

National Assembly Debates

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

Part I

53rd SITTING

2.00 PM

Monday, 7 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.	-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications
The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P.	-Minister of Parliamentary Affairs
The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P.	-Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation (Absent)
The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.	- Minister of Local Government and Regional Development
The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.	- Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport
The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.	- Minister of Education
The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.	- Minister of Finance
The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.	- Minister of Housing and Water
The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P.	- Minister of Home Affairs; Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara (AOL)
The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P.	-Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security
The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.	- Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development
The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P.	- Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock (Region No. 5-Mahaica/Berbice)
*The Hon. S. Rudolph Insanally, O.R., C.C.H., M.P.	-Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs

Monday, 7 March 2005

- *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) (Absent)*
- 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) (Absent)*
- 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 (Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini)*
- Mrs Pauline R. Sukhai, M.P. - *(Absent)*
- Mr Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica) (Absent)*
- Mr Neendkumar, M.P. - *(Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne) (Absent)*
- Mr Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P. - *(Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne) (Absent)*

* *Non-Elected Minister*

** *Elected Member from The United Force*

Members of the Opposition (30)

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

Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P.	
Mr. Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P.	- (AOL)
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P.	- Deputy Speaker of the N.A
Mr. E. Lance Carberry, M.P.	- Chief Whip (AOL)
Mr. Ivor Allen, M.P.	- (Region No.2-Pomeroon/Supenaam)
Mrs. Deborah J. Backer, M.P.	
Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P.	
Mr. C. Stanley Ming, M.P.	
Mr. Raphael G. C. Trotman, M.P.	- (AOL)
Mr. Vincent L. Alexander, M.P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Basil Williams, M.P.	
Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P.	
Dr Dagleish 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 Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

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

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

OFFICERS

Ms Lilawtie Coonjah, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

Mr Maurice B. Henry, Head Committees Division

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave

Honourable Members, leave has been granted to the Honourable Members Mr Winston Murray, Mr E Lance Carberry, Miss Sandra Adams, and Miss Lurlene Nestor up to 11 March 2005, and Mr Raphael Trotman for today's sitting.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

Budget 2005

Assembly resumed the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2005.

The Speaker: The first speaker for today is the Honourable Member, Mrs Riehl. You may proceed, Honourable Member

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Finance, in his Budget Presentation, said on Page 10 Paragraph 3.15, that *the Guyana dollar depreciated by 2.9 percent*. On Page 11 Paragraph 3.18 he stated that *the Customs and Trade taxes grew by 23 percent to \$23.5 billion, with consumption taxes accounting for the bulk of the increase*. Again, on Page 12, Paragraph 3.21, under the caption *Public Enterprise*, he stated that *receipts from operations rose by 16.8 percent to \$77.7 billion, mainly because of the favourable euro dollar exchange rate received by GUYSUOCO, and*

the increase in the contribution rate of the National Insurance Scheme that was enforced in April 2004.

If one takes into account that consumption tax for goods is inevitably passed down to the consumer, and an increase in the NIS rate means that more money is being deducted from workers' pay, then the impact on the cost of living of the salaried worker is clear in the context of a depreciated Guyana dollar, with no concomitant increases in salaries, and no tax break, that workers in this country are actually getting poorer. The country has an inflation rate, altogether, of 5.5 percent, and I know that some of my colleagues have already wondered whether that's the true inflation rate of this country. It is small wonder then, Sir, that workers are leaving Guyana by the thousands every year. I think other colleagues, Honourable Members on this side of the House have already indicated some of the figures of 10,000, some between 10,000 and 13,000 per year. Our nurses, teachers and young professionals are leaving, so not only our workers are getting poor, they are getting fewer in Guyana today.

Mr Speaker, should this haemorrhaging of Guyana continue unabated, we will soon suffer, not only from a critical shortage of skills, which I suppose we already have, but an actual shortage of people. Whilst our *bona fide* citizens are leaving, others are coming. I refer, Sir, to the unregulated manner by which over 40,000 Brazilians have relocated themselves here. The Government has turned a Nelson's eye, and it must be said that it has tacitly encouraged this influx. Enclaves of Brazilians are to be found in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Brazilians are cognisant of the concept of interiorisation. I believe they invented that term, when they moved inland a generation ago and built a new capital city of Brasilia in maiden territory in their own country, but my worry is that they seem now bent on the interiorisation of our country. They are located in the interior region, our richest region, full of minerals, gold, diamonds, et cetera. When the Takatu Bridge has been built, as promised by President Lula and the Guyana Lethem road opens fully, we will be inundated. So I have a suggestion, Sir.

Mr Speaker, land ownership had been one of the most powerful pull forces for mankind. In olden times, men have crossed continents and have fought wars in search of land. Here in Guyana we have 216,000 square kilometres I believe it is and translates into 83,000 square miles, most of it unutilised, or under-utilised. We have a small population ... Goodness knows what the true figure of that is also ... and an almost equal number of us live outside of Guyana. Let us offer land as an incentive, let us create a lottery - I want to be constructive here and innovative at the same time.

Let us create a lottery, much in the same way as the Americans created a visa lottery, but let us create a lottery offering land to Guyanese. We will have to confine this strictly to Guyanese, both at home and in the diaspora, offering them land as an incentive, to those who are away already to come back. All it needs is the will of the government to identify an area in the interior, do a cadastral survey and a very minimum amount of infrastructural work, and then proceed to offer the lottery. It could be annually, or biannually, if you want to see how it will work, and have our citizens participating. The true pioneers will come forward and we will begin the process of the interiorisation of our country. There are all kinds of details to be worked out, I admit, but such a project, if it is done, can have a two-fold effect, especially if it is done anywhere close to the Venezuelan border area. It will also constitute occupation by our citizens, which is one of the best-known ways of staving off aggression in border disputes, which this House knows we currently have with Venezuela.

Mr Speaker, I once read a book by Pearl S Buck called *The Townsman*, which showed how a group of people in the great United States, and this is a factual account, how that group of people on the mudland - a piece of muddy area in the United States - was able to raise a town, which is now a major metropolis in that country. As I said, this is a factual approach.

We have to be innovative in this country. We cannot just sit by and, as my colleague Mr Ravindra Dev has said, squabble over this little

coastland strip in which we live, and from which our citizens all want to run away. We were inundated recently with floods, but we are vulnerable to floods, not only from rainfall, but from breaches of the sea defence. We have to maintain sea defence to keep us off from the ocean. I believe Mr Dev referred to it as this trench bordering the Atlantic Ocean on which we are forever squabbling, on which we are building bridges, schools and roads and have to keep doing them and recycling them every few years. Let us think large for a moment and do something truly innovative. If not this, but something else, but let us think of something that will attract our citizens and help to repatriate them and rekindle some spark and imagination of our people.

I have it here, let us unleash the potential of our people. I think this was the actual name of one of the Budgets of the Government a few years back.

Mr Speaker, I now step down to little more mundane matters. China is on the incline, I do not mean to say that that is a mundane matter, I am sorry. China is on the incline of becoming one of the world's or, if not, the world's next superpower, and ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations, and up until 1993, Guyana always had an ambassador there. China reciprocated and has continuously maintained an embassy with an ambassador here. Guyana's last ambassador to China was recalled in 1993 because he was not politically correct, understandable, but no ambassador has since been appointed. Reciprocity demands that an ambassador be appointed. I have spoken *ad nauseam* on this matter in this Honourable House.

With respect to India, the government has declared its intention to reopen our High Commission in New Delhi. That declaration of intent is meaningless until it is followed by action.

Both India and China, within recent times, have shown a lot of goodwill towards Guyana. We are getting conference centre, a cricket stadium, and all sorts of things from these two upcoming giants. Both countries are far too important to our short-term and our long-term in-

terests and welfare to be ignored in this manner.

I now turn to our own diplomatic missions abroad, and I want to pose two questions:

- How are these Missions functioning; and
- Are we getting optimum representation from these missions?

According to the Auditor General's Report for 2003, \$1.1 billion were expended in meetings and the cost of operations of our overseas missions, and an additional \$24 million in excess expenditure.

A further perusal of this report shows a litany of bad accounting practices and irregularities, based principally on understaffing and budgetary complaints. I wish to read a few samples.

Auditor General's Report Page 59:

Guyana's Embassy Washington DC

There was a lack of adequate segregation of duties in the accounting unit in that the financial attaché ...

I did not know that they have such a thing.

... was involved in the preparation of payment vouchers, the writing of cash books, votes ledgers, preparation and signing of cheques, collection, depositing, remitting revenue, reconciliation of bank accounts.

This practice is not considered good internal control; it can lead to irregularities. The Officer-in-Charge explained that this was due to restricted budgetary allocations.

In other words, not enough staff; and I skip a bit here ...

However, the embassy over the years has not been adher-

ing to the procedures, in that it was using its main bank account to grant such advances.

This is for travel:

In addition, at the time of inspection, advances totalling US \$96,617 remained outstanding. In each case there was also no evidence that Cabinet had approved of the official travel overseas.

This is a recommendation:

The Audit Office recommends that the Ministry takes urgent measures to ensure that the Embassy strictly complies with laid-down procedures relating to official overseas travel for its staff, in particular the embassy should cease using its main bank account to provide advances for such travel.

Also, on the same page, I would like to read this, because this has to do with the remittances coming from our embassies to the Accountant General's Department, and this is considered quite serious.

Amounts totalling \$197,699,000 were remitted by Guyana's overseas missions to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for onward transmission to the Accountant General's Department. The Accountant General's Department was required to examine the revenues remitted, along with the supporting documents and to deposit it into the Consolidated Fund. However, up to the time of reporting, which was August last year, only \$9.682 million was verified as deposited into the Fund. As a result, revenue has been understated by \$180 million. The Assistant Accountant General was unable to shed any light in relation to this matter.

So I do not know whether the other millions are in limbo. They

have not been properly reconciled, but let me go on, Sir, because this makes the whole thing about all our ministries exciting reading.

Guyana's Permanent Mission to the United Nations

... and of course we have no permanent representative there:

The Mission continues to function without the services of a Permanent Representative to the United Nations. It is obvious that the absence of such a high ranking official would have an adverse effect on the quality of Guyana's representation at the United Nations.

The Audit Office recommends that the Ministry, in collaboration with the Office of the President, takes urgent measures to appoint ...

Even the Auditor General is urging, Sir, that we put in place

... a Permanent Representative to the UN in order to provide effective representation at this international level.

And then another item

expenditure totalling \$7.18 million was incurred, in respect of line items. It is evident that the Mission's allocation was inadequate to meet its operating expenditure.

Budgetary constraints again:

Guyana Consulate, New York

Here again was a lack of adequate segregation of duties in the accounting unit. In that case, the Executive Officer was involved this time in the preparation of payment vouchers, writing up of all the books, reconciliation, signing cheques, et cetera. This practice is not considered good internal measures and can lead to irregularity. I understand that these irregularities actually occurred in the China Embassy. Although

there is not an ambassador, there are other people there.

The Consulate continued to receive remittances, either close to the end of the month, or in the following month to meet expenditure for the month in question. As a result the payment for goods and services had to be delayed. In addition the remittances received did not appear to be inadequate since excess expenditure totalling \$6.77 million was incurred in several line items.

And this goes on and on, Sir. Every embassy has the same flaw of not having adequate staff and one officer having to do all the accounting procedures, and then turn around and reconcile his own work after he has written up cheques and written books, which is a sure prescription for fraud. And it happens with great frequency, indeed.

And this last bit from the Guyana Embassy in Toronto.

Revenue is to be remitted to the Accountant General on a fortnightly basis. However, there was evidence of significant delays in doing so. For example, revenues for the period January to March 2003 were not remitted until October 2003. In addition, at the time of inspection in August 2004, amounts totalling C \$103 million, representing revenues for the period June to December 2002 had not been remitted.

So these boys are keeping the monies there, perhaps, to use until their own monies come.

Discussion with the Finance Officer indicated that this state of affairs was due to the late receipt of remittances from head office to meet operating expenditure. So, as I said, it goes on and on. Where the *Guyana Commission to London* is concerned, they even have an aspect where the High Commissioner has to dip into his pocket to meet some of the needs of the Mission. This situation is highly undesirable. If we cannot, or do not sustain these embassies, we might as well, close them down,

but certainly they cannot continue to function like this. The Auditor General is saying that very specifically because, as I said, it is the same complaint over and over, and it has to do with budgetary constraints, principally, and understaffing.

Mr Speaker, since 1992, Guyana has been unable to attract any significant foreign investment. At one stage I got the impression that the Ministry was embracing the concept of economic diplomacy in the positioning of attachés at some of our key embassies. Not only was this never done but also, as far as my knowledge goes, the missions are bereft of ordinary staff as I just said, and are operating day-to-day affairs on a skeleton staff. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for staffing these missions, is itself in a similar, if not worse, position, and I would like to read a page of the Auditor General's Report, Page 56

The Ministry was operating significantly below its authorised staffing, in that actual staffing in place, as at December 2003, was eighty-six, compared with the authorised establishment of one hundred and thirty-nine.

Eighty-six is the actual staffing, and the authorised staffing is one hundred and thirty-nine, giving a vacancy rate of 38 percent ... I am sure that that has gone up considerably.

This level of staffing would have an adverse effect on the operations of this department and, in particular, the level of internal control needed to ensure adequate checks and balances. The accounting officer explained that this was mainly due to budgetary constraints and the lengthy procedures that have to be followed in the filling of vacancies.

There is another bit, Sir

Up to the time of reporting, the Salaries bank account #3086, which reflected a balance of \$24.82 million at 30

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June 2004, was not closed, and the balance returned to the Consolidated Fund

And this is one of those recurrent problems that the Auditor General has been speaking about since 1996.

In addition, the old Impress bank account #444, which became non-operational in July 1996, reflected an overdraft of \$51.635 million as of December 2003. Evidence was seen where the accounting officer wrote the Finance Ministry, in August 2004, requesting advice on the closure. However, up to the time of reporting, a response was not received.

Highly, highly undesirable.

Mr Speaker, with missions functioning in that fashion, how can we attract, or begin to even look at ways and means of speaking to overseas investors and attracting them? How can we begin to practice anything close to economic diplomacy? Mr Speaker, there are no signs on the horizon of the ministry of intentions to arrest this situation.

I will go now to the Budget today -*Current and Capital Revenue*, to look at what staffing requirements are projected for this year. That happened last year ... because the Auditor General's report pertained to the year 2003.

When we look at the staffing details ...

Sir, this is at the bottom of the *Current Expenditure*, Page 49

... we find that the authorised staffing has...

I will go through the headings very quickly

Administrative – 34 positions, 14 filled

- *Senior Technical - 12 positions, zero filled*

- *Other technical and skilled - 4 position, zero filled*
- *Clerical Office Support - 123 positions, 39 filled*
- *Semi Skilled - 29 positions, 16 filled*

Out of a total of two hundred and two staff only seventy six functioned last year, at the Embassies I will give you the total, Sir, and not continue to bore this house with these figures, but they are very startling, and they give a good idea how this government value, or does not value, foreign relations. On the foreign relations aspect is the same gloomy picture - the total number of staff authorised for 2004 was one hundred and seventy seven and the number of vacancies seems one hundred and seventy with only six filled.

The total budgetary projection is actually less in 2005, Sir. In 2004 it was \$1.196 billion it has been cut down. The actual figure for 2005 is \$1.162 billion, a lot of millions less. So, Sir, the gloomy picture for foreign relations and foreign affairs, and the Ministry itself ... I do not know, perhaps the Honourable Minister, when he stands up to say something, he will tell us what exactly is going on with his Ministry.

It is clear, Sir, that this administration has no interest in foreign relations, and I think that the individual of whom Mr Ravindra Dev spoke ... because we cannot call names in this place here, is conducting his own foreign affairs, and has no need for embassies and missions I do not envy the Hon Minister. In fact, I know that he has been given, to say in Guyanese parlance, basket to fetch water, and he cannot help if he is not given the necessary finances to run his Ministry.

Sir, I wish to read the UN Report, just a few lines, too, from the executive summary of a report of the United Nations Advisory Mission to Guyana, dated April 2003, just two sentences ...

With the present structure, modes of operations and capacity, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot discharge routine activities, nor exploit opportunities, to contribute

to Guyana's national prosperity

This is the first page. As I said, I do not envy the Honourable Minister, but I wish to read from his own speech when he first became Minister, and I shall read, and I have nothing against the Honourable gentleman in this House. I really do like Mr Insanally *[Noisy]*

I am quoting from the *Hansard*, 27 March 2002, Pages 22 -23

Mr Speaker, I would like to say that we must not like some people, see foreign affairs as a drain on our national resources. Foreign affairs is the other side of our national policy and must be seen as complementary to our domestic objectives.

Obviously the Government which we serve does not share that view, if we are to judge from this very bleak picture that has come out from the embassies abroad. Further I say not on that issue, but I will continue to bore the House.

Mr Speaker, President Lula's recent visit to Guyana, and Guyana's position in the Rio Group - next year's position, to host the Rio conference and its position - Le Troiter, have revived an old dream of a Continental destiny, but I do not believe that Guyana has positioned itself, or even began, in this Budget, to position itself to fulfill such a role. We cannot stand or sit by without doing anything, and expect that the Union, and the organisations to which we belong, will do everything, and we will just slide along. We have taken no steps to teach our citizens Portuguese, even though Brazilians have been coming and knocking on our doors here for the longest while. I do not think that we are in a state of readiness. I go to Nigel's Supermarket and there is a host of Brazilians encamped on the little street on the side, and I see on the supermarket shelves a whole lot of products with Portuguese writing I cannot understand ... with no English version of it.

The Speaker: That is illegal, Honourable Member.

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: I know that it might be illegal, but it is there ...

The Speaker: Let the Police and the shopkeeper ...

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: ... because I cannot read some of the things to see what ... I do not know Portuguese ... Perhaps if we are going to do a two-way trade eventually, as I know, we would then have to try to encourage Portuguese, and to encourage the Brazilians, to put English on their product packaging. I do not think they are ready yet, Sir. We are not ready for any movement, because we are forever squabbling on this little coastland here, and we have not been thinking big. We are fearful to move this country forward to galvanise ourselves. We are forever micromanaging and doing maths and just focusing, zeroing-in our energies on little things on the larger picture of the underdevelopment and continued underdevelopment of this country. Other people are seeing in us great potential which we are always hearing of this great potential ... I have been hearing about it since I was a little child, and I am growing older and I am going to die, perhaps, without seeing Guyana begin to realize a quarter of the potential. I do not want that to happen, Sir. I would like to see Guyana develop. I have never left this country only a few years out at University. This country belongs to all of us, and we will have to get up and get. The Administration will have to get up and get and really get down to moving this country, and stop the micromanagement. It seems that Guyana, under this Administration, Sir, is going to be limping for a long time, leaning heavily on international financial institutions for the sustenance of a foreseeable weak economy, without any plan for an exit strategy for this entangled albatross from around our necks.

... dependent on HIPC and other forms of relief from old debts, while simultaneously saddling posterity with new debt

... unable or unwilling to do what is necessary to attract foreign investment and to galvanise this country

... failing to retain and challenge our youths and young people and keep them at home

... being swept along into groupings and unions fashioned by other visionary leaders in our Region while lacking the breadth of thought, the courage to initiate actions and manoeuvres of our own.

I wish to remind the Honourable Members on the other side of the divide in this Honourable Chamber Sir, of the maxim that *two heads are better than one*. In this case, two sides are better than one. We are willing to assist, and have offered to participate in shared governance, because together we can do it. We must not let Guyana down. Thank you, Sir.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon Rudolph S Insanally: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, Fellow Guyanese, I, too, support the Budget for 2005, which was presented to this Assembly by the Minister of Finance, the Hon Saisnarine Kowlessar. It was a comprehensive statement of 21 February, last. The Honourable Minister and his staff ought to be congratulated on the sound and sensible approach to taken in the presentation. Mr Speaker, it was Shakespeare who said *sweet are the uses of adversity, which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in his head*, and it sees the adversity through which we have just come, the flood disaster, as having a lesson for us as a nation - a lesson with the virtue of national unity and cooperation. The government and people of Guyana, together with the international community, including friendly donor governments, the financial institutions, and the entire UN system responded to the crises with such common purpose that its worst consequences, I believe, are being effectively minimised. It was hear-warming to see, in particular, the readiness with which Guyanese rallied together in a spirit of solidarity to survive the disaster. Equally impressive was the response of our citizens abroad - the diaspora, who quickly banded together to provide for their suffering compatriots. Not without reason it was said that it as of ill wind that does not blow sudden good. Indeed, despite its terrible consequences, the flood disaster served to

unify our people in the face of a common threat. I couldn't help thinking to myself that if only we could bring that spirit of unity and solidarity to our own deliberations, not only in this House, but elsewhere, we would be better off as a nation, instead of engaging in constant recrimination. We would turn our minds to jointly better our people.

As we have heard, Mr Speaker, this year's Budget has to be seen in the context of the calamitous flame which overwhelmed us over the past few weeks. Although the costs remain to be calculated, it is fair to say that the toll has been heavy. Businesses have been hard-hit and will find it difficult to recuperate. Agriculture, particularly in the East and West Coast of Demerara, has been seriously affected. With the help of the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Government is now assessing the damage done to the economy, and thereafter we will be forced to be obliged to review the Budget's provisions and reorient, as appropriate, its direction. And may I interject to say, contrary to opinions on the other side that the Government's intervention was not warranted, I think that one has to understand how the international system works. The international system has to rely on investments, feasibility studies, and these are time-consuming exercises, so I thought that it was in the national interest that the Government would intervene in the utilisation of its own resources to at least cushion the worst impact of the disaster. Despite all the negative sayings, I think that it is comforting to note that, after completing the third review of Guyana's economy at the poverty-reduction and growth facility, the IMF has not only approved a significant disbursement of assistance funds to aid Guyana's recovery, but has also confirmed that the country has, and I quote:

Made welcome progress in implementing its medium-term economic programme

This progress, as the Fund's report itself remarks, has been achieved, despite both domestic and external difficulties. There is, therefore, every reason to hope, Mr Speaker, that, with the continuing implementation of the fiscal monetary and other measures, which have been announced in

this year's Budget, progress towards the objectives outlined in our National Development Strategy will quickly resumed.

Again, Mr Speaker, according to the recent World Bank outlook study and the report issued by the IDB, global macro-economic conditions are now favourable to growth and development in our region of Latin America and in the Caribbean. Commodity prices, terms of trade, and current fiscal accounts and investment flows are generally improving, and we may reasonably expect, therefore, that with appropriate international policies, the momentum of growth and development will increase. Equally indispensable to progress are visionary policies at the domestic level. There can be no doubt that, in Guyana's case, the 2005 Budget can be said to be both visionary and realistic. The wide array of measures contained therein attest to the forward-looking approach, and it is therefore unfair to criticize the Budget as static or retrogressive. If the Budget recapitulates certain objectives and goals, it means that those goals and objectives are perennial, and we have to deal with them. So I would say, Mr Speaker, along with other government ministries and agencies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is prepared to translate the vision of the 2005 Budget into reality. We are in the progress of formulating a new strategic plan aimed at pursuing the major objectives of our foreign policy in a new international environment in which we live. I must, at this point, address the intervention of my distinguished colleague on the other side, and I would say I have a high regard for her also, but her intervention confirms the fact that a little knowledge might be potentially a very dangerous thing. Admittedly, we do not have the ideal resources that we would want for the kind of ambitious foreign policy that a small country like Guyana practices. It should be to our credit that we have managed to achieve what we have with the minimal of resources. I must say that the intervention was very selective. Of course, my distinguished colleague is responsible for foreign affairs, but if she was to look at the other Chapters of the Auditor General's Report, she would find that the criticisms levelled at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are equally applicable to many other ministries. Having said that, let me admit frankly, Mr Speaker, that in today's world we cannot, as a small nation, hope to address the ever-increasing demands of the international agenda unless

we move in the direction of joint representation within CARICOM. We are too small a nation. We cannot field all the balls that are in the air. Nevertheless, we tried and we should not therefore be condemned for scoring few goals against such tremendous odds. We will continue to try, despite the limitations of staffing, to do the best we can. Some criticisms have been made, and they are well taken. We have taken actions in the Auditor's General Report. Some of these things cannot be laid at our door. Most of the remittances are sent to the Auditor General's Office, the Revenue Authority where, apparently, they are piled up somewhere. There is too much business and the proper receipts... the missions abroad cannot be tasked constantly. We remind them of their obligations, and I do not think that one can generally level the charge of fraud as if it were pervasive. I would like to hear if there are any particular instances, and the Ministry would be prepared to respond. There are some anomalies, and this is simply because I think that our systems here do not recognise we are serving missions abroad, having to respond to domestic conditions. We are not like post offices in the countryside accountable to the post office in Georgetown. I would say, very frankly, that our financial systems need to realise that, in order to ensure that remittance to our missions are wholesome, that they are adequate and are sent in time. We will not be held responsible for the failing of others. Mr Speaker, we accept some of the criticisms, and where they fit, we are willing do what we can about them. Let me come back to the point, because we cannot go on indefinitely in this way. This is becoming a great charade where we play at the dictates of the developed countries, which have all the resources, all the human capacity, and we are dragged into that and having to respond with very, very limited resources. I think that the problem is larger than that described by my colleague on the other side. I think that we need to look at the larger fundamentals. I would not say anymore on these practical matters, but I will come back to some other points raised in the intervention.

I would like, however, to take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to speak a bit about our substantive responsibilities. For example, the protection of our sovereignty and our territorial integrity, which must be uppermost in our minds, and I would wish to confirm, as was signalled

by the Honourable Minister of Finance in his Budget Presentation, that we have taken our maritime dispute with Suriname to an international tribunal of the Law of the Sea, with a view to securing a peaceful and definitive settlement. The memorial containing our arguments of the case was submitted a week ago to the Court. I think the Surinamese have until mid-October, or thereabout to tender their counter memorial, after which the tribunal will meet to hear the case. All things being equal, I believe that we may have a final award in about two to three years time. If we are successful in our representation . . . I personally have no doubt that we will, the way will be opened for the exploration and exploitation of the marine resources, which exist in the off-shore areas adjacent to Suriname, to be used for our benefit. We are poor people and, as was said by my colleague, perhaps we are trying to do too much, but once we can benefit from these resources, Mr Speaker, I think we will be better endowed to implement a more active foreign policy.

Speaking about our maritime resources again, I may add that we are also preparing a claim to our continental shelf - you know that area beyond our territorial sea, which will also open up even further possibilities for future economic progress. It must be our hope, then, that we will have these resources some day, and that we will have set the kind of ambitious policies we want to see pursued in the outside world.

I would just say a word on our relations with Venezuela. They have also evolved in a way that leads us to believe that progress towards greater understanding and cooperation with our western neighbour is indeed possible. Following the visit of President Chavez to Guyana in February 2004, new avenues have opened up in the search for a peaceful solution to a controversy that, for much too long, has denied us our rights to fully develop our economic potential.

Accordingly, even as we continue to avail ourselves to the UN Secretary General's good offices to find a peaceful settlement of the controversy, we are examining all options that may help us to untie the Gordian knot that this problem has become.

As with Suriname, we will seek to utilise the other high-level bilateral mechanisms which are now in existence, to raise the levels of cooperation between our countries and, in the process, hopefully, the confidence and trust that are necessary to reaching an applicable solution to our differences.

Mr Speaker, looking northward to the Caribbean, I would like to make just a few remarks on the promise of our membership of CARICOM. The inauguration of the Secretariat Headquarters at Liliendaal is a symbolic demonstration of Guyana's conviction that the achievement of its fundamental objectives is linked to the process of the regional integration movement. While others have denigrated it here, I could tell you that, in the region, it has been welcomed as an act of generosity on the part of the Guyanese government and people.

Mr Speaker, with this generalisation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will work along with other relevant ministries and agencies in this year of the single market to make our country CSME ready, to be able to take advantage of the large regional markets that will be opened up. It remains to be hoped that Guyanese entrepreneurs will now be prepared, will now ready themselves and be poised to grasp the new opportunities that will be created for our country's expansion.

Mr Speaker, in anticipation of the CSME, the Government of Guyana has called for the creation of viable economies of scale that would be able to compete successfully in the global market. As spokesman for agriculture, and I hope that I am not breaking any house rules, but President Jagdeo has been named as spokesman, and he has advocated the development of a common agricultural policy, as well as a common fisheries regime, that would maximise the economic returns from these important sectors throughout the region.

In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation and other international agencies CARICOM, led by Guyana, will be working to reorganise and revitalise agriculture and related industries to enable them to withstand the threat of globalisation and the liberalisation of

world trade. I may add, a common fisheries regime will also help us to resolve our overlapping claims with each other so that we can beneficially exploit our maritime resources for the good of our region.

I want to say a word here, in response to the point made by the Honourable Member Mrs Clarissa Riehl, about the movement of people - that we have an exodus of Guyanese to the region and beyond and, in counter-flow, we have an abundance of foreigners now occupying our territory. The fact of the matter is that we are living in an era of globalisation where markets and frontiers are being opened up so that movements of people, like globalization, as has been said by many economists, is irreversible. We cannot, therefore, hope to turn the tide back, but rather, instead, devise strategies whereby we can hope to control and take advantage of those flows. The Honourable Member made a good suggestion of a scheme for immigration of people from the Caribbean. The truth of the matter is, that offer has been on the table for years now, and the truth of the matter is not many people are pioneers these days. They do not want to go into the interior of the country, like the people of the old West, to develop the country. They want electricity. They want all the comforts of modern life... [Interruption: 'I thought I was only in Leguan they were doing that' "Well eventually it will, but what I am saying is that, when you talk about a policy like that, you must be aware of the implications."]

Again, the number of 40,000 has been given for the migration from Brazil. I rather doubt whether that is a realistic number. If you look at the facts, I think we may have more Guyanese now on the Brazilian side of the border, more Guyanese on that side. So we have to get our facts correct.

Mr Speaker, we are very pleased with the evolution of our relations with neighbouring Brazil. As I said in my statement in last year's budget, and as Minister Xavier and others have indicated, new horizons are being opened up to enlarge our economic space, and consequently our prospect for development. As was evident during the recent State visit of President Lula Da Silva, our relations with Brazil, our giant neighbour

to the South, are now at a high, and I use that word literally.

We are now at the point where several agreements, ranging from agriculture, trade, travel and infrastructure development have been put in place to allow increased cooperation with the two countries. As reflected in the Communiqué that was issued at the end of the visit, Brazil has renewed its commitments to the completion of the bridge over the Takatu River to allow for a land connection between Bonfin, the State of Roraima to Lethem on the Guyana side. I would not go into all the details of the agreements. Suffice it to add that, in the next sixty days, a mission from PETROBRAS, which is the Brazilian State Oil Company will visit Guyana to investigate the possibilities of joint operations in offshore oil and gas exploration. There are therefore many abundant opportunities for economic cooperation, which both countries can explore for their common good.

Other speakers have ventured the need for language-training, and this is well-taken and, apart from the points made by my distinguished colleague, the Minister of Education and others, we have asked the Brazilians, and we are assured that they will provide a chair for the teaching of Portuguese at the University of Guyana, and they are quite ready to have the language facility as a two-way stream where, very shortly perhaps, English language teaching centres will be established in Brazil. So it will be a two-way stream.

Mr Speaker, as a member of many Inter-American bodies, the Association of Caribbean States, Amazonian Cooperation Treaty Organisation, and the newly formed South American Community of nations, I believe we are well-placed to serve as an inter-connection between the North and South America. In the past, as a colony, we were accustomed to look to the metropolitan north. Largely, I am aware of our neighbours to the south. Recent developments, including most latterly, the State visit of President Ricardo Lagos of Chile, have opened up our eyes to the value of new relationships with the countries of Latin America. As has been said just now, we cannot say, Mr Speaker, that we are not ready. The world is ready, we have to adapt ourselves. We

have to make sure that we formulate the necessary strategies, take the right measures, and we can benefit from these developments, otherwise we will be overrun. I would readily agree that we will be overrun by a powerful neighbour if we do not plan our strategies. We have to formulate these things, and we are planning these ... We are doing demographic studies; we are formulating policies; we are looking at infrastructure, we also have to do a public education campaign of our own people, who continue to believe the propaganda that there are 100,000 Brazilians in Georgetown, and there are no Guyanese in Brazil.

Mr Speaker, our relations with North America, especially the US and Canada, and with Europe, have been historically important, and should be further strengthened. Our political and economic diplomacy must, however, extend beyond the Americas and Europe to the more distant regions of Africa and Asia. Our relations with India, China, Japan and the Russian Federation have been increasingly fruitful, and will be further developed in the fullness of time. It has been said, Mr Speaker, that economic prosperity in China and India, the world's two most populist nations, will enable the world, as a whole, to achieve the overwhelming millennium development goal - the target of eradicating poverty by 2015. It is symbolic, as has been adverted to that, along with the New Amsterdam Hospital and the CARICOM Secretariat Headquarters that were built with the assistance of the Government of Japan, we will soon have a convention centre and a cricket stadium erected respectively by the governments of China and India. The benefits of South South Cooperation are now here for all to see. We have said that these are important missions, and we have, in fact, now established a High Commission in New Delhi, at the level of Charge de Affaires, and we are going to proceed to appoint a High Commissioner to China. But we have been talking to CARICOM to see ... because there are endless capitals - we have South Africa; we have other evolving nations; we have Malaysia, and we have a number of other countries - but how can we, as small nations, afford the diplomatic representations in all these capitals. But China is sufficiently important, and we are committed, to put an ambassador in place.

Mr Speaker, these bilateral relations will be complemented by an extension of multilateral diplomacy, as has been remarked on before, in our own region of Latin America and the Caribbean. We have been given, from 1 January 2005, the great honour and privilege of serving, along with Argentina and Brazil, on the Bureau of the Rio Group, a major Latin American forum for major dialogue and economic cooperation.

Mr Speaker, *the Stabroek News*, three days ago, had an excellent Editorial on this matter to show how important it was, so it really is logical, or it really makes a terrible impact to say, *look, you are a weak ministry, you are a weak foreign service*, but yet you are in the first ranks of diplomacy in the world [*Applause*] after having successfully presided over the General Assembly, a hundred nations, *The Group of 77*, which is a misnomer because it now numbers around 150. We were not candidates for this position, but we were asked and we consented, after great thought, [*Applause*] because we know of the challenge. Mr Speaker, I do not know how to put it, but just to give you a little insight, it is for the first time that an English-speaking nation - one that does not even have 800,000 people, will be called upon to preside over a largely Portuguese and Spanish speaking group of powerful nations, whose total population exceeds 515,000,000 people. [*Applause*] Needless to say, the prestige and influence inherent in this leadership position offer distinct possibilities for mobilising support for developmental programmes.

But, beyond that, I should tell this House that this year we have been appointed to serve in New York as a member of the UNDP Governing Council, which is a policy-making body for the UNDP. [*Applause*] Very often, here in Guyana, we see foreign policy only through the faces of the missions that are here, from which you accept what they give you; but it is time that small nations like ourselves try to influence the policy, rather than merely be subjected to their policy, and we have not done too badly. I would cite our successes in the past, but this position on the Governing Council of the UNDP, which is an important catalyst for financing, will be important for us and, if that was not enough for us, we have been appointed to serve on the Global Environment Facility

representing the Caribbean constituency. So, Mr Speaker, it would seem that others have more confidence in us than we have in ourselves. *[Applause]*

I think we will continue to pursue this multilateral path, and to come up with ideas. Maybe it is a foreign policy that is out of proportion to our size and to our resources, but if we can do it, so much the better. We will be pursuing the idea of a New Global Human Order which was, in fact, supported by even more members in the last General Assembly, and which is constantly being fleshed out and, hopefully, one day the world will see it fit that a small nation could come up with a good idea. Brazil and France came up with ideas that catch all, but we also have ideas. It is not only the big nations that have a prerogative on ideas, small nations also have such a prerogative, and we will not hesitate to use it.

Mr Speaker, may I say, finally, that I believe that, in foreign policy, it is very important to have a bipartisan, if not a multipartisan approach. It is too important an issue in our affairs to be bandied about just casually, and I myself have found it very useful to meet with the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations in order to have that exchange of ideas. I would hope, for the benefit of our country, that this Committee in particular will continue to meet and share these ideas so that our foreign policy can benefit from various ideas. I myself have heard very good ideas from members of the Committee, including the Honourable Members Mr Trotman and Mrs Clarissa Riehl. So we can work together and I am very prepared to do that.

Mr Speaker, in this presentation, I have sought to illustrate some of the ways in which our foreign policy and, more particularly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will seek to facilitate implementation of the Budget's main provisions. As the Honourable Minister himself has said in his document, effective diplomacy is essential to the success of our efforts, and I would certainly not quarrel if he wants to give me an additional billion next year. I would welcome it, but we do not live in isolation, nor can we succeed independently of others. We live today in an inter-

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connected world in which our domestic situation is continuously influenced and shaped by external factors. Mr Speaker, we must therefore seek and act both locally and globally. I think only by so doing can we hope to successfully confront the challenges before us, and to sustain growth and development. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member

The Minister of the Public Service

Hon Dr Jennifer RA Westford: Mr Speaker, I rise to add my compliments to the Honourable Minister of Finance and his hard-working staff for the timely presentation of the 2005 Budget Estimates - a Budget which is the largest ever presented in this House.

Mr Speaker, over the past four days we have heard the cynics on the opposite side of this House describe our 2005 Budget Estimates as *unrealistic*, as *voodoo economics*, to name a few. The fact is, when listening to the Honourable Members on the opposite side of this House talking about sound economic policies, one has to be very suspicious of their motives - and do not forget that this very Party, during their term in Government presided over the most fiscally reckless era in the history of this country.

Mr Speaker, it is not that I have a yearning to dwell on the detrimental performance of the past PNC/R regime, but it is necessary for us to remember from whence we came so that we, as a nation, will understand and appreciate the developmental stride that the PPP/C Government has made in arriving at our present enviable status. The reality is that the 2005 Budget, apart from being the largest ever presented, is one which reflects the vision and the commitment of this Administration to confront our country's challenges, with the aim of sustaining its positive growth and development.

Mr Speaker, over the past four days we have listened to my colleagues on this side of the House as they detailed their projects for 2005, projects which will continue the developmental thrust of this Administra-

tion. The Honourable Minister of Finance, in this 2005 Budget Estimates, mentioned that human resource development is a priority for this Government.

To this end, the Public Service Ministry will continue to facilitate training opportunities for eligible citizens of this country. Over the past four years, this government has accelerated its training drive and has trained over 350 persons in various professional fields. Currently, we have 465 students studying at overseas universities, and 170 at local training institutions.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member, Dr Hanoman, during his speech, which was rife with misrepresentations, said that the government was only training medical doctors at the undergraduate level. This is far from the truth. This government has been training medical specialists at several overseas institutions and, as recent as last Friday, the Public Service Ministry concluded the selection of students for post-graduate studies in Mexico. Mr Speaker, let me mention, for the benefit of the Honourable Members Mrs Holder and Dr Dagleish Joseph, that this PPP/C Government is developing human resources at all levels. This Government gave scholarships for training at all levels, and I repeat, at all levels. We gave scholarships for training at:

- the Carnegie School of Home Economics;
- the GITC;
- GTI;
- GSA;
- local and overseas computer training schools;
- the University of Guyana; and
- other overseas Universities.

We have also been conducting intensive staff development/training, both locally and overseas. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Alexander, during his presentation, mentioned that the Public Service Ministry (PSM) is taking over the Public Service Commission. Let me inform the Honourable Member, and the other Members on the opposite side of this House, that the Public Service Ministry has no intention of taking over the Public Service Commission, but this House can be assured that the Public Service Ministry will unwaveringly perform its constitutionally prescribed duties without fear or favour. Our objective is to build an effective and responsive public service.

Mr Speaker, I am always appalled when Members of the PNC/R try to hoodwink us into believing that their party is so concerned about the welfare of the public service workers. The Honourable Member, Mr Williams, bemoaned the issue that public servants salaries are small, and that the yearly wages increase hardly serve any purpose.

Where was the Honourable Member when public servants were paid a minimum of wage of \$3,100 per month?

Where was he when a wages freeze was implemented for four years, from 1979 to 1982, by the then PNC administration?

Where was the Honourable Member when public servants were made to perform non-job-related functions, for which no remuneration was given?

Mr Speaker, I will not repeat the historical handling of the public service wages by the former PNC regime, since this was aptly handled by the Honourable Member, Mr Komal Chand, during his presentation, but I must remind this Honourable House that it was this PPP/C government that increased the minimum wage from \$3,100 in 1992 to \$23,204 in 2004.

The Honourable Member, Mr Williams, in his rambling about revised wages, wanted to know if the unspent funds were used for political purposes. Sir, it is either that the Honourable Member is ignorant of the

meaning of revised wage estimates, or that he is willingly trying to mislead the public and score cheap political points. It is my hope that the Honourable Minister of Finance will advise the Honourable Member so that he can become fully *au fait* with the interpretation for a future budget document.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Williams, also mentioned that the Government has been trampling on the collective bargaining process as a result of the imposition of wage increases. Mind you, Mr Speaker, that this very Honourable Member earlier, in the same presentation, chastised the Government for not mentioning, in the 2005 Budget Estimates, a proposed percentage increase for public servants. I think that the Honourable Member is either himself confused, or is trying to confuse the persons listening to him. On one hand, he is saying that the Government must announce wage increases in the Budget Estimates and, on the other, he is saying that doing so is tantamount to trampling on the collective bargaining process. Mr Speaker, let me advise the Honourable Member that this confusionist tactic is effective in the courts when you want the jurors to return a verdict based on reasonable doubt, but it is not going to work in this House. You are going to have to stick to the facts to prove your point.

This aside, let me say, for the record, that this Government has always - and I repeat, always conducted wages negotiations with the relevant bargaining units. What has been the trend, Sir, is that, as a result of unreasonable demands by these bargaining units, there is a breakdown of talks, which leaves the Government with no other option but to announce increases. Mr Speaker, this Government is, and has always been, a working-class one. We would be happy to pay our public servants higher salaries, but our economic realities are the dominant factors. The Honourable Members, Mr Williams and Mr Alexander, both intimated that the Government's employment of contracted workers is being done with some sinister motive in view. Let me advise the Honourable two gentlemen that this is not a new innovation by this Government. The trend of contracted workers is the norm in all modernised public services and, if we intend to diminish the flight of professionals, we will

have to continue employing contracted workers.

The Honourable Member, Mr Williams, singled out the Public Service Ministry's contracted workers for special mention. He even insinuated that these contracted positions were not held by genuine workers, but by political cronies. Let me, for the benefit of the Honourable Member and the Members on the Opposite side of this House give the designation of the contracted workers of the Public Service Ministry, and if the Honourable Member desires to have their names, he can formally have those names by asking a question to this Honourable House, which he has the right to, and it will be provided to him. He will also have the opportunity, and the right, to visit the Public Service Ministry any time during the working hours, from 8.00h to 4.30h to verify that these persons are working there.

Mr Speaker, they are:

- one Legal Officer;
- one Systems Development Officer;
- one Administrative Assistant;
- one Senior Personnel Officer;
- one Permanent Secretary;
- one Adviser on Education and Training;
- one Systems Administrator;
- one Systems Support Officer; and
- two vehicle drivers.

They are all on contract.

Mr Speaker, the Public Service Ministry has conflicting roles and role

expectations. It must be protector of the public purse, and rightly so. On the other hand, it must also be the benevolent employer and protector of the worker and workers' rights. This Ministry has always acted carefully, with constraint, probity and professionalism. However, room must be made for creative developmental thought, for independent opinion, and advice on personnel matters, such as pay. This will be addressed by one of the aspects of the Public Sector Modernisation Project, and yes, Sir, I did say the Public Sector Modernisation Project, for the benefit of the Honourable Member, Mr Williams. Let me say that this project is still on-stream.

The Government of Guyana is currently completing the conditionalities for the disbursement of the IDB loan to commence the Public Management Modernisation Phase. This Phase will be looking at the following components:

- to Strengthen the capacity of the Public Service Ministry to regulate and manage the Public Service system;
- to improve the effectiveness of public employment;
- to strengthen the central data base for human resource registries and payroll;
- To increase system coverage and information quality, integration, and improving development of personal general statistics;
- to train high-level staff, including Permanent Secretaries and advisers in leadership techniques;
- to design and implement a performance appraisal system for Permanent Secretaries and high level staff, including a revision of their responsibility and authority;
- to diagnose and revise the Public Service policy and rules, including the analysis for unification of legislation;

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- to increase flexibility in public employment management;
- to develop and implement a set of policy guidelines, and institutional and organisational models aimed at reinforcing and streamlining the broad institutional framework of semi-autonomous agencies;
- to promote a permanent and comprehensive strategic vision of the reform, including stakeholders' consensus building;
- to support a complete picture of the process of reform, with an implementation in a phased approach;
- to strengthen the capacity of the Integrity Commission so that it can adequately perform its statutory functions;
- to improve transparency in Public Sector;
- to develop specific guidelines;
- to increase access to information.

I hope that answers your question, Mr Williams.

- to strengthen Local Government and Regional Development Ministry, including diagnosis of the distribution of roles and responsibility among central, regional, and local levels of government, and the financial sources for each one;
- to design a corresponding policy, and to strengthen legal and constitutional framework for local and regional governments, including the relationship with central government.

Mr Speaker, again the Honourable Member Mr Williams, on behalf of the PNC/R, questioned the expenditure of \$173,000,700 in 2002, and \$23,800,000 in 2003, by this project. I would like to assure the Mem-

bers on the opposite side of this House, of the Public Sector Modernisation Project, that these funds were expended in accordance of the Government of Guyana and the IDB Regulations, and that the expected objectives were realised.

A point to note is that the audited financial statements are readily available for perusal. This government had sought to keep pace with the changing national and international environment. We have never wavered from our fundamental commitment to seek, at all times, the very best for our beloved country.

Mr Speaker, this Government has set the country on a sound economic path and, in doing so, we have provided opportunities for maximum participation by the Private Sector and our workers. We have established open, ongoing communication channels to the people at a level unprecedented in the history of representative government in Guyana. I believe Mr Speaker, that there is nothing which we cannot achieve if only we can pull ourselves together, always mindful of the prize of a better Guyana. I believe that there is nothing which we cannot achieve, if only we can pull ourselves together, always mindful of the cries for a better Guyana for the vast majority of our people.

Mr Speaker, let me repeat the commitment of this administration to the development of a society in which every single man, woman and child feel proud to call this country home.

We strive for a society that will afford all our citizens the opportunity for growth, a sense of self-worth and self-assurance that will make constructive contribution to the building of our nation, and the crafting of a just, peaceful, and prosperous society. None of this can be achieved without ensuring the values and attitudes that will foster a respect for self and others. It will require a genuine devotion to duty, even while maintaining one's values, over the protection of individual rights.

We, as the duly elected Government of this country, re-affirm our pledge to a culture of partnership in our efforts to achieve a brand of

governance, which takes into full account the benefits to Guyana, of active, dynamic collaboration between government and organised labour of the private sector. This has to include all parties in the process whether they are managers or workers, employers or trade unions.

We must thank those citizens who remained committed to this country, despite the daily assault of their consciousness of doom and gloom by those who prefer to spend their energies on cynical pursuits rather than creative response to the challenge of our time. In saying so, I dearly hope that the Honourable Member, Mr Williams, will seek to have the term *woe to Guyana* deleted from his budget speech of 2005.

I, for one, retain the confidence I have always had in the good sense of the people of this country. They know how to transform liabilities into assets, how to sidestep days of shame and search instead for opportunities of hope. I expect from them positive responses in helping to get the entire society over the present hump of admittedly serious difficulties, which are not less rampant in countries which are much more economically advanced than we are.

We, who are in the vanguard of the political profile, must demonstrate that the Parliamentary process is not a guerrilla warfare, but a democratic device offering options for guiding the way forward into civil society.

We in this Honourable House are meant to engage in civilised rivalry in the service of our people. Mr Speaker, this Government will continue the work we have begun in securing for our citizens a just, free, decent and civilised Guyana, a Guyana, which has its people at the centre of its concerns, where policy and actions will treat our citizens as the resourceful, ingenious, creative human beings they have long proven to be.

I therefore invite all Guyanese to travel with us along these pathways so that together, we can reap the fruits of our labour and secure a brighter future which is within our grasp. Let us, therefore, this day

resolve that succeed we must, and with God's help we will succeed.
Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member, Mrs Shirley Melville

Mrs Shirley J Melville: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the Budget 2005. It is an honour to be the representative for the Rupununi, Region 9. A region with many issues, however, blessed with committed and dynamic leaders and people.

Mr Speaker, does the Budget reflect the will of the people? The answer is no, it does not. There is need for more discussions with communities so their priorities could be taken into account. *[Applause]* I must commend the efforts of the Regional Democratic Council and, in particular, the councillors who try to carry out their duties with very limited resources over a large area of their sub-districts.

This brings me to the point of stipends for regional councillors. Regional councillors are paid \$18,000 per annum. I propose that these figures be reviewed.

There has been great improvement in the working relationship among the staff of the Regional Democratic Council. However, from time to time, civil servants need to be reminded that they are the servants of the people. For example, the accounts department pay salaries late, and it is unfair for teachers to cycle as much as seventy miles, only to be told that salaries are not available. There is need for a qualified accounting officer, as the Deputy Regional Executive Officer has many other responsibilities. I would recommend that some civil servants be given public relations courses. Mr Speaker, it is important to know to deal with people. It is a step towards working together.

Village Administration - Village councils have continued to strengthen their capacity-building skills. This translates in more responsibilities for the village councils. Once again, I recommend a paid secretary for the

council, and an increase in the stipend for Tosaos and senior councillors from \$7,000 and \$5,000 respectively.

Honourable Minister Rodrigues, I commend and thank you for the ongoing training, in which you were very instrumental, in order that skills be utilised to the fullest. Honourable Minister, I recommend that activities of your Ministry, and that of the villages, be coordinated in a more timely manner.

Honourable Minister, the villagers are still inquiring about the President's Youth Choice Initiative Programmes.

Amerindian Act - Consultations were done with the Amerindian Act, issues were raised, and Mr Bulkan did an excellent job in his responses. We welcome his presence as Mr Bulkan has worked with the Amerindian issues. Mr Speaker, our people would have benefited immensely if, when the Draft Act was distributed, our people had access to legal aid. This would have enabled them to have a clearer understanding of the Draft, and they would have been more prepared to meet with the Honourable Minister and her team.

Another area of concern is the guarantee with issues raised at consultations would be considered and incorporated into the final draft.

The Amerindian Act is a very important piece of legislation, as it is going to impact on the lives of our future generations. Could the Honourable Minister investigate why some Amerindian brothers and sisters were denied entry to the consultations held at the Red House?

Education - This continued to improve in Region 9. Information technology is one of the subjects to be written at the CXC exams for the first time. At this time I thank GT&T for the contribution of two computers towards the already existing thirteen computers at the St Ignatius Secondary School, which was donated by friends of the Peace Corps. Special thanks again to the friends of the Peace Corps who have made a further donation to the Arapaima Primary School.

Mr Speaker, reading is a weak area and I must say that phonics programmes via the computers have assisted immensely. From a regional perspective, information technology is high on our priority. There are more than 100 computers and eight satellite dishes in Region 9.

Communication is vital, and we are all aware of the need to keep in touch within our region, and in the wider world.

Schools - On the issue of schools, I thank the Government of Guyana for the secondary schools in Annai and Aishalton. *[Applause]* However, these schools were not built to specification. I propose that the quality work be seriously investigated and, in future, these schools could be converted into dormitories. Could the Honourable Minister state what is the present status of Shulinab secondary school? Most of the surrounding communities have agreed on the location.

Mr Speaker, as we look at the Budget allocation for furniture for schools, the funds are not sufficient, the quality of PIP is very poor. I propose that local furniture from the region be acquired, as the records show that local furniture is more durable and, at the same time, jobs are being created for our people. *[Applause]*

The Cyril Potter College of Education, Distance Education Primary and Early Childhood Education In-Service Centre have been launched. This has been welcomed, and it will have a positive impact in the areas, such as better performance by teachers, better family lives, better planning for family budgets and an increased awareness of the role of women in our communities. There are many female teachers as well as males.

Mr Speaker, without appropriate meals children cannot concentrate for a long period. I thank Minister Jeffrey, Beacon Foundation, and the people of Region 9 for supporting the initiative of the School Feeding Programme, where cassava bread and peanut butter would be introduced. These are both local products of Region 9. This will benefit many individuals, and this will be explained when I deal with agriculture.

Mr Speaker, education does not have adequate transport facilities for the intensive educational programmes in Region 9, I recommend good vehicles.

Women in Development - The women in Region 9 have continued to excel. Their determination and innovativeness should be commended, despite harsh conditions and many hurdles. More women are sitting on Village Councils, Parent Teachers' and Friends' Associations, entering the teacher and nursing professions, more entrepreneurs and taking up more challenges of being involved in leadership roles.

However, we do not ignore the fact that our menfolk are vitally important. Therefore, women are aware of the gender issue and are involving the menfolk in their various activities. Special thanks to you Youth Challenge Guyana and CIDA, for the gender equity programmes. At the moment training programmes are ongoing in the region. Thanks to Minister Nadir for the upgrading of craft skills, and other capacity skills, in the women's groups.

Health - Once again Hon Minister Ramsammy mentioned in his presentation the Lethem Public Hospital and HIV testing facility. The people of Region 9 look forward to the completion of the projects in 2005. We do not have a doctor at the moment. However, I wish to thank the Honourable Minister for accepting Dr Antoine to return to work on the completion of the new Lethem Public Hospital. Mrs Bercina Humphrey has returned to work as the Administrator of the Lethem Public Hospital. I commend her for her dedicated service.

Lethem Hospital has no reliable vehicles. We hope that this would be remedied in this year's Budget.

Mr Speaker, the people of Region 9 await the second reading of the Regional Health Authority Bill, when better operational practices within the health sector would be addressed. For example:

- I recommend training programmes for technicians for the operating of the Xray machines;

- the malaria department has been included in the regional system but, to date, there has been delays with salaries.

Mr Speaker, cervical cancer continues to be a rising concern of the women of Region 9 and other regions across our country. Special thanks to Minister Rodrigues for investigating this issue. However, the testing of individuals is only the beginning of a long process. There is need to go beyond this stage. Mr Speaker, our women are in dire need of attention in this area. Once again, assistance has been sought in Brazil. However, we need to streamline this process. It is done in an *ad hoc* manner at the moment. Lots of tests are required, and a lot of finances also. It is extremely expensive to take patients to the Caribbean. Due to the close proximity of Region 9 to Brazil, it is hoped that this would be one of the health problems of which the Hon Minister Ramsammy made mention of in his presentation with regard to health programmes, which persons in Brazil and Guyana face.

Mr Speaker, cancer is a desperate situation in our country, and I hope some serious steps can be taken towards assisting patients who have been diagnosed.

Once more, I thank the Brazilian government for giving our patients the necessary attention and treatment. I thank Remote Area Medical for assisting with transporting of patients within and beyond our region.

Housing and Water - Housing Schemes are being identified. Houselots have been doubled, I thank you, Minister Baksh. Mr Speaker, I propose that infrastructure work be a priority when housing schemes are being set up.

During last year in the Budget debate, mention was made of the status of Lethem becoming a secondary township. Mr Speaker, it is imperative that the profile of Lethem be improved. Lethem is one of the most important locations in our country - the gateway to South America. No mention was made of the complex to house immigration, health, customs, police, tourism and other relevant authorities after exiting the

Takatu Bridge. Mention has been made of works recommencing on the Takatu Bridge.

Water continues to be a problem in Region 9. A well was due for one year. I hope that this well becomes a reality in 2005. However, in order to resolve the water situation with the growing population, I propose that a storage system be set up. At the moment work is being done in villages by teams of GWI personnel and I propose that local facilitators be included in this team, and consultations with the villagers for an ideal spot be done. In St Ignatius pipelines are being laid down. Mr Speaker, how can two inches pipe be used for the main pipes. All types of resources are scarce, but we suggest that whatever is available be used in a more responsible manner.

Roads and Bridges - Mr Speaker, \$18 million has been allocated for roads. Our roads are still in dire need of repairs. Could the Hon Minister Nokta update us on the compactor? I propose that whatever road repairs are being done in Lethem, asphaltting of the main roads should be a priority. Asphalt is available in the Government stores in Lethem. Quarry bridge is in pieces. This is a main link to the south central and deep south Rupununi. I propose that this bridge be treated as a priority.

Electricity - Mr Speaker, Lethem has twelve hours of electricity daily. However, residents have not given up on the Moco-Moco Hydro. Special thanks to be given to the Government of Guyana for their support and blessings for alternative technical assistance to be sought - \$10 million pledge by the government of Guyana will go a long way in the restoring of the Moco-Moco Hydro power facility. Mr Speaker, energy will be required for the proposed industrial site. I propose that energy be sought from the Guri Dam as this energy could be in Lethem with the completion of the Takatu Bridge.

Security - Mr Speaker, I commend the security forces in Region 9, despite so many hurdles, efforts are being made to try and get the job done. To this end there is need to improve the image of our officers in their living and working environments. Mr Speaker, it does not reflect

professionalism when some of our officers have to be living in rooms adjoined to their offices. These officers are living away from their families. Let us try to make them a bit more comfortable. I commend the Guyana Defence Force for maintaining a good working relationship with the community. With the increase of vehicles, I recommend a traffic officer's station in Lethem to facilitate the documentation, registration, et cetera, seeing that today our people have to travel to Georgetown to deal with such matters.

Tourism – Eco-tourism is being viewed as a possible economic activity. Persons are becoming more organised and aware of the value of the natural resources and need to conserve and preserve. Mr Speaker, the hinterland of Guyana is the destination of many visitors arriving in Guyana. As we are aware, the rich culture of the Amerindian people are very much admired by visitors, along with the flora and fauna and wildlife of our country. There are many Guyanese and interested individuals who care, and who would like to see our wilderness preserved.

Mr Speaker, eco-tourism is an economical alternative for our people. However, there is major concern, with regard to unauthorised persons operating in the trapping of birds and animals. I propose more educational and awareness programmes. I thank CI for the work done in Region 9. However, there is a need that our nation become more sensitised on this issue. For example, in Georgetown the Botanical Garden has six acres of land, which is the home for more than 120 species of birds living in their natural habitat. Mr Speaker, I would like to propose the revision of the Wild Birds Protection Act as there is an urgent need to protect our birds. As from data available birds are one of the most profitable wildlife exports. Eco-tourism is beneficial to the entire country, and to the future of Guyana.

Mr Speaker I think special mention should be made of the village of Surama, which has done well, and is doing well, in eco-tourism, and they are fully booked for the balance of the year. In the papers the other day I noticed that the International Trade Fair in Germany would be on soon. I would like to let the Honourable Minister know that we do have

material, in the form of a CD containing very high-quality pictures from the Rupununi. We would also like certain procedures to be outlined, with regard to people visiting Guyana with their own vehicles and hoping to be just in transit. Mr Speaker, at the moment there are many persons who are interested in the circular route - from Brazil, Guyana, Suriname, French Guyana, and back to Brazil. We need to have these systems put in place.

Agriculture - Once again, in looking at the allocation for the agriculture sector we are convinced that it does not reflect that agriculture is one of the main activities in our region. Two nurseries are to be constructed in Annai and Karasabai. Again, in 2002, a nursery was constructed in Karasabai, but it was never used. Could the Honourable Minister explain why this was so, and why another nursery is being constructed in the same village? Field officers are needed, and also an agricultural officer who is proactive.

Special thanks to NARI, particularly Mr Gonsalves, who has been giving of his best, despite limited resources. Mr Gonsalves is a role model with the right attitude, work ethic, and vision. Agriculture is the economical future of Region 9.

Mr Speaker, I would like to share with my other colleagues in this House that Region 9 has developed a regional agricultural plan and, with the blessing of the government of Guyana, work is being carried out. Peanut production has increased for the past year to 2,000,000 lbs. Special thanks to the Government of Guyana, Beacon Foundation, Universities of Georgia and Florida, and the farmers of Region 9.

There was a difficulty in marketing. This is the third year that I have come to this Honourable House to raise the issue of the thirty-percent consumption tax. Could the Honourable Minister report to this House what is the present situation?

Special thanks for the Aflatoxin certificate which should be available in three months, according to Hon Minister Sawh. I thank the Govern-

ment of Guyana.

St Ignatius Women's Group is experimenting with other products - salted peanuts and peanut butter. There is a provision for providing value-added products instead of only the raw products being shipped out. A fish-farming project is in process. Mr Ernesta Faria should be commended for taking up this challenge. Special thanks to IPED for the funding, and the funding of many other products in Region 9. I would also like to thank Subri, an Institute in Boa Vista, Roraima, where there are many technical experts.

Mr Speaker, there is quite a lot taking place in Region 9. The people of Region 9 are aware that the government of Guyana cannot meet all their needs and, as such, alternative solutions are sought.

Mr Speaker, in closing, I thank the Government of Guyana, the Government of Brazil, the Government of Canada, the Government of USA, the Government of UK, CIDA, UNDP, UNICEF, SIMAP, the Toshias and the people of Region 9 who are determined to leave a legacy for the future generations, we continue to place unity as the top priority in moving forward.

As Sir Paul Reeves, Commonwealth Secretary General, remarked on his visit to Guyana in January 2005:

On this visit, I had the pleasure of visiting the interior, more specifically the Rupununi in Region 9. I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to Major General Joe Singh and Conservation International for organising the trip.

What impressed me were community-based cooperative initiatives in places like Lethem and Annai. Ethnicity was not a barrier to working together; that is the model we are seeking. I ask myself, if it can happen at the local level, why can't it be a feature of the national life of Guyana. After all, the motto of this country is One People, One Nation, One Destiny.

Mr Speaker, may God bless this Honourable House, its Members and Guyana. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: Mr Speaker, Social and economic development has been advancing in Guyana since the PPP/C Government took office and, of recent times, one can see a tangible example of improvement in the lives of the Guyanese people in every sector, and in all parts of Guyana. This Budget, as presented, gets the support of all of us on this side of the House, and I urge my colleagues over there on the other side to do likewise because, as Guyana develops, all Guyanese benefit

PPP/C Members of Parliament, representing various regions, have already added their contributions, and highlighted many aspects of the development process taking place and, at the same time, responded to the negatives and distortions from the Opposition.

As production increases, Guyana moves forward. So, as Minister responsible for the ten regions, I am tasked to report to Parliament on some aspects of economic and social development that are being enjoyed by the people.

Nationally, Guyana's income has grown from \$33 billion in 1993, to \$86.4 billion in 2005, which is fourteen percent more than the latest estimate for 2004.

However, critics may want to twist or juggle with figures, and some Members say *massage figures*, or you can quibble with them. But the fact is that this country's economy has more than doubled in twelve years. There is more money to spend, and all Guyana shares the benefits. Minimum wage for Public Servants in 1992 was \$3,050.00 per month. That was the time of the famous ERP - Empty Rice Pot - when all Guyana was told by the PNC *Eat Less, Sleep Less and Work Hard*, that was

the reward for the poverty that existed then. Today, under the PPP/C Government, the minimum wage is \$23,204 per month. What a difference.

Mr Speaker, I have, in my hand, a paysheet for 1992 - 13 to 31 October, for a Senior Minister in this House, Harripersaud Nokta, and it says that, after all the deductions for half a month, my take home pay was \$9,905, less than what we are giving to the ordinary worker as a minimum wage. This is true.

Mr Speaker, when we look at what is happening in Guyana now, while we know that \$23,000 is yet small, we can see that Guyanese people in every walk of life are enjoying a better standard of living. Today, people can go and have leisure. Look at the seawall on Sunday evenings - people can go, and they find disposable income. Look at the many eating houses that we have. If the people were not having money, do you think that they would go and eat out? So many restaurants! As I said, it does not matter how you twist it and massage it, Guyanese are enjoying a better life in this country under this PPP/C Government.

Mr Speaker, last year, the ten regions of Guyana were allocated total capital expenditure of \$1.113 billion. This year, that amount is lifted to \$1.260 billion, an increase of \$147.7 million, which means more money for each region to further improve education, health, agriculture, transportation, communication, and other social services.

Mr Speaker, I sat here for five days and listened to the contributions coming from Members from the opposite side of this House and some members attempted - the Honourable Member, Dr Joseph, tried to treat us with a menu - something very unpalatable, when he spoke about medical service under the PNC. He failed to remember that, in those days, medical service in Guyana was so bad, shortage of doctors and medicine and so many things, that Mr Burnham - the PNC had to legalise obeah to send the people to the obeah man instead of going to the doctor. Up to this day that kind of habit is still within the PNC. They are marching on the streets, and they are burning fowl feather, they are

practising it up to now. *[Laughter]* That is what they were taught. *[Noisy Interruption]* Mr Speaker, they failed to understand ... the truth hurts. Mr Speaker, rats were running the hospitals and Mr Burnham, as President of this country, described the Public Hospital of Georgetown as a death trap, and he became a victim of that death trap.

Mr Speaker, I listened to the Honourable Member Dr Hanoman, and he, as a professional in the field of medicine, spoke quite a lot, and I do not have any expertise in the field of medicine. I am impressed about his knowledge, but when I listened to him, when he said that all of the streets of Georgetown have prostitutes, he has to be a professional in that field to diagnose that.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, on a point of order, I think the Honourable Member should be asked to withdraw that remark, because he clearly stated that Dr Joseph was a member of the prostitution profession. That is what he said. *[Interruption: 'He did not say anything about him. ']* He said that.

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: Mr Speaker, I did not say that Dr Joseph is a member of that profession.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, let me ask you this: Did you say that about Dr Joseph? Did you refer to Dr Joseph in that way?

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: No, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

A quick glance will show that each region enjoys an increase, as follows, in the capital estimates:

- Region 1 - from \$81.6 million to \$109.5 million;
- Region 2 - from \$171.3 million to \$188 million

- Region 3 - from \$134.4 million to \$147.8 million
- Region 4 - from \$84 million to \$92.5 million
- Region 5 - from \$132 million to \$145.2 million
- Region 6 - from \$176.3 million to \$197.9 million
- Region 7 - from \$61.1 million to \$68.1 million
- Region 8 - from \$65 million to \$73.9 million
- Region 9 - from \$103 million to \$124 million
- Region 10 - from 103 million to \$113.7 million

When I listened to the Honourable Member from the Rupununi, her whole speech was like a vote of thanks. She was thanking everybody. But I will come to it. We are happy that people are recognising that the Government is improving the lives of the Guyanese people. At least, they have honestly said *thanks* and we are happy. They are thanking us. *[Applause]*

Again, last year, the regions recorded a high percentage performance of their capital programmes.

This year, the regions will strive to do likewise, should there be no adverse problems. It must be noted, however, that shortage of staff and technical skills in every sector, and in each region, impedes the timely fulfilment of programmes, and constrains the delivery of services in some sectors, especially health and education and, in some instances, lack of adequate allocation of funds affects infrastructural development.

Mr Speaker, many of my colleagues on this side of the House have dealt extensively with developments in the coastal regions. It is therefore necessary for me to highlight the achievements of the hinterland regions during last year, and to give an overview of projections for 2005.

Some of my colleagues over there attempted ... and when I listened to them, there is hardly much to comment on, save and except when I listened to the Honourable Member, Mr Ravi Dev ... and all he could tell us is that he is advised by his nanee. *[Laughter]*

When I listened to the Honourable Member from the WPA, the best part of the speech is that it ends very quickly. I want to advise that some people say when the beginning of the speech is as close to the end, I hope it can happen every year, very little talk, and very little to respond to.

Mr Speaker, I come to Region 1. Last year was quite a busy year for the Administration. The historic San Jose bridge across the Moruka River was completed. It stands out as pride to the residents of Moruka. With monies available this year, approaches on both sides will be completed, history will be recorded when the first four-wheeled vehicle will drive across the Moruka River. The guess is: who will be first, His Excellency the President, Honourable Minister Carolyn Rodrigues, or yours truly. We shall see when the time comes, but we will make history in Moruka, as we have already done, and I invite all of you over there ... Moruka has minibus service now. People can travel in minibuses, never before in the history of Moruka ... and more will come in days to come.

Health posts at Four Miles Kaituma and Eclipse Falls are completed, and so is the doctors' quarters at Port Kaituma, which means improved health for that sub-region. \$20 million was spent to upgrade the road from Kaituma to Mathews Ridge and Arakaka. Road construction has started to link Matthews Ridge with Barimita and up to today, I was telling the REOs, when we were discussing the Estimates that not very long from now with monies available for the road to continue from Matthews Ridge to Barimita, I am hoping to be the first Minister who will walk from Matthews Ridge to Barimita this year. I may invite the Honourable Prime Minister, because he has a liking for hinterland travels, and maybe he may join us when the time comes. Mr Speaker, with additional funds allocated this year, it is expected ... and for the first time in history, that far-off Carib communities with over 1,500 residents

will be able to travel freely, taking goods and services to and from the area, and not having to depend on expensive air and transport, as they do now, and has always been under the PNC's time. This road will bring greater benefit for social and economic advancement to all residents of Barimita, and for the generations to come.

The Mabaruma sub-region has not been left out. The new 500 KV generator has been installed, which brought improved electricity services to residents of Hosororo, Mabaruma, Kumaka, and I hope Mr Khan also enjoys it, because he lives there, and the catchment areas. With \$3 million allocated this year, residents will receive electricity for the first time when the expansion programme is completed. \$32.5 million is allocated for education development this year and will finance the construction of teachers' quarters at Kamwatta, Mabaruma, Four Miles Kaituma, and Hotoqui, as well as extension of dormitories for both secondary schools at Santa Rosa and Mabaruma, thus providing better facilities for education delivery.

Roads have not been left out, with \$40 million budgeted in 2005 ... and this is what you will like to hear ... road stretching from Citrus Grove to Port Kaituma, Tobago Hill to Wauna, and from Matthews Ridge to Arakaka and Port Kaituma will be upgraded. I will invite you to come later on and see for yourself, Mr Joseph.

Health services will be further boosted, with \$11 million to construct a laboratory at Pakera Hospital Complex, and for construction of Health Huts at St Ansalem, Canal Bank, and Lower Koriabo.

Mr Speaker, it will be remiss of me not to respond to a few comments which were made by the Honourable Member, Mr Ivor Allen, when he referred to the North West District in his comment and told us about this glorious Fish Complex at Morawhanna, and the citrus or orange juice factory at Mabaruma. I happened to be living at Mabaruma at that time - from 1968 to 1974, and in those days oranges were so plentiful, there were three big citrus farmers - Mr Hercules, Mr Badrudeen Khan and the Chan-a-sues. They were the ones who were pressing the

then Government to not allow the oranges to fall. I used to buy 100 for \$1 and get twenty-five and thirty more ... *[Interruption: 'You see how good the PNC was.']* ... Yes, because they did not provide them something, but they hurriedly went somewhere ... I do not know which part of the world, and they brought an old second-hand machine to crush orange. They built a building at Morawhanna which, we had to convert. Let me edify you. They installed this engine but, unfortunately, this machine could only crush oranges of a very small size, and one of those very big farmers, I would not call his name, said, *Cde Harry, what they did there, it means that we have to pray to the orange tree now, ow, please, bear a small orange so that we can crush it.*

Mr Speaker, another instance ... I am just referring, because he gave the impression in this House that things were glorious under the PNC Morawhanna Fish complex - for years and years ... and I would call the names of the fishermen, many of them have died by now. They put a few greenheart planks by the stelling, and every time I stand up there and hold a public meeting, I used to tell the people that *look, I stand up on your saltfish factory*, because that is what they promised them, but they only put some greenheart planks.

Then I listened to him talking about the tomato paste factory in Black Bush Polder. He does not know the history. PNC started by setting up a factory at Mibicuri, but they did not have the tomatoes. *[Laughter]* Right in this House a PPP member by the name of Roshan Alli from the Corentyne stood up and said, *you are not having tomatoes and you are buying squash and you are cutting it, you are colouring it and calling it tomato paste.* Mr Speaker, I would not want to go any more, but I just do that because I want to tell them over there that there are people in this House who have memories, and we lived through those days. We sat in here, too, and we listened to what they were telling us, and if I happen to open the book with all the stories, they will continue for a long while.

I now come to *Region 7*. This Region had its share of developments, as provided for by a budget of \$18 million for the extension of

Kako Primary School, teachers' quarters at Bartica and Kwebanang last year. In 2005, \$18 million will be spent to construct head teachers' quarters and apartment buildings for other teachers of the Waramadong Secondary School. Residents of Kurupung and Kaikan were provided with new Health Posts in 2004, and this year there is an allocation of \$9 million for two more Health Posts to be constructed at Middle Mazaruni ... and I can tell you about the place there, the scenery ... and one at Arau on the border between Guyana and Venezuela. I even advised that if they do not have enough money to complete both, at least complete the one at Arau, because that area is farther away, and we can start and have a hold-over for next year.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member from Bartica talked about roads. Roads in Agatash, Bartica, Potaro and Kamarang to Waramadong will be improved, as maintenance continues, with an allocation of \$16 million this year.

Last year, when I visited the Upper Mazaruni, residents of Phillapai requestd an outboard engine, and that promise was fulfilled recently with the handing-over of a new 25HP Johnson Outboard Engine for the Village. It was done by the Hon Minister Carolyn Rodrigues, as we visited in company with the Hon Prime Minister, when we were discussing the pre-budget. Similarly, a promise was made to the residents of Paruima, the last village not far from the Venezuelan border, for electricity to be extended in the village, and for pure water to be brought by way of pipes from a natural spring.

I am happy to report that my promise will be fulfilled this year, with \$1.5 for extension of power supply, and \$5.5 for the construction of a reservoir at Paruima Mountain - far up in the mountain spring to supply pure water to that village.

The PPP/C Government always strives to bring social benefits and development to residents of Hinterland areas.

Before I move on to the next region, let me say that the Honourable

Member from Bartica talked about the health services, and made mention about the new Kamarang Hospital. Kamarang boasts a new hospital building provided by this Government. She said that they did not have a doctor. I admit we do not have a resident doctor, but we have a Cuban doctor at Bartica, and arrangement is made for that doctor to go up to Kamarang at least once per month to spend a week or two so that the people up there will have extended medical service again. Mr Speaker, this is what this Government is doing all along to help the people in the Hinterland, and also all over the country.

Region 8, the smallest of the ten regions in population, is regarded as the most difficult and expensive to administer. This Region, inhabited predominantly by the Patamona Tribe, stretches far and wide over and across the Pakaraima Mountains and valleys. Beautiful as it is with waterfalls, rivers, and a majestic landscape, life for the residents there was stagnant for centuries. Today things have changed for the better. The PPP/C Government must claim credit for the continued improvement and development that is taking place, especially during the past twelve years. Every village from Kaibarupai going right on to Monkey Mountain can boast of having a school and a health centre, with a trained Community Health Worker. Medexes, Microscopists and Dental Technicians serve the communities and provide year-round health services in all the areas. Mr Speaker, we are not saying that because we have done so much in the hinterland and that all is well. There is much more to be done, and I have no doubt that, once we have started, and this PPP/C continues to be in Government, that the people in Region 8 and other regions will continue to enjoy better social services. *[Applause]*

With \$13 million last year, a new healthpost was constructed at Kurukabaru, and an extension of the one at Monkey Mountain and an X-ray room at Mahdia Public Hospital. This year, \$13 million more will be spent to extend healthposts at Paramakatoi, Kopinang and Tumatumari, while \$5 million will be spent to install an X-ray machine, film processor and dental equipment for Mahdia Hospital, which means improved delivery of health services for the residents of Region 8. I must mention that almost all health centres are equipped with a radio set powered by solar

energy, resulting in easier and faster communication at all times, and especially in times of emergency.

With \$19 million last year, and this year another \$19 million for education delivery, things will further improve in Region 8. Secondary Schools at Mahdia and Paramakatoi are both equipped with dorms, kitchen and mess halls, with supply of electricity at Paramakatoi. As the Honourable Member from that side said, there is no electricity at Mahdia at the moment, but I want to say that a new generating set has been installed not long ago and the dorms, the kitchen and the mess hall will be provided with electricity, and that, by September, we will have children accommodated for the first time at the Mahdia Secondary School dorm.

Improved education, resulting in a larger number of passes at the Common Entrance Exams, and many more children having access to secondary education within the region, increases the demands for larger classrooms and more spacious dorms. If we look at Mahdia: it started in 2003 with 81 students. This year we have 108 and, in 2006, for the first time, the children in that part of Guyana will be writing the CXC Exam. That is improvement which the PPP/C Government has brought.

Mr Speaker, roads and bridges are a success story. Three years ago, driving from Karasabai to Orinduik was a dream. With the support of villagers, and small amounts of money provided by Regions 8 and 9, using only power-saws and hand-tools, road construction linking villages became a reality in this Region. Rivers such as Micobie, Wailangbaru and Tumong were bridged last year, and an extension of the road from Kurukabaru to Kamana and to Waipa was accomplished. Also the distance from Tusening to Kato is shortened by a road diversion by passing Bamboo Creek and Paramakatoi, saving approximately five hours on the direct journey.

Mr Speaker, \$16 million is allocated to purchase a grader to improve the roadway, and further extend it to Karisparu and Kaibarupai.
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Your 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.

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: Mr Speaker, more heavy-duty bridges will be constructed in 2005 and, as the Honourable Member requested, three bridges will be constructed this year at:

- Wickoloie;
- Imuk; and
- Palamaku, along with Twiling Valley.

The one she asked for is a bridge across the border from Region 8 to Region 9. That is going to be a large bridge across the Echilebar River, and we are hoping to some day have enough money so that we can put a bridge across that river so that the two regions will be bridged.

Guyanese have already tested the drive by landrover from Karasabai to Orinduik, as they over-nighted at Monkey Mountain and Kato on two successful Safaris. Trucks can now transport goods and services to the villages at cheaper cost, rather than by air-freight, which means expansion of agricultural production and reducing cost of living. Crop production is gradually expanding. In time to come, we will see onions, cabbages, yams, garlic, and other produce coming out of Region 8 to other regions. Already there are five rice hullers, thanks to the Minister of Amerindian Affairs - five rice hullers are now established in the mountains. Amerindians in five different villages are increasing rice production by expanding mountain paddy cultivation. They are growing paddy on the mountain, not on the flat like we do here, to satisfy, firstly, their domestic use, and later, for sale in neighbouring villages and other areas.

Tourism development is awaiting expansion in Region 8. With improved roadways, guest houses and other tourists' interests, it will bring greater development to that sector and more benefits to the Region. With that in mind, the tourism fraternity, in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism, is awaiting the third Safari from Georgetown to Orinduik and, when the time comes ... and we have a tentative date - 8 April, to start a Safari from Karasabai to Orinduik, overnighiting at Monkey Mountain and Kato. I invite all of you to join us, but come at your own expense. We will give you guidance over the mountain, but walk with your own food.

Mr Speaker, the Guyanese people will have the opportunity to see and enjoy Guyana's beautiful landscape and natural beauty.

Now I come to Region 9. In 2003, a total of \$100.3 million was allocated for developments in that Region. Education, roads, bridges, land transport and agriculture benefited largely from that Budget. Since the PPP/C Government took office, great improvements have been, and continue to be, made in the social and economic life of the people. Travelling around the villages, be it north, south, or central Rupununi, residents are recognising the benefits, and this was acknowledged by their Parliamentary representative, Hon Mrs Shirley Melville, when she made her budget presentation in this Honourable House last year.

I quote from Hansard, National Assembly Budget Debates 15 April, 2004, Page 5:

Mr Speaker, Region 9 has continued with its development, despite adverse conditions.

And here again today, we have been showered with praises and thanks, and we want to acknowledge that sentiment. It will further propel us to continue with the development programme, and progress will continue.

Again, on Page 7, she said:

Mr Speaker, the people of Region 9 are very committed to

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the development of our Region, and look at the changes that are occurring locally, nationally, and internationally. I am happy to report to this Honourable House that internet services are available in Region 9.

Thanks to the PPP/C government. Mr Speaker, the PPP/C Government has facilitated this development.

Continuing on Page 8, the Honourable Member, in her address, welcomed the proposed secondary township status for Lethem, and the proposed new hospital which will soon be a reality. It will be executed by the Basic Needs Trust Fund. The soon-to-be received 500 KV generating set has since been provided. The roads and bridges built to the North and Deep South Savannas, especially those that now link Aishalton with the small Wai-Wai Village named Masakenarie, are all contributing to the development of Rupununi, especially in the North and South Savannas.

Mr Speaker, we must compliment the Honourable Member, Mrs Shirley Melville, for recognising and expressing those sentiments in this Honourable House. She thanked all the agencies which contributed to the progress and development of Region 9.

Again, on Page 9 of her address:

Mr Speaker, we thank Minister Nokta and the people of South Pakaraimas for the work done on the road between Region 9 and Region 8.

Tell it as it is. That's how it was in 2003. Last year, another \$103 million was provided for development works, and this year that amount has increased to \$124 million. So again we will hear some more thanks, and some more praises when the time comes.

Mr Speaker, \$45 million for education; \$18 million for Roads; \$15 million for bridges; \$5 for health, plus a new hospital project to be executed by Basic Needs Trust Fund, with money to be provided by this Govern-

ment. I can go on and on, with \$327.6 million for development in three years. The people of Region 9 have, and will continue to enjoy, greater social and economic benefits from the PPP/C Government. We welcome those who will want to be part of the development process. Come and join us if you know that development is taking place. Join the forces and be part of that development.

Before I move on to Region 10, I just want to respond to the Honourable Member, Mrs Shirley Melville, for the matters she just raised.

The question of the Afrotoxin for the producers who produce peanuts. This is in process and, together with the USAID, Guyana is expected to be certified in three months time. This will be good news for the peanut farmers in the Rupununi.

Removal of the consumption tax - The Minister is addressing this matter and, hopefully, will be able to bring about some improvement so that the farmers will have some more profit on their production.

She spoke just now about wanting more consultations. We believe in that but, last year, I had meetings in every village, when I told all the villages in the South Savannahs ... she came into this House and said, *Minister Nokta was campaigning*. We are not ready to campaign as yet, but when the time comes we will campaign, and we will consult, and do all that is necessary. The PPP/C Government is here to stay.

Mr Speaker, I want to announce that, as from this year, the vector control service and the agriculture extension service have been handed back to the regions, and we are hoping that the Regional Administration will call in all the Agricultural Officers and the Vector Control Officers and work out a good programme to bring better service in this field to the people of Rupununi and other areas.

Shulinab Secondary School - I do not want to say much. When things are being discussed, it is better not to say, but the Ministry of Education, under the BEAMS Project, is addressing this. I am one of those who will be very happy to see another secondary school estab-

lished at this time, not in the north or in the south, but in the south central Savannah called Macoushi, or Shulinab.

Mr Speaker, I agree that we should have furniture built in the Regions because, when we build them in Georgetown and transport them to the villages, many are broken, and if we can do that, I will support it. I hope that it can be done so that the people up there can get some money, and we will get better product.

The complex building she mentioned just now for the Customs and so forth - there is money in the Budget estimates ... I refer to the Public Works Estimates there is an allocation to have those buildings constructed. I am looking forward that, as the Brazil Bridge is completed, those also will be completed.

The bridge at Quarry - Mr Speaker, I am having discussions, and will continue these, with the REO to see what help we can give with that bridge so that it can bring about better communication across that river.

Region 10 also has enjoyed its share of the national cake. Our records show that in five years, 2001-2005, a total sum of \$501 million was allocated for capital works. I can make this available to the Honourable Member, Mr Kadir.

Despite what the critics may have to say, in 2004, \$103 million was allocated for capital works. \$40 million more was allocated for the construction of the West Watooka and Amelia's Ward Nursery Schools and the Students' Hostel. With 20 million spent, and help from other Agencies, the road from Linden to Kwakwani is much improved. What is needed is constant maintenance, and this year a further \$24 million is budgeted for that purpose.

continued in Pt II

National Assembly Debates

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

Part II

53rd SITTING

2.00 PM

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cont'd fr. Pt 1

One bridge at Kara Kara is budgeted for rehabilitation with \$10 million; \$34 million for education buildings at Christianburg, Republic Avenue, Ituni and Kwakwani; \$15 million for drainage and irrigation at West Watooka, while \$8.5 million is for extension of One Mile and Wisrock health centres; all from a total of \$113 million allocated in 2005, representing \$10 million more than last year.

Mr Speaker, I conclude that prospects for Region 10 hold good, as with all other Regions, as envisaged in the Budget of 2005. I urge all in this House to give support to greater progress and prosperity under the banner of the PPP/C Government. Despite the difficulties experienced recently, Guyana will move forward and overcome.

Mr Speaker, I outlined briefly the progress made by the various Regions over the period, but there is much more to be done. Voting more money each year alone is not enough. Proper management, teamwork, and people's support and co-operation at all levels are vital prerequisites for success.

In the face of problems, difficulties and disasters experienced in the past, our country is moving forward, and we shall continue to do so in the future.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, I quote from Page 55 of the Budget Speech, so confidently presented by my colleague, the Hon Minister of

Finance, Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar:

Together, let us confront the challenges and redouble our resolve to continue building this nation so that we can reap the rich harvest of peace and prosperity.

Mr Speaker, I commend, like all my colleagues, this historic Budget to this House, and seek the approval of all of us so that Guyana can move forward. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, I think this is good time for us to take the suspension. We will resume at 17:30h.

17:00 H – SUSPENSION OF SITTING

17:35 H – RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce.

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, I rise to lend my support to the Honourable Minister of Finance, Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar, for the approval of the Budget that he so eloquently, eruditely presented and aptly titled *Confronting Challenges - Sustaining Growth and Development*.

In 2003, the Minister of Finance presented his Budget, then entitled *Confronting Challenges - Staying on Course for a Prosperous Guyana*. At that time, the world was reeling from the aftermath of 9/11, and we were caught in an unprecedented crime wave that gripped our country, leaving in its wake some twenty-three law enforcement officers dead. He called on us, at that time, to stay the course, and we did. He did not achieve the 1.2 percent growth projected that year, but we stayed the

course, and were able to reverse the negative growth, with a 1.6 percent real growth rate in 2004.

Mr Speaker, challenges are still around us:

- the impact of the recent floods;
- a hostile and competitive global environment;
- high cost of fuel; and
- an obstructionist opposition.

The Minister of Finance said that he is confronting challenges and will be sustaining growth and development in this 2005 Budget. Mr Speaker, I have no reason to doubt him, because his record has been an exemplary one of delivering a better economy and a better life for our people.

Mr Speaker, one of the questions one had to ask of the Honourable Minister's projection is: will his projection for growth be realised? And, as I said before, I do believe that, in spite of the adverse economic impact of the recent flood disaster, that other factors can and will make the projection achievable.

Mr Speaker the calculation of Gross Domestic Product includes two significant variables:

- G - representing the level of Government's expenditure ...

I do not think that Mr Dev's nanee knows about that ... commonly known as fiscal intervention; and

- I - being the level of prevailing interest rates.

These two variables are responsible, so said the United Nations, for helping the United States with its recovery and growth since their recession, which began in the year 2000.

Mr Speaker, I quote from a recent UN Publication *Trade and Development Report 2004 - Overview*. On Page 5 it says:

An exceptionally strong fiscal stimulus and a reduction of interest rates have helped the United States economy to overcome the phase of weakness that began in 2000.

Today, in Guyana, the average lending rate had decreased to 13.45 percent per annum, the lowest it has been for over two decades, and Government's spending in 2005 in the economy is expected to increase by 14 percent to \$86 billion. Current expenditure is expected to increase by 7.5 percent to \$54 billion, while Capital expenditure is expected to increase by a whopping 41.6 percent to \$31.7 billion. As the Honourable Prime Minister said when he made his speech, *we are brimming the cup for another level of economic progress.*

Mr Speaker, the stimuli of lower interest rates and increased Government spending, which the United Nations Trade and Development Report quoted are very active and present in the Guyana economic recovery of today. And so I have very strong confidence that the Minister of Finance will achieve the projected target in 2005, and it is why I, too, support the Motion by the Honourable Minister of Finance for the approval of the Estimates.

Mr Speaker, this entire debate has really been about the Government's record, and whether we have had development under the PPP/C government.

Mr Speaker, the Government has properly managed the resources of this nation, and it has brought development as a result of the Government's plans and programmes over the past years. I posit that the Government has done the job, and has done it well. It has delivered on its promises and has guided the State to improvement, betterment, and development.

Early in the debate, the Hon Minister, Anthony Xavier, condignly dealt with the matter relating to the rebuilding of the infrastructure, and I

think he used the term *dilapidated infrastructure*, which was the legacy of the People's National Congress Government. Those who do not see betterment, improvement, and development, have forgotten what Main Street looked like in 1992. What Robb and Norton Streets were like; what D'Urban Street looked like before this Government. All these have been re-done, as were super-good roads in the city. Thanks to the programme of the PPP/C Government. As Minister Xavier said, currently Lombard Street, Broad Street, and Hadfield Street are all receiving their rebirth as main roads in the city of Georgetown. Mr Speaker, what pride I feel to know that we are finally able to build highways with international standards for lighting; that we are constructing a state-of-the-art convention centre; that we are constructing a modern cricket stadium; that we are getting a new airport terminal at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport; and already we are being praised for this positive change; that a five-star hotel, and possibly another, will see the start of construction in 2006; that full-length movies are now made in Guyana. *[Applause]* To doubters and nay-sayers, these may sound trivial, and the members opposite may see no merit in these show pieces of national pride, but these are signal achievements of our nation.

Our country has now embarked on a new phase of our development. We are moving ahead after reconstructing the dereliction bequeathed to us by the People's National Congress, after two and a half decades of uncleeted rule, mismanagement, unaccountability, and experiments with discrimination and socialism.

Mr Speaker, we are building new things ... *[Interruption: 'What is new?' 'New infrastructure, new facilities, that all of our people can justifiably be proud of']* Under the guidance of the Minister of Finance, this new phase of growing up of our nation sees a new CARICOM Headquarters, a new New Amsterdam Hospital, the Upper Corentyne Technical Institute; the Essequibo Technical Institute, the UG Campus in Berbice, new housing development, water facilities and the railway embankment road.

Imagine the chaos, the misery, the hunger, the starvation, the sick-

ness and the diseases and the losses, if we did not have a railway embankment road to serve those who were affected by the flood ... imagine? Mr Speaker, I guarantee you that if we had the People's National Congress in office over the last thirteen years, this flood disaster would have been catastrophic on our people and our nation. *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Silence please, Honourable Members.

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, imagine the PNC in power ... there would not have been a CN Sharma, a Roger Moore, a Ronald Waddell, a Christopher Ram, a Basil Bradshaw, a Tony Veira, nineteen television stations, nineteen talk show hosts, three daily newspapers. In Guyana, where freedom of speech is so free, people enjoy their rights to be ridiculous and spread racial hatred.

The PNC/R spent the people's scarce resources in stifling democracy and in the overseas public relations, rather than looking after the basic needs of the people and freeing the spirit of enterprise so that entrepreneurs can blossom.

The PNC/R speaks of not being able to have an emergency debate on the recent flood. Mr Speaker, I remember Jonestown, and I also remember the news blackout that happened when Jonestown occurred. Where was the Parliamentary debate on a motion of urgent public business for the Jonestown catastrophe?

Mr Speaker, the Hon Member, Mr Satyadeow Sawh, said that the PNC/R had no moral authority to criticise the Government. I agree. They lost that privilege and should be thankful and grateful that the Hon Minister of Finance is at the helm, prudently managing the collection of our taxes, the grants, the loans, and wisely expending these precious funds to make a better life for all Guyanese.

We are creating the environment necessary for this country to meet the basic needs of our people, and to develop and grow. The Honourable Minister of Finance made the necessary allocations for housing,

education, social services, the aged, and we are investing to ensure the physical, legal and international arrangements are in place for the production and marketing of Guyanese goods and services.

Mr Speaker, the Debate also revolves around the indices of development, and some persons used, extensively, the GDP growth rates over the past five years netting 0.6 percent. I agree that this is little to shout about. That is true, but when one looks at the context in which we have to operate, I doubt if any other Government would have been able to match this record.

The working out of a programme with the IFIs, facing crisis of terms of trade for export - and last year was an exception because of the favourable prices for rice - dealing with the crippling effects of high fuel cost, which has seen prices moving today:

- gasoline from \$70 per litre in 2001 to \$126 per litre, an increase of 74 percent;
- diesel from \$59 per litre to \$103 per litre during this period, an increase of 75 - percent and
- kerosene from \$50 per litre to \$100 per litre, an increase of 100 percent over the past five years.

We had a country which was virtually closed for nine months during the period from January 1998 to June 1999; nine out of those eighteen months Guyana was on hold, because and the PNC/R refused to accept the results of the 1997 free-and-fair elections and marched on the streets of Georgetown for six months, then was joined by the crippling 51 days strike of the GPSU in 1999. Nine out of eighteen months this country was shut down. It is remarkable that, today, we are able to recover and grow year after year. Perhaps, Mr Speaker, the most destructive factor has been the maligning campaigning which the opposition PNC/R has carried out. They have asked the IFIs to stop giving us aid and loans. Their misinformation and un-substantiated accusations, their racist press supporters, their overseas campaign, their sick policy of rule at any cost,

even if they have to rule of ruin is one of the challenges that we have to face. In this environment, the Minister of Finance has been able to craft budgets after budgets that are delivering a better lifestyle for the majority of our people.

Mr Speaker, the debate over how we measure development is still not decided. The use of per capita GDP, GNP are indices that give a measure of quantifying wealth and, to some, correlate wealth with development and growth. While generally accepted as indicative of development and betterment, qualifications do exist. We only have to read the Economist of the Caribbean in Guyana - persons like the late William Demas, the late Walter Rodney, the Norman Gibbons, the Clive Thomases and the Lewises, and you can get a good insight into this Debate. Other factors such as purchasing power parity; access to potable water; doctors per ten thousand population, kilometres of paved road, and many others are used.

Locally, I had an opportunity to examine the country's consumption of imported cement, and we can get an idea from this as to how much physical development we would have had in the country since 1992. In 1992, this country imported 50,000 tonnes of cement annually. The next eight years saw that doubling by 100,000 tonnes of cement and, five years later, today, we are importing and consuming, for our development, 150,000 tonnes of cement annually. That figure is three times more that we had in 1992. This poor, this maligned country, this mismanaged country, if you listen to the Opposition, has been consuming building materials at an increasing rate, because of the development which has occurred under this Government - a period of building and construction boom unparalleled in our history and financed by the hard work of the people of this nation. All this has happened with the pursestrings being held by the hands of the Honourable Minister of Finance Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, since one swallow does not make a summer, I decided to look at the production and consumption of lumber in our local market. In 1994, we had 29,832 cubic metres of lumber consumed in the local market, production in 2004 was 59,480 cubic metres of chain-sawn lumber, which is basically used

for local construction.

Mr Speaker, Minister Shaddick used percentages to deal with the level of poverty today and the pre-1992 years, but I think we also need to look at the numbers. Guyana is still a very poor country, with an excess of 250,000 persons still living below the poverty line. We are still a very poor country, and we still have significant numbers of people living below the poverty line but, a dozen years ago, we could have counted half a million people living in that state prior to 1992. I will accept that we still have too many poor people, that need a better living wage, that crime, in spite of the reduction noted by the Honourable Minister of Finance, in his speech on page 45, is still 3,448 too high. The Minister of Finance said, *commendable though this may be, much work still needs to be done in crime fighting.*

Mr Speaker, I go back to this same United Nations Report, and it states that, prior to 2003, the situation of South American countries, Guyana and the Caribbean were included, was that of stagnation and negative growth rate. Guyana was in that category prior to 2003. In this report it outlines four basic steps for recovery. It says that in order to get out of this economic valley that we are in, we have to ease the debt burden, we have to reform fiscal structures, we have to enhance the supply of domestic credit at lower interest rates, as well as achieving equitable distribution of income. This is what the experts are saying, and this is exactly what the Honourable Minister of Finance has done over the past five/six years. He has been able to guide this nation correctly with his budgets of the past, and so will this 2005 Budget. Our debt burden has been reduced. Whether we have paid it off, or had it written off, we have been benefiting from a reduced debt burden. This is by no accident. It is because of our efforts, our lobbies, our friends who have confidence in us. On Pages 12 and 13, paragraphs 3.23 and 3.24 respectively of the Budget Speech, the Honourable Minister of Finance comprehensively deals with this:

On January 14, 2004, the Government of Guyana and its Paris Club creditors reached an agreement on the terms

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and condition for the reduction of Guyana's external debt, in the context of the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (EHIPC) Initiative. Under the Paris Club framework, eight out of ten creditors committed to forgive 100 percent of the relevant debt stock, while the Governments of the Russian Federation and Trinidad and Tobago will provide a 90-per cent reduction in Net Present Value (NPV) terms. As a result, by the end-December 2004, the stock of external debts had fallen by 1.2 percent to US\$1.08 billion. In line with this decline, debt service payment decreased by 12.2 percent to US\$43.7 million.

In paragraph 3.24, the Hon Minister of Finance further detailed the reduction that we have had. It is by no accident, Sir, none whatsoever, that we have achieved this. The strategy continues, if we check Page 44, Paragraph 4.59, when the Honourable Member, Mr Zulfikar Mustapha, made his contribution, he also made reference to the continuing efforts of the Minister of Finance to reduce out debt.

Mr Speaker, as I said earlier, it is not by accident that Guyana has been able to deal with this debt reduction. Time does not solve these problems, as the Honourable Member Mr McAllister would want us to believe. It is because of the strategic and effective work of our Government, and the understanding of sympathetic countries and institutions, rewarding prudence and accountability. Mr Speaker, the IFIs and the donors do not work with you if you do and do what you say you will do, if you do not achieve your targets, if you are not accountable, and if you have not managed well the resources put at your disposal.

Mr Speaker, in the last Budget ... and someone mentioned the name of the former Minister of Finance, Carl Greenidge. In his last Budget in 1992, he said that the IFIs and the donors were starving them of resources. We all know why, but the guy tried. In his Budget of 31 March 1989 ... I think I have one somewhere, Sir, in fact, I have a copy of one, and I have the original too ... *[Interruption]*

Mr Deryck MA Bernard: Is it in order for a former Member of Parliament to be called a guy in this Honourable House. I believe that I heard the former Minister being referred to as a guy.

The Speaker: I really do not know if it is in order, but I will ask Mr Nadir not to do so again.

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, in his 31 March 1989 Budget, the then Minister of Finance laid his feet clearly at the feet of the nation. On Page 17, he said, no country was prepared to help outside of a signed IMF Programme. He said he had spent two years working on a programme of debt-forgiveness and new economic initiatives and he was able to get a three-year programme in 1989, and he had to have a signed IMF Programme if other donors were going to deal with him. This speaks to the issue of credit-worthiness, and that is what the Honourable Minister Mr Kowlessar has done. Mr Speaker, he has restored credit worthiness to Guyana, [*Applause*] so that today the IFIs are eager to lend us money. Banks only lend you if they evaluate you as having the ability to repay, and that deals with your credit worthiness. This condition now exists, and it is a sign of confidence in the Government and the people of this country.

Mr Speaker, in that Budget of 1989, the then Minister of Finance said, *donors seem preoccupied with proof of the Government's intention and ability to implement hard decision*. Why he could not get an earlier programme was that the donors, the International Financial Institutions, wanted some truth, they did not have the confidence of the government then, of its intention, and its ability, to implement the hard decisions. Mr Speaker, we have now been down that road. We still have the donors with us. The difference today is that we continue to work with them, because there is no doubt in their minds about our ability to manage, to implement, and to tackle the hard decisions. Lest some may go away with the impression that, while the stock of international debt might be decreasing, and the stock of domestic debt is increasing, and some may be misguided by some accountants who pronounce profusely on this issue, today our domestic debt stands at \$59

billion, and it is comprised of Defence Bonds, do you remember that? It consists of Debentures and Treasury Bills. But only \$14 billion out of that \$59 billion is used by this Government for budgetary purposes.

The other is held in the sterilisation account, and I trust that this is the last time that I have to educate the Honourable Member, Mr Dev, about this issue. Now he may have gone, as he said, to some institute, and to some professionals dealing with economic research and analysis. I do not doubt that, Sir, but he may not have given those economists all the information. If he neglected to give them all the information, they would have given him an incorrect analysis and conclusion. So, again Mr Dev said that we must cut the sterilisation account and invest them in facilities like GAIBANK and some of the other initiatives, which were tried and failed before. Mr Speaker, the sterilisation account is very important. It is part of our monetary policy so that we can meet those targets that the then Minister of Finance, Mr Greenidge, committed us with the signed monitoring programmes with the IFIs. Those targets are very, very important, and when we look at the numbers, the Minister of Finance is coming out ahead ... *[Interruption: 'After twelve years.' 'You listen, and you will learn something.']*

Mr Speaker, if the Government puts more of this money in the economy ... I said this before, Budget after Budget, we will dry inflation. We will move inflation from the five and six percent that we have contained it to over the last few years, to hyper-levels and we know what happens when we have hyper-inflation in an economy. As I said, we are financially ahead.

Mr Speaker, if you turn to Page 58 of your Budget document, and you look at what the interest payment on our domestic credit is, it is \$2.9 billion. Our HIPC alone brings in \$5.5 billion. So Mr Minister of Finance, continue to sterilise, because you are \$3 billion ahead of the game at the end of the day. All in all, our grants and our debt relief for 2005 is projected to be \$11 billion, as against \$2.5 billion in interest payments with that sterilisation. Even Honourable Member Mr Dev's nanee could understand that 11 is better than 2.9.

Coming back to the conditions in the United Nations report, it said that we have to deal with the fiscal structure, and that is what we have done. The introduction of the Guyana Revenue Authority has been one of structural changes, and we have seen what that has done to revenue; and we have taken the hard decision that the value-added tax, which was called for by all these parties ... in fact, I called for that in my very first speech in here and it was supported by the Private Sector. VAT Legislation is going to be introduced, one of the hard decisions. All this is done with transparency - a word alien to the vocabulary of the People's National Congress prior to 1992. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: 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 Member.

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, not only has this Government provided the means to have audited accounts tabled annually in this Assembly, but it allowed for the Auditor General to present his report directly to you, Sir. In this year's Budget the Hon Minister of Finance has promised that the necessary Treasury Memorandum will be tabled in Parliament. I am sure that many of the Honourable Members did not read his speech, or listened to him attentively. On Page 43 he gave a commitment that the memorandum will detail the corrective actions that will be taken, in response to findings, or recommendations, will come to the National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, I have to come back again with this Trade and Development Report, because it spoke also about expanding domestic credit at lower interest rates. On Page 9, Paragraph 3.12, the Minister of Finance said that the total net domestic credit of the banking system has increased to \$37.4 billion, transparent and we can check every single deposit, because we do have legislation in this country to deal with peo-

ple who banked excessively large amounts of money. That banking sector has had 48.5 percent increase in liquid assets, amounting to \$47.6 billion, but credit to the private sector has declined in spite of us having money everywhere, as someone said. If there is too much liquidity, we are going to sterilise it if we want to control inflation. But the limiting factor for domestic credit has not been the Government, has not been the sterilisation account competing with the private sector. It has been the banks themselves, and the Minister of Finance laid it out before us in black and white. The Hon Minister of Finance said it was the overly-cautious approach to lending by banks. He said that the banks were holding 85.2 percent liquid assets above the minimum amounts required, and that the banks had a preference for short-term treasury bills. Now we understand why there was a decline. Mr Speaker, try as he may, the new economic czar of the People's National Congress/Reform, the Honourable Member Mr Jerome Khan, failed miserably to read and comprehend why there was an anomaly. In black and white was the explanation before him, right there in the Budget speech, but the Honourable Member fell victim to the saying of the devil quoting the scriptures to suit his own purpose. He also tried to incorrectly infer that we could not have declining production in our basic products and have better revenues from our exports. People have stockpiled. You could have declining production and increased volume of exports, because you would have exported what you had stored - fourth standard economics, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, these are the conditions within which the Honourable Minister of Finance has crafted another prudent, practical, workable budget. Our financial sector today is wholly privatised, but the two conditions necessary ... it may not be sufficient, but necessary, of more credit and lower interest rates currently exist in our economy.

Mr Speaker, we had growth last year, and we will have sustained growth and development this year. Last year, Brazil posted its fastest growth rate in a decade and, according to a news report out of Sao Paulo, which was carried on 2 March in the Chronicle, it quoted President Lula, the same President who was here a short while ago as saying:

Tight fiscal and monetary policies have controlled inflation and helped to lower the debt to GDP ratio ...

which we have

... that has pleased the investors and made the Real unusually steady.

Our Guyana dollar is unusually steady too. That article also said that more is needed, and we do need more here too, particularly in keeping the momentum of the reform process. We have to keep the momentum, and this Budget will do that, to ensure that the positive outlook ushers in a virtuous circle of improved confidence, resilient and equitable growth. That is all the 2005 Budget and the past programme of the Minister of Finance are about. Brazil is perhaps the fifth largest economy in the world and that is part of their prescription for getting out of their economic recession, and we have seen it work in Guyana also.

The Honourable Member, Dr Joseph, in his presentation, spoke to the issue of higher heights, and I agree with him that we have to get to higher and higher heights, and this is exactly what this Budget addresses. We are moving into a higher plain of development, which will see us and is seeing us, building facilities for this 21st Century. How could one not support a Budget that speaks of a five-year US\$120 million programme for the Guyana Power and Light? Have we ever seen any kind of vision like this before in the Budgets of the past, in a decade and a half? A programme that will see 87,000 new households getting power and the system being upgraded. How pleasing to hear that we are no longer working the equipment till they break, but that we are going to retire plants and equipment. We have to support the Budget that provides a Doppler Radar System for Guyana and better technology for people to work with. We have seen this in every single sector, in every single government agency that, year after year, more investment is made in technology and modern equipment for our people to work with.

Mr Speaker, in this regard, the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and

Commerce is no exception, and I bring your attention to the *Guyana National Bureau of Standards*, for which this Minister has responsibility. The last few Budgets have seen the GNBS receiving some \$25 million to upgrade primary standards and new testing apparatus. This Budget provides another \$12 million for the Guyana National Bureau of Standards. How significant it is, the only time we had primary international standards acquired in this country was more than sixty years ago. We had that two years ago with the new primary standards for measurement, for length, for volume, and for masses. Last year, with the provisions in the Budget, we had the new mobile-testing facilities that have the capacity to calibrate the large scales that are used industrially. Mr Speaker, with the allocation this year, we will acquire a 200 ml volumetric measure and equipment to test temperature gauges in factories so that our fishing industry, our food processing industry, will be able to meet the highest level of international standards.

Mr Speaker, I now come to *Tourism*, and I did have a good laugh when the Honourable Member, Mr Deryck Bernard, said we had comedy tourism, but I will tell you how the comedy is going. This Budget makes a \$51 million allocation to tourism, the largest percentage increase for any area ... comedy tourism ... Two years ago I stood in this House and I spoke of one yacht sailing from St Lucia to Guyana, and last year, about the same time, I had the opportunity to speak of four yachts coming. This afternoon five members of the Guyana Tourism Authority - the private sector have just launched eight yachts, coming out of the Yacht Club in Chagauramas, sailing on Thursday, to arrive in Essequibo, Guyana on Sunday 8, and thirty-six more are lined up to come, and that is the comedy we are speaking of, Mr Speaker.

We have recently done a further analysis in preparing the next five-year programme for the tourism sector. What we did in the past as a comedy, we broke a record last year bringing 125,000 people to Guyana. That is what the comedy did, and we are going to do even better, Honourable Member Mr Bernard.

Mr Speaker, it was not by accident that the country was selected

by Cricket World Cup 2007 to host six quarter final matches. It is because the country was assessed of going to build the facilities, and we have the capacity, in all respects, to host such an international event. It is just not about making an international pitch, it is about an international sports tourism event, for which the comedy for tourism, Guyana, was evaluated by Cricket World Cup 2007 as having that capacity. So, Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks and congratulations to people like Mr Bryan James and the members of the Board of the Guyana Tourism Authority, that includes representatives from the People's National Congress, and Mr Donald Sinclair and the staff of the Guyana Tourism Authority who worked so hard to establish that milestone in Guyana. Also I would like to take this opportunity to likewise express my appreciation and thanks to the private sector, the diplomatic missions that worked with us, THAG, USAID, Canadian CPEC Programme, the OAS, GTZ, the German Development Agency, Conservation International and the Guyana Tourism Organisation, all of who participated in the comedy of tourism that Mr Bernard said that we have.

Mr Speaker, in 2003, we conducted a charette to consider the development of three key tourism products - The Rupununi, Historic Georgetown, and Kaieteur. We have already begun the implementation of those recommendations. Kaieteur today has a refurbished guest house powered by solar electricity ... *[Interruption: 'They had one before.'* "I do not know what you put there, but I know that they now have a working solar system, put in place by an environmentally-friendly government."] Mr Speaker, efforts at promoting Kaieteur have attracted a world-renowned film director to shoot the major part of the film *White Diamond* there. Last year in the Rupununi ... and the Honourable Member Mrs Melville made mention of this ... we conducted training workshops, in Lethem, in Aishalton and in Karasabai. Next month, with the assistance of Conservation International, again, we are now going to be mapping the tourism product of the Rupununi at a workshop in Annai. In this year's Budget, the Honourable Minister of Finance has made the allocation that the Orinduik guesthouse will have solar power. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mr S Feroze Mohamed: I wish to move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thanks to the opposition for wanting the good times to roll. Mr Speaker, these are touchable developments that the Government has brought, with respect to tourism. I want to invite the Leader of the Opposition and his Members to join the Safari that will move off on April 8, to go and travel the roads that were built by Minister Nokta with his vision so that we can get hiking and trail biking in the Pakaraima Mountains of Guyana - a new form of tourism we have embarked upon.

We are currently fighting the negative impact of travel advisory issues, and the sector is also suffering from the immediate and medium term cancellations, but we remain very optimistic, and we will have to revert to the tried and tested markets of our own people and our friends from the Caribbean to keep and better the numbers in 2005.

Mr Speaker, the Ministry also has some responsibility for consumer affairs, and the Consumer Affairs Department of the Ministry has just launched today Consumer Rights Week, which will culminate next Tuesday with World Consumer Rights Day. In this regard, we will continue the massive programme that we started last year for greater consumer education and advocacy. This programme worked giving significant effectiveness and enabled people to respond almost simultaneously to those shopkeepers who suffered from the flood, and they said that they suffered from *mekmospirosis*. Consumers reported people who were selling long boots, raising the prices from \$800 to \$2,500, who were raising the price for wheat-middling, and the Honourable Member, Mr Sawh, had to take wheat-middling direct to the farmers all, because of the effectiveness of the consumer education programme ...

The Consumer legislation is currently with Cabinet Sub-Committee

on Trade, and we are promising you that that legislation is coming to the House in 2005.

Mr Speaker, the Minister of Finance said that manufacturing remains flat, it needs to be nurtured still, and this year the Ministry intends to work with the Manufacturers' Association to promote their goods directly to our local consumers. The advances made by the Kisson Group in foam making ... and they have one of the most modern machines in the Caribbean, the advances made by Gafsons, Toolsie Persaud, New GPC, by BK International, will all be highlighted this year when we host a very special GUYEXPO in September of this year..

Mr Speaker, two years ago, I said that Eccles Industrial Estate would produce 1,000 jobs. We did not achieve that, we have only achieved 500, but we are counting more. The annual turnover at the estate is in excess of \$1.2 billion ... *[Interruption: 'Where?' "I will take you on a tour, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, anytime when you are ready. You did not see the new towers of G T&T and all the things that are happening there."]*

In Lethem, the design for the estate has been done, and we are ready to go out for the tender for the works to develop the new industrial estate. In 2003, we also promised the new bamboo craft training programme. That began in November 2003 and, by August 2004, almost fifty of our craft producers acquired new skills in the production of bamboo craft and bamboo furnishing.

As I said earlier, training was extended to Region 9, Aishalton, Lethem and Karasabai. Almost 100 persons had the benefit of these outreaches. While the Chinese were only here for one year, the bamboo craft recommences this month with our talented graduates, who will be continuing the programme to further enhance the training with this particular item.

Mr Speaker, there are some other points that I must raise before I conclude. The Honourable Member, Mr Khan, mentioned the issue of

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export processing zones. Two years ago, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Honourable Prime Minister and a private sector person for the development of such an estate around the Linden aerodrome. These things have to be led by the private sector. We have already signed on to that policy.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr McAllister, said that we need to invest in infrastructure development. He was not quoting anything new. I think it was President Roosevelt who launched the new deal after the depression. There is nothing new. This is what is happening. The largest expansion of government's expenditure in infrastructure is happening in this Budget - building new facilities, creating more jobs, repairing the dereliction. Government's capital expenditure in this Budget, is set to increase by 41.6 percent to \$37.7 billion. That is the new deal for Guyana, Guyanese, and even members of the opposition.

Mr Speaker, this has been a good debate in spite of some members of the Opposition saying that they were the ones proposing. We had the Minister of Finance making his proposition. We had the new economic czar of the People's National Congress/Reform, the Honourable Member Mr Jerome Khan, doing the opposition. Then we had the offenders on that side and the defenders on this side and, at one time, the debate went here, and the next time it went there, and then it went here, and then it went there, and then it went here, and it stayed here, stayed here, stayed here ... *[Applause]* It was a good debate, probably good points, it was a good debate, because there have been the swings, but then when the real test comes, the government has been running away, because it has delivered the goods to the people. As I said, the Government did lay a Budget and the Opposition had the opportunity. There are merits in some of the things which the Honourable Member Mrs Backer said, with respect to reforms. What the Honourable Member Mr Trotman said, there are merits, but we must remember that we are still competing for scarce resources, and no other than the Minister of Finance of the People's National Congress, when they were in power, Mr Carl Greenidge, recognised that.

Mr Speaker, I refer to Page 53 of the 1989 Budget, and we were accused of not having any vision, and this is what the then Minister of Finance said, with respect to his vision to solving the transportation problem in Guyana:

For solving the transportation problem we are going to import 3,500 bicycles ... [Interruption: 'What page?' 'Page 53, 1989.']

Again that Budget was entitled *Facing the Challenges*. But the then Minister of Finance could have only dreamt of 3,500 bicycles for 700,000 people, because that was all the money the minister had. He could not, even if he wanted to, he was constrained by the lack of economic progress which the regime had foisted upon him. Mr Speaker, this is not a joke, but that was what he could have afforded.

We are much better off today, and we are building infrastructures for the 21st Century, but still more has to be done. This Budget is not only confronting those challenges, but it will bring sustained growth. There was one member who mentioned, and I think it was echoed over and over again by members on the opposite side, that the money is coming from other means. Well, if they have the evidence, put it on the table. You have gone to different embassies and cried and misrepresented, and even you now believe in these things to be true, but we challenge them, because no country is going to have sustained development and sustained growth with illicit money. Your house or my house cannot be built with bad money, it has to be built with hard work and toil from the sweat of our brows.

So, Mr Speaker, this is what we have in 2005 as we bring to an end this new programme of the PPP/C Government, and we look forward to a next five-year period for further growth and development of the nation. So, Mr Speaker, I have great pleasure in commending this Budget to all the Members of this Honourable House. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, after one week of debate in this Honourable House on the so-called 2005 Budget, we have exhausted lungs, tired our Hansard recorders, impressed, bored, or angered various sections of the community, and we must now face the stark reality that nothing really has changed.

Regrettably, nothing has even been said by speakers from the Government benches, including the last one, to indicate any willingness to accept that change in our approach to governance is indeed necessary to ensure the rapid economic and social development of our country. As far as he is concerned, everything is fine - going rosy; we need to do nothing, and soon Guyana will end up in Paradise.

No acceptance that change is necessary to provide hope for the thousands of young people that Guyana could be their permanent residence, and not to be used as a dormitory until the first opportunity is available for them to leave for other shores.

Mr Speaker, after one week of debate, nothing seriously has been said by the Government:

- To assure our businessmen that the investment climate will be conducive for expansion and the creation of jobs, to ease the high unemployment situation, and increase our Gross Domestic Product, despite all the hot air we have heard in this Parliament.
- To assure the thousands of unemployed youths that the Budget will enable them to find a job in Guyana this year, despite this boast of 500 jobs, which perhaps are invisible jobs, which we are told about that were created in Eccles last year.

I live in that area. I would be happy to be taken on this tour where these 500 jobs were provided last year. I will go tomorrow with the Minister. The last tower was an automated one with two guards. It is fully automatic, it does not need employment. Technology has advanced to the stage where it does not even need people to operate certain facilities. There is a new sub-exchange for telecoms at the head of Republic Park. All it employs is one security guard. Everything is automated, so talking about new facilities here and there does not indicate that there are any new employment opportunities. So let us go on the tour.

- To tell the Public Servants and teachers that their unions would be able to represent them and they would be paid a living wage in 2005.
- To tell the workers of Guyana that the income tax threshold has been raised so that they can have a greater take-home pay to cope with the unbearable rise in the cost of living with GPL bills, water rates, etcetera.
- To tell the commuters of Georgetown that there will be better transportation facilities to get to work in the morning without having to jostle for limited seats in mini-buses, thus arriving at work already exhausted from the rigours of travel and, at the same time, to get home early after work without having to wait for hours at the Stabroek market and getting home late at night.

We heard the Minister lamenting the Government without a vision, because the former Minister of Finance was importing 3,000 bicycles. I say to you, those people in South would welcome those 3,000 bicycles right now because of the hassle they are getting.

Not only did the PNC bring in bicycles, buses were brought in by the Guyana Transport Services. So when you quote selectively about the attempts which were made to deal with the transportation problem, then you are not being objective when you do not give the total picture -

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buses were imported from as far as India, which were called Tata buses - and from Brazil and you refused to accept that they were necessary for mass public transportation. So when you come to this House and try to say that the PNC had no vision, because only bicycles were brought in, you are giving a half truth to this House about the magnificent vision of the People's National Congress. Nothing has been said in 2005 to tell the people of Guyana about what you are doing about public transportation now, and that is what the people want to know, not what happened in 1985. They want to know what is happening in 2005 and 2006.

- To assure the motorists that the traffic lights of Georgetown would be fixed to remove the nightmare from travelling through the city daily. Not a word. These are burning is sues.
- To advise the elderly:
- that old-aged pension will be increased immediately, and the exact amounts that they will receive from the end of March 2005;
- that they will no longer be required to pay the exorbitant electricity bills sent to them by GPL;
- that they will no longer receive bills for water rates, as was promised by the President on a recent visit to Berbice, and they are still receiving them;
I expect to hear that, and nothing has been said to confirm that these facilities will be provided to our senior citizens.
- that they will receive a subsidy on transportation that they have already received under a PNC administration;
- that they will correct the skulduggery with pension books;
- that the Special Assistance Fund at the Ministry of Human

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Services would be managed equitably and without discrimination and not managed as a personal fiefdom of the Honourable Minister.

We have not heard anything about that.

These are what the people of Guyana are looking forward to be told in a Budget.

It is therefore obvious, Mr Speaker, that, after 12 years of the heralded slogans *TIME FOR A CHANGE* and *RETURN TO DEMOCRACY*, on which the present Government entered the halls of government, the facts are that we have indeed changed, but unfortunately not for the better. I am wrong, I cannot say that there has been a change. We have a new slogan - *GUYANA GOING PLACES*. That place must be the Le Repentir Cemetery, at the rate of which the cost of living is going at the moment.

Unlike countries like Malaysia and Singapore, which have transformed themselves into booming economies and modern States, Guyana has retrogressed and survives only because of the largesse of friendly countries and support from international financial institutions. That is a fact. Despite all of what the Minister said this afternoon, about the credit-worthiness of the country, and we are getting money from elsewhere, the fact is that we have only managed to survive because of the largesse of many others.

We need to determine, as a country, whether Guyana will continue to be dependent upon the largesse of others, or whether we will use our ingenuity and our vast resources to build a modern economy according to a model that is relevant to our own circumstances.

Regrettably, Mr Speaker, the 2005 Budget offers no hope that these fundamental problems will be addressed.

Mr Speaker, many persons, including the General Secretary of the PPP/C, had suggested that most of the problems confronting Guyana would

miraculously disappear if and when the PNC/R returns to Parliament. Well, we are here and nothing has changed. *[Interruption: 'Because you have not changed.']*

It must now be obvious to him, and to others, that the state of our economy is not about the PNC/R's participation in Parliament, but a direct result of an ill-thought-out, lop-sided, incoherent, and discriminatory policies. In short: bad governance. That is the reason for our problems.

I recalled there was a heated national debate about the PNC/R's participation in the last budget debate. The Government passed a Budget which identified and allocated large expenditure. They boasted in the national media, their media Czar of the largest Budget in history. I will describe the theme of that Budget a little later, but they claimed that it was the largest Budget in history, a Budget which identified and allocated expenditure. Where did the money go? How was the money spent? Despite this approved Budget, and all the talk about the importance of Parliament and the Parliamentary process, our dear President proceeded to make unilateral allocations of public funds as he toured around Guyana, as if he had assumed the powers of the Parliament. In these circumstances of what benefit was the budget debate and estimates provided and approved for in this Honourable House?

Mismanagement; the absence of significant new investments; the continuous closure of businesses, quite contrary to what my good friend is seeing, maybe we are living in a different country; the continued flight of capital - go to Miami and you will find out what is happening to legitimate businessmen in this country, who find it difficult to compete with the money laundering businesses that are thriving. You will see where they are really going. Do not be deluded by the illusions of the flight of capital; the loss of entrepreneurs, and the spiralling cost of living continued to be the order of the day, despite the glorious budget of 2004. That is the reality.

Everyone in Guyana continues to feel the impact of outrageous elec-

tricity bills, high water rates, taxes and taxes, taxes on telephone calls, which went up, and this has been even more devastating to our senior citizens and pensioners. The unprecedented levels of unemployment, the rising levels of poverty, the decline of the social and economic conditions in many depressed communities, all over Guyana, continued, as well as the unparalleled levels of corruption and the blatant lack of accountability.

We will not be fooled by words about transparency, to imagine that the Minister of Tourism can tell us about increased transparency and accountability. There was a public inquiry. But what about the scams:

- the stone scam
- the gold scam
- the law-book scam
- the re-migrant duty-free vehicle scam
- the Cane Grove Conservancy Dam scam
- the export of dolphins from this country.

Where is the transparency? Of what, therefore, is the Budget Debate, when all these statements are made, and immediately thereafter we return to business as usual?

I submit, Mr Speaker, that there are many lessons still to be learnt with this week-long debate. One of which I suggest is that, having reviewed all that was said in previous budgets, and analysing what transpired thereafter and progress in the country, I believe that there is one lesson we ought to learn, and it is that budgets alone will not solve the problems of the country and advance it economically, for unless we address the fundamental question of governance, budgets will be meaningless in transforming our country into a modern 21st century state, and improving the quality of life of our citizens.

There are many lessons which we can learn from this Budget.

1. The 2005 Budget is the latest manifestation of the Government's callousness, contempt, and utter disregard for the people of this country, and I would explain why.

Over the past few days, speakers on this side of the House have eloquently illustrated this fact, throughout their many presentations, from the lack of vision on the part of those who presented the Budget, to the absence of any clear policy to guarantee economic progress.

The first three pages of this document are dealing with the flood disaster and the thousands of citizens affected by the flood. Yet, as we perused this document of this Budget and the attached voluminous Estimates of Expenditure, admittedly by the Minister of Finance, there is no provision for providing compensation to those affected, or any amount for rehabilitation of those who have lost their means of livelihood in Guyana. So what are we talking about here? There is an absence of it.

Instead, in the same old manner that the Government behaved during the flood, and I will come to that ... using it as a means of PPP/C propaganda. We are regaled by the Honourable Minister mouthing words of sympathy to those who are affected by the flood, outlining the serious devastation which took place, and the difficulties that people have experienced, but the bottom line is that the Budget has no allocation of funds for rehabilitation and compensation of those flood victims. I have seen no allocations to deal with the massive infrastructural needs. We are told that we must wait for six months for a new supplementary budget that would take these matters into consideration.

Why six months? How long does it take for a proper assessment to be done to determine the needs? That is what you should have been doing over a month ago when you were parading on trucks. Instead of being perched on a truck delivering food to people, our dear Minister of Finance should have been busy at the Ministry of Finance quickly reformulating the Budget, and his allocations to deal with the new situation,

rather than bring us here for five days to debate an old situation that becomes irrelevant in a few weeks' time.

Is it laziness? Is it callousness? Or are there other objectives? Is it that the Government wants a free hand, without Parliamentary scrutiny, to continue dealing with matters relating to the flood? Is that the reason for having this delay, that no allocations could be provided in this Budget?

For example, we have already heard, out there, our dear President announced that \$90 million have been allocated or given for the cleaning of schools. I wonder whether the Minister could point to the section of the Budget, or the Estimates, that reflects this expenditure. This has already been announced, and we are debating Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue, but while we have one set of figures in our books, we are even hearing, while this debate is going on, that there are arbitrary pronouncements about how monies have been spent. I will be happy to be pointed to the section of the Budget that we are debating where this \$90 million for the cleaning of schools were arrived at.

But where is the Minister of Education on this matter? I did not hear him say anything about that in this Parliament. I would have thought that at least the Minister of Education might have said so in this Parliament. He is not here, and I do not like to make remarks in the absence of my friends, but he cannot be spared from my remarks that I have recorded here, because I would have expected that the Honourable Minister who has responsibility for this portfolio would have helped this House to understand the serious situation where the President is announcing a \$90 million for the cleaning of schools, and he came to this part of the Budget Debate and said absolutely nothing about it. I want to know if he was too busy playing squash or that the President had usurped his portfolio. I will find out from him in the squash, court and, even so, what was my good friend the Honourable Minister of Education doing during the flood crisis? Apart from following those 14 trucks that were despatched on that day of January from Mahaica, very clandestinely, around the coast, what was he doing during the flood crisis? My good friend Mr Jeffrey should have been busy mapping out a strategy for the

thousands of school children displaced during the flood and be ready with a plan. *[Applause]* A plan that would have informed us during this debate how he proposed that those children, who have lost school hours and are preparing for exams, would be helped to catch up with others who were not as unfortunate as those in the flood-hit areas.

But alas, Mr Speaker, it was perhaps too much to expect. Instead of pontificating, I was hearing who he was answering, Mr Bernard, with all kinds of highfalutin economic terms, what happened in this part of the country. We are yet to hear about the coherent economic education policy, and concerned parents want to be assured that the Government is taking seriously the plight of their children who have suffered from the flood.

Mr Speaker, we have also heard from the Head of the Presidential Secretariat (he speaks regularly to the media, even on your behalf about the Parliament)... *[Interruption: 'He is not a Member of this House. ']]*

The Speaker: He is not authorised to do so.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: ...but he boastfully speaks about the Speaker's portfolio. I am told he was giving certain explanations about why this Parliament was not opened, but you have not corrected it. I hope you will do so. But he was speaking on another matter this time. He was speaking boastfully, and reporting that the Government had already spent more than \$200 million on the flood disaster. Surely, this is money already spent, and of which the Ministry of Finance certainly would have been aware of before the presentation of the Budget. Could the Minister then point me to the section of the Estimates that accounts for this expenditure already incurred in 2005 before the Budget came to this House? Where is it? *[Applause]*

Consequently, Mr Speaker, there is obviously substance in my submission, that this so-called Budget that we are debating here today is an illustration that this Government is bent on pulling wool over the eyes of the people of this nation, and the relevant ministers are using this Institu-

tion, the Parliament, to perpetrate this travesty. Here we are debating, and the figures mean absolutely nothing because, in a few months time, we are going to be brought back here to deal with it.

Let me correct some inaccuracies in this Budget, Mr Speaker. I am aware that you have ruled on this flood matter, but I am speaking on the Budget, not on the flood, Sir. On page 1, Paragraph 1.3, in the Budget the Minister has reported to the nation that *the Leader of the Opposition nominated members to the task forces, and received written daily reports that were prepared by the Joint Operating Centre. This Centre was set up to coordinate the various activities and was manned by the Disciplined Forces.* Mr Speaker, with due respect, I urge the Minister of Finance to correct this inaccuracy. The Disciplined Forces, or the JOC, were not coordinating any activities. This is very inaccurate, Sir. There was a Joint Operational Command (JOC) that had absolutely no control of anything that went on, and on the Minister's own admission in this Parliament, the entire operation was controlled by the Chief Executive of the land. So why mislead the Parliament to say that the Centre was set up to coordinate the various activities? I have already dealt with this issue in the Budget Debate. It is true that the Leader of the Opposition nominated members to the task forces and received written reports that were prepared by the Joint Operating Centre, but that is all. As I said, the task forces never functioned but, put in this manner, it gives the impression that there was great meaningful consultation, as was stated in Paragraph 1.8. So I would like to correct that record. The operations were manned elsewhere, and Mr Lumumba should know very much about this. I have not heard his presentation, but I have the notes on what he said. So, Mr Speaker, this inaccuracy should be corrected.

Then, on Page 2, Paragraph 1.4:

Additional pumps were mobilised as a round-the-clock battle began to drain the water off the land as quickly as possible.

But yet, despite this statement, three pumps that were donated by the people of Trinidad of Tobago waited 15 days longer to arrive in this country than it could have arrived and brought in to help suffering people, because of bungling in the office of the President of this country, but we have here, *pumps are being mobilised*. So, for the accuracy of this Budget Debate, I hope that the Honourable Pandit will consult and have this section corrected properly so that it reflects accurately what went on.

What about the accountability. We have heard nothing about it. That is what the Budget should have been telling us. If you look at Paragraph 1.5, it says:

the Government allocated \$220 million for the procurement of goods and services. We waived the duty and consumption ...

But, more important, in the third sentence:

Humanitarian contributions in cash and kind were received from neighbouring countries, international organisations, the Guyanese diaspora, local, religious, charitable and service businesses.

And the Minister goes on to thank all those who contributed. I have also expressed my own thanks in the relevant debate on the flood, but what is more important for us at this time in this Chamber is to be informed about what methods and systems have been put in place for accountability for all these items that were donated to the people of Guyana for the flood disaster. *[Applause]* That is what I expect the Minister to tell us about, that there was a transparent system, so when we hear in the passageways that seven of the generators donated have already disappeared and no one can account for them without any clear explanation by the Minister, then we must wonder whether something is being deliberately withheld. Certainly the donors to our flood relief operation would expect that we would be ensuring that their contributions

are properly managed and equitable distributed.

One speaker on the other side of the House, and I believe is a senior functionary in the Administration, the rules do not permit me to call the name, was in public television accusing the PNC/R, and the leader of the PNC/R, of discouraging and undermining contributions to this country during the flood crisis. Mr Nadir, a few moments ago, though he did not refer to me, suggested that the Opposition was engaged in this practice. But, for the benefit of Mr Nadir, he ought to know that, long before the government of Guyana and the President called for international assistance, we were on public radio in New York telling Guyanese about the crisis and inviting them to send assistance to this country. *[Applause]* While you were wondering on Monday, 17th January, whether we would accept aid from the international community, we were already discussing with many of them how they can assist us in this crisis *[Applause]* because, as a Party, we recognised, very early in the day, that that was a national situation, a crisis of enormous proportions unprecedented in the history of this country. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: You may proceed, Honourable Member.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. So I just want to correct the record. I can say, quite clearly for the records of this House, that the President of the Co-operative Republic did not have to call the Leader of the Opposition in a crisis which we received. I called the President early in the morning of Monday and offered the full support of the opposition in this country. *[Applause]* I initiated the call, despite all the other problems and all the other matters that we were concerned

about. I do not mind what political spin the czars put to it, I hope they correct it, but the point is that it was irrelevant who initiated the call, so GINA and NCN and their propaganda, it seems that that was important to really switch the facts around - that the President did all of this. I was not interested in that. Here we have thousands of people suffering, and an offer has been made of full support, and absolutely nothing was made of it, but I will move on. The records must be corrected.

Mr Speaker, when we look at this Budget, the numbers mean absolutely nothing particularly, as I said before, when the Minister has advised us of his intention to present a supplementary budget in June. What manner of madness is this? Is this some kind of joke to this Parliament? Why have we been subjected to this exercise when all it took was vigilance and activity on the part of the Ministry of Finance, and the many officials in this Government, to quickly re-assess the urgent national situation caused by the flood disaster and, since the Budget was already delayed, produce some numbers before us that had some relevance to reality. *[Applause]*

So while we debate here a national Budget, and the Minister of Tourism can shout about the great progress that will take place in 2005, the reality is, he is basing his projection on a fiction, because that is what we have in the Estimates here. But, Mr Speaker, we should not be misled into believing that this pattern is as a result of the flood. It has become a constant feature in the life and practices of this Government. For example, in 2003, we were similarly regaled with a Budget entitled *CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES: STAYING ON COURSE FOR A PROSPEROUS GUYANA*. Yet, immediately after that debate, the Ministries and Regions were instructed by the Ministry of Finance to disregard the numbers presented to the Parliament and reduce various allocations in their capital expenditure by as much as 30 percent in some cases, and 10 percent in others.

For example, take Region 4. I have a letter that the Regional Vice-Chairman sent me around that time when I was seeking to find out what was happening in that region. In 2003, for roads, we noted that \$20

million was approved. The day after the debate and the Estimates were approved, the Budget officer at the Ministry of Finance instructed the region to deduct \$4.5 million immediately. So that, while the House was under the illusion that \$20 million was approved for roads in Region 4, as soon as we thought and boasted that these roads were going to be done in 2003, \$4.5 million was deducted immediately. You ask them?

Agricultural development: \$18 million was approved in the Estimates for 2003. The very day after, they were again instructed to deduct \$5.4 million. So while we passed \$18 million and the great speeches on development, it was really \$18 million minus \$5.4 million the day after.

Public Works: Bridges - \$4 million allocated in the budget. A few days after the budget officer instructed Region 4 to not worry with those Parliamentary allocations, but to reduce by \$2.3 million. Imagine what was really spent. I have a letter here, which was signed by the Regional Vice-Chairman, Mr Latchman Ramsammy, dated 26 June 2003, when I was trying to find out on one of my visits to Region 4, why certain works were not being done. So he said, do not worry with the Estimates, those are words of fiction. We got different instructions from the budget officer. He gave me all kinds of explanations that they had anticipated money, but the monies were not coming.

Mr Speaker, the fact is that the numbers allocated to the Parliament here were not real. The same pattern continued in 2004. We did not come to oppose the Budget, the Budget was approved and I believe, during the flood, we saw printed in the national newspapers a letter from the Regional Chairman of Region 4 pointing out what he had requested for the infrastructural works for Region 4, and what he actually got, appealing to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture to help out so as to avoid flooding, and the Hon Minister Sawh as effective as he always is, called a meeting urgently, but he only approved half of what they really wanted. I supposed we will be told that no funds were available, but the fact is that the Budget before this House has become works of art, rather than works of reality. That budget was entitled *INVESTING FOR SUS-*

TAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENHANCED SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. Well, the report presented by the Minister on our last year's performance demonstrated the fallacy of such a title. The speakers before me have illustrated this fact, and I do not want to repeat what all of them have said on various aspects of this Budget Debate to make state into reality.

On Page 9 of the report entitled *FOCUS ON GUYANA'S BUDGET* by Ram and McRae, the Chartered Accountants, Professional Services Firm, puts the picture more succinctly than all the elaborate speeches we have been having, because there is a wonderful table where you can see the figures very quickly, so you do not have to worry with the flowery speeches, you can go to the heart of the matter. They have outlined the figures, which I recommend for reading by Mr Nadir who, a few moments ago regaled us on all this great performance.

This speaks about the economic and financial targets. It tells us that the Budget, in 2004, was projected here for performance and, as a result, many areas had negative performance:

- Mining and Quarrying, minus - 94.9 percent;
- Gold, minus 6.6 percent; minus 24 percent is projected for this year;
- Bauxite 12.4 percent and these lofty projections of 51.7 percent.

The Prime Minister knows that this cannot be a reality, because they are not going to start mining - RUSAL or no RUSAL. But he puts it, very crisply, in one sentence on Page 10, and I will read that sentence:

Per capita GDP for 2004 was US\$868.6 compared with US\$840.2 in 2003

That is the reality, so what we need to see is that this dramatic expansion and great progress in the economy never occurred, perhaps it occurred

in Mr Nadir's imagination. *SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENHANCED SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT* remains a figment in many people's imagination.

Mr Speaker, I am sure that I have produced sufficient evidence to support my first submission that the 2005 Budget is the latest manifestation of the callousness of this administration.

2. The 2005 Budget, and the ensuing debate, illustrate that our Government has lost yet another opportunity to provide hope that the issues of concern to our citizens will be seriously addressed. It has failed to provide this hope, judging from the tenure of this debate. There is no evidence in this Parliament that the government has any intention of ensuring genuine democracy that they are constantly preaching about.

There is no better example than in the preparation of this very Budget. Democracy is not talking in this Parliament. That is a joke. We have been doing that since 51 years ago.

There was a media blitz about the extensive consultations over the Budget. Who was consulted, Mr Minister of Finance? What were the recommendations, and what became of those recommendations? This great democracy that we are hearing about!

At Page 3 of Ram and McRae's Focus, I invite you to look at this. *Summary of proposals made by some of the bodies consulted*. I do not propose to bore this House with all the details, but, I refer you to Page 3. Among them are:

- Urgent need for the country to implement and develop economic strategy, and an exit strategy from the current IMF, which has guided economic policies for 17 years.
- Critical need for closer collaboration among Government, private sector, labour and rest of civil society
- The Private Sector Commission offered to work towards a

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social compact, noting that it was imperative that Government take the initiative and work towards some national consensus.

- Investors frustrated by long delays and unclear procedures in the consideration of applications for investment incentives.
- An increase in personal income tax threshold from \$20,000 to \$30,000 per month.
- Reduction on tax rates on the manufacturing sector to 25 percent.
- Reduction on the rate of consumption tax.

All those were some of the Private Sector Commission's recommendations. Where are they reflected in this Budget? So what was the purpose of consultation and this talk about democracy? We have had our experience with the Investment Act.

But then we were told that there were consultations with the Guyana Trades Union Congress, among others, and this is what the recommendations from them stated:

- A plan to minimise tax evasion

Imagine the workers give you that suggestion, that you should have a plan to minimise tax evasion, but they have also said:

- That the threshold for the payment of income tax should be increased to \$45,000 per month; and
- A comprehensive study to be done on the National Insurance Scheme involving participants from the Government, TUC, and Private Sector.

I simply ask, Mr Speaker, where are these recommendations reflected

in this Budget? But alas, Messrs Ram and Mc Rae pointed out simply on the last paragraph of Page 3:

There is no indication that the submissions were even considered, and there is an increasing loss of confidence in a system that invites, and then ignores, all recommendations.

You can go on to see the last paragraph says:

The Private Sector is hardly likely to be surprised at the rejection of its submissions, and individual entities with some influence with the Government will likely privately resort to seeking concessions and favours for their own businesses.

That is how this country is going forward. That is where we have gone. So the private sector bodies in these organisations make recommendations and they are totally ignored, but the culture is that you have to go through the back door, beg favours, and obviously toe the political line before there are investment facilities. How will we develop this country in this way? This is not Corbin speaking, this is an assessment done by an independent firm that has consulted with the private sector body. Well, let the private sector deny this and, if you want to doubt this, just look at the history, Mr Mohamed, about the Investment Act. They have the same experience. They had big consultations; they made recommendations to the Government to what should happen if you want investment in this country. Several months later, tucked under our papers in this Parliament, was a note from the Government about the investment policy. It was devoid of any recommendations from the Private Sector Commission. You doubt that. *[Applause]* So I do not need Ram and McRae to tell me the facts. We have evidence of this before in this House.

So, Mr Speaker, while we speak of democracy, we have to understand that, when the Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech at Page 3, Paragraph 1.8 speaks about:

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

It sounds good, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

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

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: You may proceed, Honourable Member. The Honourable Member does not wish you to conclude. *[Laughter]*

Mr Robert HO Corbin: I know the Honourable Members wish me to continue, but I do not think I will. The facts are already clear.

Of course, Mr Speaker, when we look at those statements that sound so beautiful, I must say the words are well crafted, Honourable Minister - beautifully crafted - but the words are empty, they mean absolutely nothing in view of the evidence before the House about rejection of stakeholders' participation in almost every area of human activity, including the flood.

Of course, we in the PNC/R can cite numerous examples of this so-called meaningful consultation and what that means to the PPP Administration,

- the constructive engagement,
- equitable access to the state media still to become a reality,
- the domination of the state media by the PPP/C
- the establishment of the office of the Leader of the Opposi

tion

I am told that you were hoping to prepare an office for the Leader of the Opposition here sometime. According to Dr Luncheon, that delayed the whole Parliament. *[Laughter]* I perused the entire Chambers, but I am glad you corrected the situation. I think we should correct the Head of the Presidential Secretariat for misleading the Guyanese public that the Office of the Leader of the Opposition delayed the completion of this Parliament.

So we have a lot of experience of what this meaningful consultation means:

- the amendments to the procurement legislation, which can not reach here yet, all kinds of manoeuvrings
- the appointment of the Integrity Commission, without any consultation with the Leader of the Opposition, according to the Constitution, and I have written about this matter ... no reply.

So many of these statements about meaningful consultations are indeed meaningless. Many other examples could be found, Mr Speaker, even by a visitor in this report presented to us not so long ago by a certain gentleman, Sir Michael Davies, who was very warm when he was here, but wrote very candidly. There are many more, but I will deal with that briefly before I conclude.

3. There is no assurance in the Budget that there will be greater accountability this year. What about the Lotto Funds? I noticed my friend Mr Lumumba has left the Chamber, Mr Speaker. Why have we not been informed in the Minister of Finance's presentation that those funds will finally be placed in the Consolidated Fund, as recommended by the Auditor General? Is this going to happen this year? Then we are going to get some assurance that the Budget offers some hope for accountability, not blank statements like what Mr Nadir was issuing a few moments ago. Where are the accountability and transparency? And it

does not make sense harping back to a fact that there were no Auditor General's Reports in the past, so therefore one cannot speak. You promised a lean, clean, and mean administration. You boasted of that in your Manifesto [*Applause*] so there is no excuse to say what happened before. [*Interruption: 'We did not say mean.'*] An examination of the use of these funds for the past four years confirmed that this Fund has been used as a political slush fund, as managed by the Office of the President, and assisted by my good old friend, uncle Lumumba. [*Laughter*] I almost put in a word in between. He has a lofty title of Presidential Advisor on Empowerment. Empowerment of whom? The only focus appears to be of another kind of empowerment, and I am not speaking here about the export of dolphins. I want to assure you. [*Applause*] I am not speaking about that at all. Instead of empowerment, I can only see further marginalisation, particularly of vulnerable groups in our society, and the flood has brought home the reality of this serious state in so many parts of our country. I am sure my colleagues would have seen this as they travelled around the country during those difficult times.

So, instead of the honourable gentleman in his presentation to this Parliament informing us of how he had empowered and, to use his term, I am told, black people, he used his time in this debate to give us a history lesson on 28 years. Imagine Lumumba giving us a lecture on 28 years. [*Applause*] Imagine that. Now where is he? I do not want to say things in his absence. A man who came back to Guyana in 1985, with a suitcase full of Hoyte's posters praising the PNC, he can now have the gall of saving the people in the PNC. Imagine we are regaled in this House, Mr Speaker, about the PNC. Instead of telling us about empowerment, he used the debate in this House to tell us about black contractors not having a day under the sun ... and all those kinds of things, and going to election history. But let me inform the Honourable Member that the PNC was just not concerned with middle-class black people, so if some suffered, that was unfortunate, but the PNC in government was concerned with all the people of the country, irrespective of race, colour, or creed. [*Applause*] But if my friend wants to speak about history and if he wants to examine history in this House, he must

not talk about twenty eight years only, because when I visited State House during the flood, I thought of 200 years of history in a different era when men chose to use abominable systems and subjected their fellow human beings to inhuman conditions and slavery. *[Interruption: 'I do not see any relevance.' "You do not see the relevance. I am saying it is relevant, because in Guyana today, we should be talking about empowerment, and not behave like house-slaves in this country."]* *[Applause]*

Despite all the talk in this House, we want to talk about development of all the people of this country. I am amazed that my colleagues on that part of the House would allow him to speak that, when we are dealing at this time with inclusion and inclusionary politics, and trying to reach out to deal with the difficult problems that we are faced with in this country to bring about cohesion.

So, Mr Speaker, despite all the talk in this House, there are no assurances that there would be measures put in place to reduce and eliminate corruption as a scourge in this nation. Of course, we have had the rampant growth of the drug trade barons in Guyana, and more worrying is the apparent alliances that are being formed, and it appears that we are turning a blind eye and apparently facilitating some of these operations.

4. The massive money laundering effects are not really contributing to the long-term growth of this economy, and I warn that this development will lead to the destruction of us all. Stabroek News of Saturday, 5 January, said it all; *Drug Fight Here Weak, US Report - Guyana/US Operation compromised by corruption*. It is all here in this newspaper. I do not have to regale the House with it, just look at Page 3. Every commodity that Guyana exports has been used to ship cocaine out of this country, in shipment of timber, frozen fish, molasses and so on. I think one Honourable Member referred to this in the debate. But what is more, on the front page, *last year the US had issued warrants for several suspected drug traffickers, and the relevant order was obtained from the local courts. However, none of the persons sought*

was apprehended, and there were concerns locally that these persons had been tipped off. Allegations of corruption are widespread and reach to the Government, but continue to go un-investigated. Not me, *Stabroek News* of Saturday, 5 March 2005 - a few days ago, Mr Speaker. They are quoting, not from an imaginary document, but from a US Report. So when I say that we are dealing with an issue of Guyana becoming a narco-State, we need to remember that the unholy alliances with the drug trade is destroying the very moral fibre of our nation, and if the Government believes that they can disengage or people can disengage, when it suits them, it is a dangerous game. Of course, we will have to put in place necessary programmes for the development of our country, and it is a pity that this Budget does not offer real programmes that can deal with the employment and empowerment of our youths.

5. This Budget has been devoid of any real coherent plan in the various sectors. The Minister of Housing (again he is not here today), but I listened to him regaling us with the great housing development plans, the massive programmes, but I think it was Mr Stanley Ming in the Debate who exposed the disparity in development and the short-sightedness in the approach towards housing development.

While long established housing areas are neglected, other new housing areas are being provided with massive infrastructure before even a single house is built. What kind of policy is that? Is that what we are talking about as development of this country? As election time nears, we see in the Budget this year large sums of money allocated to deal with these neglected areas. We will see if it amounts to the election promises that were made to the people of Sophia in 2001. As I speak today, many of them have not yet been fulfilled, but the people of Guyana will judge you. In a few months time:

- we will see whether the work will start in Kanesville;
- we will see whether the work will start in North Sophia;

- we will see whether the road will start in Sophia;
- we will be looking forward for all these promises, and hope that they do not go the way as in 2001. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I rise to ask that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

The Speaker: You may proceed, Honourable Member.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, the Government, which encouraged people to squat in many areas with grandiose promises ... several promises have come to us, after leaving them for several years in squalor and poverty, to tell us that they are now to deal with this situation. You might say that I am making an idle statement, but we are all on the hustings. We are all politicians. We know what is said at the bottom-house meetings, just as how you tried to know what is happening in ours, so let us not fool ourselves in this House that people were advised, *do not worry, go and squat quickly, and then things will be regularised later*. So, having encouraged the squatting subtly, now we are faced with the massive regularisation programme. I do not have a problem with people getting houses, but do not leave them in this squalor for all these thirteen years and then tell us that you are now regularising the situation. *[Interruption: 'Only thirteen.'* "Yes, only thirteen, because we did not encourage that. We gave proper housing schemes - Melanie Damishana, South Ruimveldt Gardens, Amelia's Ward at Linden, Tucburg in New Amsterdam, Tucville Scheme in Georgetown. I can go on naming them, I am not guessing them - well laid out schemes, *[Applause]* North Ruimveldt, although we were told that nothing was done in 28 years. Maybe we do not see. I do not want to go back to that."}] So I am saying that, if you have a housing policy, what the Minister should be telling us is what he will do to move forward to deal with the situation. I am saying that I am

happy that he has this large allocation for (as he called it) regularisation, but I am sounding a word of advice, that let us hope that it is not the election promises of 2001, where the people of Sophia were promised all kinds of things, and when it is discovered that they did not put their vote in the right direction, not a single bit of soil was turned in that area since that time of the flood. *[Applause]*

The Health Ministry - We were told a lot of speeches about the health policy and what a wonderful health programme. Well, Dr Hanoman dealt with that, but I was waiting to hear the Minister of Health tell us that he would be putting into operation the Dialysis and the CAT scan machines this week. I am still waiting on this reply, and Dr Hanoman spoke before him, Sir. It would have been much more meaningful, instead of hearing all those great plans for health and what is to happen, to hear a simple reply, *we would put this machine that was not in operation for so long in operation next week*. So we are left to wonder when on earth this Dialysis and the CAT scan machine will be put in order.

Finally, Mr Speaker, the Budget lacks a clear and resolute focus on the initiatives to bring about economic growth at the level and rate required to absorb the spiralling unemployment and produce a gross domestic product that would offer real hope for economic prosperity for the Guyanese people. It would not happen with mere words.

There have been some investments, but those are hallmarked by two features. We are not blind, but I am saying that the overall picture is not as rosy as the Minister is painting it. He is trying to disillusion ... They are very small-scaled and, while they are welcomed, they are incapable of making the impact at the level required to bring about the transformation of our economy, and we need to have a plan that can really do that.

Many of these investments are permitted on the basis that many of the investors must first find comfort with the ruling Party before they can be really made comfortable to invest in this country and that, I hope, will be changed in the near future. So what we really need in Guyana is

1. A really meaningful investment law, which will make pellucid the areas open for investment, and the incentives to be accorded by law.

2. The removal of all ministerial discretion in the granting of incentives, except in certain clearly defined circles, and we passed a bill in Parliament related to this not too long ago, but when will it be operationalised.

3. Adequate and appropriate representation by genuine private sector organisations and all advisory and statutory investment bodies, and not as a rubber stamp, but to listen and adhere to their suggestions, unlike what was done in the preparation of this Budget.

While it is true, Mr Speaker, that we cannot abandon the traditional sectors, we must pursue diversification within those sectors and, at the same time, we must relentlessly pursue a general diversification of the economy as a whole.

We are convinced, Mr Speaker, that Guyana has nowhere to go, and has no realistic chance of revitalisation without genuine peace, reconciliation, stability and social justice in this land ... *[Interruption: 'Out your fire! Out your fire!']* A peace that is based on justice and the recognition that the rights and aspirations of all Guyanese, whatever their political persuasions or ethnic background, their religious beliefs, etcetera, are all respected, protected, and enforced, since they are the foundations of a stable society. How can we then achieve this national cohesion? In my address not so long ago to our Party's congress, we made it very pellucid that the People's National Congress adheres and supports an approach which requires genuine consultation and involvement of all forces in this country, all sectors to the table to discuss the way forward for this country on the basis of the National Development Strategy. The document is yet to be discussed in this Parliament, but it is a document which I believe had the blessings of the then Minister of Finance, who now enjoys a much higher office today. Why then we cannot look at Guyana holistically and recognise, as I have said so often,

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that no one political Party has a licence to all the solutions to the problems of our country? Why can't we reach the point where suggestions made in good faith in the interest of this country cannot be accepted in order that we can move with some kind of consensus to take this country forward?

So I conclude by urging my friends on the other side of the House that, if we are to take Guyana forward, there is need for change:

- in our approach to dealing with interest groups in this country,
- to our method of consultations that they be meaningful,
- to the manner in which we approach our development policies and a conviction that once, we arrive at decisions and conclusions, we will stick to those decisions, implement those decisions, and take this country forward.

It is my sincere hope, Mr Speaker, that, even though this Budget and the National Budget Debate is not a real reflection on what will take place in this country, because we are being brought back here in a few months perhaps to look at the real thing. If nothing else, I hope this debate produces a realisation by the Administration that they have others willing to cooperate and assist, but that cooperation and help would not come unless there is sincerity of purpose. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member Mr Corbin.

We will suspend now for fifteen minutes.

19:50H – SUSPENSION OF SITTING

20:15H – RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Honourable Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I stand tall, [Applause] in the sense that I had an excellent brief, and one of the first statements that I want to make is that the PPP/C can speak about accountability, because it has accounted all the time for the country. [Applause]

I come to record in this House tonight, which reflects that we have virtually complied with a statutory period, which is limited, in presenting, on or before September 30 in each year, the Auditor's report. It might have gone to October, but I did not come here tonight with a record when we did not account for ten years. That cannot be defended. I am speaking about accountability, and let me make the statement here and now, every cent expended on the flood is being accounted for and audited by officers of the Auditor General's Office. [Applause] So I want to put my honourable friend's mind and heart at rest, that we have got an admirable record, and that the money is being accounted for.

He said that nothing has changed. I was tempted to tell him that the PNC has not changed. But at the end of his contribution he said, *there is investment, we are not blind*. In fact, your conscience spoke then, you could not withhold it anymore. You could not continue. It had to come out. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, \$200 million originally announced will come in the supplementary estimates. On talking about the supplementary estimates, I want to make the point that we are acting in consonance with the provisions of the financial regulations. We are not breaching the law. It is not unusual in any part of the world, particularly within the realm of the Caribbean, I am talking about financial arrangement, the Statutes are similar all around, and so you will have events and incidents where governments would have advanced money from the Contingency Fund. That is not unusual, it is not irregular, it is not illegal and that is what this Government did. I thought I ought to commence with that, spend some time on that in order to clear the records, with respect to accountability, that has been raised by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

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He spoke about corruption. I have heard very often that word is used very loosely, very wantonly, very recklessly, very irresponsibly. We are on record, on this side of the House, as telling the opposition, if you want to point fingers on the Government for corruption, bring the evidence and we will take action, but simply to shout corruption is not the way forward, and not the correct approach. The President is on record as saying that he would not put his head on the block for anybody, but if there is evidence of corruption, bring it and he will take action.

Mr Speaker, could anyone convincingly argue that the Government is not interested in investment. Of course, we are, and we want investment. Seeing that there is evidence of investment, why should we do anything to hinder or impede investments coming into the country? I know as a fact, sitting in the Cabinet, that all the measures have been put in place to ensure that there is no delay, there is speedy action, and that investments come in the country. We have argued, we have stated, and we have virtually pointed finger on the opposition that they are preventing investment to come into the country. By utterances, I just hinted across, I hate words like marginalisation. Who marginalised who? And for what reason? The Leader of the Opposition is correct when he says he cares for everybody, and he is taking care of every body. Why we ought not to do that, and we are the Government? Give me one reason. In fact, there can be no evidence. All the people who were distributing hampers and what have you took care and ensured that they went into every village and distributed house to house to everyone. I do not condone anyone who withheld hampers or any such gift from the people at that time. I will be the first to shout and condemn any such actions and any such persons. So I think we should get out of those phrases for a change. I am not opposed to objective criticisms, to fair criticisms, but I do not like generalisations when there is no basis.

I would dismiss the Ram and Mc Rae analysis. That is a PNC/R analysis. *[Laughter]* So I am not excited or fascinated or thrilled or enthralled at all by that. Everyone knows who is who in this country. This is a small country.

Mr Speaker, Guyana has a great future, and unlike those who are building out of themselves images of prophets of doom ... and I want to warn them that it is not the best thing. This is a great country. It has problems, but I feel that we can overcome the problems. Wherever in the world you worked, two political parties will always have differences. It is not unusual. That does not even bother me, but when you talk about democracy, this Government has amended the Constitution of this country to take away powers from the President, and that was substantial power, making an order to dissolve the Parliament. He no longer enjoys such power, because that could have been quite correctly described as absolute power. We have removed that power from the Constitution.

Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's power has been strengthened. For example, the Chancellor and the Chief Justice cannot be appointed unless he agrees. *[Applause]* It has been done, but the Leader of the Opposition cannot argue, if I make the point very rationally, that the Government had a choice, it had a voice, and the Government could say yes or no. If the government had said no, it would not have been changed, but we changed it.

Mr Speaker, the \$90 million he referred to - he struggled to get two figures, it is \$290 million - that \$90 million was given by donor countries, including PAHO. So you can rest again regarding accountability as money is being properly spent.

Mr Speaker, the auditors are involved, on a daily basis, in the scrutinising of every cent spent. At the end of it there will be a report. We have to know that, and we have to deal with the issues as they exist. I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition is not unaware that it is the PPP/C Government which removed the means test for social assistance and old age pension. *[Applause]* And he is not unaware that there is now a five percent increase for old age pension and social assistance.

He said that the Budget offers no hope. Mr Speaker, the Budget is one of the best. It is not only a Budget in generality, but it is a Budget in

detail, stating what it will do and where it will do it, so that you could see exactly where the country is going.

This flood has been the biggest, and it has been our worst experience. Any bystander, or any person sitting outside and observing what has taken place during the flood can come to no other conclusion but that the Government has performed magnificently. The Government interacted very freely with all the people of the country. I think that is what is worrying the Opposition. That is their major worry. They went to every community and they talked to every community, and I heard, subsequently, that the Leader of the Opposition conveyed the idea that he started this, he started that, and he started the other. He did not start house-to-house distribution. He went long after. I saw him at Lusignan when he was handing out a parcel and said, *like Corbin join the band. So I congratulate you for calling the President.* I think you did a good thing, and I said behind your back that you are an experienced politician. That is the right thing to do, and you did it right. But I get the feeling that, when the Leader of the Opposition makes a decision, that there are some in his Party that attack him, so he makes his decision, he puts two steps forward, and when they attack him, he puts ten steps backward. *[Applause]* But I feel if those people who intervene leave him alone, he will do a good job.

Mr Speaker, if you look at what is going on in the country - from Charity to Crabwood Creek, there is visible and conspicuous evidence of development; development not only by the Government, but by private individuals as well. What does that say? It says that the private people are expressing confidence in the Government by developing and expanding their businesses and their homesteads.

Mr Speaker, if you look at this Budget, and look at the various provisions - roads, water and, in a number of the areas, provisions have been made for development. They have machines and switch to do those works. You are talking about employment. I am saying that when I look at the record of areas of development, and where they are doing it, it clearly shows that not hundreds, but thousands are going to be

employed during this year in the country. That cannot be denied. You look at the vision in the Budget - go on the East Bank, roads are being improved, bridges are being repaired. You go from Georgetown to Rosignol, there are improvements of the roads and bridges. You look at the Essequibo, the ferry stelling is being improved. In every conceivable area where attention is needed and required, attention is being given, and there is action to improve the situation. Even if the President makes announcement of money for an area, it comes through the votes, it comes through the Estimates; he has to account for it. As I said, we do not have a bad record. We have the best record in the country for accountability. All the areas of concern are being addressed at the moment, and we are not ignoring any. While the PNC/R, on the first instance called the President, my information is, and I genuinely and reliably believe it, they did not proceed further to take part in the task force, and to work genuinely in all the task forces. The name of the Honourable Member Miss Amna Ally, was mentioned, but there were those who were stirring up trouble too. Mr Speaker - one big rumour, that the government has refused help from the United States of America, no lesser person than the Ambassador of the United States denied that, and then the rumours and the propaganda stopped.

Mr Speaker, Guyana has an excellent future. It has the potential and the resources. What Guyana needs is stability.

We have un-dividedly given attention to governance. It is not true that the Government is not in favour of good governance. All the changes that have taken place - and yet the Leader of the Opposition says that he did not see any change... The four Parliamentary Sector Committees - two are chaired by the opposition and two are chaired by the government. You are on the Committee, you chaired the Committee and you can run the Committee. First time in the history of this country, a minister allows himself/herself to be interrogated, and many ministers have gone before those Committees. Mr Speaker, the Government has responded substantially to changes, to improvement, to more inclusivity. There can be no evidence that we did not respond to those things in these areas.

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Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about Tata buses, but he confessed that they moved from Tata bus to bicycles. [*Applause*] I would hate to believe that when you talk about public transportation which is Government-influenced that you are going to provide bicycles for public transport in the country. That would be a retrograde step.

Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition was at pains, he struggled to really make a speech, and he said that he is presenting his case, and I interjected and said that there will be a no-case submission, because you have not proven any.

Mr Speaker, years ago, the word *budget* was a kind of bad word. When people heard about budget, they got frightened, because Budget was concomitant with tax, but now the Budget came, it was presented, it was debated, and there is nothing to hurt anyone. There is every evidence that the Budget will help the communities in this country.

Mr Speaker, we operate in an international environment that is challenging and harsh in many respects, and that the domestic environment is in itself subjected to many potential shocks. The global challenges we face include, perhaps most prominently, the threatened erosion of the preferential market for our sugar. You know that story where we are arguing the indefinite duration of the sugar protocol. Perhaps the most glaring domestic challenge faced right now is the task of coping with, and recovering from, the aftermath of the worst natural disaster ever experienced by this country. What we need is support and co-operation of all, and I can announce, Mr Speaker, that the President will announce a package for those who have suffered. The Government has not been found wanting, and could not have been found wanting to help, to show care, to show interest and to provide for the people who suffered countrywide.

The past twelve years provide ample examples of important lessons and steadfast implementation of appropriate policy by a disciplined Government, which enable the overcoming of all challenges. Budget 2005 is another step in this direction. The policies and programmes

articulated in the Budget 2005, coupled with the continued resilience and confidence of the Guyanese people, therefore provide much cause for optimism. That is what I take seriously with the Leader of the Opposition. The Budget offers hope. The Budget lists a number of things that the government will do. If you compare this Kowlessar's Budget with the PNC's government Budget, there is no detail in this, but this one says what they will do, when they will do it, and where they will do it. Mr Speaker, Budget 2005 is not to be seen and read as an isolated, one-off stand alone, a single year document. Instead it is to be seen and read as part of an ongoing programme aimed at sustaining and enhancing economic and social development for betterment in the quality of life enjoyed by all the Guyanese people.

We are very concerned about the quality of life of the people. We have to function and operate within our limits, but there can be no doubt that the Government has been addressing these matters and issues with despatch, and have been taking action wherever necessary. Delivery of this ongoing programme has been the firm pledge of the PPP/C government over the past twelve years, and the steady achievement of its results has been government's consistent track-record over those years. The proud achievements of this ongoing programme include reducing the incidence of poverty by thirty-four percent, and the incidence of absolute poverty by nineteen percent over the period 1993 to 1999. Those statistics speak volumes. They clearly show that, financially and statistically, things are moving in the right direction. The Government has dedicated much time in ensuring that poverty is tackled, poverty is arrested, and we provide for the people who can ill-afford a better standard of living, and a better quality of life.

He made the point about inflation, reducing price inflation, which erodes the real value of incomes and savings from 28.2 percent in 1992 to 5.5 percent in 2004. So that figure shows that it has been reduced from 28.2 to 5.5, a very substantial drop in the inflation.

Increasing the monthly public servant minimum wage from the equivalent of approximately US \$25 in 1992 to US116 in 2004 or from

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\$3,137 in 1992 to \$23,204 in 2004. In other words, Mr Speaker, is point has to be laboured - when we entered the Government, public servants' minimum wage was \$3,000 per month. We have moved that in the twelve years - from \$3,000 per month to \$24,000 per month.

The proud achievement of this ongoing programme also includes bringing high quality health care to be readily available to all Guyanese through the construction, upgrading and equipping of health facilities throughout the length and breadth of the country. The Leader of the Opposition got carried away with this scanning equipment. He said, *you should tell us that you will start this thing tomorrow. We want to know, not a word about it.* These things do not happen overnight, but I want to publicly praise Dr Leslie Ramsammy, whom I think, during the flood, has done a magnificent job, and deserves our praise. *[Applause]* We did not neglect, or we were not found wanting. We were not culpable, insofar as the health services were ... It appeared to have been the best offered and, to date, and to the moment, no one has pointed fingers with evidence against the Minister of Health, or the Ministry of Health, which is obvious that they had to concede that a very good job has been done. I think, in that contribution by the Minister of Health, Dr Joseph was praised for his positive responses and for his help.

Increasing the annual income tax threshold for the lowest income earners, from the equivalent of approximately US \$384 in 1992 to US \$1,200 in 2004, or from \$48,000 in 1992 to \$240,000 in 2004 ... *[Interruption: 'We want to hear about 2005, 2004 just finished.]*

The proud achievement of this ongoing programme also include bringing high-quality education to be readily available to all Guyanese through the construction and upgrading of educational facilities throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Mr Speaker, isn't it a fact that the Minister of Education was actively engaged in ensuring that the children go to school, that the buildings are available, the teachers are available. I have seen them in the school, but still the Opposition Leader raises the point tonight as if nothing was done.

Bringing potable water and electricity to the villages and homes of thousands of Guyanese for the first time; providing thousands of Guyanese with the opportunity to be dignified home-owners for the first time. You should find out the numbers of titles and transports which are being issued at the moment. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: 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 Member.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: ... the introduction of the most modern Constitution in the Caribbean and the strengthening and deepening Parliamentary Democracy in every respect ... That is so, and I want to spend a couple of seconds to talk about it. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition is not without information. You used to get an Order Paper from the PNC on Friday, and the Parliament meets on Monday, and the whole Bill used to be run through. There have been dramatic changes in the work of the Parliament ... *[Interruption: 'What happened to the Disciplined Forces Commission?... the Select Committee meets.']* You never used to have those things. You know what we are dealing with, a new situation - the staff has to be trained, the numbers have to be equivalent to the requirement. When you get all those things ... changes in any situation of administration do not happen overnight, it takes time to take grounding, to become efficient, and if there are deficiencies, it will take some time ... *[Interruption: 'Why you stopped training people overseas?']* "We have not stopped." There is no evidence that we have stopped. We have not stopped anybody from going. Mr Speaker, Parliament Office is a specialised area, and what you need there is probably the minimum, a qualified person with the first lower degree so that he or she will understand the Statute very easily. But we have made strides, we have made progress, we are

moving ahead and many things are taking place. Never before in the history of Guyana so many Select Committees, Sectoral Committees, Constitutional Committees have been meeting like they are meeting now in Guyana. I expect the Opposition, no matter what you do, I do not expect the opposition to come here and say, you are doing well, *I admire you.*

Restoring transparency and public accountability by resuming the submission of audited accounts and Auditor General's Reports to the Parliament and by strengthening the Auditor General's Office ... All these things have taken place and are happening - modernisation of the legislative and administrative framework in such areas as financial management and public procurement. The Public Procurement Act is evidence of a powerful advance in the process of democracy and governmental development. Of course, we have not successfully reached agreement on the names, but I hope and trust that agreement will be reached, but you cannot say that we have not done anything. We have done a lot. This is the proud track record of the Government's on-going programme of which the Honourable Members on this side of the House have been elaborating over the past week, and Budget 2005 is the next step which is integrally important. Budget 2005 sets the stage for advancing this outstanding track record even further in many respects, including providing allocation to build on social gains achieved over the years. Increasing public spending on education to 8.9 percent of GDP in 2005, as compared with 2.1 percent in 1991. So we know what the education votes were, we know what all the votes were, but our records are showing that we are increasing these things substantially, and it has climbed year after year. It never decreased. You mean, you are not seeing those areas of progress ... *[Interruption: 'I have to buy a pair of spectacles.' 'We have a scheme where you can get one free.']* The education vote is 8.9 percent of the GDP, and that is in the 2005 Budget.

Increasing public spending on health ... 4.3 percent of the GDP in 2005, as compared with 1.8 percent in 1991. So we have moved from 1.8 percent from 1991.

Allocating over \$2.4 billion to increase access and improve housing facilities for low-income families ...

Allocating \$1.1 billion to old-age pensioners and social assistance programme, which will benefit about 60,000 persons. You asked for this, and I give you the figures ... *[Interruption: 'What about the water rate?']* Do you know that it has been announced that the pensioners will be exempted from paying water rates? Now, in 2005, that is a decision taken and announced. So what are you worried about? 60,000 people will benefit from that exercise. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition knows that the Local Government Act provides for exemption of pensioners. That has been there, but we have now ensured that it is in the law and the people will be exempted. I think it is a good thing and we commend it.

Providing allocation to continue rehabilitation and expansion of infrastructure, including \$783 million under the electrification programme that will bring electricity to thousands of previously unserved households. You have a tough time getting near to the electorate for 2006. *[Laughter]* People get telephone, light, roads and water. It is true that all the areas have not got the same. We are not saying so; we have not said so, but we are saying that most of the areas are benefiting, and these are clear improvement in the quality of life of the people in this country. All the figures that I quote here are in the Budget which you do not like.

Over \$2.8 billion to continue improvement of the road works; \$756 million to continue the bridges rehabilitation programme; \$480 million to upgrade Cheddi Jagan International Airport; \$377 million to rehabilitate ferry stelling and refurbish ferry vessels and dredge; \$1.8 billion to continue drainage and irrigation works; over \$1.7 billion to continue the sea defence programme.

Mr Speaker, I do not want to quote these books. They have been quoted, but when this government came into office, there was no evidence of maintenance of sea defence or D&I. The trenches were dry, they were without water. I recall, three days after I took the oath as

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Minister, the sea defence at Columbia broke down, I did not even know what to do, but I went up there and I tried to sort it out. All the sea defences were weak, collapsible, collapsing. We had to change that situation. People have forgotten these things. Mr Speaker, Minister Greenidge, in his Budget speech, admitted that they were not able to maintain and to give the services which are required.

Providing over \$3.4 billion to the Police to maintain law and order, gather intelligence information, improve policing capability, and acquire equipment, among other things, this Budget has not excluded the police. The police is provided for, because we want law and order, we want security, and we try to provide the police with whatever their demands are, and \$3.4 billion is provided in the 2005 Budget.

So, Mr Speaker, I have cited figures from this Budget Speech to show roads, water, police - all are provided with substantial sums of money to improve their services to the community. One would have expected ... When some of the opposition members get up to speak, one would feel that we never did anything, but as I said, that at the end of the Opposition Leader's speech, he said, *yes, there are some investments.*

Laying the groundwork for modernising our traditional industries, principally sugar and bauxite, with Skeldon sugar factory and electricity co-generation project set for take-off this year, along with the CAMBIOR acquisition of the Linden Bauxite operation and the launching of RUSAL's involvement in the Berbice Bauxite operations ... All of these will help to secure the long-term viability and competitiveness of the traditional sectors. What do these things mean? More jobs, better quality of life, greater economic drive ... and all these efforts are coming from the government. I do not know which budget they were reading, but they did not read the one I read. Before I forget, Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and members of the opposition benches are not unaware of the exorbitant sums provided for drugs/narcotics. Substantial sums of money are provided to fight it in Guyana. Mr Speaker, I think it is temerity for any person to get up and point fingers at the Government

and say that it is encouraging this. This Government is not in any way committed, not in any way involved, in any drug business. The Government will ensure that the full impact and effect of the law is meted out to those who indulge in drugs. *[Applause]* The Leader of the Opposition said that he will support us. I know that when you were speaking, you were not armed with the facts, and I thought of giving them to you.

The optical health programme for the aged, will provide the gift of restored sight to thousands of the elderly and low income persons. We have a programme to give them spectacles. People are benefiting in many ways from this Government, and this Government has been going to the people, meeting with the people.

The poverty programme, will issue over 14,000 school uniform vouchers to needy families. The CXC subsidy programme will benefit over 5,000 students. We are doing all of this while maintaining a stable macro-economic environment that fosters private sector confidence and is conducive to attracting higher levels of investment to create jobs and generate growth.

Mr Speaker, I want to state in this Honourable House that the Government has a vision, it has a programme, it has a plan, and the Government is pursuing that programme, and that plan, diligently, honestly and sincerely; aware that the ultimate implementation of those plans will bring about greater comfort and greater prosperity and greater development in Guyana. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Harripersaud Nokta: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honourable Minister be given another fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Minister.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I want to say that the

People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has been in the forefront, for many years, in the battle, struggle and fight for the return to democracy. This country is free. People can virtually say what they like, when they like, and how they like. As I was saying, democracy is very conspicuous, but the democracy is fragile. We recognise and we acknowledge that we have to work together, and come together, and have meaningful discussions. We have no problem with that.

Mr Speaker, we are prepared to work closely with the Opposition, and we have always said it. We know that they have an important and crucial role to play in the country. I will urge and persuade them tonight if I can not to allow them to be drawn into negative activities which can ruin us, inimical and detrimental to this country's interest and progress. The politicians might not have changed, but the people have changed. People are not blind anymore. People want the country to move forward, blind in the sense that people were going blindly for parties, and I can speak with some degree of evidence and authority, to say that the people in Guyana have been responding substantially to the Government's work. Mr Speaker, I am sure that, if we work together, we can move this country forward. We cannot have a double position. We have to have a general and straight forward position, but if there is one thing that we have to defend and preserve, and zealously so, it is the democracy which we have won. We are committed to periodic elections, and we will not allow one day to pass beyond the constitutionally due date for elections. I want to say that elections will be held, and must be held, within the constitutional framework [*Interruption: 'With all the conditions in place.'* "Well, you must have all the conditions in place."] Mr Speaker, we do not have a record of rigged elections. You know that we do not have that kind of record. The thing that bothers you most is accountability, and we have accounted. I want to say that the PPP/C's position is clear, and ought to be known.

I was disappointed tonight in the Leader of the Opposition when he took some negative positions. I thought he was coming here as a statesman, but instead he allowed himself to be drawn into those narrow areas which cannot help this country. Mr Speaker, we have been responsive

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from the Government's end, and we will continue to be responsive to the opposition. So let us move out with the *pension book business*, *Budget offers no hope*. My position is the budget offers every hope. Those are the things you said - accountability and I have made the point. We had the biggest flood, and we have fought and battled and brought it to where it is at the moment. I am sure that many people felt that we would fail, and they wished that we had failed, but there was sincerity on the part of the Government. The Government was genuine and it did everything conceivably possible to deal with the situation. I trust that I have been able to answer all the queries and all the questions raised by the Leader of the Opposition, and I trust and hope that, henceforth, we will expunge from our vocabulary here words like *marginalisation and discrimination*. Which Government will discriminate in a country which is multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious, in a country which is plural? The world is becoming plural, and the President, quite correctly and sincerely, said today that the days for race politics are finished. I feel that we have a future. We can move this country and advance it forward. I think the people are behind us, and the people want a change in their life; people want a better quality of life, and we have to work to do that for them, but the point I have made, so that there is no mistake, is that from 1992 to now, things have changed drastically and magnificently for the better. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I urge the Guyanese people to follow what the Government is doing, and the Government is very wide open. The Government is virtually around the people, meeting and talking with them. I am sure that in time you will move out of the negative thinking and the negative approach, and that we will move into a positive united approach. I believe in the word *togetherness*. Togetherness is dynamic and if we are prepared to act together, with oneness of approach and oneness of mind, and tackle the problems of the country we will find that we will overcome all the hurdles and have a better Guyana.

I thought the debates for all the days were very good. I do not think that it was a waste of time at all, I think both sides expressed their views, and they expressed them freely, fearlessly, and frankly. Now that

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we have reached the end of the speech-making and we are going to Estimates, I think we should resolve here tonight to work together, to approach things together, to send a signal of unity to the people of this country, and to let them know that we will do our utmost to push the country forward for the good of everyone. Health has improved; education has improved; the economy has improved. The statistics show that there are great changes, and those changes signal and indicate that, once we move and work together, we can bring about prosperity and happiness for Guyana. May Guyana move forward, and we will move together. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: The Honourable Member, Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar. *[Pause]* Is Mr Kowlessar responding?

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: No, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, this concludes the general debate on the Budget.

Before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the report of the Business Sub-Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2005 Estimates of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply.

IN COMMITTEE

The Chairman: Honourable Members, the Assembly has now resolved itself into Committee of Supply. I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met on Tuesday 1 March 2005 and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2005 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed a resolution on the matter and copies of the Sub-Committee's Minutes, Resolution and Schedule have been circulated.

The Honourable, Minister of Finance.

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Hon Saisnarine Kowlessar: Mr Chairman, I now move that the Committee of Supply agree with the Business Sub-Committee in its Resolution.

Question put and carried.

The Chairman: Honourable Members, the Committee of Supply has allocated three days for the consideration of the Estimates. The consideration will begin on 8 March 2005 in accordance with the Resolution of the Sub-Committee.

ASSEMBLY RESUMED

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I thank you for your attention and contributions. Our business is now at an end for today.

The Honourable Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I wish to move that the National Assembly stands adjourned to Tuesday, 8 March 2005 at 14:00h.

Adjourned accordingly at 21:18h