revised and distributed to schools.

The Ministry has also revised the primary science and social studies curriculum guide for grades one to six; compiled the national standard for literacy and numeracy from nursery to grade six, and developed blueprints for the assessments of literacy and numeracy at the primary level.

A technology education curriculum for primary schools has also been introduced. We have prepared materials for delivery to all of our schools of mathematics by interactive radio that is called the IRI; utilizing the national network, local radio or CDs in the remote areas. The information technology and literacy training programmes have also been expanded and, of course, I have said that the information officers that we have appointed in the regions will work with the various regions on these new technologies.

Mr Speaker, in the area of language, we have increased the number of schools teaching Spanish, not at the secondary, because that was already there for the most part, but at primary by some 31 schools. We recognise that other languages, particularly Portuguese, are important, given our location, but everything we say and everything we do, we must bear in mind the cost, the resources at our disposal. I have just said to you that we are spending something of about US\$200 per child per year. We cannot do everything with that. We recognise the CEO has indeed ... I think he has sent out, or will be sending out, a letter encouraging all schools, where possible, to teach Portuguese, because we recognise, given our location, it is an important subject; but we can hardly tackle Spanish at all levels in all schools at primary, much less to deal with Portuguese. During the visit here of President Lula, I discussed with the minister, and we are going to do some inter-border relationship to try to exchange teachers of Portuguese on the Lethem border. So we recognise the importance of languages, and particularly Portuguese, to national development.

Based on our 2003 book policy, in 2004, and up to today, we have purchased some half million dollars worth of text books for distribution to all nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Mr Speaker, one of the most important areas in modern life, just for survival's sake, must be the whole question of literacy and numeracy.
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Time is up, Honourable Member

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Minister

Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey: So therefore improvement in literacy and numeracy ... standards of school-aged children, continues to be our greatest priority, and programmes to raise the literacy levels will continue into the future. New methodologies to teach literacy, pre literacy skills, mathematics, and the enhancing of the teaching of other skills, have been introduced using new and modern technology. We have established a curriculum advisory committee to review and monitor our programmes, projects, books, and materials. Honourable Members, as part of the efforts to improve literacy and numeracy, in 2004 the Ministry established a system of ongoing school-based assessments. As we seek to continuously monitor the inter-level transition of the pupil, we have appointed master trainers and assessment officers, centrally and in the regions, to reinforce and enhance our continuous assessment efforts, and to commence the programme to replace the SSEE - what we call the Common Entrance Examination, with separate examinations at levels two, four and six. The first grade two assessment was completed in 2003, and the national assessment of grade four will be conducted in 2005 and subsequent years.

Mr Speaker, teacher training is most important for us. It is why we recognise today that teaching quality is vital for the education process. It is also accepted now that poor countries cannot depend on the old face-

to-face education system, the old method of creating teacher training colleges to meet their demand. In-service teaching training is now the recommended approach to rationalize such teacher training, and to improve the percent of trained teachers, particularly in the hinterland. Our in service training programme will be broadened. A revised curriculum for teacher training was utilized in 2004, and the duration of the teacher training programme extended to three years. In 2004 some 370 teachers were certified. 103 hinterland teachers completed our foundation programme in 2004. At present there are two in-service centres at Regions 1 and 9 that are delivering the teacher certificates programme, using a mixture of distance and face-to-face methods. Mr Speaker, teacher training and certification have finally gone to the Regions.

The programmes that were planned over the next four years will enhance the size, quality, performance and conditions of teachers. It will also improve the training, managerial and supervisory skills of our middle managers. Five hundred teachers Education Ministry Officials, and local specialists will be trained in new approaches to teaching and literacy.

Mr Speaker, the conditions of unemployment of our teaching and other staff are of considerable importance to us. While we recognise that, with the present economic environment, large across-the-board salary increases may not be possible, we believe that it is possible to find funding for performance-based incentives, once these are a part of a comprehensive but realistic programme, to address the concerns of all our employees.

Mr Speaker, turning to the University of Guyana, in December 2004, as part of the Dennis Irvine lecture series, I was invited to deliver a lecture on *University/Community Relations, a Policy Perspective*. Much of what I want to say about the University at a policy level, I said it during that lecture. The most prevalent criticism of the University of Guyana is that its graduates are generally of poor quality. These comments, like the criticism of the education sector, indeed, have a say, like the criticisms of most of the social sectors in Guyana, are often made

without any reference to the University's financial and other constraints. They are also often made without recognising the exceptional service the University has, and is still performing, for our society. This is not to deny that the improvements that would allow us to utilize our resources more efficiently can and should be done. The University is owned by this nation, and by the people of Guyana from which, in various ways, it received some \$1 billion per annum. This year it has an allocation from the Budget directly of about half a billion dollars. It has perhaps been one of the most studied institutions in Guyana, and many of the recommendations having to do with departmental, and course rationalization, the putting in place of an open entrance examination, the need to pay more attention to open and distance learning, have been recognised and are being implemented.

To improve transparency, the University needs to pay a greater attention to its mandate, with regards to the quality and quantity of teaching and research to be more rigorous with regards to team review of teaching course outlines and content. Staff appointment should be more transparent and, of course, the University should expand and, where necessary, introduce student appeal panels and external examiners' reviews. However, in the final analysis, the prerequisite for a top-class University, as Dr Irvine did say, the kind of University that we all desire, are top-class staff and top-class facilities, but for the University of Guyana to acquire these, it will need additional Government and public support. To gain this support, the management of the University will have to be more pointed, thus putting itself in a position to sell a positive developmental vision to all stakeholders.

Mr Speaker, finally I want to merely touch on three important areas attracting the attention of our Ministry. One of our stated aims is to achieve greater equity in education by giving special needs children special attention. A special needs coordinator has been appointed and is completing a national policy and operational plan. A programme of special needs has been introduced into the teacher-training curriculum, and the special needs resource and support will be established in every region.

The second initiative has to do with health and family life education. The backbone of the Ministry's response to the HIV crisis is to focus on the implementation of the health and family life education programme from grades one to nine. The programme is part of a broader CARICOM project developed in response to concerns that Caribbean youths do not have psycho-social competence to deal with the stresses of modern life. The HFLE is a life-skills based programme intended to provide students with the opportunity to analyse and manage real life situations in the area of life skills, morality, conflict resolution, citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity. This important programme deserves our support, because it provides participants with the capacity to manage many of the difficult circumstances of contemporary life. The implementation of the programme has begun and will spread to every primary and secondary school.

The third initiative has to do with physical education. We believe that the proper appreciation of need for, and participation in, physical activity is essential to healthy and productive living and must be instilled in the early years. The national physical education committee was established to promote the teaching of physical education across the region. The PE curriculum has been revised and teachers' guides and manuals are in place. The training for training programmes has been conducted in all regions. Physical education has been introduced as an option in the expanded teacher training curriculum. A physical education and sports academy, costing some \$4 million, was launched in August 2004 to cultivate in young people the proper approaches to physical education and sports, and to provide initial training in a range of sporting activities, including cricket, football, and volleyball. The idea is to create a critical mass of persons who will generate a sustained culture of physical activity.

Mr Speaker, in advancing education delivery, the Ministry has maintained close links with a number of the donor agencies and NGOs. As I have noted, we have major programmes with the Inter-American development Bank and the World Bank. UNICEF continuously supports our sector. For example, in the production of learning guides for primary

pupils and development of child friendly schools. UNESCO has funded programmes on micro-science and literacy on HIV. The OAS has funded the development of a reading programme and Guyana is participating in a hemispheric project approved at the Summit of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean in October 2003. The programmes are designed to improve teacher education, recruitment and professional development, pre-vocational education at the secondary level, and early childhood education.

Mr Speaker, 2004 saw the destruction by fire of a dorm at the President's College. That cost some \$100 million to rebuild, and of the Sacred Heart Primary School which, if it was to be rebuilt, would cost over \$200 million. If these were not enough, the recent floods brought some \$400 million worth of damage to the sector. All this has been befalling a system that is already under-financed. These are a few of the material challenges we need to overcome, and we would like to thank all those Heads of schools, teachers, students, parents, national and international organisations, without whose support and effort we would have not been as successful. Yet the real challenge still lies in the creation of a sustained developmental culture that will allow each person and community to design, build and gradually improve their life opportunities. Of necessity, if success is to be achieved, the education sector must be conceived as part of this general developmental process. Thank you, Mr Speaker [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr Ivor Allen

Mr Ivor Allen: Mr Speaker, if this was the court, I would have asked for an adjournment, having just been intellectually bombarded by two excellent presentations. But Mr Speaker, I must move you and this House away from the realm of academia and restore you to the real world of food and shelter.

Mr Speaker, if there is one thing that all Members of this Honour-

able House would agree on it is that growth of the agricultural sector is pivotal to the development of our country. Most of our population depend on this sector for their livelihood. Indeed, I am persuaded that rapid growth of this country's agriculture sector will facilitate other sectors of the economy. It goes without saying, therefore, that without a properly structured plan for the orderly development of the agricultural sector there would be no real development in the other sectors.

Much has been said about the country's performance in agriculture under the PPP/C Government, a variety of expressions have been used in the assessment of their performance, but the one that comes to mind is a dismal failure.

Mr Speaker, over the past twelve years, the PPP/C spent billions of dollars in this sector. Most of these funds were obtained from overseas funding agencies in the form of loans, which have to be repaid. However, it would appear that in some instances of poor vision, and in the absence of a well defined programme, mistakes have been made. Some of these mistakes have been proven to be painful and disastrous for the livelihoods of our people, as well as the economy of our country.

Mr Speaker, I would be less than honest if I did not recognise the Government's successes in the development of the fisheries industry. Indeed, Sir, the Honourable Minister deserves every credit for the energy and zeal which he and his staff of the Ministry used in their approach in the development of this sector. I wish also to recognise the investors who have lead the way in this drive. Apart from the fisheries, it is difficult to identify any other segments of the agriculture sector which did not suffer as a result of Government's lack of coherent policy for the development of agriculture in Guyana. Among the areas hardest hit were drainage and irrigation - the MMA Scheme, the Black Bush Polder, the sugar and rice sub-sectors, the dairy developmental programme, non-traditional crops, extension services, processing and canning.

Drainage and Irrigation - During 2004 more than G\$1 billion was spent on drainage and irrigation, but the recent floods throughout the

coast of Guyana has exposed the weaknesses and inefficiencies of the National Drainage and Irrigation Board, and it is now quite clear that this Board needs to be reorganised and fully-staffed with professional engineers, supported by a full complement of rangers and overseers, who will have the responsibility to monitor D&I and structures throughout the country - and on a daily basis.

Mr Speaker, according to the Estimates the sum of \$1.8 billion has been voted for drainage and irrigation works in 2005. These works will be executed by the D&I Board, the agricultural support services programme, and the poor rural community project. Mr Speaker, given that the D&I Board has full responsibility for the management all D&I functions in Guyana, one is at a loss to understand the rationale for there being so many agencies executing D&I works in this country. Surely this serves to undermine accountability to us. There is probably a rational explanation, and I hope that the Honourable Minister would wish to share that explanation with this House.

Mr Speaker, the PNC/R is very concerned with the manner that contracts are awarded by the Drainage and Irrigation Board. The Board should screen all contractors before awarding contracts to them. There have been too many complaints of substandard work being done and paid for throughout this country. There is also a need for closer monitoring of works through the construction field to ensure that they meet the required specifications of the contract. This can only be done to any degree of satisfaction if the Board has qualified engineers in its employ. Persons who are going to be responsible for monitoring, residents must also be encouraged to help in the monitoring of the works being executed in their community.

Mr Speaker, the PNC/R believes that there is an urgent need to have all of the existing D&I structures throughout Guyana audited with a view of having an integrated system which can be easily monitored. This will also make it easier to plan for an efficient maintenance schedule, and to ensure that all structures are kept viable.

MMA Scheme - The Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Scheme, which is the largest agricultural scheme in the Caribbean, was once touted as the project to make Guyana the bread-basket of the Caribbean. As you know, Mr Speaker, this Scheme was established by the PNC Government to bring relief to farmers and other residents in the West Berbice area. This scheme was established for that main purpose, but resulted in significant increases in the production of rice, sugar cane, food crops and dual purpose cattle. I have noted in the Estimates that the Minister proposes to spend the sum \$1.2 million to rehabilitate the Abary conservancy dam and canal, rehabilitate drainage structures in areas such as Little Abary and Hyde Park and Mahaicony, as well as for the provision of state services and for the undertaking of cadastral surveys. This is a very welcomed allocation, and the works identified are all critical to the development to the area. However, over the last 10 to 12 years, this project has received massive local and overseas funding. But, in spite of this, the Scheme has now become a liability to the country, and this once vibrant and viable project is buckling under the pressures of a large debt, poor administration, and a total lack of capacity to provide services to farmers who are now suffering as a result of the scheme's inability. As a consequence yields in all of the production areas have plummeted to an all-time low, causing many farmers to either scale down or to abandon their investments altogether.

The intensive agricultural drive, which was evident during the years of the PNC's Administration in office, has dramatically declined, and the project area has now been categorised as depressed. The question which must be asked is what has been the benefit of all this funding to the farmers and to the community?

The MMA Scheme has largely failed to live up to its promise, and I recall a conversation with a farmer from the community - Mr Deodat, who said that he had invested some \$25 million since his return to Guyana, and his final words to me were, *I am in pain with the poor returns.*

Mr Speaker, among the things which farmers would like the Gov-

ernment to put in place are an adequate system of drainage and irrigation, readily available agricultural inputs, including support services, and these are basic things which would result in increased yields and crops. Government must also consider the introduction of a system of land reform, which would allow farmers to have security of tenure as well as an increase in the size of plots for those who have demonstrated the ability to manage larger plots. But Mr Speaker, there appears to be a complete lack of confidence by the farmers in the Scheme's administration. For us there is need for a change in administration for the Scheme at this time.

Black Bush Polder - The Honourable Minister proposes to spend large sums of money, here again, through the Drainage and Irrigation Board and the Region 6 Administration, in several areas, including the Black Bush Polder Scheme but, like MMA, this Scheme is also in a bad state despite being allocated large sums of money since the Government came to office. There has been a steady downward spiral in the living conditions of residents. Black Bush Polder, once the country's major producer of rice and other agricultural crops, was established in the early 1960s by a previous PPP regime, but it was the PNC government that made it the rice bowl of Guyana by providing proper drainage and irrigation facilities, potable water, roads and social amenities, but today, under the PPP/C's Administration, all has disappeared. The infrastructure that the Polder enjoyed in its early days is now over.

Mr Speaker, the community, if we are not careful, is of the verge of collapse, and I call upon Government to honour the promises made to their people over the years in that community. The PNC/R implores the Minister, Mr Speaker, to ensure that the sum budgeted is spent in a manner that really works to the benefit of the farmers and other residents, who are really hurting, and not just for the enrichment of contractors.

Sugar - Our sugar industry is in deep trouble. The Minister, in his presentation, placed great emphasis on GUYSUCO and GUYSUCO's much-touted restructuring strategy, which envisages a decrease in the

Company's high production costs for sugar. This strategy is seen as being pivotal to GUYSUCO's ability to compete in the export markets outside of the existing ones, but we are threatened by some bilateral arrangements. The emphasis on modernising the sugar industry is centred around the new factory in Berbice, and is seen as a move to concentrate on more stable, high-yielding areas, to the neglect of the Demerara Estates. Even the World Bank has expressed concerns about the viability of this plan, and has also suggested that the Demerara Estates should be closed, but understandably, the PPP/C's Administration does not favour such a move since it is likely to result in economic and social dislocation.

The decision by the European Union to alter the sugar relationship with the ACP States, if implemented in its current form, will have dire consequences for GUYSUCO and the economy of our nation. It is therefore important that the Government redoubles its efforts at diversification of industry, even as it continues to work with the ACP partners for a better deal from the EU.

Rice - During his presentation, the Honourable Minister of Finance, on page 26, informed the House that *the rice industry will be boosted significantly this year with the coming on stream of the EU programme*, but he also warned that *dark clouds are hovering on the horizon*. He further referred, in his Presentation, to *the recent changes in the EU market for rice, which would have a negative impact on the recovery and growth of the rice industry*.

Mr Speaker, while that is true, it can, in some sense, be seen as a smokescreen. The Government seems incapable of doing anything to enhance the viability and the sustainability of the industry. During 2004 the Government received €11.7 million under the European Union/Government of Guyana rice project, which was intended to enhance competitiveness, improve productivity, management skills, rice research, and marketing. The funding was also to be used to upgrade rice factories, including the drying and storage facilities, and the drainage and irrigation systems, in rice growing areas. Quite apart from this, the government

also received assistance from the IDB and Oxford and the Building Community Capacity Project, to name a few. Notwithstanding the aforementioned funding, the industry continues to decline steadily.

Mr Speaker, the industry is in crisis, with large acreages being abandoned due to poor drainage systems, high production costs, and poor quality of seed paddy. Among other ills, the rice farmers are also faced with low prices for their produce, late payments by rice millers, exorbitant prices for transportation, and the high costs for agricultural inputs. Most significantly, the rice farmers have major financial commitments to banks and agro-chemical companies. Therefore, it would appear to me that Government must seek to come up with some sort of proposal that would lessen these burdens on the rice farmers, at the minimum, as a first step towards restoring the industry.

Forestry - This sector has become more significant as a potential growth sector. The Honourable Minister has reported that the sector recorded an increased performance of 0.5 percent in 2004. This, I must inform the Minister, is but the marginal growth. If our forestry sector is to realise its full potential there must be a greater degree of secondary and tertiary wood processing locally. The industry must shift its focus from producing mainly raw materials for overseas processing and become more of being both a producer and processor. It has been noted that the growth for the sector in 2005 has been forecast at 4 percent. Such an achievement would indeed be commendable, given the performance of the sector over the last few years. However, I wish to humbly submit that the implementation of the national forestry policy must be a priority this year. Further, the GFC must be fully equipped and staffed with professionals at all levels, just to boost its capability to manage the country's forests. A forward-looking GFC must also take steps:

- to ensure a fair, and impartial, and transparent framework for the allocation, revocation, renewal, and renegotiation of forest concessions;
- to put in place tendered agreements so that all

concessionaires will operate under the same conditions;

- to collect all royalties countrywide;
- to undertake a progressive marketing and promotional programme overseas for both well-known and lesser-known species; and
- to undertake a thorough inventory of the country's forestry resources.

The GFC must also provide the staff at all locations with the necessary hardware support equipment and machinery necessary for performing their duties.

Agriculture Processing Mobile Units - The PPP/C's Administration closed down a number of functioning processing and canning units, maybe for good reasons, I am not arguing with that. To name a few, these include:

- the Pineapple factory at Kuru Kururu,
- the tomato paste plant at Black Bush Polder,
- the citrus cannery at Mabaruma,
- the bone meal plant in the Rupununi;
- the cassava factories at Lookout, Charity and Kaituma were also sold to the private sector.

Today, there is no facility to support farmers who plant cassava. The farmers were encouraged when the Government received a gift \$16 million agro-processing demonstration mobile unit from the Government of India, and to them we are grateful. The nation was told this unit will be used to demonstrate, to the country's farmers, ways of reducing wastage of fruits and vegetables. Sadly, this unit has not been reaching out to

the various farming communities as was anticipated. Farmers on the East and West Coast of Demerara, Corentyne, Essequibo Coast and the Pomeroon complained of not having access to it. Information gleaned from a usually reliable source suggested that the unit falls under the direct control of the Minister. Further, rather than being programmed for visits to locations on a scheduled basis, in accordance with demands of the various farming communities, the facility is despatched on an ad hoc basis to specific locations identified at random. This is wholly unacceptable. The PNC/R urges the discontinuation of this unfair and discriminatory practice.

Oil palm promotion - The Minister has made provision in the Estimates for G \$3.5 million to be spent to improve access to drainage and to improve agricultural production in the northeast district. However, given Government's track-record for facilitating the collapse of development projects in this region, the PNC/R has serious reservations about the sincerity of this proposal. When Government took office in 1992, Wauna/Yarakita Oil Palm Project was well on the way to making the nation self-sufficient in edible oil. This project cultivated 1,000 acres and produced 2000 tonnes of palm oil annually, but today, because of neglect, whether by the Ministry or by NEOCOL, its present owners, this project is in a downturn. Farmers no longer plant oil palm because of the declining crisis. The kind of operation of the oil palm facility of San Juan in upper Demerara River has been closed, resulting in unemployment of staff.

Quite apart from the oil palm project, agricultural development in the entire Northwest region is on the decline. The once-thriving Matthew's Ridge Arakaka/Kaituma Project has been allowed to fold, and the farmers in Kariabo, Aruka, Kopedai and Kaituma River have reduced their cultivations because of the lack of adequate market, high cost of transportation and agricultural inputs, and the absence of agricultural services.

In other sub-divisions of the region, such as Mabaruma and Moruka, agriculture is a thing of the past. Mining has taken over throughout the Northwest, and many farmers have been forced into illegal trading in

order to survive and maintain their families. [*Interruption: What about mining in Mabaruma?*] Mr Prime Minister, they are not mining in Mabaruma, but the people who used to farm have gone into mining.

Extension services - Another serious blow to the country's farmers is the lack of extension services in all the regions of this country. The Minister has budgeted a sum of \$2.5 million to purchase boats and engines for Regions 3, 4 and 5, as well as filing cabinets, photocopiers and fans for the division of the Ministry. The PNC/R questions the adequacy of this amount and is concerned that, even with that level of that expenditure, there will be little improvement in the services to farmers. Since the last Budget presentation, at least ten agriculturists have resigned, including the Chief Crops and Livestock Officer and his deputy. Extension services in all regions are hampered by a whole host of constraints, by which agricultural officers and field assistants have to contend.

There is a total lack of basic facilities, including telephones and radio communication equipment in most offices. As a consequence of these conditions, the officers have been unable to provide the community with even the basic services, and have had to curtail the important activities such as field days, demonstrations, and workshops.

Quite apart from the foregoing, the agriculture information and communication centre at Mon Repos, as well as the rural communication centre, which have been a vital input to agricultural extension, have now been closed. Millions of dollars of equipment are lying idle with many being non-functional.

This administration also discontinued the holding of farmers' congress, scaled down the agricultural month's activities in all regions and withdrawn assistance and services to the various farmers' action groups, causing most of them, if not all, to die. These actions groups were the watchdogs of the sector and played an important liaison role among farmers, Government, and other agencies. The Administration disbanded the important agricultural committees, which were set up by the PNC

administration, to monitor agricultural production, and these include:

- the National Accelerated Agri-production Committee;
- the Agricultural Marketing Committee;
- the Special Rice Export Committee; and
- the Regional Agricultural Committee,

which were established to co-ordinate regional agricultural activities.

The Speaker: Time is up, Honourable Member

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed

Mr Ivor Allen: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Dairy Development - the Minister proposed to extend \$3.8 million for a National Dairy Development Programme. This amount is to be used for the purchase of motorcycles and the establishment of pastures in Regions 2 and 6. It would seem that this Government has the propensity for taking three steps backward in order to make one step forward. The fact is that NDDP was forced to reduce operations because of small budgetary allocations and inadequate administrative support from Government. This unit, which was once housed in spacious offices in the Lands and Surveys buildings in Lodge, now occupies two small rooms in Brickdam, with a reduced office and field staff. A number of communal dairy pastures throughout the country were allowed to deteriorate due to the lack of adequate funding. The incentive given to dairy farmers during the PNC regime, which led to an increase in production, were withdrawn by this administration. These include:

- artificial insemination services;
- the utilization of frozen semen from North America; and
- the distribution of young herds to farmers.

As a consequence the number of dairy farmers who, under the PNC administration, enjoyed lucrative businesses have decreased. Many were forced out of business, causing some to migrate.

Milk Processing Units - There are three milk-processing units currently in operation.

These are:

- Dhanzic Dairy Project, with brand name *Whitegate*;
- St Stanislaus Dairy Project Unit of Sophia, under brand-name *Good Morning*; and
- in New Amsterdam More Goodies Incorporation, under the brand-name *Goody*.

These units produced flavoured milk, yogurt, dips, sour cream, but they are facing immense constraints in the exportation of these products, even as the industry continues to decline. The Government's dairy programme, which was complementary to the private producers, has been curtailed. Government's dairy programme have been curtailed. The operations at Mon Repos, East Coast Demerara, and Ebini have been significantly reduced, and the farm at Moblissa on the Linden Highway has been closed. At Moblissa today a few private dairy farmers remain and are barely surviving, having to contend with the poor state of the roads, inadequate potable water supply and high transportation costs. I visited Moblissa.

The programme for increased milk production - I am happy to learn more about the programme for increased milk production. This pro-

gramme was virtually scuttled by the PPP Government nationwide. The abandonment of the milk pasteurisation plant at Kingston is ample testimony to the Government's attitude to the dairy industry. From one of the most extensive dairy programmes in the Caribbean, this project has failed. Mr Speaker; it will take more than the meagre sum allocated to salvage the dairy industry. Quite apart from funding, there will have to be a detailed planning aimed at rebuilding the infrastructure and confidence of dairy farmers.

Essequibo Islands - The Minister made provisions for revetment works to be done on the Essequibo Island of Wakenaam. Although the capital estimate document is short and specific, after the amount allocated, this is none-the-less good news for the residents in the community. I deliberately dropped the line. I want to be kind. Mr Speaker, despite the 17.5 square mile island, which was once regarded as one of the country's top rice growing areas, where some 60,000 acres were cultivated, justifying a modern mill and modern silo, today only 25,000 acres are being cultivated. This is due mainly to drainage and irrigation, and this is evident by the non-functioning of at least six kokers on the island.

The roads and dams in the area are in a deplorable state because Government is willing to dole out money to pay for substandard work, and I congratulate Government. I know that several attempts were made to improve the roads in Wakenaam. The fact is that we did not have good works and, as a consequence, the money was wasted. The PNC/R supports the residents in their call for a massive rehabilitation programme for the island of Wakenaam to include roads, drainage and irrigation services, as well as social services. Leguan, Hogg Island, Troolie Island, as well as Kara Kara, have also suffered from total neglect, resulting in much hardship to farmers and other residents. Since the last Budget presentation, central Government and the regional administration, here again, awarded contracts for works on these islands in the area of flood control. However, the works were done in a substandard manner and the situation has deteriorated to the level, in some cases, worse than prior to the award of the contract.

Berbice River-farming community - I have not seen any provisions in the Estimates for the Berbice River farming community. I would like to think that this has been an oversight, Mr Minister. Indeed, the difficulties facing farmers in these areas have resulted in a marked decline in agricultural production, and these have caused the residents severe economic and other hardships, and they are crying out for help. Such hardships include:

- the lack of machinery and agricultural inputs;
- the absence of the Berbice River steamer service;
- the high cost of transportation for their produce to Georgetown by trucks;
- the lack of legal documents, such as titles and leases, for lands that they have planted for many years.

Mr Speaker, more than 300 farmers at Kimbia, Sandhills and De Velde areas in the intermediate savannahs must be commended for their perseverance and their steadfastness, despite the difficult circumstances which prevail. The PPP/C administration is no doubt concerned, but that concern is not manifested in the work being done. The welfare of the farmers is at risk, and the constraints they face are numerous. They claimed that several promises were made to them by Government ministers in relation to boosting of agricultural development in their communities but, to date, nothing, they claim, is forthcoming.

Mr Speaker, in an effort to stimulate and encourage these farmers, the Regional Democratic Council of Region 10 proposed to the Government an allocation of money for a number of projects, including:

- the development of the already-existing trail from Millie's Hideout on the Linden Soesdyke Highway to Sand Hills and Tacama on the Berbice River;
- upgrading the trail to a fair-weather road; and

- the construction of a storage bond at Tacama.

However, these projects have not materialised. I am saying that you did go, you did make the promises, the people were happy, but nothing has happened to date. However, the intermediate savannahs were considered a part of this developmental project, and which was identified for agro-industry development, but has failed to get off the ground. The Intermediate Savannahs Agricultural Project, regarded as the country's second frontier for the expansion of the agricultural sector, is not proceeding at the pace anticipated, and there is much failure.

The project, which was created in 1997, was intended to facilitate orderly and sustained development of the intermediate savannahs and adjacent communities through the promotion of an agro-industrial development, and eco-tourism and community building. However, this has not been a success story. Some progress was made when the project was being funded by the Organisation of America States, but since Government has taken responsibility, it is at a virtual standstill. Leases totalling some 100,000 acres have been approved, but many investors have scaled down operations because of the numerous constraints. These include:

- bad roads;
- poor prices; and
- lack of markets.

I have noted that, in attempting to solve the existing problem confronting the project, the Minister proposed to spend \$1.8 million for the promotion of agricultural and agri-industrial development in order to increase agricultural production and employment generation. However the PNC/R has noted that INSAP Secretariat, which is now housed at NARI, have, over the years, produced a complete information package with videos. These packages were distributed overseas and were in fact used to encourage investors, some of whom responded favourably. The

PNC/R would therefore like the Minister to give the House some more details on this new proposed promotional drive. Certainly it is a good thing.

Further, the PNC/R has noted that, although the INSAP project is situated in its entirety within Region 10, the Central Government, which controls the project, does not communicate any of the information to the regional administration, with regard to INSAP. Mr Speaker, this is an affront to the regional administration and is wholly unacceptable. If the agricultural potential of Linden in Region 10 is fully developed, it could provide alternative employment opportunities outside of bauxite. However, the Ministry of Fisheries Crops and Livestock has not provided its officers with any kind of funding to visit communities outside of Linden. As a consequence, the loan officer has been unable to visit the Berbice River communities to give service for the past three years. The farmers in Linden and in other communities in Region 10 have been neglected, because the Ministry refuses to make funds available to even purchase a starter for the vehicle. Mr Speaker, Fisheries, Crops and Livestock Division in Linden cannot even supply ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member

Mr Ivor Allen: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I noted that the Minister has made provisions to spend \$15 million on rehabilitation of D&I works in West Watooka, and we commend the initiative. The farmers in this new agricultural scheme in this area are very critical of the poor standard of works done by the National Drainage and Irrigation Board recently. It is hoped that, this time around, a greater level of supervision would be instituted during the execution of the works. The farmers are also calling

for their lease to be allocated without further delay.

The sum of \$250 million has been accessed from the EU and made available for the Linden Economic Advancement Programme for 2005. Mr Speaker, this programme is being touted by the Government as the main vehicle for moving the Linden community towards economic recovery. One wonders then, why it is that, out of the 167 applications which were submitted by would-be investors, only 22 were granted. Residents of the community are of the view that the project has been moving at a snail's pace and would like to see the programme develop at a much a faster rate. The following is the breakdown of the loan distribution of the programme to date, and I quote the information under the heading, so that this House will have an understanding at the pace at which this project is proceeding:

Poultry, 6 allocations for \$1.1 million;

vending, 6 applications for \$1.3 million dollars,

and this is not 1.3 million each, this is 1.3 million total,

logging and forestry, 3 applicants, \$35 millions;

farming, 3 applicants \$3 million;

food processing, 1 applicant \$150,000;

stationery supplier, 1 applicant \$200,000;

photography, 1 applicant \$100,000,

butchery, 1 applicant \$100,000; and

catering, \$100,000.

Mr Speaker, it is clear that at this stage LEAP is not going to be the machine for driving Linden in any direction other than backwardly.

Other Crops Division - Guyana's export of non-traditional crops declined significantly over the past year. I repeat, Guyana's export of non-traditional crops declined significantly over the past year. The total volume of fruits and vegetables ... I know that fruits and vegetables not giving you all the weight, I am not talking about coconuts - fruit and vegetables exported by air for the four main markets - Canada, Barbados, United States and Trinidad in 2004 totalled 537,034 kg, based on GMC's annual report. This represents a decrease of approximately 15 percent, when compared with export volumes for 2003, which was 630,041 kg. Mr Speaker, some of the constraints facing exporters of non-traditional crops include:

- unreliability and lack of punctuality of the air carriers;
- limited cargo facility and poor quality; and
- high prices of locally-manufactured packaging material.

The central packaging facility, which was established in February 2001, and which has responsibilities for the packaging of all exports, needs to be expanded. The new GMC, in addition to managing the facility, also has the responsibility to match buyers to exporters, but seems not to be functioning well in this regard. The Minister has proposed the sum of G \$4 million towards a purchase of a vehicle for this entity. It is hoped that the acquisition of this new vehicle will galvanise the staff into greater mobility in service of their clients.

Guyanese farmers have been supplying produce to Barbados since 1985. The country's pineapple had over 90 percent of the Barbadian market, but now it is estimated at 5 percent of the market because of competition from the Multinational Fruit Company, Dole, and a number of Trinidadian exporters, who ship their goods in refrigerated containers, thereby saving on transportation costs.

Exports to Canada target the demands of the Guyanese population in Toronto and its environs. Mangoes and pumpkins make up a significant part of the export, which also include bora, seime, pepper and, to a

lesser extent, sapodilla. But, Mr Speaker, Government needs to pay greater attention and emphasis on the export of these non-traditional crops by reviewing some of the constraints facing, the exporters and assisting them to acquire more markets.

Administrative bottlenecks - Potential investors coming to do business in Guyana, especially in the agri-sector, have expressed disgust with the bottlenecks and constraints they face by the various Government agencies, including Lands and Surveys, and I must call on the Honourable Minister to use his good office to ensure that the process is expedited.

GSA - The present situation at the Guyana School of Agriculture leaves much to be desired. The overall state of GSA is deplorable. I have noted that, in the Estimates, the Honourable Minister proposes to spend \$5 million to rehabilitate the plant Science building, the veterinary clinic, the farm office and storeroom, as well as to construct food labs. Mr Speaker, if this meagre allocation is any indication of the importance attached to the training in agriculture, then much is left to be desired.

NARI - We appreciate the \$19 million allocated this year, but here again, we must ask for an update on the mushroom project, and the number of promises that were made, and which NARI has not been able to deliver. What has happened with the nurseries at Christianburg, Bartica and Silver Hill, to name a few?

Mr Speaker, to conclude, I humbly submit that, when one examines the number of agricultural agencies which have been either scaled down, or closed all together, and when one considers that many of these have suffered from the lack of staff as well as finance, it is difficult not to conclude that perhaps the time has come for the Government to merge the two ministries in the agricultural sector - The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Fisheries, Crops and Livestock, into one efficient and well-organised ministry so as to have one budget allocation and maximise the use of staff and facilities. It has been noted that there has been no allocation in this Budget for the Ministry of Fisheries, Crops and Livestock. Perhaps, Mr Speaker, this is an indicator that the merger has

already begun. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: This is an appropriate time to take the suspension.

17:15H

THE SITTING IS SUSPENDED

17:55H

THE SITTING IS RESUMED

The Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation.

Hon. Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, like my colleagues who preceded me, I would wish also to lend my voice in support of the Honourable Minister of Finance for the presentation of his 2005 Budget which, I believe, reflect precisely the direction in which Guyana must inevitably go, withstanding the challenges and the difficulties that we know are ahead of us, but at the same time be cognisant of the fact that we have to constantly work to improve the wellbeing and the standard of living of our people

Mr Speaker, the contributions from the opposition benches have been most distressing, disappointing, and I would say, lacklustre, to say the least. We have heard, Mr Speaker, *ad nauseam* the oft-repeated mantras from the opposition benches:

- that the Government has no vision
- that Guyana is a country in trauma,
- that the Budget has nothing to offer; and

we could go on and on with the clichés that we have heard throughout, and I mean thus far.

Mr Speaker, the litany of woes and distresses, complaints and de-

mands, which are basically of an unreasonable nature, lead us to believe that the PNC/R, and those others on the opposition benches, are not very clear in respect to ... which direction they would take Guyana if they were in the government.

The Honourable Member, Mr Deryck Bernard, kept insisting that he was not trying to be partisan, and that he was not casting blame but, in essence, listening to the content of his presentation, forget the form, he constantly criticizes the policies of the ruling Party and the Government of the day, seeking, at the same time, to stand on a pedestal, as it were, keeping some kind of distance from what he described as partisan politics, and giving an academic pitch to his views on the performance of the Government. But, Mr Speaker, what does this cacophony from the opposition side mean for us. Mr Speaker it tells us three things:

- Firstly, is that there is a tendency to leapfrog over the period 1964 to 1992.
- Secondly, the tendency to relegate all their misdeeds to a different era; and
- Thirdly, the tendency to make the adversary stop talking about their 28 years in office and even to relegate that historical period in our country's history to a joke.

Something not be even talked about, discussed, or even considered. We have heard, Mr Speaker, the bandying of various boodles of economic development, and we even had countries, or examples of countries, thrown at us. We heard of the Singapore model. We heard of the Chilean model - a plethora of models, and I agree with my colleague, Minister Jeffery, in refuting these models that were being advanced in the course of this debate. I just to want to quickly refer to one example. Mention was made of Singapore. There was a man by the name of Lee Quan Yu. He started out in 1963 after Singapore broke away from Malaysia. The People's Progressive Party was in Government from 1957 to 1964, and I want them to bear these dates in mind, Mr Speaker. The

People's Progressive Party was in government from 1957 to 1964, Lee Quan Yu started out in 1963. What we left in 1964, that was inherited by the PNC, pales into significance in relation to what Lee Quan Yu inherited after he broke away from Malaysia. This country, even though it was still a colony of Britain, had what was then described as the highest standard of living in the entire Caribbean. It had the best educational system in the entire Caribbean. We established the University of Guyana as an example of this, and we established the Bank of Guyana, and comrades, the economy and the country were moving by leaps and bounds, and I daresay that, if the People's Progressive Party had remained in office, this country would have outshone Singapore and Malaysia [*Applause*]

Mr Speaker, it is easy, quite simple, to come and bandy about these examples, and to compound and to add insult to injury, Mr Speaker, what we have is a tendency to leapfrog, to leave out, to escape, historical experiences, not to mention to blot it out completely, and to begin and talk as though the history of this country started in 1992. Mr Speaker, the PNC/R must make up its mind what it wants for Guyana, and I am serious about this, and I assume that many citizens of this country feel the same way. Those who sit in the opposition benches must make up their minds what they want for this country. Why do I say this, Mr Speaker? On the one hand, they pretend to support the free-market economy, but this is mere tongue-in-cheek posturing because, when you listen very attentively to the contributions, what do you discern? You get the distinct impression, from that what we are hearing here, is that in every thing, every movement, every aspect of social and political life, the government must be involved. We are moving away from that era. The time has long gone, Mr Speaker, for this type of approach which the PNC built itself and its authority on while they were in the government. The External Trade Bureau - the entire trade of the country was under one roof. Mr Speaker, I get the distinct impression, and my gut feeling tells me that these Honourable Members are still caught up in the maelstrom of socialist rhetoric and programmes. They are still caught up in that body and pretending to be free marketers - Ayatollahs of free trade, that

is what they are pretending to be but, deep inside, Mr Speaker, there is a philosophy that is lingering there that is only awaiting the opportunity to manifest itself in the social and economic life of this country. Mr Speaker, I want to submit that the PNC/R, those who sit on the opposite side of the House, must commit themselves, at the end of this debate, that, notwithstanding all the posturing, they must commit themselves, at the end of this debate, to a new economic culture. They must commit themselves to that, and they must seek to encourage and imbue in their supporters and their constituents, depending on how many they have, this new type of thinking which serve, Mr Speaker, and I am sure that they are acquainted with it. Ask not what your country can give you, but what you can give to your country. That is the kind of thinking that you must imbue in your people. Mr Speaker, this is the new kind of culture that I believe that this country needs. Too often we are hearing that the Government is not doing this, the Government is not doing that, the Government must do this, and the government must do that, but the next day, when they get on a plane and get to America, they are prepared to accept no government in their lives, but they want it here. Double-standards in their thinking, double-standards in their whole philosophical outlook. Mr Speaker, you have to bring something constructive to the table. You cannot expect, Mr Speaker, to come to the table to take away something. This is precisely what the PNC/R keeps doing all the days, and all the days of their lives. They are not bringing anything to the table, but they want, whenever they come to the table, to be taking away something. Mr Speaker, life does not work that way. Life is a question of give and take, but you only want to take. You do not want to give anything. All you want to give is criticisms, criticisms, criticisms. The Government is not doing anything, but you still want, even though, to listen to the contradiction ... Mr Speaker, listen to the contradiction - the Government is not doing anything, but yet you want the Government to do this and you want the Government to do that. How can the Government to do this and do that when you are saying that the Government is not doing anything? Mr Speaker, total contradictions.

continued in pt. II

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 CONVENTION CENTER
OCEAN VIEW INTERNATIONAL HOTEL LILIENDAAL Part II**

51ST SITTING

2.00 PM

Wednesday 2 March 2005

Continued fr. Pt 1

Mr Speaker, Mr Ravi Dev ... I think we have to congratulate him, and I am afraid that I am probably being a little cynical here. We have to congratulate him. Why? Because he has made the journey from the PNC/R's Economic Recovery Programme to Ravi Dev's Economic Risk Programme. That is what he has done. He has made the leap from the PNC's Economic Recovery Programme to Ravi Dev's Economic Risk Programme. Mr Speaker, we know, by the virtue of our own lives ... because we never left this country to go anywhere. We stuck it out through thin and thick, or thick and thin. Well, now it is your turn. That is what democracy is all about.

Mr Speaker, we know where the ERP took us - to the road to disaster. That is where the ERP took us. What we do not know is where Ravi Dev's version of the ERP will take us. We do not know where the Economic Risk Programme will take us. Mr Speaker, I posed a simple question to this Honourable House - all the talk of risks, the Government must take risks, the Government must know to take risks, or else. Mr Speaker, I asked a simple question: who would want to gamble with the fortunes of a nation? Which responsible Government would want to play dice with people's wellbeing?

I wish to submit that Ravi Dev's Economic Risk Programme, if implemented, would throw the entire economy of this country into a tailspin. It would completely upset the macro-economic fundamentals currently obtaining in this country, and we would be on the road of no-

return. But he did not contain himself only to the Economic Risk Programme, he develops it further, and he advocates a Political Risk Platform, because he recognises, as we do, Mr Speaker, that politics is a concentrated form of economics. He recognises that, and so he moved from economics to politics and he advocates a political risk programme which, Mr Speaker, I daresay will throw this country into total political turmoil, if it is ever implemented in this country. Heaven forbids what would be the economic and social consequences of going in that direction.

Mr Speaker, I want to caution all those who are advocating models of economic development, and these various platforms and programmes. What we want, at this point, in time for our country's development, are four fundamental features. We want:

1. *predictability*. We do not want to be groping in the dark, as is being suggested we do. We do not want to take risks when we do not know what will be the political fortunes of our people;.
2. *stability*;
3. *security*; and
4. *sustainability*.

Those are the four features that must characterise the future of this country at this point in time.

Mr Speaker, this is not a time for reckless action, and that is precisely what is being suggested from the opposite side of the House. Mr Speaker, we are not going to be a part of any infantile and immature behaviour. We are not going to be a part of that. We are not going to be playing with the political fortunes of this country. We are not doing that. What I would respectfully suggest, most humbly, to those who advocate these economic developments, are the following:

As for Mr Dev, I think that he needs more time in the opposition, because that is where I think he will become a little more mature. He should not be in a hurry to get into government, because he might regret it. I am sure those who have been in office on that side of the House would agree with me. Let him spend some more time in the opposition and mature - like a good XM rum, become extra mature - and those of his ilk, I would suggest that they do the same. Do not hurry to get into government, bide your time in the opposition, and learn the wills of the way. When you believe that you have reached maturity, and when the people decide that they wish to have you in the Government, then so be it, Mr Speaker.

Anyone who is acquainted with the global and national realities, because I kept hearing this word being bandied about quite often over there, about realities, let me tell you there are realities, and there are realities. What might be your reality might not be my reality. For I daresay that anyone who is acquainted with the objective reality of the global and national situation would agree that the theme for this year's Budget accurately reflects these realities.

The truth is that, while we are confronting these challenges at the international level, we are, at the same time, simultaneously, striving to sustain growth and development, as the Budget suggests. But let it be said that growth and development are twin processes, and are integrally linked. Neither of these two processes can bear fruit overnight. However, the point is that the Government of the day, while promoting growth and development, by implementing policies that are people oriented, we are at the same time taking concrete steps to improve the quality of life of the Guyanese people. Mr Speaker, we need to repeat this *ad nauseam* until it gets into the thick skulls of those who probably have a desire, or probably do not have the disposition to accept certain realities. We need to repeat, over and over again, that the maintenance of a stable macro-economic environment is critical to moving any country forward, and that is not something we wish to gamble on. Mr Speaker, I ask the simple question again: how can this economy be in shambles, as those in the Opposition benches claim, when we have kept inflation

under control, when interest rates are low, and when we have maintained a stable exchange rate. How can you say the economy is in shambles? How can this Government be deemed heartless? I have heard that word used time and time again, emanating from that side of that House. How can they describe this Government as heartless, when the beneficiaries of these fundamentals that are in place of these people-centred policies are the widest and the broadest majority of the people of this country? Mr Speaker, the national and international realities I referred to - they throw up both challenges and opportunities. We read that in every piece of literature that comes out, whether it is a base of a study, whether it is an academic piece of work, whether it is a publication. We read that all over because so much has been written about this.

The Budget explains that it is our task to confront these challenges, not to back away from the challenges. I question what the Honourable Member, Mr Deryck Bernard, was suggesting, that we appear to be slinking away like a fox, or a sly mongoose, from confronting the challenges that face this country. We have never backed away from challenges, whether we were in the opposition or in the Government. That is why we are where we are today.

Mr Speaker, the literature also speaks about seeking out and exploiting opportunities, so when the Honourable Member, Mr Deryck Bernard, comes and lectures to us that we do not seem to be able to identify opportunities and exploit those opportunities, he is lecturing to the converted. I must stress at the very heart of this twin objective, of this twin process of development and growth, the people must be at the heart of this process. The working people - the farmers and the broad majority of people who contribute to the growth and development of this economy, they are the ones who must be at the heart of this process. Mr Speaker, let me touch on the issue of challenges at the external level. I am not saying anything new here. A major challenge facing developing countries such as Guyana is that of putting a human face to globalisation. How to put a human face to the process of globalisation? Mr Speaker, simply rejecting globalisation is certainly not an option for Guyana or CARICOM. Let me also add that opening our markets is but one di-

mension to embracing globalisation. So when he talks of Mr Stiglitz, and we respect Mr Stiglitz, he is one of the famous economists in the world today. We say that we did not get this from Mr Stiglitz. We got this from our own experience. We got this from life. Mr Stiglitz added the academics and the intellectual spin to what life has taught us, but we say that opening our markets does not ensure development by itself. We know that our domestic policies must also be right, as the programme used to say, *getting it right*, and we believe that we have gotten it right. In addition to that, Mr Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

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

Question put and agreed to

Mr Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon Clement J Rohee: Thank you, Mr Speaker. What is also important is that the Government of the day must ensure that the distribution of the benefits must be equitable, and I daresay that this flood experience that we recently had is but a microcosm of what happens at a national level in one fiscal year. The way in which we distributed the needs, assistance and help to people, I personally participated in that, and I am prepared to put my neck on the block that I know that the Government was very even-handed in dealing with flood relief across the length and breadth of this nation. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, I challenge members on the Opposition benches to prove that the Government domestic policies have not been right and, to use a word that was coined by my good friend, the Honourable Member, Mr Alexander, *imbalanced*. I challenge them to prove that the Government's policies - its domestic policies, have not been right and imbalanced, and that we have not been doing our utmost to ensure that the distribution of the national cake is not being done on an equitable basis.

Mr Speaker, this year's Budget is yet another example, if not indi-

cator, of Government's commitment to ensure that as many Guyanese as possible ... and this tendency that those on the Opposition benches have, of always subtly introducing discrimination and marginalisation, like the conservative elements in the past in the cold war, you used to see a communist under every table, you used to see a communist under every bed, you must get rid ... I would suggest that these distinguished and Honourable Members rid themselves of this complex, where they see, at every bend of the corner, and every taste of the policy, they must move away and come out of the store which only offers the flavour of discrimination and victimisation and taste other flavours that are available in the stores.

Mr Speaker, I want to suggest that, if trade policy was a plane, the negotiators, like pilots flying today's modern complex jet aircraft, have to keep their eyes on many more dials and not simply the altimeter, the airspeed and the trim of the wings. They have to keep their eyes on much more than that. They also have to look at what is called passenger comfort, and that is the most critical - how comfortable the passengers are on this journey. Mr Speaker, we in the PPP/C certainly know where we want to go, and how we are going to get there, and they can talk until their faces get blue that we do not know where we want to go, and how we want to get there, we know that.

Mr Speaker, listening to our friends on the other side of the House, it is hard, extremely hard, most difficult, to penetrate and to discern whether they themselves are clear about their sense of direction. They seem to be rudderless and without any clear indication of where they want to take this country, even though they are in the Opposition. Mr Speaker, I want to warn that if it is their intention to take this country back to the pre-1992 period, then the electorate has already rejected that path on three occasions, and I have absolutely no doubt that, as the night follows the day that, come 2006, they will reject it for a fourth consecutive term. I have absolutely no doubt about that.

Mr Speaker, international trade in these days structured around four, rather than three, industrial polls. You want analysis? Let us give

analysis now. Let us talk analysis. You thought that analysis can only come from that side of the House. We could do analyses here too.

The European Union is building on its strengths in chemicals and pharmaceuticals - cars and non-electrical machinery, that is where their strength lies. Japan is holding its position in electrical and non-electrical machinery, cars and plastics, but they have lost some ground to China on office equipment and telecommunications.

The United States, where manufacturing continues to decline, is holding out well on non-electrical machinery and plastics, and China, which is strengthening the dominant position in textiles, clothing, and various manufacturing items has confirmed its position in office equipment and telecommunications.

Mr Speaker, trade continues to be of great importance to Guyana. Listen and learn. This country is exceptional for its high degree of dependence on external trade. This is no secret, and this is nothing new, so that the point that the Honourable Member, Mr Jerome Khan, was seeking to make when he made his intervention, with respect to the national trade strategy, which was drawn up by Mr Craig VanGrasstek, a distinguished consultant and a lecturer at Harvard University, was not something anyone whom is acquainted with Guyana's vulnerability as a small trading State would not be aware of. Anyone whom is aware of the high dependence of Guyana on external trade would know this. In fact, a study by the IMF revealed that the average CARICOM Member States import and export of goods and non-factor services accounted for 160.9 percent of GDP between 1994 and 1998. For Guyana it was 211.3 percent of GDP, and this clearly demonstrates that Guyana can ill-afford to overlook the challenges and opportunities presented by external factors.

It is precisely because of these realities, and because we are not alone in this respect ... there are many other countries that face this kind of problem, that encounters this phenomenon, that we, as a block in the World Trade Organisation, are pushing as hard as we can to have ac-

cepted a new category of members within the WTO, namely small, vulnerable, and commodity-dependent countries. We need to have this new category of countries accepted within the World Trade Organisation so that we could deal with this problem of over-exposure and dependence on global trade.

Mr Speaker, as was pointed out in the Budget Presentation, our merchandise export grew by 9.2 percent, which is US \$559.8 million. This is 82 percent of our GDP, compared to 80.8 percent in 2003. At the same time, our merchandise imports in 2004 were US\$ 674 million over US \$ 571.7 million in 2003, which was over 90 percent of our GDP. This is a good example to show the extent to which this country depends on external trade. Mr Speaker, our top 10 export markets are:

- the United Kingdom;
- Canada;
- the United States;
- Jamaica;
- Trinidad and Tobago;
- Belgium;
- the Netherlands;
- Barbados;
- Portugal; and
- Antigua and Barbuda.

These are where our main exports go. With respect to imports, the countries that top the list are:

- the United States;

- Trinidad and Tobago;
- the Netherland Antilles;
- the United Kingdom;
- Japan;
- China;
- the Netherlands;
- the British Virgin Islands;
- Canada; and
- Brazil.

But, regrettably, with respect to CARICOM, our balance-of-trade remains unfavourable with our main imports coming from:

- Trinidad and Tobago;
- Barbados; and
- Jamaica.

But when you disaggregate the sum total of this situation, we find that we have favourable trade flows among Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica and Suriname. So, after all, we are not doing too badly in CARICOM.

As a result of our work in the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) of CARICOM in 2004, we have gotten both St Vincent and St Lucia to remove discriminatory import taxes on rum originating in Guyana, and we are currently working with the secretariat to remove a discriminatory export tax imported by Suriname on logs destined for the CARICOM market.

Wednesday, 2 March 2005

Mr Speaker, our Ministry is also working hard at the level of COTED for market access to Trinidad and Tobago for our beef and poultry products. We have recently received a report of a sight visit by a CARICOM assessment team in relation of to the food safety and epidemiological standards to assess the quarantine procedures and the disease surveillance programme for the export of beef and chicken to the CARICOM market.

Mr Speaker, greater market access in CARICOM for our local products is not a privilege. We do not consider greater market access for our products in CARICOM to be a privilege. In fact, we consider it our right under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, and I want to assure this Honourable House that we will do everything in our power, including resort to the Caribbean Court of Justice if necessary, to ensure that all barriers to trade are removed - whether they are technical, non-tariff, or discriminatory, because this is not what the CSME is all about.

Mr Speaker, the CSME, CARICOM Single Market and Economy, is about the free movement of people, goods and services, as well as capital, in a single, seamless economic space comprising 5.6 million people, except Haiti, and if you add Haiti, it comes up to approximately 6 million people. So when we go out there to market Guyana, we do not market Guyana as such, we market Guyana as part of the entire CSME. In other words, we speak of a market of 5.6 million people, to which any investor coming into this region would have access to.

Mr Speaker, we are also pushing aggressively for a comprehensive review of the Community's Common External Tariff. Too often we find that this particular instrument, rather than serving to protect regional manufacturers from goods of non-community origin, and to encourage regional production, is manipulated by some member states of the community in such a way that it has no effect whatsoever. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Time is up, Honourable Member

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: I move that the Honourable Minister be

given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, the comprehensive review of the CET will bring immense benefits to our local manufacturers and exporters, but I want to make the point that, since Governments do not trade, it is important for the private sector to take advantage of these market openings, because they mean jobs. They mean greater private sector developments, investments and, in the final analysis, growth and development. MOFTIC is the focal point for the CSME, and the realisation of the CSME in 2006 is the key to our success in engaging the globalised world economy. We do not want to engage the world economy on our own. It is impossible; it is difficult; it is almost insurmountable. We have to do that as a community, as a grouping. That is why we have sought to harmonise ten pieces of laws constituting of protocols, and constituting the Single Market and Economy. Guyana is committed to the CSME. We are committed to be CSME-ready by December 31, 2005, and we have already made significant progress in that direction. In the coming months we will be putting, or placing emphasis, on our legislative agenda, because from here on the process is basically a legislative one.

Mr Speaker, the key to the process of Guyana embracing the CSME are two factors:

- public awareness; and
- the active involvement of the private sector.

The recent public debate on the issue involving ANSA McAl and Banks DIH helps raise the level of awareness in Guyana about the CSME, but it must not take issues of this type for us to be engaging in robust debates on CSME, and the implications of Guyana in the CSME. Indeed, such debates must take place continuously, with the view of broadening the debate at the national level, and thus educating the people in

general. Mr Speaker, we would welcome the views of the Opposition on the CSME and Guyana's commitment to be CSME-ready by December 31, 2005. We want to have your views on this.

Mr Speaker, with respect to challenges, I want to refer to the proposals to reform the sugar regime of the European Union, which was raised in the Budget Presentation. I have spoken, several times on several occasions, on this matter in this Honourable House. We, as part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group, have maintained that the proposed price cut of 37 percent is too deep. The 2005 deadline for implementation is too short, and the proposed phased-in period is too soon. We have told the European Union that we are not against reform *per se*. What we are against is this particular reform proposal which, if implemented, would cripple the sugar industry and bring about untold suffering and social dislocation to our people in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to inform this Honourable House that ten out of the current twenty-five member States of the European Union are supportive of our position, and they have rejected the proposals that have been put up by the Commission. They have in fact formed what is known as a blocking minority so that this proposal cannot move forward unless they change their position. The Government of Guyana is in the forefront of the intense lobbying that is taking place in Europe. The Commission has come up with an action plan, what they call an action plan, for accompanying measures for countries that are to be affected by the regime's proposals. We have told the European Commission that, while we appreciate the action plan, it is secondary to our main concern, which, if the reform proposals as currently constituted . . . and we are demanding of them a fair and equitable reconfiguration of their proposals. Mr Speaker, next week stakeholders on this matter will meet in Trinidad and Tobago to engage in a one-day brain-storming session with the Europeans, and Guyana will be present at this meeting at the technical level.

Mr Speaker, I want to assure all of Guyana's cane-cutters, and the field and factory workers, as well as the small cane farmers of this country and their families, and all those associated with the sugar industries,

that the Government of Guyana will continue to do everything in its power to ensure that the impact of the reform proposals do not cripple the sugar industry in this country. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, another challenge to our sugar is the case now before the appellate body at the WTO. This is the case where Australia, Brazil and Thailand have challenged the EU sugar regime. Again I have updated this Honourable House on several occasions on this matter. As you are aware, on 15 October 2004, the EU lost this case before a WTO panel. However, the European Union decided to appeal the decision. The WTO appellate body will meet from 7-8 March 2005. The ACP, including Guyana, is a third party to this appeal. We have a team of competent lawyers working with us from the inception. Guyana, Mauritius, and Swaziland will be making oral submissions to this appellate body. In our presentations to our appellate body we will be seeking to demonstrate the social and economic consequences that will impact on our countries should the panel's decision be upheld by the appellate body. Here again we have been in the forefront championing the interest of our people at every stage of the process. It is our hope that, whatever is the decision of the appellate body, the interest of the ACP States would not be affected.

We have taken note of what President Lula of Brazil said on this matter when he addressed this Honourable House, but as we have said, time and again, such assurances do not increase our comfort level on this matter. Notwithstanding these challenges to sugar, there remains room for optimism. We are pressing the European Union to provide funds for the establishment of a competitiveness fund as an anticipatory measure, apart from resources for the adjustment costs, following the implementation of the reform proposals. Be optimistic, Mr Speaker, about the availability of additional access to the EU markets, as a result of an expanded European Union, from ten to twenty seven countries. Guyana has the potential to become the third largest supplier of cane sugar to the European market after Mauritius and Swaziland. Gone are the days when we imported, from Guatemala, sugar for local consumption and in order to satisfy our external commitments

Mr Speaker, when we talk about the future of sugar in Guyana, we must remember the past when, under the PNC, the sugar industry was on the verge of collapse. Sugar does have a future in this country, and a sustainable one at that. Our intention is to diversify within sugar, and not outside of sugar. The objective is to move to value-added brands of products.

Moreover, intellectual property rights legislation, treated with geographic indications to protect brand names of local manufacturers, will soon see the light of day in this Honourable House. So when Mr Bernard spoke about intellectual property rights legislation and protecting innovations and so forth, we have already moved in that direction. This would be a major breakthrough for Guyana.

Mr Speaker, with respect to rice, we continue to press for duty-free, quota-free market access to the European Market. At the same time, we are currently drawing up proposals for our rescue package and a complementary rice-enhancement agreement with the European Union to draw down on fresh resources, in addition to the €24 million. These fresh resources will be available from the tenth EDF by December 2007. In fact, we have just concluded our negotiations with the European Union on this matter. We want to assure this Honourable House, and the rice-farming community in this country, that the PPP/C administration is working assiduously to ensure that the livelihood and the security in the industry is not jeopardised, and that the industry remains viable and competitive. And as the night follows the day, we will prove to the prophets of doom on the other side of this House that the rice industry will bring prosperity and immense social and economic benefits to thousands of Guyanese. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, Guyana is in the peculiar situation where it is currently engaged in five cases of external negotiations. We are in negotiations at the:

- World Trade Organisation;

- ACP/EU;
- Free Trade Area of the Americas;
- Single Market and Economy, and
- bilateral level as well.

We have just concluded the first round of negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement between CARICOM and MERCOSUR in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr Speaker, quickly let me report to this Honourable House that Intellectual Property Rights legislation will soon be laid in the National Assembly for consideration. This legislation, which is long overdue, and its implementation, will bring immense benefits to Guyana, in terms of investments, employment generation, and industrial expansion. It will also result in an increase in our trade and services.

Mr Speaker, Ministry of Foreign Trade is also responsible for mobilising technical assistance for capacity-building and institutional-strengthening. We have bilateral mechanism such as the Guyana/Cuba joint Commission, the Guyana/China joint Commission, the Guyana/Columbia joint Commission, et cetera. We also engage in other forms of international cooperation with other countries.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, we have just finalised bilateral investment and protection agreements with Switzerland, the Republic of Korea, and India. We are also negotiating a double taxation agreement with India. Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation is a small ministry, but a dynamic Ministry, and we intend to work assiduously to bring as many benefits as we can to this country in order to ensure that the 2005 Budget becomes, not only a living reality, but something that benefits the overwhelming majority of people in this country. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence.

Mrs Volda A Lawrence: Mr Speaker, governments the world over, especially in developing countries, may have, in the past, looked at social programmes in terms of civil society. Today, there is a urgent need for governments to look more closely, attaching greater importance to the development of social policies and the provision of social programmes, programmes for poverty reduction, literacy, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, juveniles and health to name a few.

Studies have shown that governments which aggressively address the issue of poverty allocate a critical proportion of their budgets and activities towards this cause. In some cases, a large part of their goods, services and expenditures are used to address social policy concerns such as income, inequality of opportunity, and economic insecurity.

However, Mr Speaker, time has also shown that any government that ventures into the formulation of such policy must be a government with vision. One which seeks, or one which has, or seeks to develop some macro economic policies and strategies and, most of all, a government that is able to convince the people that they can not only produce goods, but deliver them also. They not only talk the talk, but are also adept at walking the walk.

It is true that the PPP/C government of the day had outlined, in their many manifestos, the many ways that they have planned to beat the pinch of poverty stalking our society. I can still recall the 1997 manifesto, which referred to poverty being the critical issue. At that time, the Government recognised the need to increase the productivity of the poor, expand the employment opportunities, and raise income levels.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Finance, like in previous Budget speeches, outlines in Pages 16 through 18 the many ways he is attempting to deal with the critical issues of poverty. While the national Estimates allocations for the social sector is increased each year, those persons who fall within the poverty bracket are still to feel the impact of

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this sector on their lives - persons in our society whose needs should be addressed by the Ministry of Labour Human Services and Social Security. These persons still await the accessing of these services in a professional and equitable manner. Those services which give moral scope and emphasis in the delivery of social welfare to Guyanese are as follows:

- to provide services to protect the Guyanese society from crimes and juvenile delinquency,
- to raise the standard of living for all Guyanese through the provision of non-contributing financial assistance
- to monitor and to coordinate the activities of social services
- to provide guidance and assistance to families and children
- to strive towards the empowerment of women,
- to offer advise and regulatory services,
- to provide geriatric care to the needy, elderly and indigent Guyanese.

Mr Speaker, I do not doubt the Government when they say that those areas that I have just listed are the main focus of the Ministry of Labour Human Services and Social Security. For over the last few years we have seen Government involvement in the several studies done regarding poverty alleviation. We have seen:

- the National Development Strategy Paper - Eradicating Poverty and Unifying Guyana.
- the Guyana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper; and
- the Guyana Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Progress Report 2004/2005

Mr Speaker, as I rise to speak to the National Budget of 2005,

captioned *Confronting Challenges - Sustaining Growth and Development* laid in this Honourable House by the Honourable Member and friend Minister Saisnarine Kowlessar, I wish to point out that as usual my good friend informed this House and the nation that, and I quote from Page 3, paragraph 1.8:

All stakeholders must be involved if we are to continue to roll back the tide of poverty and reach the frontiers of economic prosperity

Mr Speaker, I know of many persons in many communities who would be appreciative that their plight - that of poverty, is once again being addressed in this Honourable House, and they should feel comforted, in fact, that there is an agency of Government which is mandated to provide the necessary assistance needed to fight the scourge of poverty. This agency is none other than the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security. Mr Speaker I asked the Honourable Members of this House to show some understanding and appreciation as we take a look at some of those vital issues in which the Honourable Minister of Finance has asked us stakeholders to become involved with.

Let us first look at the *Probation and Welfare Services*, whose primary function is to offer counselling in various areas of social problems. Over the years, this unit lacks the complement of qualified and trained personnel needed to offer the services required. These professionals need to be given the scope to work in an environment where their professional, expert assessments and recommendations are rewarded with non- intervention by persons with political agendas. All cases must be dealt with on merit. Victims not connected with persons who hold high office must receive the same treatment as those with friends in high places.

Our *street children*. We do not deny that there is provision for some street children at the drop-in centre, but is this centre equipped to meet the needs of these children? Many of these children seek an adult with whom they can develop some form of relationship whereby they

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can build trust and feel secure - not only a meal and a place to sleep. This is hopelessly inadequate to prepare our underprivileged children to take their place in society.

While there is a building where children can visit, or be taken to, the centre lacks qualified and trained social workers with whom these children can interact on a long-term basis. Volunteers who assist at this centre do not stay for long periods, hence when children begin to become attached to a particular person, that person has to remove him or herself, and the child must begin all over again to develop another relationship with another adult. In many cases, the child, or children, do not return to the centre. This surely cannot suffice.

Over the years the Welfare Department has been plagued by the lack of the requisite number of professional staff. Something must be done to remedy this lapse. Estimates over the years have shown the inability, or unwillingness, to attract the full complement of authorised staff. Welfare Officers, in most regions, are minimal or not existent. For example:

- Region 1 - there is no officer
- Region 2 - there are two officers
- Region 3 - there are two officers
- Region 4 - there are three officers
- Region 5 - there is one officer
- Region 6 - there are three officers
- Regions 7, 8 and 9 - there are no officers; while
- Region 10 - has one officer.

For street children and juveniles the conditions have... [Pause]

Women and Legal Assistance - Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I know that, like you, I too have heard and read with interest of the setting up of a Women and Gender Equity Commission. For me and many other women with whom I interacted, we felt that some good would have come out of this Commission but, as I speak in this Honourable House, this Commission is as dead as a doornail due to politics and a total lack of insightfulness. This Commission is another one-in-name only, even though there were fifteen women elected through secret ballot from 117 nominees representing approximately 35 women's organisations. The results of these elections were submitted with the relevant bio-data forms to the Clerk of the National Assembly, dating as far back as August 2003. This process of elections of the intended new commission caused the existing national commission on women to cease functioning at the end of December 2003.

Mr Speaker, during this period, the first quarter of 2004, nominations were reopened without the knowledge of the women who participated in the first process, even the chairperson on the then defunct national commission on women was not notified. The new nomination forms were sent to only Regional Democratic Councils and not to national women's organisations. Mr Speaker, as I speak, this commission now suffers from *sleptospirosis* [Laughter] It has failed to do what it has set out to be done. Do not worry, Honourable Member Ms Shadick, I will get it right. I always do.

Mr Speaker, abuse of our children is on the increase - physical, sexual, mental and psychological abuse, not only by the parents or guardians, but by friends, family members, teachers, religious leaders, to name a few. Many cases before the courts tell the story of the plight of Guyana's children, our children.

Those few Welfare Officers involved in the day to day battle for these children can tell this Honourable House that many of these neglected children become juvenile youths who turn to crime. Our country has been experiencing a large upsurge in crime by our youths and, mind you, the statistics will show that this menace in our society has no racial

bounds, though some would like to say differently. We have witnessed youths of all ethnicity involved in one type of crime or another. Once again the probation service continues to operate with a mere fourteen officers against the requisite strength of forty. Appalling, to say the least.

Mr Speaker, I brought to this Honourable House, over three years ago, the plight of these juvenile youths and those children who are taken off the streets. At that time those children were kept in Camp House - a police detention centre for male juveniles. They were kept in fifteen by seven cells which, from time to time, housed up to 267 children. Like the 250-odd victims of our flood disaster, they had no mattresses, but what awaited them was a dark and filthy room with overflowing toilets, a place where they suffered from ringworm, scabies, and swollen testicles.

May I inform this Honourable House that, to date, as we continue to champion the cause for the development of our children, including street children and juveniles, the conditions have improved. The boys are now sent to the Ruimveldt Police Station and the girls to the East La Penitence Police Station, which houses adult females who have issues with the law - some improvement.

Mr Speaker, many of these children picked up off the streets continue to come from rural areas and, in most cases, are transferred to the New Opportunity Corps, where their rights are denied. The New Opportunity Corps, which is an institution established for reforming juveniles, now lacks the basic elements to reform anything or anyone. This institution lacks the necessary instruments and professionals needed to reform the lives of our youths. During 2003, there were over 300 juvenile cases as against 200 in 2002. Just think about that.

Mr Speaker, the Women Lawyers' Association, with their limited subvention, continues to provide limited services to women in the coastland regions, with the exception of Region 2, which continues to enjoy the services of a legal officer. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Minister Bibi Shadick told this House that, under her watch, there was going

to be legal representative in all the regions for women. Mr Speaker, this is still to happen.

Uniform distribution - The issue of uniform/voucher distribution continues to be one of much contention. On Monday evening the Honourable Minister reported that all hinterland children were given uniforms in 2004. Shortly thereafter, the Honourable Member Mrs Bancroft informed this Honourable House that only a few children in the hinterland region, Region 8, from which she hails, received school uniforms.

Mr Speaker, this has been the trend in 2004 also. Many desperate parents were taken for a ride when they were informed, through the newspapers, by Minister Shadick that school uniform vouchers were being distributed by religious entities and community leaders. Many persons went from church to church inquiring as how they could access such help for their offsprings, but none was forthcoming.

In my capacity as Director for the People's National Congress/Reform Human Services Department, I undertook to write to the Minister concerning this issue. To date I have received nothing from the Honourable Minister. I wish to inform this Honourable House that the People's National Congress/Reform, in its commitment to people, raised over \$1.2 million, all accounted for, and distributed uniform vouchers throughout this country. *[Applause]* This was done on a non-discriminatory basis. Irrespective of where they were from - whether from Foulis, Ann's Grove, or Enmore, person's eligible received vouchers from the People's National Congress/Reform. *[Applause]*

Pensioners - Mr Speaker, toady pensioners in our country are treated as liabilities, when in fact we should be providing an environment in which our pensioners are treated with respect and dignity. An increase of five-percent was given to our old-age pensioners, which takes their monthly pension from \$1,920 to \$2,005, a mere increase of \$85, not even enough to buy a loaf of bread. On the other hand, Public service pensioners, according to the Minister of Finance, will receive a pension that is 50 percent of the minimum wage. The old-age pensioners now receive a

tenth of the minimum wage. How are they to survive on such a meagre allowance? And to think that this increase was only retroactive to January 2005. One must ask what the fate of these old people is in the general scheme of things. These old people who, for the most part of their lives have, served their country well and are now destitute. Mr Speaker, if we ignore our old people's plight then what is the message that we are sending to our youths?

I think that a better system needs to be put in place for the preparation of the old-age pension books. The staff identified to do this must be properly trained in advance. Planning for the old-age pension books distribution should commence at least three months in advance. The timing of the present distribution system is totally unacceptable. As I speak today - 2 March 2005, the shut-ins have not yet received their books. *Interruption: 'How do you know that?'* I am your shadow, remember that? Having written to the Minister on the plight of those pensioners in Micobie, Tumatumari, and Princeville in Region 8 - as usual no reply, that the officers be sent to these communities to pay pensioners, since the cost of transportation to the Mahdia post office return from Tumatumari is \$3,000; Micobie is \$4,000, and Princeville is \$2,400. Mr Speaker, remember the pension is \$2,005.

Mr Speaker, problems such as equity in the distribution of the old-age pension books continue to exist. Centres for distribution of old-age pension books continue to open late. Many pensioners turn up at centres to find their names on the list, but their books are not available. It happened this year. The Honourable Minister, in her Budget presentation, declared that there is no fraud concerning pension books. I wonder whether the Minister is also the Auditor-General that she auditing her books. I wonder.

Benefits to pensioners - Mr Speaker, with regard to those who are exempted from paying for water, this selection process needs to be vastly improved. It should be done with the involvement, perhaps, of the National Commission for the Elderly responsible for the elderly. Many complaints have been heard that persons in the PPP/C areas are being

given priority over those pensioners in areas who do not support the PPP/C.

Mr Speaker, transparency is essential in this process, and the same applies to the distribution of spectacles. On the other hand, pensioners who are given the benefit of reduced or non-payment of water rates experience much difficulty when visiting Guyana Water Inc. since there... [Interruption: 'Tell me about Linden. Tell me about Linden. Is she doing a better job there?'] Listen to me, Honourable Member, listen [Laughter] I am saying that the pensioners who received their reduction, and/or non-payment of water rates, experienced lots of difficulty with the office of Guyana Water Inc., since there is a lack of coordination between the two entities. They are sent back and forth, back and forth. There is no communication whatsoever.

Spectacles - While some assistance is given through the poverty programme to pensioners who require spectacles, this is highly discriminatory. All pensioners should be given the same consideration. [Interruption]

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to finish her presentation.

Question put and agreed.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Mrs Volda A Lawrence: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Funeral expenses - Mr Speaker, the criteria for assistance are not clearly defined. While it is told ... remember the Honourable Member Minister of Finance encouraged the stakeholders to come onboard ... I am a stakeholder, sweetheart ... While it is told that a flat rate is used, this is not so in all cases and, at the same time, the Honourable Minister must ensure that there is some flexibility, since the cost of funeral expenses in

the city is different from that in other places.

Mr Speaker, the PNC/R wants to play a more meaningful role in the development of this country, and plans to do so. At present, our efforts are thwarted in every affair by the Government's blatant disregard for the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and general bad governance. We believe that it is time the Government begins to confront the key findings relating to ministries, departments and regions, outlined year after year by the Auditor General. For example, for several years the Auditor General has reported, and I quote from Page 4 of the 2003 report:

The proceeds from the Guyana lotteries continue to be retained in a special bank account to meet public expenditure without Parliamentary approval. Such proceeds are public revenues which are required to be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Mr Speaker, from the Guyana lotteries report in the Auditor General's report for the period December 1999 to December 2003, the total of \$6.268 million has not been transferred to the Consolidated Fund. The Auditor General continues to report on the significant breaches in the Tender Board Regulations, in the many ministries/ departments and regions - too numerous to mention.

Added, the 2003 Auditor General's Report has indicated two new findings on Page 4, paragraph 16 which reads:

The Audit Office assessment of the operations of the wildlife division at the Office of the President indicated that the legal status of this entity is somewhat blurred in that in some respect, it is treated as a central Government activity, while in others it is treated as a separate legal entity. The Audit Office is of the view that the operations of the wildlife division should fall under the purview of the Environmental Protection Agency. In addition, amounts

totalling \$50 million related to revenues collected during the period 1998 to 2002 could not be traced as having being banked.

Paragraph 3 of the same page 4 reads also:

A number of irregularities were discovered in the granting of duty free concessions to re-migrants. The matter was referred to the police and two officers were charged and placed before the courts.

Mr Speaker, I do not need to continue, since every Member of this Honourable House has a copy of this report.

Let me conclude. It is said that countries are judged by how they treat their elderly citizens. If we were to use that yardstick we would be found badly lacking. Pension books are given out long after they should be, old men and women - some hardly able to walk, shuttle from post office to post office. Our youths too deserve better from us. Let us spend funds to improve their lot. Make their improved conditions a priority, not only on prestige projects. They deserve our help and our compassion. They can make our country a better place. So I urge the Honourable Members on the other side of the House to let us give them that chance.

Mr Speaker, before I take my seat, I want to offer these words to the Honourable Member Bibi Shadick. As stakeholders, it is our duty to police what you have done; as stakeholders, it is our duty to represent the people of this country; as stakeholders, it is our duty to make recommendations. So do not let your pressure go up, my dear, we will still be Members of Parliament and friends at the end of the day. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mrs Chandarpal

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, it is with pleasure and pride that I rise to lend my support to the Budget proposals, so ably put forward by the Honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, most of the world is going through great financial and social problems, and this brings out the need to confront the challenges which, inevitably, flow from such a situation.

This Budget - the twelfth of the PPP/C, is in fact the largest in our country's history. Much has been said already on this Budget - some positive and some negative. The theme in itself has identified, to my mind, the crucial point for the dilemma for us as a young nation. Only days ago we celebrated our thirty- fifth anniversary as a republic born out of a desire to attain true freedom, sovereignty, and economic independence.

As we reflect on this idea, we need to recall the good old days, as we used to say when we lived like a big family. A lot has happened to divide us, and it is imperative that, in the culture of a democratic State, both Government and Opposition must take on their responsibilities, which is the norm in any democracy, to take our country to greater heights. I recall, Mr Speaker, the sentiments of the Former President, Dr Jagan, on the occasion of the twenty-six anniversary of the republic when he said:

If our people, who were slaves and indentured servants, could raise children to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, first-class entrepreneurs ranking with the best in the world, why can't we achieve the same for our children under much-improved circumstances; but we can hardly do these things by returning to the standards and way of life they maintained - where principles and neighbourliness predominated and race did not feature in the sharing of efforts and triumphs. It is a natural progression for united efforts to prevail in achieving success - no matter what the undertaking. We need to hold sacred the

principles of right and wrong our forefathers upheld, no matter what the cost. What we are doing today with our badly-falling standards is cheating their memories, defeating their struggles, and negating the spirit and the valour colouring their sacrifices. We need to reevaluate our priorities and decide what is worthwhile in life.

We, the decision-makers, have a responsibility to this nation, and to the young people who are watching from the sidelines. We have the collective responsibility to take on our role in a very positive and responsible way so that we can achieve development in the shortest possible time. Do we want our children to only look at the greener pastures in the developed countries, or do we want them to remain here?

The only way we can have accelerated development is when we embrace the same goals for our nations good. I do believe that those goals were agreed to by more than 700 consultations from Guyanese from all walks of life, when the PRSP document was adopted. The Honourable Minister, in his Presentation, referred to this issue when he explained that the first review of the PRSP was completed, and that the comments and recommendations were taken on board in formulating a new three-year medium-term programme. He went on to say, and I quote from Page 22 of his Budget Presentation:

Mr Speaker, the over-arching consideration of the three-year programme is growth, employment generation, and the improvement of the quality of life of all Guyanese.

These, to my mind, Mr Speaker, constitute the most important ingredients for our development. Take growth, for example. Is it possible to attain levels of 1992/ 1997 of a 7 percent annual GDP growth when, according to the world economic outlook, global growth is expected to fall to 4.3 percent?

We recognise that growth is not dependent on internal factors alone, but in a number of other issues, as was pointed out in the presentation of

the Minister when he said:

Mr Speaker, other challenges at the international level abound. These will test our resolve during this and coming years. The forces of globalisation, liberalisation, and regional integration are systematically eroding the nonreciprocal trade preferences and the market protection on which we have traditionally depended on.

In view of the aforementioned, we must ensure that strategic interventions identified for 2005 are met, and these are:

- maintaining macro-economic stability;
- expanding the economy through enhanced performance of traditional industries; diversification and the development of new activities;
- rapidly increasing job opportunities;
- improving the physical infrastructure;
- providing improved educational, health, housing, water and sanitary systems and facilities;
- making our countries safer from crimes and drugs;
- reducing poverty;
- safeguarding our democracy; and
- strengthening the governance framework.

Mr Speaker, these measures should, to my mind, find favour with all sides of the House, since they emanated from the PRSP document - a document by the people and for the people. If, as a nation, we can rise above the fray to make these measures work for us, we can definitely see improvement in macro-economic indicators, which will ultimately see growth and concurrently more development. The growth levels of

1992 to 1997 contributed to more development and, ultimately, better standards to the people of our country.

Here, Mr Speaker, I need to refer to the presentation by the Honourable Member, Mr Ravindra Dev, who gave the impression that we are following the dictates of the IFI's hook, line and sinker. This is far from the truth. The ideological position of Dr Jagan has always been for the path of development that is just and equitable, and that is on the side of the poor and the marginalised, but he was a realist Mr Speaker, because he recognised that, in the absence of another path of development, we must, as a Government, work with the IFIs while, at the same time, negotiating for positions we believe in. This is not a static position.

The example of sugar is one such area of our engagement. Dr Jagan advice of walking between the raindrops is very pertinent as we strive to move the country forward, and within the confines of what is the reality. One cannot ignore the fact that we do not have the resources, at this point in time, to chart the developmental path that we would like to take. Therefore, as we borrow and negotiate, we have to do so, taking into consideration the difficulties Guyana faced during the latter part of the PNC rule, when they became un-credit worthy and, as a consequence, had to go down the ERP road. The position of the PPP/C has not changed with the death of Dr Jagan. *[Applause]*

On the issue of growth and development, I would like to revisit a book on the New Global Human Order by our late President in a paper presented to the European Commission, and I quote from page 41:

We must elaborate a rational model of development not simply for economic growth, but also for human development we need growth with social justice and eco justice. There will be no solution to environmental questions for instance if the boundaries of poverty continues to expand.

On the question of poverty reduction Mr Speaker, the Minister of Finance refers to social welfare and poverty intervention and I would like

to quote.

Mr Speaker, the caring nature of the government has been borne out on numerous occasions. It will be recalled that upon our accession to office in 1992, the means test for the receipt of old age pension was abolished. Additionally we have consistently increased pensions in line with the increases in the minimum wage. Further we put in place arrangements to ensure that no public servant will receive a pension that is less than 50 percent of the minimum wage...

And presently Mr Speaker,

... Work is on-going to improve the financial viability and the soundness of the National Insurance Scheme. Among the actions that will be taken to achieve the financial objectives of the NIS are a review of the Scheme's operations; broadening of the base, and the establishing of a prudential framework for the investment of NIS assets. That is in line with best practices.

Mr Speaker, with respect to the social welfare and poverty intervention programme, more than \$5,642,000,000 has been allocated to this sector, and I find it very strange - my colleague, the Honourable Member Mrs Lawrence, can talk about a caring Government, because then I will say to her, *if it is you are talking about a caring Government, then we are the people you are referring to, [Applause]* because, as can be seen in the sectors that have been identified, and I do not want to repeat them, I would like to ask Honourable Members if they have not seen it before, please turn to pages 39 and Page 40, and these will indicate the amounts of money that has been spent by this caring government on poverty-reduction measures.

While I am on this issue, Mr Speaker, it is important for me to clarify the point that was raised, with respect to what the Honourable

Member Mrs Lawrence referred, to in terms of Region 8. According to the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, she indicated that the regional administration was responsible for submitting the list of schools and the number of children enrolled to benefit from the provision of uniforms. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs supplied uniforms according to the list that was supplied by the region. So I find it very strange that the Honourable Member, Mrs Bancroft, can talk about discrimination aspects when whatever they have asked for in the region was what the Ministry supplied.

Further, Mr Speaker, it became apparent that the region did not cater for the projected enrolment, and Mrs Bancroft spoke with the Minister on the matter and she was told that these will be provided for, and I do believe that, with better communication this issue can be resolved, hopefully in this year.

I want to refer to the question of gender improvement in this country, and all of you will agree with me that it was this PPP/C government that really put gender improvement measures on the map of this country. *[Applause]* It was our government that initiated a number of progressive measures and legislations in order to give women the opportunity to take their rightful place in society *[Applause]* and these have been alluded to many times, and I will not again want to refer to them, because the Minister spoke on these issues and therefore, Mr Speaker, I want to say, and all my colleagues - the female members on the other side, they are aware of all of the developments that have been taking place in this sector.

Mr Speaker, with respect to the Welfare Department ... and I would be the first to admit that we do have problems, but you know, there have been so many problems that we have inherited, but I do not want to go to them, but I want to say that it is this Government that has resolved to put a number of the thorny issues within the public service in terms of placement; in terms of the facilities of workers, et cetera. Mr Speaker, it was our Government because, when we came to power, even the lights, the telephones, the typewriters, the benches, everything was in a state of

disarray. That is how they had the workers whom they love so much. Those were the conditions they were working under. We have started from day one to ensure that there are proper conditions for the workers, and we recognise that there is need for more workers in the Welfare Department. I am pleased to say that we are fully staffed at the present, and the same holds for the drop in centre.

Also I would like to clarify the issue raised by Honourable Member Mrs Lawrence, and to remind her that in 2003, she had collected 157 uniform vouchers, and has not yet submitted the sheet with signatures, because we talk about accountability, and if you want us to be accountable, then we call on the Member to please provide that for us.

Mr Speaker, I wish to return to my presentation, and this has to do with the over-arching consideration of the three- year programme. I want to deal with job creation.

Job creation is a vital requisite for development. We have a population where a high percentage of our young people are opting for a better education with the hope of obtaining a job that is commensurate with their qualifications. Here again we are faced with a challenge of getting our trained and qualified young people to stay and develop our country. The dilemma is how to retain them here with our level of salaries and job conditions, when we are pitted against developed countries and member states whose levels are higher than ours.

The different initiatives once, operational, will definitely provide the flexibility to resolve the vexing question of better remuneration for our people. The PPP as a Party, and the PPP as a Government, are committed to the working class, and are grounded in the working class ethos.

During the last 12 years, we have provided many incentives for workers in recognition of their role to the economy, whether it is a producer of wealth, or user of resources for the services of the populace. This is well-known and has been referred to time and again by us, contrary to the blatant lies that are peddled by those who are on the benches

of the Opposition. We share the common desire to have our children staying in Guyana, to serve our country and help in its development since the future belongs to them. The task, therefore, is for us to work as hard as we can to change the landscape of Guyana. We need to carve a niche for ourselves with the hope that our families and children who have departed these shores in search of a better life will be proud of our collective stewardship - that is, a Government that is equipped to govern and a responsible opposition.

The other consideration is that of improvement of the quality of life for all. I would like to tell you a story that will illustrate the point that I want to make.

A year or so ago, I went to Cane Grove to speak to a group of women. In the course of the discussion they spoke about the high cost of living and how they have to pay more for electricity and water, et cetera. I listened very attentively and, when they were through, I said to them, *do you recall that I used to visit this area in the 1970s and the 1980s?* They said *yes*, so I said to them *let us go down memory lane for a while, and let us speak of yesteryear*, I reminded them about my own experiences visiting them, the access road were in a deplorable state; the internal roads were mud dams, and many times I had to hitch my skirt and, with shoes in my hands, plough through the mud to get to them. There were still many people living in logies and they had no electricity and no potable water in their homes. They all had firesides and they were forever in search of wood and coconut shells for cooking. The women had to fetch water, ... [*Interruption: 'What years are you talking about.'*] I said the 1970s and the 1980s... black water from the canals to take indoors to do all their washing, which we know can be a back-breaking experience. They depended on the post office to get a message to some relatives, and had to spend long hours waiting for a car to take them somewhere, because there was always shortage of car parts and gasoline was always in short supply. I also reminded them about the difficulties in getting basic things for their survival, and how difficult it was to put food in their children lunch kits. They all remembered very well but, as you know, we tend to become very com-

placent and take these things that we have today for granted.

So I inquired about their present conditions and started to ask about the things that they have. Most of them replied that they have decent homes, they have potable water in their pipes, they have electricity, better roads, landline phones, and some even had cell phones. Well, getting back to the electricity bills, I asked about electrical appliances. Everyone had iron, some had blenders, all had TV, some had refrigerators, washing machines, et cetera. And they informed me how, through the hire-purchase scheme, they were able to buy these items by using their box hands, kitchen gardens, or poultry to repay these, and believe you me, they had more time to spend watching TV than you and me. We are talking about Cane Grove.

Mr Speaker, what I have sought to do is to compare the past and the present and to show how, collectively, our standard of living has improved. This is an area that is not close to the centre of things. This is an area that is outside the hub of where activities are being held.

Yesterday, Mr Speaker, we had members of the opposition trying to down-play the achievements of the housing sector, and I need to remind them of what the former Minister of Finance of the PNC government said. Mr Carl Greenidge, in his 1988 presentation, and I wish to quote page 41, and this is what he said

In 1988, some attention was devoted to financial resources for a housing/building programme. However, over the years, a factor looming increasingly large in the building construction sector has been the chronic shortage of building materials, in terms of boulders, crushed stone and lumber. The capacity and age of public sector equipment, on which the 1970 expansion was based, no longer allows for a vibrant or extensive programme of construction ...

Your Minister of Finance, Mr Speaker, as if these were not enough

... skilled and unskilled labour has been in short supply to the public sector - masons, carpenters and heavy duty equipment operators in particular have found more lucrative outlets for their skills than in the construction sector.

Mr Speaker, herein lies the difference of governance. The PNC/C believes that they must build homes and just hand over the keys. The PPP/C believes that the land that has always been there can be used more productively by the population at an affordable rate with concessionary payments. This will provide the impetus for them to take responsibility and to grow incrementally.

A lot have been said, Mr Speaker, by other members with respect to the housing sector, and I would conclude this part of my presentation by referring to the Chinese saying; *the longest journey begins with a first step.*

I wish to go down memory lane once again, and I want to remind Honourable Members on the opposition that there was a time when the majority of people felt a sense of trepidation when it is Budget time. Do you know why, Mr Speaker? People were anxiously waiting to know if there was going to be another devaluation, or whether there were going to be more taxes or more hardships. Today, on the contrary, no such fear exists, since the people can look forward to the Budget, knowing fully well that it will be a statement of Government delivering on its promises. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the economic agenda indicated in the 2005 Budget will definitely accelerate development, as has been seen in the last twelve years of the PPP/Civic Government. That can be termed as a period of democracy, development and good governance. While there were difficulties in achieving some of the desired results in the areas identified, we do believe that much has been accomplished in various sectors, as was pointed out by the ministers. We, who sit on the Public Accounts Committee, recognise that there are many problems, and we have iden-

tified the solutions to these, and the delaying of the treasury memorandum. It is anticipated that some of these problems will be minimised initially, and hopefully we can reduce them even further.

Mr Speaker, we must not put our heads in the sand. I do not know that we could ever wipe out corruption in this country, or from any part of the world, because we are dealing with human beings. What we can strive to do is put measures to minimise these, and this is what our Government has sought to do, and my colleagues, Mrs Volda Lawrence and all the others, who sat on the Public Accounts Committee, we know that we are making changes, and we know that, within the shortest possible time, we will be able to reduce some of these corrupt practices.

Mr Speaker, I want to refer to the question of development, and it is important to know that, no matter where you go in this country, there are signs of development in every corner. In villages or towns and every region there are tangible signs of progress and development generated by the work of the PPP/Civic. More could have been accomplished had it not been for the various types of destabilisation efforts aimed at holding back progress, but people are tired of being political footballs in the power games of the main Opposition party, which continues to place itself and its greed above the interest of the nation. While there are many things which we can see, there are also the intangibles like freedom, democracy and equality, which were put in place by the PPP/Civic Government, using different mechanisms and measures in order to give effect to these principles.

The PNC maintained a minority dictatorship through rigged elections and the suppression of human rights and civil liberties. It is the PPP/Civic Government that has restored and broadened democracy at all levels. *[Applause]* People are free today to express their views without fear of being harassed or victimised, as was done by the PNC administration. This atmosphere of freedom has encouraged people to take initiatives and to contribute more to national development. In the last twelve years, people's self-confidence and sense of self-respect have grown significantly.

The irony of political life in our country is that those who abused the rights of Guyanese for nearly three decades are now hypocritically claiming that these rights are being violated while, at the same time, using the wide freedoms that exist to undermine our democratic framework. How can we forget the call for *more fire, slow fire*, making the country ungovernable and telling investors to fade away? Mr Speaker, who are the democrats, who are the patriots? Today, Guyana's Parliament works with committees, in which the opposition is fully involved and, in some cases, serve as chairperson. *[Interruption]*.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

Mr S Feroze Mohamed: I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given ten minutes to conclude her speech.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal: Thank you, Mr Speaker and Honourable Member, Mr Mohamed. Democracy has become a strong pillar of the political structure of Guyana, thanks to the commitment of the PPP/Civic government. *[Applause]*

The PRSP is critical to our development, and the success of our managing this programme will decide whether we will be able to achieve the millennium development goals in the:

- reduction of poverty and extreme poverty;
- universal primary education;
- gender equity and women's empowerment;
- reduction in child mortality rates;
- reduction in maternal mortality;

- reduction in HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- guaranteeing environmental sustainability; and
- creating a global partnership for development.

Mr Speaker, I would like to end with a quote from Cheddi Jagan, the late leader of the People's Progressive Party, when he said

We all need to get involved, mentally and physically, and in every positive way, to return prosperity to the Guyanese people. Remember the poem about two men who were standing behind prison bars, one looked down and saw the mud, but the other looked up and saw the stars. Let us not only see stars. In spite of our problems, let us also reach for them. A united effort will see us succeeding

On this note I call on all sides of this House to support this Budget and let us move on with the task of nation-building. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. We can perhaps, at this time, suspend for fifteen minutes.

20:15H

THE SITTING IS SUSPENDED

20:35H

THE SITTING IS RESUMED

Mrs Shiela VA Holder: Honourable Members of this National Assembly, there is a purpose to a Budget, because a Budget is intended to take stock of the social, political and economic problems confronting the society, and it is also expected to propose fiscal and economic measures to ameliorate them. A Budget that does not take these into consideration is a Budget of futility.

For many years, the Annual Budget has been presented late to this National Assembly for various reasons of which we were told. How come now that we have a national flood disaster, the budget is being presented early? There is something topsy-turvy and illogical about that state of affairs, and does not auger well for good economic management of the economy.

In fact, it is an affront to the intelligence of this House, and indeed to the intelligence of the people of this country.

It is therefore, in our view, that, after more than a month, it was reasonable to expect that, with the resources available to the State, an impact assessment of the flood disaster should have been incorporated into the 2005 Budget, as the flood could affect economic growth, it could affect inflation, government's spending, exports and so on. So, for the 2005 Budget to be meaningful, it should have taken stock of these difficulties.

Apart from the flood disaster, Guyana has to deal with other major issues such as;

- the stagnant economy in particular;
- the possible loss of preferential markets for our main commodity, sugar;
- the coming onstream of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy;
- preparations for national and general elections in 2006 and, of course
- the ever present border disputes;

Given these realities, I have no choice but to declare the 2005 Budget not meaningful.

It is against this background that the Budget must therefore be viewed; and in relation to other relevant issues such as:

- the continued loss of skills;
- the inability to attract sustained foreign direct investment;
- continued capital flight;
- high levels of crime and insecurity;
- narco-trafficking;
- organised crime;
- trafficking in persons;
- continued internal conflict of a racial, political and industrial nature;
- rampant activity in the parallel economy; and
- border smuggling.

Furthermore, for a Budget to be meaningful, it should be anchored to a development strategy but, as we all know, the National Development Strategy, which the Government itself has advertised as the development framework for the country, was not even mentioned in the Budget.

I believe the first task I have is to disabuse the minds of those in the Administration that they have several months in which to get done a socio-economic assessment of the flood disaster. They did not. Not if the intention is to lessen the impact of the disaster and truly assist the large number of the poor and powerless that the flood revealed we have in this country. The flood assessment therefore should have been done already.

Secondly, we agree that an independent Trust Fund should be es-

established to manage all disaster relief and reconstruction monies, which should ideally be administered by a broad based group of persons. This will not only ensure transparency and accountability, but will also significantly reduce issues of the discontent so prevalent in the society. From our perspective, there are two main social and economic priorities in this year's Budget that should be considered:

1. economic growth;
2. the creation of jobs.

Over the past seven years of this Administration, the economy has grown at less than 0.6 percent for the period 1998-2004, as compared to 7 percent growth between the period 1991-1997. This is a depression that has lasted for seven years without being fixed. And it worries us that Government's internal review process has not questioned why the country's economy continues to stagnate.

According to Go-invest, over the same period we've had high levels of investment, yet the economy performed poorly. Surely this is proof that something is wrong with the economic management of the country.

Investment under the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is projected at 27 to 28 percent of GDP, yet growth is at a miserly level of 0.5 percent on average between the periods 1998-2004.

This situation, Mr Speaker, is puzzling the Multilateral Financial Institutions, as well as others in the society where, even though there is said to be a high level of investment in Guyana, economic growth remains poor.

When I listened to the various ministers delivering their glowing reports on development here, there, and everywhere, and juxtapose those with the long list of projected targets not achieved, the picture becomes very worrying indeed.

First, real GDP:

- it was projected that the economy would grow by 2.5 percent, but in fact grew by 1.6 percent.
- Sugar output was projected to grow to 8.6 percent, but actually achieved only 7.6 percent.
- Rice production was projected to increase to 8.3 percent, but in fact declined by 1.4 percent.
- Mining was projected to grow by 3 percent, but in fact declined to minus 6.6 percent, due to Omai winding down, we were told.

To make matter worse, in Appendix V, Page 60 of the 2005 Budget projects less exports for this year than for last year, at US\$533 million compared to US\$559.8 million.

In addition, the Budget projects to import the same value of fuel and lubricants as was imported last year, despite the expected rise in prices. The amount listed in the Budget for last year was US\$165 million, and for this year US\$170M. How can growth take place with the use of less energy and power?

Another signal of economic stagnation is the fact that there is high liquidity in the banks indicating that there have not been bankable loans. Indeed, the main plank of the economy, sugar declined in output last year and is now far less than the peak thirty years ago, when output was at an all time high of 370,000 tonnes.

Mr Speaker, on the political and industrial fronts, the situation is just as bleak, since crucial political issues contained in the 1998 Herdmanston Accord are still outstanding. A number of Constitutional reform measures are still to be enacted - the procurement commission, rights commissions, arrangements to improve race relations, they are yet to take effect, equal opportunity legislation and sustained dialogue between the two major political parties remain in limbo. Meanwhile, the social and industrial climates leave a lot to be desired.

Turning now to the services sector, Mr Speaker, the services sector had a modest target of 3 percent, but delivered less at 2.3 percent. Last year the Minister gave a commitment to work towards an inflation rate of 4.5 percent, but in fact delivered an inflation rate of 6.5 percent. On the Balance of Payment deficit front his stated targeted was US\$5.4 million, but delivered an actual balance of payment deficit of a whopping US\$45.4 million, which is only partly accounted for by the establishment of an Escrow account for GUYSUCO.

That is the scorecard of the Administration. The Opposition could hardly be blamed for those failures, since they were totally excluded from the entire budgetary process. All we do is judge the Administration, based on what it places before us. To the extent that the performance falls short of their stated intention, it forces GAP-WPA to speak to those realities. But, by doing so, we are made to be overtly critical of the administration. That leads us to believe that we are speaking to the deaf. We argue, Mr Speaker, that the Administration is not the sole repository of wisdom and expertise in this country, and hope that they would desist from persisting in a policy of exclusion of our best brains; desist from offering mediocrity and an *ad hoc* approach to our serious social, economic and political problems. Here is an example of what I mean -

Last year's Budget was premised on the PRSP, but this year no mention at all was made about the PRSP. Under the feedback review exercise - the PRSP, the report makes the point that if the critical element of credibility of the consultation process is to be achieved, Government must address issues raised by stakeholders. Yet we see no evidence that this advice was ever taken onboard. Given this fact, I present here, for the benefit of the House, the interpretation of the word *consultation*, as stipulated in the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, and I quote from TITLE 10 - the interpretation. It says here -

Consultation" or "meaningful consultation" means the person, or the entity responsible for seeking consultation, shall -

(a) Identify the persons or entities to be consulted and specify to them in writing the subject of the consultation, and an intended date for the decision on the subject of consultation;

(b) Ensure that each person, or entity to be consulted, is afforded a reasonable opportunity to express a considered opinion on the subject of the consultation; and

(c) Caused to be prepared and archived a written record of the consultation and circulate the decision or entities consulted.

Mr Speaker, clearly, what passes for consultation in this Administration falls far short of the Constitutional requirement, when proposals made by the labour movement for a plan to minimize tax evasion is ignored; when their advice to Government about how to modernize the Inland Revenue Department and Customs & Excise Department to expand declining revenues is ignored, as was their advice to move the threshold for the payment of income tax to \$45,000 per month. Imagine a Government that stakes claim to being people-oriented ignoring the recommendation for the establishment of a minimum wage and to commission a study for the National Insurance Scheme, but I understand from the Honourable Member just now that that is to be done, and I am pleased to hear so.

To turn to the Private Sector - I recently heard two prominent business personalities express the view, on national television, that the private sector has also been under-performing. The impression I got from listening to them is that the sector operates based on the belief that to speak truthfully about the Guyana reality, and about their own predicament, would put them in jeopardy with the Administration. This, I believe, has contributed in no small way to the lacklustre performance of the sector over the years. In this context, Government's refusal to publish the names, enterprises, and investors who were granted fiscal incentives is a cause for serious concern. The Minister owes this House an explanation for rejecting their proposals, especially for an exit strategy from the IMF, and the call for a social compact, among the other meas-

ures proposed.

It appears that the Minister of Finance does not seem to appreciate that there is an obvious correlation between policy measures and economic results. I say this because a historical review of budgets over the last six years revealed the pattern of abandonment of fiscal and developmental measures:

- In 1999, there were ten specific fiscal measures, two of which compensated labour;
- In 2000, economic measures had been reduced to four;
- In 2001, there were down to three;
- In 2002, six;
- In 2003, four fiscal measures, and one that benefited labour; while
- In 2004 and 2005, there were absolutely none.

Mr Speaker, if I may turn now to the commercial court, I see the establishment is in vogue once again. Regrettably, the court seems to be an idea to be played with by Government, having disappeared one year and reappeared the next.

Turning now to public debt, the Minister's focus has been mainly on the stock of external debt, which has decreased by 1.25 percent, to US\$1.08 billion, due to debt write-offs, while the domestic public debt is showing exponential growth over the last twelve-year period of PPP/Civic administrations. Mr Speaker, these are not indices that the economy is being properly managed. This is costing the country billions of dollars annually, but seems to bother the administration very little. Many persons, in and out of this National Assembly, have expressed justifiable concerns about this, but to no avail. *Budget Focus* by Ram and McRae said on Page 13:

It seems that the government has no policy or guidelines that set out the principles and conditions under which the Government borrows. Government borrowings can easily become intervention, which may harm the market and distort the allocation of resources.

One way of minimizing this danger is to place caps on the amount the country may borrow, either internally or externally as a means of reining any tendency to over-spend.

Borrowings for 2005 will by far be the highest for the decade, giving impetus to the call for a cap on borrowings.

Finally, on the issue of Go-invest and the creation of jobs - We are told that Go-Invest facilitated \$G9.3 billion in investment. Last year *Budget Focus* raised the question of Go-Invest grossly overstating the cost of a fruit juice investment and suggested that they might be doing so again with Barama's US\$35 million sawmilling investment which the Minister of Finance claims will create 500 jobs. That amounts to G\$14 million per job. If one does the mathematics, according to the Budget on Page 19, Go-invest will, in fact, create jobs at a cost of over G\$15 million per job. These numbers suggest that there is reason to question the gullibility of the Minister of Finance, as well as the investment promotion agency.

When one takes into consideration the generous tax concessions being given out for these investments that strain the credulity of the Guyanese people, this House ought not to be surprised if the question of fictitious investments raises its head in the society as a real possibility, with some of these investments being bandied about in the absence of credible evidence. Consequently, we call on Go-invest to publicly list by name and size the investments they say they have succeeded in capturing for an investment-weary environment.

On the issue of GUYSSUCO, last year the Minister of Finance made mention of a GUYSSUCO plan to lower the cost of production of sugar from seventeen cents to nine cents per lb by the year 2007, a claim knowledgeable persons in the society believe to be a fiction of some-

one's imagination, which not even the management of GUYSUOCO has made bold to make. Where is that today? The Minister has been silent on that.

On the matter of the Cricket Stadium, I submit for consideration by the Administration the fact that construction experience in Guyana suggests that there are limits to local building capacity, which is likely to cause the construction of the Stadium to exceed the available time, even if steel fabrication were to be done overseas. For example, it took approximately three years to construct the CARICOM building, which cost US\$11 million therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that it would take more than the available twenty months to construct the cricket stadium which is estimated to cost approximately. US\$30 million. A simple mathematical calculation would show that Guyana's construction capacity in dollars is approx. US\$4 to \$5 million per year. At that rate the stadium would take approximately six years to complete. That is the price Government will pay for destroying the construction industry with the questionable public tendering system that continues to frustrate many contractors, forcing them out of the sector and to flee the country.

Mr Speaker, those are the challenges that I wish this Government will confront. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security.

Hon Rev Dr Ramnauth DA Bisnauth: Mr Speaker, Members of the National Assembly, colleagues and comrades, I shall not say who the colleagues are, and who the comrades are not. I am grateful for this opportunity to add my bit to this Debate on Budget 2005 and in the process, I hope to give this House some accounts on my Ministry's stewardship in 2004, and some indication on how the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, for which I have responsibility, will utilise the budgetary vote for 2005. My colleague in the Ministry, the Honourable Bibi Safoora Shadick, has already spoken to Programme

II. I shall, as far as I possibly can, confine my discussion to Programme III.

But firstly I must congratulate my colleague, the Honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Saisnarine Kowlessar, for making a difficult and complex job understandable, even to someone like myself. I know, Mr Speaker, and my colleague knows, that the Budget has been criticised because it has been said that there has not been any improvement on the past, that much that it has is really a change in numbers. What is very interesting, from where I sit, is much of the criticism of the Budget are predictable in that it got a familiar ring to them, and one was just reminded of that in the presentation of the Honourable Mrs Holder. Naturally I support the Budget. I would have liked a larger vote for my Ministry, but I appreciate that the Ministry cannot get what it wants. It must get what is available and affordable. It is up to us now in the Ministry to reprioritise and reschedule our programmes in keeping with Government's indicative financial configuration for 2005. That is what I personally regard the Budget as an indicative financial configuration for the fiscal year in keeping with governmental developmental plans long-term, medium-term, and short-term. I note, however, that in Programme III has an increase of almost 16 percent in 2005 over 2004. I do not agree with the Honourable Member, Mr Basil William's estimation that the size of the labour vote, and particularly the omission of what he perceived as a significant reference to labour *per se*, that is to say labour as labour, and not as Labour, Human Services and Social Security. In the budget speech constitutes what he describes as *no interest in workers and the Government not having that interest at heart*. I think there is an echo of a sentiment, that I just quoted on, in fact the Honourable Member's interventions stated that at the beginning of the intervention, and it ended with the assertion that the Government's attitude to workers can be characterised as heartless. That conclusion was arrived at after the discourse on:

1. wages and salaries,
2. Government's withholding of the subvention to the TUC,

3. Government's approach to collective bargaining as arbitrary,

to use his words, and whimsical and in violation of ILO's Conventions, which Government has ratified particularly as early as in the 1960s.
- 4 the composition of the Trade Union Recognition Board and its incapacity to live up to what is required of it because of the suspicion that Board attracts.

Since the conclusion of that discourse on part of the Honourable Member Mr Basil Williams constitutes what I consider a serious indictment on Government's attitude to workers - statements that Government is totally lacking in interest and is heartless. I, of necessity, have to address these issues. In doing so, I shall try to be as dispassionate as possible, perhaps make any reference, except this one to the last twenty-eight years, but I may have to refer to the past. Unfortunately, I shall do so as someone whose doctorate is in history. I actually believe the truth of what some people said, that in order to engender hope we must concentrate on the future. I myself think that to engender hope, we have to look at the three dimensions of hope lost in the past as part of the future in order to know how one must engage in the present. How much I may consider the Honourable Member's criticism and demands, and he has stated those demands vehemently, unlike my good friend, who gave an indication of what a PNC/R government would do. The Hon. Mr Basil Williams made demands, I do not know how good a strategy this is, particularly if you do not have power really to enforce those demands. So I consider, very much I may consider so much debris that must be removed. I nevertheless wish to express my great pleasure that, at long last, there has been an Opposition spokesperson on labour as labour. I was beginning to despair. Lest it be foreknown that my own intervention in this Debate would have lacked content were it not for the Honourable Member's contribution, I have the force to integrate information on my

Ministry's work in this presentation, particularly on Programme III the Honourable Minister Bibi Shadick dealt with Programme II, although some of the things she said had not been heard, that confirms the wisdom of a great teacher in the past, who said that some hear but do not understand, and they see but cannot perceive, and that to quantify that is so lest they be forced to convert. And because I believe that the Honourable Minister, Ms Jennifer Westford, the Minister of Public Service, will treat with matters of wages and salaries and the accusation that that Ministry is engaged in a programme to dismantle the Public Service Commission and to vitiate its authority, I leave that element of the Hon Basil Williams's discourse to Hon Miss Westford, and I think that she will do so very ably and very comfortably.

Mr Speaker, sometimes the devil is not in the detail, but in the generalisation, while the Honourable Mr Williams purported to speak of workers generally, all of his discourse focused on unionised workers and within that category on workers in the Public Sector. I wish to remind this Honourable House that:

- unionised workers generally constitute around a mere 24 to 25 percent of the nation's workforce;
- those within the Public Sector constitute an even smaller percentage.

In fact, at the present time, even the Trades Union Congress is a minority one, what with the large GPSU's withdrawal from the TUC and the re-emergence of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana, which contains the largest union, GAWU, with a membership of 21,000 workers. Shall I mention the CCWU and NACCI and the MWU, which straddles both the TUC and FITUG? To charge that the Government is heartless to workers generally on the alleged maltreatment of TUC affiliates surely cannot be accurate.

Mr Speaker, that what this PPP/C Government has done for that large a majority of workers - those not within the TUC fold, along with

those within the TUC family, and those in the informal sector, let me indicate that in 1994 it amended:

- the Bakeries Hours of Work Act;
- the Labour Condition of Employment of Certain Workers Act, those employed in hotels, guest houses, et cetera, in keeping with the ILO's Convention of 172; and
- Licensed Premises Act
- Labour Act;
- the Mechanical Transport Employees Regulation.

In 1995, this Government repealed the Holidays With Pay Act and enacted a new Holidays With Pay Act that provides holidays with pay for all employees and not, as previously, for only a certain categories of workers.

In 1997, this Government enacted:

- the Occupational Safety and Health Act,
- the Trade Union Recognition Act,
- the Prevention of Discrimination Act; and
- the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act.

The passage of all of these Acts has been in compliance with the ILO's requirement that legislation be enacted to satisfy the requirement of the ILO's core conventions that relates to fundamental human rights. They comprehend all workers, whether unionised in the public or private sectors, as well as those in the informal sector.

In 1999, the Employment of Young Persons and Children Act, the Factories Hours and Holidays Act, and the education act were amended.

All the Acts and amendments were fully discussed with GTUC and CAGI, and all have brought enhanced benefits to workers - I repeat, unionised or not, and all in effect to ILO's Conventions. For example, the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay provides, for the first time, for workers to be paid severance and redundancy allowances, and establish a legal retirement age at sixty, when NIS benefits may be received, or for any other age otherwise agreed upon. This was done by this administration, the Operational Safety and Health Act is recognised by the ILO as the most comprehensive in the hemisphere. This Act has important implications for workers in the informal sector, and particularly in rice cultivation. I would imagine that certainly this Government must care for workers, at least in some extent.

Mr Speaker, legislation is one thing, and compliance with legislation is another. Now what can we show in this regard?

In 2004, 720 complaints were received, 608 were resolved by the Labour Department, the others are under investigations by the Labour Department. We did that in 2004. A sum of \$9,750,000 was recovered from defaulting employers on behalf of compliance as against \$7,095,000 in 2003, and, incidentally, some of these complainants are unionised and the union failed, really, to take up their cases but the Ministry has.

Inspections of 649 workplaces were done to ensure compliance with the labour laws. Ten defaulting employers were prosecuted in the courts on twenty five charges. This was in 2004, which included failing to pay wages, severance allowances, and payment for holidays.

The Labour Department:

- inspected 452 workplaces to enforce compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations;
- investigated 227 workplace accidents and took the necessary steps against employers once culpability was ascer

tained;

- investigated 13 complaints against employers for breaches of OAS regulations;
- conducted 72 lectures to employers and workers on Occupational Safety and Health, and held ten workplace seminars on Occupational Safety and Health;
- promoted the establishment thirteen workplace safety and health communities; and operated a small recruitment and placement department that registered 2651 unemployed persons seeking employment, 1632 of these registrants were actually employed.

I would admit this is a small number, given our unemployment rate.

Mr Speaker, 2005, that is looking to the future, much of this work will continue and be intensified, and this year the Ministry's programme on HIV/AIDS at the workplace will be prosecuted with vigour.

In 2004 a feasibility study was done. The Ministry will host an ILO's regional seminar for the Caribbean on labour inspection in agricultural undertaking in September 2005. It will intensify its in-house training of labour officers with a view to improving their efficiency and effectiveness, as well as to make them capable of inspecting, narrowly, labour matters, occupational safety and health matters, TIP matters, and child labour complaints.

Today I spoke with an ILO consultant, who is in the country helping my Ministry to refine our legislation and to advise us on the need for further legislation to fully comply with the Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 that we have ratified. One has got to do with child labour.

This year will probably see, I should be stronger than that, *will* see the merger of the Department of Labour with that of Occupational Safety and Health for efficiency and order to enable us to stay within the budg-

etary allocations.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member, Basil Williams, invaded against TUC Recognition Board and demanded that it be made independent and insulated from the Ministry of Labour, because that failed to live up to the purposes for which it was established in 1997. Why was the TURB established? The answer is simple, to resolve conflict when two or more unions vie for recognition to represent workers in entities.

In 1997, when the Act established the Trade Union Recognition Board, it provided for two things:

- that unions recognised prior to the passage of the Act would be automatically certified;
- that when, on the establishment of the Board, there existed a challenge between union for recognition that a poll would be taken and the successful union will be recognised.

Actually, Mr Speaker, at the establishment of the Trade Union Recognition Board, there were nine challenges, and as many as eight of these nine have been resolved. Only one remains to be resolved and that one involved the GAWU and the UAAWU for recognition to represent the workers of the National Parks Commission. I wish to inform you, Sir, that the General Secretary of the AAWU is a senior officer of the TUC who sits on the Trade Union Recognition Board. In fact the board comprises these people as its members:

- three members of the TUC. I can do that.
- three members of the CAGI.

Its chairman is appointed after consultation and agreement between employers and workers organisations. That the secretary of the board has neither voice nor vote on the TURB, that he is there statutorily not whimsically as per TURB Act and the Regulation that derives from it and

that he and his officers are responsible to the Board for the arranging for the polls, et cetera, to determine which challenger should be recognised. Ironically, Mr Speaker, at a recently held meeting at the Trade Union Recognition Board the AAWU, TUC representative on the board walked out of the meeting for testing the absence of the Chief Labour Officer and not the other way around. It was very interesting to note that there is no government representative on the TURB.

In 1990, the PNC government tabled a TURB in Parliament. The board proposed by that government envisaged a membership of two government representatives, two workers representatives, two employers' representatives, with the chairman to be appointed by the Minister thus effectively giving the government three members on the board. The TUC did not object to that composition. Objections to the first chairman the Hon Cyril Belgrave was initially raised by the employers representatives on the ground that his election gave the Trade Union Movement three representatives on the Board. It was initially the employers who objected to Mr Belgraves's election as chairman; and secondly by the workers representatives on the ground that he was a government representative. Today, the chairman is Justice Prem Persaud. The Honourable Member Mr Williams made no reference at all to the incumbent chairman of the TURB. One could understand this that he had to be selective really in the choice of his facts. So what? I do not object to that, you may describe this as political posturing or whatever but I do not.

In 2004 ... *[Interruption]*

Mr Basil Williams: I think you have ruled, I recalled vividly when the leader of the opposition was speaking, I was attempted to address an issue that was engaging the attention of the court ... and is in that light I did not touch on the current chairman, it was a subject of a court action, as the Honourable Minister has mention

The Speaker: I understand that the Honourable Member just mentioned that the chairman is so and so

Mr Basil Williams: And I was selective by not dealing with the present chairman ...

The Speaker: What is *sub judice* about ...

Mr Basil Williams: ... because the present chairman's position is being challenged in the courts.

The Speaker: Yes, but the Honourable Member did not mention anything about any court matter. He said that the chairman's name is Prem Persaud.

Mr Basil Williams: I am guided by you, Mr Speaker.

Hon Rev Dr Ramnauth DA Bisnauth: In 2004, in spite of the charge made by the Honourable Member, Mr Basil Williams, the negative image of the Trade Union Recognition Board, that Board certified four bargaining units - one of them being the general workers union headed by Mr Norris Witter, and the other union certified is the CCWU, but I cannot understand the plight of the UAAWU. Certainly if it fails to be recognised, for all practical purposes it will lose its *raison d'être*. And this remains one out of nine. Eight out of nine, I think, is certainly a good score.

Incidentally, there is a proviso that, if a dispute exists between two unions on the question of recognition, that matter ought to be referred to the TUC for assistance in the resolution of the problem.

Mr Speaker, let me touch on what seems to be the vexed question of the withholding of the \$5,000,000 subvention to the TUC. *[Interruption]*

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

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: I rise to move that the Honourable Minister be given fifteen minutes to continue his speech

Question put and agreed

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Minister.

Hon Rev Dr Ramnauth DA Bisnauth: Incidentally, that subvention was withdrawn in 2003, not as the Honourable Mr Williams said, in some chronological inexactitude, that it happened in 2001. I do not think that this error, by itself, called for the rest of his presentation in question. There is no need to attribute ulterior motives to anything that is readily inexplicable, like you say the Government's likelihood that the Government trades in cocaine. That my friend said there, and that explains some differential in some figures in the Budget, or that or the differential between what is budgeted for in 2003, and what is actually spent really goes to the establishment of a slush fund for political purposes.

In 2002, my Ministry was informed ... I am explaining the withdrawal of this subvention ... by the Minister of Finance that its requests for subventions would not be granted automatically, that subvention agencies would have to indicate their viability:

- by supplying the Ministry of Labour and the MOF with an audited account of how it used its allocation in 2002; and
- by supplying a work programme for the next year for which the subvention is being sought.

These documents were supposed to be submitted in a timely fashion before the budgetary process started in August/September. That was made very clear to all the subvention agencies in writing. Fourteen agencies, including the TUC, did not comply. It was not the TUC alone. The TUC indicated that it was *infra dig* to deal with a mere Permanent Secretary on this matter, since its previous engagements were with the President himself. The fourteen agencies included:

- Archer's Home;

- Chase's Indigent House;
- Enmore Senior Citizens Home;
- Good Samaritan Home;
- Alpha Children's Home;
- Bethel Boys Home;
- Kamal House. This is a Berbice Institution.
- Haruni Girls Home;
- National Congress of Women;
- Red Thread,;
- Shaheed's Girls Orphanage; and
- Shaheed's Boys Orphanage. Those two are Muslim orphanages.

I wish to indicate that some of these organisations have been given subventions in 2004. Notwithstanding the foregoing, there are organisations that received subventions in 2003, but did not receive in 2004 because they did not comply with the requirement. Among these are:

- the Genesis Home;
- the Florence Nightingale Home,
- Islamic Senior Citizens Home; and
- the Red Cross Convalescent Home.

The TUC is among those still omitted. Its later submissions were held to be unacceptable. The matter has been complicated for 2004 and 2005 by the rift in the Trades Union Movement occasioned by the re-emer-

gence of FITUG. It firstly emerged in mid-1980s.

I agree with the Honourable Member, Mr Basil Williams, that all international conventions ratified by the Guyana government should be accorded recognition and adherence. However, this must include ILO's Convention No. 98, which was ratified by Guyana in 1966, by the PNC government in 1966 and that was a good move. However, let me indicate that Article 2 and Paragraph 2 of that Convention states:

Acts which are designed to promote and place the establishment of workers organisations under the domination of employers or employers' organisations, or to support workers organisations by financial or other means, shall be deemed to constitute acts of interference within the meaning of this Act.

Continued in Pt. III

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 CONVENTION CENTER
OCEAN VIEW INTERNATIONAL HOTEL LILIENDAAL** Part III

51ST SITTING

2.00 PM

Wednesday 2 March 2005

Continued fr. Pt II

How are we to adhere to this Act, which subsidises the TUC with a very small subvention I admit, when that body includes workers of the GTU, the GPSU, the AWU, NUPSE and AT&GU, who are employed by the Government. Mr Speaker, I would have to be convinced that FITUG would not draw the attention of the standards committee of the ILO to this Government's infringement of the letter and spirit of Convention No. 98. This is the root of my fear that body knows very well that, when the ERP was presented in 1989, when the Trade Unions disagreed with the ERP budget, which Mr Eusi Kwayana called a vampire thing, and protested against it, how those unions were brought into compliance by the then government, which threatened, and in some cases actually withheld, financial patronage in the form of union dues, agency shops in the para-statal and state unions - much in the same way as the Honourable Member Ravindra Dev said yesterday, *he who pays the piper calls the tune*. It is true that the PNC government, as an employer, provided the annual subvention. That is good. At the same time, it is also true that it failed to pay its yearly membership contribution to the ILO, thus losing its right to vote at the ILO conferences. This Government has since cleared the debt to that body whose conventions, the Honourable Member Mr Basil Williams rightly declared that we ought to recognise. Mr Speaker, let the TUC demonstrate its viability and the subvention may be continued, and let the rift in the TUC movement be healed. The rift is still there, and I had offered the Ministry's service in the healing of that sore.

The Honourable Member, Mr Basil Williams, opined that the TUC could seek redress in our courts for this government's infringement of ILO Convention No. 98. By all means, I would suggest let it, but I wish to suggest that the chances of getting a favourable decision are as non-existent as those persons who may seek compensation for damages sustained in the recent floods, on the basis of the ruling of Vialence and Fletcher, as the Honourable Member advocated. Let me say, with admiration and I say admiration that it was the PNC government that ratified Convention No. 87, which provides for free, unfettered collective bargaining. We have to admit that, but let me hasten to add that it was that same Government that insisted that the collective labour agreements involving government ministries and public sector organisations, that those CLAs should stipulate that arbitrations should be mutually agreed upon by the parties, in case of the PSU, PSM, Ministry of Education GTU. The disagreement of any of the parties to go to arbitration, I would suggest, hobbles any consensus on arbitration. That is the problem we have got. Now this Government did not make the rules in this regard. It inherited them. These CLAs will have to be changed to facilitate movement. Mr Speaker, let me make the point that the imposition of wages, consequent on the breakdown of the arbitration process, was done by the same PNC Government, which ratified Convention No. 98 again and again, and this established an ominous precedent.

As for wages themselves or, if you like, increases in wages for the public sector during the incumbency of the Finance Minister, the Hon Carl Greenidge, year after year, to use that Clement Rohee word, the mantra was repeated *wage freeze, wage freeze, wage freeze*, or increases were definitively not indicatively announced at budget presentations. Today, an indicative percentage is given, but even this allows for bargaining, and this Government has demonstrated that it has been able to go above the indicative percentage for whatever reason you would agree, that the Armstrong Tribunal accorded the PSU increases for two years above the indicative percentage contained in the budget, 30 and 26 and, of course, in spite of that, we call this present Government, who could have challenged that, uncaring.

Mr Speaker, let me give you the profile of another kind of Government, which I shall not describe a caring one, if you like to use Mr Williams' opinion. In 1975, when the MPCA refused to go to arbitration with the government-owned GUYSSUCO, the Government amended the Labour Act to provide for the Minister to impose arbitration. Indeed, Section C of the Labour Act still stands in relation to certain entities. The CRANE Tribunal handled that arbitration. In 1977, the Government effectively abolished individual Trade Unions from collective bargaining when it signed a three-year 1977 to 1979 wages agreement with the TUC, when, in 1979, Government failed to honour its agreement to pay \$14 per day, announcing that even people in the churches pay \$14 per day for hydro-electricity [*Interruption: 'What year was that?'*] 1979 - Timal, a government worker, in a test-case took the Government-owned GUYSSUCO to court and won the case on the grounds that the TUC had no right to bind Timal. In 1984 the Government, in response, enacted the Labour Amendment Act. That same year Mohamed Ali and two others challenged the Amendment Act. Chancellor Justice Keith Messiah, delivering the judgement in 1987, had this to say, and I going to quote from the Court of Appeal of the Supreme Court of Judicature, Civil Appeal No. 15 of 1986. This is what he had to say ... [*Interruption: 'What was the decision?'*] The decision in Timal's case, in plain blunt language, had to be got rid off. This was the true position. No matter what euphemism was used - Statutory employed a linguistic artifice and resorted to, in order to demonstrate the contrary, the vision was to satisfy the amended Act.

In short, that same Chancellor said that the Minister of Labour caused Parliament to be in breach of the Constitution. In short, the wages freeze that that Government tried to enforce through the amendment was overturned by the Court. But in 1988, that Government enacted the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1988, which removed the need for consultation and altered Article 142 of the Constitution to provide for the seizure of wages without compensation. Timal's increment that were allowed would effectively start. Now, I would say, Mr Speaker, the government would love to restore the protection of wages, but will the Honourable Mem-

ber, Mr Basil Williams, and colleagues support this? Mr Speaker, today the Minister has a tripartite body that advises him on all matters pertaining to Labour legislation. Minimum wages orders that indicate what must be paid to workers in various areas of employment, unionised or not, in the formal or informal sector, are made on the recommendation of this consultative body, which is even now reviewing the rates of certain categories of workers. That body, too, monitors the wages paid by the private sector. It monitors that, and any serious examination of the public service sector wages with the private sector wages would indicate a small minimal differential. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud: I rise to move that the Honourable Minister be given fifteen minutes to conclude his speech.

The question put and agreed.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Minister.

Hon Rev Dr Ramnauth DA Bisnauth: Is this heartless, Mr Speaker? In fact, we want to enlarge the tripartite body to include representatives of the informal sector, in keeping with the BLAC line of the CSME. BLAC is the acronym for Business and Labour Advisory Council, on which will sit representatives of civil society, the arts and entertainment industry, and the representatives of workers in the informal sector.

In 2004, the Ministry of Labour brokered, with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, the establishment of a local BLAC, with the full concurrence and support of TUC and CAGI.

In 2005, we will work with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation to further this project and facilitate the free movement of workers across the CARICOM region, and the establishment of business enterprises of CARICOM nationals across the region.

Mr Speaker, in 2004 the Ministry of Labour continued the pro-

gramme of conducting seminars for employers, workers, trade unionist to sensitise them to the provisions of the labour laws, and to sensitise the social partners of the need to increase production and productively, and to improve the quality of our goods and services to make them competitive in the face of the challenges of globalisation and trade liberalisation.

In 2004, we held meetings at worksites - educational programmes, at a number of enterprises to promote that we need the new paradigm of labour, management engagement that uphold the rights of workers, and recognises the just expectations of employers. We will continue this in 2005, even as we seek to encourage the establishment of a social contract of which my colleague, the last speaker spoke, which we were unable to do that in 2004. We will seek to establish a modest office to encourage the promotion of the management labour cooperation, with the help of the Caribbean Office of the ILO.

Mr Speaker, the reduction of strikes and work stoppages in the country continues. In 2004 there were 229 strikes, 227 of which occurred in the sugar industry. There was a brief strike at the Guyana Power and Light. We could have invoked Section 4 of the Labour Act enacted in 1974 to force the GPL and the relevant unions to move to arbitration. We did not, preferring to intervene informally to have the problem settled among themselves. And it happened, the Labour Department intervened in many strikes by our conciliation and our mediation. Forty-nine such conciliation exercises were completed in 2004, while thirty-five collective labour agreements were countersigned. Thirteen for one year, seventeen for two years, three for three years, and two for indefinite durations.

I want to answer the notion, mentioned by the Honourable Member, Mr Basil Williams, that ILO conventions are brought to this House, as happened a couple of weeks ago, with no serious attempt to adhere to them. I have indicted earlier how these conventions, five in all since we took office in 1992, influenced labour legislation. However, let me indicate that, when we do not have things in place to facilitate compliance - either of conventions or recommendations, recommendations do

not have to be ratified. We delayed bringing that convention, as in the case of the protocol to the OSH Convention No. 155. In the case of recommendations that do not need ratification on small businesses until the Small Business Bill was passed in this Honourable House. This gives the lie to the notion that replace these ILO instruments routinely and thoughtlessly.

Mr Speaker, one Member of the Opposition gave the D mind in us, and an F to various aspects of the Honourable Minister's Budget. I wish to suggest that, when the question is put at the end of this Debate, the As would have it, and that those marks will be sustained by the real external examiners when next elections are held.

Mr Speaker, I do not have time, but I am tempted to say now that the probation department is fully staffed. The drop-in centre is staffed fully day and night, and the distribution of pension books has to await increase in the pensions, and I wish to say that 90 percent of the pension books have already been distributed.

I want to suggest that the suggestion that there is no fiscal measure on the Budget for growth and development really goes against the grain that the whole Budget is about fiscal measures, whatever you may think about.

For the Honourable Member, Mrs Sheila Holder, to say that there is not even a mention of the PRSP in the Honourable Minister's Presentation is to really ignore what is said on page 22:

It is in this context that last year, the first review of the PRSP was completed and the comments and recommendations taken onboard in formulating a new three-year medium-term programme.

Clearly this could be conceivably interpreted that she really has not read the Budget Speech. Much of what was said against the Budget Presentation, as I said, there was really no recommendations, for anything, only criticisms. I understand that this is *[Interruption: 'You are*

talking about me.'] I am not talking about, you comrade. No, I am almost finished, and I am not talking about you, but I am saying ...
[*Interruption: 'You are talking about me.'*] I am not talking about you, either, but this is why you have to listen. I am talking about the last speaker, that is to say, the speaker before me. That is what I am saying. Mr Speaker, I wish to indicate that, at the end of it all, whatever it is said, that is our Budget and we stick by it. Thank you, Mr Speaker. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Miss Genevieve Allen.

Miss Genevieve Allen: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, I rise to make my contribution to the Budget Debate of 2005. The Budget is presented under the theme *Confronting Challenges - Sustaining Growth and Development*, but Guyanese today are confronted by challenges, and it is indeed a magnanimous task to overcome the issues relating to HIV/AIDS, poverty, joblessness, under-employment, drug abuse, homelessness, and despair. Even as they grapple with all of the issues mentioned, the recent floods have impacted on their lives. For some, there is a sense of hopelessness and the feeling is intensified by the loss of livelihood, hard-earned household items that they would have treasured over the years, and they still await, with bated breaths, a response to their needs.

At the present moment, the problem of proper garbage disposal is still prevalent in most of the affected communities, and even though the government has undertaken to bring relief to the affected communities, a very pungent smell emanates from these communities. Coupled with this are the overflowing sewerage tanks in the compounds of some of the schools along the East Coast of Demerara. Further, these schools are forced to open their doors without the removal of the sewerage tanks and with the school buildings and furniture not properly cleaned and fumigated, and the entire environment not sanitised.

Mr Speaker, this situation is certainly an undesirable one, and one would have thought that cleaning of the environment, schools, and other public buildings, would have been a priority so as to alleviate further health problems that can occur if not given immediate attention. This situation itself can illustrate the point that, if the Ministers of Government were planning and focusing, even though we are six weeks into this situation, proper plans would have been in place to alleviate the situation. Mr Speaker, please take note of the experiences in Haiti, where more persons die in the aftermath of the floods than during the flood itself.

Mr Speaker, the Budget Presentation on page 45, under the heading social safety nets and

Poverty Intervention Programme, states:

A poverty programme, inclusive of a school uniform programme, to the tune of \$350 million, and a nutrition programme for children, pregnant and lactating mothers, to the tune of \$109 million

Mr Speaker, we can recognise that, in the communities along the east coast of Demerara, a number of our families are now under the poverty line, and the PNC/R will be monitoring the implementation of the programmes mentioned above, and will continue to agitate for the equity of the recipients who will benefit from these programmes.

Please allow me to rebut statements made last night in this Honourable House by the Honourable Member, Mr Neendkumar, when he made references to letters pertaining to irregularities in Region 4. Mr Speaker, the letters made reference to preparation of contract documents for the tendering process, and this letter was dated 29 July 2004. It was addressed to the Regional Executive Officer, Region 4, and it was signed by Shameer Samad, Regional Engineer, Region 4. Mr Speaker, please permit me to bring to the attention of this House a letter that was signed Mr Clement Corlette, Councillor, RDC Representative at the Regional Tender Board at Region 4, and it is addressed to the Regional Executive Officer, who is Mr Mohamed Deen, Chairman of the Re-

gional Tender Board, Region 4, and the reference is *Contractor bills of quantities defined information format* and it reads thus

At the Regional Democratic Council statutory meeting on April 20, 2004, a defined format was approved for the setting out of Bills of Quantities submitted by contractors costing the basis of compound costs has been set aside. Regional Tender-board on Wednesday June 9, 2004 mandated that I submit a specific format outlined on the defined format, and please find attached submissions and defined format for the preparation of contracted Bills of Quantities.

Mr Speaker, the defined format read thus:

Submission in addition of mobilisation and demobilisation:

- 1. the value of materials shall reflect the exact costs of source, for example, wallaba posts at \$400, louvre panes at \$115, et cetera*
- 2. handling charge, for example, cost to move or select materials;*
- 3. transportation costs, for example, cost to transport materials to worksite,*
- 4. labour costs. and that reads cost of wages/salaries for persons employed to work on the project; and*
- 5. contractor fees, which is the value or benefit to the contractor for his services, but inclusive in his business and personal experience.*

Mr Speaker, I bring to this House this letter is the genesis of the letter that is dated July 29, 2004, because Mr Samad writes to say that, *as a professional this practice runs contrary to the code of practice,*

ethics, training of my provision, which I do not ascribe to, nor accept, in recognising the need for transparency. I have always tried to advise this administration, professionally and technically, to the best of my ability, and not to compromise the administration's work.

Mr Speaker, I make reference to the second letter that was read last night, and it reads: *Administration and supervision of capital and current works projects.*

It was addressed to the Regional Executive Officer, Region 4, and was signed by Shameer Samad, Regional Engineer Region 4, Carly October, Senior Superintendent of Works Region 4, and Steven Glasgow, Superintendent of Works acting Region 4.

Mr Speaker, with reference to that letter, I would like to present to this House a second letter that is signed by Mr Clement Corlette, Councillor Representative to the Regional Tender Board Region 4, and he writes with reference complaints against Regional Engineer, Mr Shameer Samad. Mr Corlette writes:

The Regional Engineer, Mr Samad, is reluctant to carry out instructions and directives of the Regional Democratic Council relative to the new requirements for the preparation and issue of regional estimates for work to be done by the region, and the submission of contractor bill of quantities by tender.

It goes on to say:

I wish to recall the statutory meeting of the Regional Democratic Council on April 20, 2004, approved a decision to use the cost structure to show cost on following:

- *exact materials and cost;*
- *handling charges;*

- *transportation costs;*
- *labour cost;*
- *contractor fee.*

It goes on to point out, Mr Speaker:

On the reconvening of the Regional Tender Board on 4 and 5 August, 2004 respectively, it was observed that the Regional Engineer did not comply with the request to submit engineer's estimates for bills of quantities showing on cost. With regards to contractor, only a few of them have responded to the request to confirm to the cost format.

It continues to say, and this is by Mr Corlette, that

Examination of all documents revealed that the engineer circumvented the directive of the Regional Democratic Council by preparing his bill of quantities in compound cost allow and accepted contractors bill of quantity in compound cost with a managed programme representation on cost outlined at the end of the document.

The last paragraph reads, Mr Speaker:

By this letter, I here give notice of my profound dissatisfaction with the conduct of the engineer as aforementioned and, as such, I hereby request that the Regional Disciplinary Authority be asked to enquire into the actions of the engineer and take disciplinary actions, if necessary, for violating a specific directive of the Regional Democratic Council.

Mr Speaker, I bring to this House a letter that was written by the Regional Executive Officer of Region 4, and it speaks specifically to the letter that was referred to *Administration and Supervision of Capital*

and Current work projects. It is dated August 9, 2004, and begins:

I refer to your letter dated August 5, 2004 in connection to the above subject, and wish to respond to your comments.

Paragraph 1:

Since I assumed duty as Regional Executive Officer in Region 4, I have always allowed the engineering section to function independently. If I visited projects and observed any problems, I immediately get on to the engineering section. I do not change any decision made by the Regional Tender-Board or the Finance Committee.

Paragraph 2:

I am not aware of any undermining decisions made against the engineering section by either the executive of the administration or the councillors of the Regional Democratic Council. The selection of councillors who have been qualified is done by the Regional Chairman's Office, who ensures that all eligible contractors receive bids. I am aware that you are involved in this process during the year and the Regional Engineer is not the sole authority to make such decisions. The Chief Accounting Officer is always cooperating with the engineering section and does not make unilateral decision. On a few occasions I had to write to you on matters pertaining to the engineering section. Let us note carefully that this section is not a law unto itself, but must carryout the instructions of the Regional Democratic Council via the Regional Executive Officer.

Mr Speaker, he now makes specific note to Victoria Primary School:

In late January 2004, the Head Teacher of Victoria Pri-

mary School reported to the Regional Chairman an attempted arson and the poor state of the school and teachers and students started to protest. The Regional Chairman summoned the Regional Education Officer, the Regional Executive Officer, and yourself to discuss the matter immediately. Two weeks elapsed and nothing was done by the Engineering Division despite it was deemed an emergency. As a result of this lackadaisical attitude by the Engineering Section, and frequent visits from Head teacher, staff and parents, several contractors were asked to visit and submit bills. After seeing that the bills were received and opened by the Regional Executive Officer and Councillor Jankie Persaud, who is a PPP/C Councillor of the Regional Tender Board Committee, the bids were sent to the engineers' section to be vetted. Mr Glasgow, Superintendent of Buildings, prepared an engineers estimate, and also represented you at the Regional Tender Board meeting. There are other bills with exorbitant prices, which you did not reject, and which question were by the works committee. These exorbitant prices are being perceived to be hidden in the compound cost you have submitted.

Mr Speaker, indeed the Victoria Primary School was in a bad state, which required finance to provide a proper building, and it was supported by the Regional Education Department and the Regional Democratic Council. The Regional Democratic Council has the authority to deem jobs that are urgent and important, and to decide on a change of programme in current expenditure. *[Applause]* I wish to advise the engineering section that they ensure that they cooperate with other sections of the administration, and particularly the Works Committee of the Regional Democratic Council. You are also advised to carry out the decisions of Central Government and that of the Regional Democratic Council. For example, stop preparing Bills of Quantities with compound cost and use the format given to you.

Mr Speaker, this matter was discussed at the Regional Democratic Statutory Council Meeting of the months of September and October, and I wish to bring to this House another letter that is dated August 26, 2004, that my honourable colleague failed to bring to the House last night, Mr Speaker, it reads ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, could you identify the letter, date, who wrote it, et cetera

Miss Genevieve Allen: I apologise, Mr Speaker, it is written to Mr Mohamed Deen, Regional Executive Officer of Region 4, and it is signed by Shameer Samad, Regional Engineer Region 4. It is dated August 26, 2004, and it is carbon-copied to the Regional Chairman.

Dear Sir,

Concerning the letter written by Councillor Corlette, dated August 6, 2004, my views are misrepresented and as such, I never refused to carry out the instructions or decisions of the Regional Democratic Council, However, this format was given to me in April. I requested further clarifications on the format required these documents were sent out in late June, which was on oversight when they were sent out, of which I humbly apologise for. I was never reluctant to prepare the cost that was necessary and as soon as the meeting was over preparations commenced immediately. However, at no time did I refuse to carry out the instruction, as can be evidently seen. The costing required is handwritten by me on the Public Works and Health documents. Presently I am now using the system, and that, in the interest of the Regional Administration and Regional Democratic Council, I have been advised to seek advice from the Ministry of Public Works and Communication. I am here to comply with all the regulations.

Mr Speaker, I have in my hands another letter that is addressed to Mr Mohamed Deen, Regional Executive Officer, Region 4, signed again by Mr Shameer Samad. It is dated August 26, 2004, and its reference is *Administration and Supervision of Capital and Current work Project*.

I was ill-advised, Honourable Member, in signing a letter of that nature, dated August 5, 2004, I hereby apologise for the content and am very sorry if the letter affected the Regional Democratic Council and you, the Regional Executive Officer. In future, before any letter emanating out of the engineering Department, I will consult you the Regional Executive Officer, and the Regional Chairman. I will endeavour to carry out all decisions of the Regional Democratic Council.

Mr Speaker, permit me. This is the last document pertaining to this matter. It comes from the Works Department, Regional Democratic Council, Paradise, and it is signed by Steven Glasgow, Superintendent of Works. It is carbon-copied to Regional Chairman, Region 4, and it is dated August 31, 2004. It reads:

I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated August 18, 2004. In a letter dated on the subject Administration and Supervision of Capital and Current Works Project, I erroneously signed the same without checking in detail the implications of the issues.

Accordingly, I wish to un-reversibly withdraw the letter and apologise for any embarrassment caused to you and members of the Regional Democratic Council. In the circumstances, I humbly request that no disciplinary action be taken against me.

Mr Speaker, we have brought this matter to rebut the statements that were made in this House last evening, and I do hope that, after we would have gone through that, and after the Honourable Member would

have failed to bring the letters of apology to this House, that he will realise that what he was doing that was creating mischief. *[Applause]*
[Noisy Interruption]

The Speaker: Honourable Members, please mind your language when you are shouting like that. This is not the marketplace, please.

Miss Genevieve Allen: Mr Speaker, I now turn to page 35 of the Budget Presentation of 2005, and it speaks to *Education and Training*, and the last lines read, *this is the focus of Education Strategic Development Plan 2003 - 2007.*

The major activity in this sector remains the implications of the Basic Education Access Management and Support Systems Project (BEAMS). This US \$30 million, project aims to contribute to sustainable socio-economic development and equitable poverty reduction.

Mr Speaker, it further goes on to speak that *the Government is a recipient of a grant under the International Development Association (IDA) Education for All - Fast Track Initiative.*

And it further goes on to say that *an amount of \$50 million has been budgeted for textbooks, institutional strengthening, and improvement of school facilities.*

But, Mr Speaker, I am a little confused because, when I turn to Page 40, under the heading *Social Welfare* at the top of page 40 it reads:

The exercise and Core Textbook Programme to the tune of \$278 million.

Mr Speaker, if we remember well, at the commencement of the school year in September 2004, there was an article in the media that spoke about photocopied textbooks that were prevalent in a number of book stores, and within the school system. We have budgeted millions of dollars, but are the recipients who should benefit from these text books,

are they benefiting? Mr Speaker, parents are still hard-pressed to buy text books for their children, and it means, therefore, that we ought to enquire where this money is going. It continues to speak about the non-taxable stipend that is paid to primary school teachers by the Government to nursery and secondary schools in Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10, and in specified riverain areas only. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I respectfully move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to finish her presentation.

Question put and agreed.

The Speaker: Thank you. Proceed, Honourable Member

Miss Genevieve Allen: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Over three years ago, there was an agreement between the Guyana Teachers Union and the Ministry of Education for teachers in outlying regions to receive hard-line allowances to the tune of twelve thousand dollars, and this has not been in effect to date. Mr Speaker, when we come to this House and we make all of these wonderful proposals in the Budget, it is heart rending that the recipients again are not benefiting from the initiatives proposed.

Mr Speaker, we recognise that there is ... I listened to the Minister of Education's presentation, and I also recognise that there are a number of private schools that have been established over the last three years within Guyana. The children that are attending those schools are not benefiting from these glorious programmes that are written in this document. Question: what assessment is used for the establishment of those schools? What is the curriculum that those schools are working with? Those children are being taught by under-qualified teachers and so therefore, Mr Speaker, it means therefore that the system that they are working under is under-developed. I wish that the Ministry of Education will take careful note of this particular situation.

Mr Speaker, I read this document that says *Twelfth Anniversary of Democracy*, and on page 16 says, *the PPP/C Administration, our first free education from nursery to age sixteen, and is now looking to bring onboard early childhood education in the public schools system.*

Mr Speaker, over the last two days I heard terms like *re-write history*, and I want to remind the members in this Honourable House that, in 1976, it was the People's National Congress that brought free education from nursery to university, which the PPP/C reversed at the level at the university. So when we talk about early childhood education in public schools it means therefore that we are attempting to re-write our history. We have all benefited from the free education programme.

Mr Speaker, in education system, there is a number of acronyms PIP, SSRP, VCCP. I want to read from the *Agenda for Development the Reformation of Guyana with the PNC/Reform* and on Page 9, under the *Systematic PNC/Reform Programme No. 2*. It reads:

Modernising the instructional technology in literacy and numeracy, PNC will implement a successor to the PIP primary education improvement programmes to replace the one that have been so badly mismanaged.

Mr Speaker, we have had all of those programmes and, to date, the Guyanese society is still awaiting an evaluation and assessment of those programmes. I want to say that education is not about dollars and cents. It is about the output, and that can only be assessed by the results that is achieved at our examinations.

Mr Speaker, I want to touch on another piece of document that says that monitoring the education sector effectively and efficiently and on page 6, it speaks to teachers salary increases since 1992, and it gives us a total of 709 percent from 1992 to the head teacher that is at a grade A school, and that is a graduate. I want to say that, from 1992 to the year 2003, when this document was tabulated, that the inflation rate had

gone up and cost of living had gone up tremendously and so, when we print these documents to purport that because that is was \$3,100 at that time and it is now \$22,099, it is relating to standards of living at that time. The morale of the teachers is very low. You will recognise that teachers are leaving the schools and they are seeking better employment out of the shores of Guyana. I listened to the Minister of Education as he spoke towards teacher training and I want to say that we continue to train our teachers to be employed at schools overseas and that, unless the teachers within this country is given a satisfactory package, whether it is incentives along with monetary rewards, we will continue to experience the situation that we are experiencing in this country. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I wish that we will consider a developmental programme that will benefit the Guyanese public in a very tangible way. I want to say to you, my Honourable Fellow Members, that, after the Budget was read, a number of people will meet you and ask you what is in the Budget for me and you will continue to say to them, *yes, you are going to get spectacles, yes you are going to get ... [Interruption: 'School uniform. ']* which school uniform? They continue to ask me, what all of you are saying. how will it benefit me? Mr Speaker, unless we have the vision and the wisdom to take this country from where it is to where it will be, when Guyanese can really and truly feel the prosperity from the resources of this country, we will continue to come into this House and to argue the way we are arguing. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member, Mrs Edwards.

Mrs Shirley V Edwards: Mr Speaker, I am indeed pleased to speak on the 2005 Budget Debate here in this august House ... You brought the affidavit. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, this \$86.4 billion Budget is indeed the largest in Guyana's history and, as such, the Honourable Minister of Finance, Mr

Saisnaraine Kowlessar, should be complimented for this important document.

After his Presentation, I am of the firm view that remedial measures have been recommended, especially in the economic strata. Of course, there are other areas to be benefited, such as rice, sugar, livestock and fisheries sectors. Incidentally, the Honourable Member, Mr Ivor Allen, said that there was no growth in the rice sector.

But let me tell you about the achievement that was made in the rice sector in 2004. 2004 was a successful year in the rice sector in Guyana, despite some difficulties in some areas, such as increasing cost of input, drainage, irrigation and non-payment by some millers. 2004 was designated the International Year of Rice. The total paddy production for 2004 was 539,991 metric tonnes, with our rice equivalent of 352,592 metric tonnes, a total of 243,092 metric tonnes was exported 2004 compared to 200,234 in 2003. This increase is the largest growth the industry has experienced over the last five years. *[Applause]* With respect to export earnings, Guyana received some US\$55 million, which is 21.6 percent higher than 2003, when total export was valued US\$45.3 million.

Mr Speaker the Honourable Member, Mr Allen, said that exports of fruits and vegetables for 2004 declined. It is not so, Mr Speaker. This is the achievements of 2004. The volumes of export of non-traditional agriculture produce and products rose by 489 tonnes, or 12 percent in 2004 when compared to 2003. In 2004 overall exports were 4,561 tonnes, valued at \$4.9 million, or G\$998,000, while the value of the export increase by G \$260 million, or 32 percent, when 2004 and 2003 were compared.

The New Guyana Marketing Corporation, the central packing facility, continues to provide service to farmers and exporters in Barbados. For 2004, 27 exporters, who processed 919 tonnes of fresh agricultural products, were using this facility.

Mr Speaker, at the beginning of this year Guyana experienced the

first natural disaster which has left damages in excess of millions of dollars, and losses of lives and properties. The Honourable Minister should be congratulated for his Presentation. Nearly G\$1.8 millions have been provided for drainage and irrigation works in 2005. *[Interruption: 'Million?']* ... billions. Indeed, we have had heavy rainfall, but some of our drainage and irrigation structures in Georgetown warrant immediate rehabilitation.

Mr Speaker, I am indeed saddened by the multitude of outbursts from the opposition during this catastrophe. From the inception the Government has been informing residents in the affected area about the dangers of the flood. His Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, has assured on so many occasions, especially through the newspaper and the electronic media. Year in and year out mud-slinging members on the opposite side used the media to misinform the residents of the affected areas. One such misinformation is that they must all vacate the areas and set up refugee shelters, and that this should be provided by the Government.

Mr Speaker, it is a known fact that, when thousands of people cluster in one building, certain diseases can be contracted. At present in Sri Lanka, where hundred of thousands of people are kept in shelters, certain contagious diseases are raising its ugly head, for overcrowded shelters are cramped, with bad conditions, and poor ventilation and are excellent breeding grounds for such diseases. We have seen the war-torn areas in certain parts of Africa, where refugees are kept for certain periods of time, that the most-dreaded disease - tuberculosis has emerged. Mr Speaker, do we want a similar situation to occur in Guyana? Communicable diseases such as tuberculosis exist in Guyana but, thanks to the Minister of Health, such diseases are under control. We cannot afford to have an increase in these figures. Is the opposition aware of this development? The Minister of Health has, from the very beginning of this disaster, spoken about water-borne diseases and tuberculosis. Such information was spelt out in the newspapers. Mr Speaker, I was of the opinion that the opposition was geared at spreading panic among

the affected populated areas. How can the opposition doctors not recognise the dangers in massive evacuation? *[Interruption]* Is he a doctor? *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the members of this side is being swamped in mud-slinging but, as I mentioned in last year's Budget contribution, as in a game of cricket our batsmen are capable to deal with whatever deliveries they produce - be it short-pitch, over-pitch, or no ball, the latter being the favourite deliveries. Mr Speaker, whatever deliveries they give, the captain and his team have the necessary productive strokes - rain or sunshine, hard ball or soft ball, our team will always win. The opposition parties must realise that the disaster is almost over and the Government is working to continue relief programmes that will benefit all Guyanese, regardless of race, creed, or religion. *[Interruption]* I am quite healthy. I do not need a doctor.

Mr Speaker, this Budget has provided some answers, apart from the psycho economic areas, but mostly the socio-economic areas but, most importantly, the increasing job opportunities and reducing crime and strengthening governance.

In my last presentation in this august Assembly, I addressed certain issues in the housing area. Today I shall continue to inform all Members in this House of the successes of the Ministry in the year 2004. Throughout the year 2004 the Ministry of Housing pursued all measures to reduce poverty, improve quality of life, and develop human settlement schemes. Such successes include:

- the government of Guyana and the IDB Low Income Settlement Project, under this project a total of 11,183 house lots in 12 housing schemes in Regions 2, 3, 4 and 10 were provided with infrastructure servicing;
- 4,916 transports were processed for allottees in housing schemes and squatting settlements for the period January to December 2004;

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- 300 hundred low-income houses were constructed;
- 4,917 house lots were allocated with 1,757 allocated in squatting settlements; and
- 144 squatters were targeted for regularisation and about 60 to 80 percent of this work has been completed in the said areas.

The Town and Planning Department have completed several plans which include:

- the seawall Development Plan;
- the Lethem development plan;
- the Ogle Aerodrome Donor Project; and
- the Bartica and Corriverton Development Plans.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Housing has implemented all its proposals, as in last year's Budget, and is now geared for the fiscal year 2005. As you see in our budget document, over \$2.4 billion has been budgeted for increased access and improved housing facilities for the low income bracket. It is estimated that over 8,000 titles, and transports will be processed this year, and over 2,000 low income houses will be constructed. Mr Speaker, these have been some successes in the Ministry of Housing. As I mentioned last year, housing problems in Guyana will soon be something of the past.

In addition to this, Mr Speaker; the Government has built a lot of new schools, especially in the south Georgetown, Sophia, et cetera.

This Government is for the people, and shall remain in power for many years to come. *[Applause]* Rest assured, Mr Speaker, that any Government that cares for the people cannot be replaced. The PPP/Civic Government is one such political force, because we are a caring Gov-

ernment

Finally, Mr Speaker, I now commend this Budget to the House, and ask the Members on the opposite side to support this Budget. Thank you.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member, Miss Myrna Peterkin.

Miss Myrna EN Peterkin: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on this 2005 Budget, but before I go into my presentation, I will not be able to rest unless I set the record straight for the Honourable Members Mr Ramotar, Mr Collymore and others.

Mr Speaker, when I came to this Parliament, I had expected to be in a Parliament that I could have learnt a lot but, unfortunately, all I am hearing is twenty-eight years and twenty-eight years. Of course, one will have to go back to the past in order to view the future, but not to live in the past. Mr Speaker, it is true that both sides of this House would have done things that would merit a credit. Over the past twenty-eight years, as my friends on the opposite side of the House are harping, under the PNC's regime, we have built roads that have stood the test of time. Under the PNC's administration we are happy to say that, on the opposite side of the House, we have educated Hon Dr Jeffery, the Hon Jennifer Westford, and the Hon Mr Lumumba, and I want them to know that. I want... and others, I do not wish call the all the names, Mr Speaker, because I know that I do not have all night here.

Mr Speaker, during the past twenty-eight years we saw the birth of the CARICOM, which was the brainchild of Mr L FS Burnham, and today, we have just recently seen the opening of the CARICOM Secretariat, and not one word of the great man, Mr Burnham, was mentioned, a shame. Mr Speaker, credit should be given where credit is deserved.

The National Service was born under the PNC's administration. Today, there is no National Service. The National Service gave hope to

many young people. This caused them to be men and women of today - very disciplined men, not like you of today. The National Service gave hope to our young people. Today, the young people are like sheep without shepherd. That is your work to do, honey.

Mr Speaker, under the PPP/C's regime we have:

- the floating wharf;
- a railway embankment road that cannot stand the test of time. In less than two years the railway embankment road will have to be rebuilt.
- the East Bank road is cracking up;
- the Berbice road that this government is so talking about will soon go, because it less that one inch or 2 inches of asphalt.

Under the PPP/C's administration we saw:

- the scrapping of our only carrier - Guyana Airways. Now Guyana is standing without and independent carrier, and we are talking about development and we are talking about destruction. Let us talk about that.
- the privatisation of the GEC; and
- that this same government had to step in and take back control of the same GEC that they had privatised.

Let us not forget that. So what we talking about is twenty-eight years - both sides of the House, Mr Speaker. We will not say that we did not have our rough years. Any Government would have, and we are proud of our twenty-eight years. We stand tall. Mr Speaker, we stand tall of our twenty eight-years. We are proud Guyanese. We did not say that we will give the thirteen years critical support and burn the cane fields. We did not say that we will give the critical support and ask then

our supporters not to plant the rice, and I could go on and on, Mr Speaker, but let us not cast stones. Let us get on with the work of this Parliament.

Mr Speaker, we are presented with the largest Budget in the history of Guyana, and I have no reason to disbelieve this. Also there is no reason to disbelieve that the Budget is far from the best, since it is a course of words and a string of figures presented to the Guyanese people after a great disaster had met a section of this nation. It is without vision or hope for the poor citizens of this nation. It gives no hope and confidence to young people that will be... they have no hope of having a job, even if after they leave University. There are no jobs for them on the road, and the homemakers, there is no hope for their economic stature.

However, my task is to highlight the issues as they relate to Region 4. I need to deal with a few statements made by the Honourable Minister of Finance in his Presentation that has qualified the Budget to be far from the best.

First, the Honourable Finance Minister stated on page 1, paragraph 1.3:

It is evident that our drainage system was not designed to cope with such volumes of water

I must make it clear to the Honourable Minister that, had a proper maintenance been done to the drainage system, there would not have been such a long and large flood on this land. In short, we would have been able to drain the land faster and cheaper. It would have been less costly if this Government had adhered to the cries of the NDC first. Let us not get this thing confused, it was the Grove/Haslington Democratic Council that first wrote to the Minister, and he is there and can attest to that, to inform him about the misdemeanour. Then the RDC wrote to fix the drainage problem. It has to be, they did not fix it, and they did not adhere to these agencies, and the result was flooding in the entire Region 4. It would have cost them, I think, although we were not given yet... I know it was more costly for them to provide cooked food, to hire trans-

portation, to hire pumps, to hire contractors to clean the outfalls, to pay teachers to stay at home, to provide dry rations, to provide cleaning kits. It was more costly for them, and I know that.

Secondly, in paragraph 14 the Honourable Minister stated that, within a short period of the flood, medical services and health advisories was given immediately. This was far from the fact. People who were infected and people who died as a result of being in contact with the water would have been more protective when they went into the water to help their fellow human beings if they had being advised earlier about the dangers of the flood. Mr Speaker, who wants to die? No one wants to die, therefore the Government must admit that the health advisory was published very late.

Mr Speaker, while the Honourable Minister of Finance stated that the flood water has receded in Region 4, he must take note that there is water, to a lesser extent, on the land at Mahaica, and to a lesser extent on the land at Golden Grove. This is a fact.

In addition, the water in the trenches of the Grove/Haslington Neighbourhood District is rising slowly everyday. This is basically because the Guyana Sugar Corporation has sunk a four-foot intake structure, below the regular structure, on the East Demerara Conservancy Dam during the El Niño period. This structure was never removed, thus causing the water to rise in this area.

In paragraph 16 the Honourable Minister stated:

Already the United Nations on February 8, launched a flash appeal for a specified intervention for the next three months.

The citizens of Region 4 want to take the same course, not to remove the water tanks from their location. Those tanks are providing pure water for the community and we are asking that those tanks remain since the flow of water via the taps are still un-purified and unfit for

consumption.

Mr Speaker, this 2005 Budget was presented under the theme *Confronting Challenges - Sustaining Growth and Development*. I am wondering what growth and development can exist when a Budget like this is presented. For example, it is known by all that Region 4 has approximately 43 percent of this country's total population, yet over the past 10 years, this Region was never, never allocated 25 percent of its requested budgetary allocation. Mr Speaker, the overall Budget has increased by 14.31 percent of this, only 4.7 percent was increased for Region 4. This large populated Region has asked this Government for a budgetary allocation of \$771.59 million to carry out its capital works. However, \$92.5 million was granted, or 12 percent of the total requested under capital expenditure for Region 4. Below I give details of how these monies are allocated:

- *Bridges* - the Region requested \$35.5 million but \$7.5 million was allocated, a mere 21.1 of the total was allocated;
- *Building and Education* - requested was \$53.5 million however no money, not a dime was allocated under this head.
- *Buildings Education* - the Region requested \$40 million, \$10 million or a mere 25 percent was allocated.
- *Roads* - The Region requested \$7.74 million, \$23 million was allocated or 30 percent.
- *Agriculture Development* - the Region requested \$35.5 million, \$20 million was granted or a mere 37.7 million was granted. Please note that drainage and irrigation and waterways fall under this head.
- *Furniture and Equipment Education* - the Region made a request \$39.5 million, \$ 5.5 million was allocated

- *Office Furniture and Equipment* - requested was \$9.2 million, \$1 million was allocated
- *Equipment and Health* - requested was \$5.1 million but no money, not a cent again was allocated to the Region under this Head.
- *Power Supply* - the Region requested \$59 million and again the same old story of Jesus and his luck, nothing was allocated.

Mr Speaker, providing services has proven to be extremely difficult for the Regional Democratic Council, Region 4 for many reasons:

First, there is an additional twenty-five housing settlements, with a population of approximately 75,500 people, with effect from 2001 to present. This additional population, which includes children, caused the primary and secondary schools to be over-crowded. In addition, there is a strain on the health service, while the Neighbourhood Democratic Council cannot cope with serving their areas, including the great problem of disposing their solid waste.

Secondly, the RDC has requested that the Guyana Power and Light (GPL), Mr Neendkumar took over the electrical supply system for housing to supply power to Government agencies in the Timehri area. This was not done. All revenues collected from the consumer are, however, paid directly into the Consolidated Fund. Nevertheless, the Region has to do maintenance work to ensure a continued flow of electricity to its consumers. No money has been allocated to do the outstanding repair work in this area. Yet still the supply of electricity remains under the RDC. If this region has always been under-funded by the central Government, how can it provide services - the service in keeping with mission statement, which states, among other things:

To ensure that appropriate and accurate financial and management systems are put in place in order to facilitate

the effective management of the Region

How can they reach this? Also take into consideration the miles of canal, the dams and the roads that need to be maintained or rehabilitated, the number of schools, health centres, or outposts, and government buildings to be maintained, and the services that must be provided to residents from St Cuthberts Mission to Mahaica on the West Bank of Mahaica River; from Mahaica to Industry on the east Coast of Demerara; from Eccles to the East Bank of Demerara, to Moblissa on the Soesdyke/Linden Highway.

Mr Speaker, please note that the RDC is responsible for providing the main services, including education, health, agriculture and public works, with very limited funds. What is more shocking is the number of much-needed projects that are there in the regions and are omitted from this Budget. Yet senior Government officials tell the people they do not know what the Region's Regional Administration is doing. Yet they say so, I heard that just now. Instead of telling them the truth - that no money was provided to execute these projects. That is what they ought to say. The RDC is not only starved of funds, but is starved of vehicles to carry out its work, and also staff. They know that. Despite requests for the past 10 years, the inventory shows that the Region has one pick-up, one fourteen years old 4x4, which is assigned to the Regional Chairman, a four by four pick-up for the Education Department, and three other vehicles that are derelicts and are over thirty years. That is a shame. The Region has no vehicle for the health department to provide health services to Laluni, St Cuthberts Mission, and all the communities in the upper Demerara River.

Mr Speaker, as a matter of fact, the Regional Health Service Department in the Ministry of Health used to lend this Department a vehicle to make these visits, but they saw the wisdom to withdraw their services, and so the Region is left without a vehicle to do these journeys. Yes he did.

Mr Speaker, it baffles me that the Government claims to operate

democratically and provide good services and good governance. They speak about these and yet they are starving the RDC of funds. They would clandestinely carry out secret and selective works in the Region, unknown to the Regional Administration, and Mr Neendkumar knows that, because he was a part of them. They even award contracts for infrastructure works within the Region unknowing to the Region. The Government also selected a PPP/C Regional councillor to head the Land Selection Committee and the Regional Chairman is just a member, but in the PPP/C's controlled region the Regional Chairman heads the Land Selection Committee. Therefore the Government deliberately allocate insufficient funds for this Region, I feel primarily because this region is a PNC-controlled Region. Nothing else and nothing more. Mr Speaker ...
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

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

Question put and agreed

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Miss Myrna EN Peterkin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think that I was really existing in a community, in a country, where it is said that all men are equal, but it seems as though I am existing in the animal farm, which says that all men are equal, but some men are more equal than some. Mr Speaker, that is evident in the distribution of the items in the flood. I do not want to go back to that, but that is reality.

The people of Region 4, moreso the people of East Coast, are appealing to have certain basic things done in the community by this Government. We are appealing to have the burial grounds sprayed. It is not good for our health and this caring Government should know that. They are so caring and concerned about our health that they should know the burial grounds should be sprayed. We are appealing to this Government for the urgent removal of the garbage that line our roadways

in our communities. A certain senior member of the Government stated recently on the television that all these garbage would be removed immediately. Ow, we are still waiting and we are begging. We come down to a state where we are begging, because the flood has caused us to be so poor that we have to beg. So we are begging. We are appealing for the urgent removal of the carcasses on the road. Quite recently, the People's National Congress/Reform has lost one of its comrades because of a dead carcass which was on the road, and she met into an accident. All of these are going on the back of this government and they are still not listening.

Mr Speaker, we are asking this Government to take an urgent look at the way of life of our people after the flood. It is heart-rending to see how some of them live. The flood has taken everything from them. We are begging for compensation, that is where we are at this point. We are begging, as it seems as though we are brought to a stage in this country where we have to beg for what should be ours by divine right. So we have to beg. We are begging for compensation. There are some of our children who cannot go to school because of the damage of the flood. We are again begging the Government to urgently look into compensating these people so that they can come back to live a normal life. Mr Speaker, I know that it is not yet, but it will soon be that our suicidal rate will go up. Mr Speaker, some people cannot cope with what is going on and, as I speak, I am not speaking as a politician. I am speaking as a human being. I am speaking as a woman. I am speaking as a mother. I am appealing to some of the motherly qualities of the women over there to urgently look at our children, to look at our mothers who are there without anything to eat sometimes because of the flood. Those who cannot find a stove to heat some water to give the little ones. *[Interruption: 'When this preaching will done?']* Well, it seems that the only thing you all understand is the preaching.

On that note, I am asking that this Government find it fit to set up a special committee to look into the welfare of those very poor people, to first form a committee that will look into the welfare of the children - the babies who have to sleep on the ground, because they did not go to the

shelters, and once they did not register in the shelters they would not have had access to mattresses. Tonight I am appealing to this House, tonight I am appealing to the human part of this Government. It is happy for us to say that we want to live in peace and unity, but the next thing is for us to demonstrate that we want to live that way.

Mr Speaker, now that six weeks would have gone, and now that the People's National Congress/Reform and the People's Progressive Party/Civic ... some of them would have worked together in the flood, and we have no doubt that, in some areas we worked, but now the time is for us to demonstrate to live what we are preaching. It is time for the PPP/C to live up to the peaceful way of solving problems and to forget about the rhetoric and for us to get on with the business of our people. I thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member,

Honourable Member, Mr Heeralall Mohan

Mr Heeralall Mohan: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, I stand to give full support to the year 2005 Budget, as presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance, Mr Saisnaraine Kowlessar.

Mr Speaker, first of all there are difficulties encountered by our nation at the local and international level. In this 2005 Budget, we redoubled our efforts to deliver increased social and economic benefit to all our people. Good! Continue to be positive. The exchange rate remains stable, and international reserves on target. The physical and human infrastructure was expanded, in terms of an increase. More money was spent on health, education, water, housing and workers.

Mr Speaker, the task of Government needs to continue to forge Guyana, in which opportunities for all our people abound - a place where citizens are free, proud, and can pursue their way of life in dignity.

Mr Speaker, plans are already in place for the realisation of this vision. This 2005 Budget, a hefty sum of \$76.4 billion, will cater for the

needs for all Guyanese in every area of need and development. During the past years we have chartered an economic and social course the have brought renewed hope and tangible benefits to our people. This course will continue and together we are being asked to take on the responsibility to create a secure and a brighter future for our generation. This 2005 Budget has now set the pace for all other budgets, and for an all-round development in every Region in every town, every village and every community, with special focus on the Indigenous communities in our Region.

At this juncture, I wish to focus in this Honourable House on some of the events that have taken place, those that are taking place, and those that will take place in my Region.

Since agriculture is the main pillar of our region's economy, I wish to begin with the Pomeroon area, and I wish to say that I am very much disappointed that the Honourable Member, Mr Allen, across there did not deal with Region 2. I think that I have to do his part also in dealing with region 2, and seeing that he is a good son of the Pomeroon soil, I will first deal with Pomeroon area.

Because of the effects of world global warming, the constant rising of tide, along with persistent rainfall, the Pomeroon farms are highly vulnerable to flooding. Mr Speaker, in order to avoid flooding in the Pomeroon area and to offer protection for the Pomeroon farmers in the Hackney/Aberdeen canal area, the drainage project to the tune of \$51 million were done by IFAD, where over 4,000 acres of fertile land were put under cash crop and coconut production. Over 800 families benefited from this project. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the Regional Administration undertook to do over thirty miles of blocked drainage by supplying freely to Pomeroon farmers a hymac excavator with operator, fuel and lubricants. Mr Speaker, many farmers benefited immensely, and they are very loud in praise to the Regional Administration. There is currently a very extensive drainage scheme in the Pomeroon, that is the little Trivest area - a \$12 million

project being done by the IFAD. Mr Speaker, this project will benefit over three hundred cash crop farmers when completed. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the coconut industry is back on its feet, with the price for coconuts still completed ill benefit over three hundred cash crop farmers n dignity Mohaning its time for the PPP/C to live up to the peacgoing upwards, and what is most noticeable and encouraging is that the lone purchaser is offering lots of incentive and intelligence to Pomeroon farmers to sell their produce.

For the period, the Ministry of River Defence has spent over \$30 million in the lower Pomeroon area. This year over \$40 million will be spent in this said area for the protection of the river dams and farms. I need to mention about the farmers wharf at Charity, facilitating greatly the farmers' selling their produce, mooring of their boats and vessels, and landing of goods and materials.

Still at Charity, a new market model is under construction at Charity to the tune of \$25 million. This model will bring back some orders at Charity, enhancing and encouraging more economic activities, and facilitating a smooth flow of traffic in the area.

Mr Speaker, the flood situation in my region was not very severe or alarming. The flood waters in the low-lying areas receded very quickly, and as such, the effects from the flood were not very adverse. There is very efficient drainage in my region.

Mr Speaker, flood hampers were distributed to those areas that were said to be heavily hit. These are Kaiburi, Manakaru, and Georges Creek. At present, the Administration is engaging in the distribution of Jeyes fluid, bleach, and spraying and cleansing of the environment. I wish to say to this House that, while flood hampers were being delivered to the flood-hit people in Manakaru and Georges Creek, those same people in turn sent back plantains, provisions, and coconuts to Georgetown to help their brothers in the same situation. *[Applause]*

There are big plans afoot to assist farmers and farming communities by helping them with farm tools, insecticides, planting materials, fertilizers and seedlings - everything possible to bring back the hard-working farmers in the line of production. To avert flooding in Region 2, on average of \$150 million was being spent on a yearly basis by D&I. For the year 2005, over \$200 million will be spent in the drainage and irrigation rehabilitation, and there is now a serious study to come up with a new and comprehensive plan for flood-preparedness in our Region, like building more sea sluices, adding more pumps to the system, ditching and connecting of new and more façade canals.

Mr Speaker, I heard, from the other side of the House, quite a lot of criticisms about the D&I system. I want to talk about the achievements in my Region for 2004, and the projection for 2005, not only in my region, but all the other Regions.

Region 2 - Construction of concrete block culverts at Aberdeen, Affiance and; construction of timber revetment at Perseverance and Zorg; elevation of canal embankment between Joanna Cecilia and Aberdeen; rehabilitation of drains and structures from Westbury to Cozier.

Region 3 - rehabilitation of culverts at Enterprise, La Bagotelle and River View Leguan; rehabilitation of drains and canals at Hydro, Good Hope, Canal Polder, Wakenaam, Leguan, Good Intent, Sisters, Free and Easy, Miles Lot, Vreed-en-Hoop.

Region 4 - rehabilitation of East Demerara Water Conservancy embankment structures; rehabilitation of drains and canals in Cane Grove, Unity, Grove, Haslington, Mon Repos, Buxton, BV, Triumph, LBI, Better Hope, Good Success, Caledonia, Craig, Mocha and Timehri; rehabilitation of Belfield Sluice, Construction of greenheart revetment and Liliandaal, Buxton, Golden Grove, Lima Dam, Jonestown,

Region 5 - Construction of earthen embankment in Mahaica Creek.

Region 6 - rehabilitation of No.1 canal in Crabwood Creek, Canals 51, 52 and Black Bush Polder, Whim Courtland NDC area and

Winston drainage canal, construction of concrete drainage structure at Fyrish sea dam and No. 49 outfall, excavation of outfall at Charleton., Lesbeholden, Letter Kenny, Whim, Eversham and Liverpool.

Region 10 - rehabilitation of drains and canals and installation of pipes and culverts in Linden, West Watooka, et cetera,

Projection for 2005 Mr Speaker - major projections for 2005 include the following:

- purchase of 2 mobile pumps
- rehabilitation of drainage pumps at Cozier Region 2,
- rehabilitation of maintenance of drains canals and structures at West Water Users Association Areas of Region 3, 4 and 6
- construction of 200 feet, 120 feet and 200 feet revetment at Lima Dam, Jonestown, Buxton, Triumph, Esau and Jacob respectively,
- monitoring and security of the East Demerara Water Conservancy,
- construction and irrigation checks at Lima, Sparta and Aurora in Region 2, and Buxton in Region 4,
- construction of sluice and sluice gate at Lousianna and Henrietta, Leguan respectively,
- construction of 100 feet concrete drop structure at Reliance,
- construction of embankment between Anira canal and Grass Hook,
- rehabilitation of sluices at Virtuin and Cane Field Leguan

and Cane Grove;

- construction of culvert at Mara East Bank Berbice;
- rehabilitation of drainage canals in LBI, Betterhope, Cozier and Dunkeld;

rehabilitation of Whittaker Cross from Nos .62 to 66, Manarabisi;
- construction of embankments at Panawaria, Wakenaam and Eastern Hogg Island in Region 3;
- construction of sea drains and irrigation structures and drainage culverts at Hogstye, Lancaster, Frontland and Portland, Ordinance, respectively;
- construction of tail wall and box culverts at Aurora and Coldingen respectively;
- repairs to sluice at Garden of Eden;
- repairs to embankment and structures at crown dam between Anns Grove and Golden Grove;
- excavation of facade drain and construction of embankment at Fleece, Hogg Island,
- excavation of drains and construction of embankment at Davis, Mahaica Creek
- excavation of outfalls at Joppa., Eversham and Adventure
- rehabilitation and maintenance of drains and canals in Regions 2, 6 and 10;
- maintenance and operation of pumps and equipment in Region 2 and 6,

- rehabilitation of irrigation canal in Black Bush front land.

It must be noted, Mr Speaker, that the allocation of \$250 million under current expenditures intended for the sustainability of drainage and irrigation in the Region, and to support work under Water Users Association established farmers groups, CDC, et cetera. So these are the works that were done, and are to be done in all the Regions, and these would help to avert the flooding and give better drainage and irrigation systems in all the regions. *[Applause]*

Education - I wish to report on the education sector. The improvement is quite visible and this is so with all the three levels in the system.

At the nursery level, a number of schools were rehabilitated and extended, a number of new schools were built. This is most noticeable in the new housing schemes, the most recent being Supanaam Creek and Three Friends. These newly rehabilitated and extended schools created access in almost every community for nursery education,

At the primary level, all communities have primary schools. These are very much assisted with the PEIP Programme, with most of them having improved facilities, such as access to computer technology and libraries.

At the secondary level, our major schools were rehabilitated and extended, while a secondary department with dormitory facilities was constructed at Wakapoa. This will provide secondary education for the very first time at Wakapoa. Work is on going at present on the construction of a new secondary school at Pomona Housing Scheme, which will also have a dormitory facility.

Mr Speaker, this school, which is gazetted as Aurora Secondary School, when completed will cater for students from Bethany, Eshaboo, Wakenaam and surrounding areas. All of our secondary schools have improved facilities, such as computer rooms and laboratory facilities.

Trained teachers were, and still are, a problem, but there are ongo-

ing training at CPC, as well as UG's Distance Education Programmes for teachers, especially in the hinterland areas

Health - Mr Speaker, health services in our Region are also improving, in terms of service, reaching out to more people, especially in the hinterland areas, where health centres and outposts are constructed in areas that never had such facilities. These facilities are also staffed with community health workers or Medexes. Mr Speaker, drug supply is regular and satisfying. Patients who can also be tested at these locations for malaria. At our two major hospitals nurse shortage is a problem, and this is also a national problem. However, there is dire need for improvement for the service at the outpatient department, which is one of the major setbacks in the sector in this Region. Patients still have to wait for long hours before they can see a doctor or be attended to.

Housing - Mr Speaker, in housing no new housing scheme was established over the year. This is so because the last two schemes that were established, that is in Charity, Extension and Onderneeming, still have a significant number of vacant lots, even though these lots were allocated to people in the area. It must be noted that these schemes have basic infrastructure such as water and streets. Additionally Lima Sands Housing Scheme and other schemes have vacant lots. Some of these lots the allottees have leases and transports. The Ministry of Housing is pursuing their repossession.

Mr Speaker, last year two squatting areas were regularised, such as Westbury and Capoey. Work is undergoing to have the Onderneeming squatting area regularised. Allocations from various housing schemes and re-regularised squatting settlement received their titles for their lots. The titles assisted many of them to access loans for construction of their homes. During 2004, 225 titles were processed and delivered, while 305 allocations were made in the various housing schemes. It must be noted that all allottees were coming forward to make claims for their titles.

Mr Speaker, extensive work was done in extending potable water

supply in various areas, especially for new housing schemes such as Pomona, Anna Regina, Jib, Westbury, Charity extension, Suddie and Onderneeming, even the replacement of pipelines in Queenstown Reliance, Henrietta and other areas. Because of the amount of new housing schemes and the new areas now supplied by GWI, the water pressure is very low in some areas. Maybe there is need for more pumps.

Electricity - Mr Speaker, the extension of this service was very low, with the extension at Anna Regina new housing schemes maybe, and some individual connections. No other major work was done, the reason being the withdrawing of the company from GPL, which has stalled all extension works.

Mr Speaker, with the acquisition of new funding under the Un-served Area Electrification Programme, rural electrification will improve, and it is expected that some of our new and old housing schemes will get electricity. Areas identified in the first place are Richmond and Henrietta New Housing Schemes, Pomona housing scheme, and Charity old housing scheme. It is expected that actual work will commence in the second half of 2005.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, the Budget 2005 seeks to guarantee and secure Guyana's future. It has provisions for further all-round development in our region. Assistance from a caring Government is always expected. The challenges facing our nation are many, but people must have the understanding that this administration cannot do everything at the same time for everyone. No Government in the world has ever done this. *[Applause]* Everybody has their roles to play. Together, the government and the people of our region have a commitment to work together to build and improve the social and economic life of our people. We fully recognise that togetherness is the only way forward for our country and our people. There are initiatives in the 2005 Budget that would take the country to the road of success. The future of this country is the future of children and the future of our generations to come. Mr Speaker, this responsibility is in the hands of all of us. Let us not shed this important responsibility. I wish, at this point in time, to make a spe-

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cial appeal to all Honourable Members of this House. Our people would like to move on. Let us put the interest of this country and its people above all our narrow partisan interests and objectively work together in unity and real brotherhood for the realisation of the lofty goal and dream of one people, one nation, and one destiny. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I would once again like to extend warmest congratulations to the Honourable Minister of Finance and his very hard-working team for a job well done. *[Applause]* I wish to call on all the Members of this House to fully support the 2005 Budget in this Honourable House. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much. I think that brings us to the end of business for today. We will resume tomorrow.

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

Adjourned accordingly at 23:50h