

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SECOND SESSION (2002-2006) 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

81ST SITTING

2.00 PM

Tuesday 31 January 2006

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (69)

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 (38)

The Hon. Samuel A.A. Hinds, M.P.	-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications (AOL)
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 Home Affairs
The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.	-Minister of Education
The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.	-Minister of Finance (Absent)
The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.	-Minister of Housing and Water
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) (Absent)
*The Hon. S. Rudolph Insanally, O.R., C.C.H., M.P.	-Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs (AOL)

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

* *Non-Elected Minister*

** *Elected Member from The United Force*

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Members of the Opposition (30)

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

Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P.	- (AOL)
Mr. Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P.	
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P.	- Deputy Speaker of the N.A (AOL)
Mr. E. Lance Carberry, M.P.	- Chief Whip
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. 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)
Mr. Jerome Khan, M.P.	- (Absent)
Dr George A. Norton, M.P.	- (Absent)
Miss Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica) (AOL)
Mr. James K. McAllister, M.P.	- (Region No.3-Essequibo Islands West Demerara) (Absent)
Dr Carl Max Hanoman M.P.	- (Absent)
Mr Joseph Hamilton, M.P.	
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.	- (Region No. 9-Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

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

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.	- (Absent)
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OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

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PRAYERS

The Clerk read Prayers

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY SPEAKER

My apologies for the late start, Honourable Members

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2006 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2006

Assembly resumed the Debate on the Motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2006

The Speaker: The Honourable Member Mr Vincent Alexander

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, I rise to participate in this Debate on the 2006 Budget. A Budget entitled *TRANSFORMING GUYANA THROUGH MODERNISATION AND PARTNERSHIP*.

Mr Speaker, approximately one year ago, a Budget was presented under a different name *CONFRONTING CHALLENGES SUSTAINING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT*. This year, one would have thought that an integral part of the debate this Budget would have been to account for the *sustained growth and development*, which have taken place in 2005. At the time that Budget was presented, we were already aware of the flood and its likely consequence. In that context, one could hardly, having committed one's self to this theme *Sustaining Growth and Development*, come now to argue that the flood was an element. We were aware of the flood at that time. That notwithstanding what have we seen this year; we have seen a Budget which has sought to make the flood and oil prices the bases on which we could not have a report on

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sustained growth and development. It is interesting, that the incumbent government would have so much to say about a rise in oil prices, bearing in mind that when we had the real oil crisis in the 1970s and that oil crisis not only affected Guyana but the entire world - a crisis which was over an extended period. And at that time, the same people who, today, are saying that rises in the oil price is a major reason for poor performance, did not accept that. In fact, that oil crisis was a major reason for poor performance, not only in Guyana, but across the globe. So we see the problem that we are faced with, where we are not yet sufficiently matured to be able to come and place before this House facts to make admissions where we are wrong and try to move forward in a context of honest and truthful debate.

Mr Speaker, the Debate for the 2006 Budget started yesterday for all intent and purposes. I thought it had adjourned, yesterday evening, to be recommenced now. But on my way here, I was listening to the only radio station that I can listen to if I am listening to AM and I heard a press conference whereby the person who holds the highest office was engaging the nation on two issues:

- An apparent update on the flood. Apparently the GINA and its officers are not sufficiently competent to update the nation on the floods, so the President has to take time off to do that; and
- a debate on the Budget.

Mr Speaker, the main point which was being made in that extra-parliamentary debate on the Budget was that the Government had achieved macro-economic stability. Now, I do not know if that is equivalent to sustained growth and development, because stability sometimes suggests that there is no movement; that you have stood still; but the Budget told us that we had growth and development, not standing still.

There are some people who are reported to be in a stable but critical state. Stabilised at the point of crisis and very often, when such people lose that stability they die; because it is not stability that is at a point where there is hope; if fact it is stability where there is no hope. So this talk of macro-economic stability must be understood in a context of:

- a country where there is a high degree of poverty; a country where there is a high degree of unemployment;
- a country where there is high degree of HIV/AIDS; and
- a country where there is a high degree if illiteracy.

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So what does this stability do for us? We are stable like that person in crisis, stable near to death. Mr Speaker, you know that from time to time, we have referred to this matter of macro-economic stability and we have made the point that macro-economic stability is good. It is a means to an end, but if it is at an end itself, it is of no use and as we see it here today, it seems to be an end in itself repeated like a mantra year after year, debate after debate.

So, Mr Speaker, as I address this Budget of 2006, recognising that the things said on this side of the House are not heard, I refer to my presentation as a ritual - a ritual between the deaf and the presenters; a ritual between the deaf and the articulate. That we can continue to hear about macro-economic stability is the first bit of evidence of this ritual no one is listening or learning. So, in that state of deafness, there is a continuous repeat of what was previously said. Mr Speaker, even yesterday, as we engaged in this ritual, the deafness was made even more evident. We had Honourable Member Mr Winston Murray making reference to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, making salient points about an Act which was brought to this House by the Government, showing that the Government itself seems not to be committed to an Act which was brought to this House, an Act which was obviously represented to the International Community as one of the bases for continued financial support. Incidentally, the extra parliamentary debate which continued, one of the things which were said is that we had concurrence of the International Community for this Budget. Therefore there is no problem in financing. So here is Mr Murray making the point: you have presented a Bill that has become an Act; it is supposed to be the basis upon which this House operates and you have not done much of what should have been done in keeping with that Act, but still you come to us and want to argue about accountability; about the rule of law and all sorts of things. The deafness became even more evident when a very popular backbencher on the other side, in responding to what Mr Murray had said, asked what about audits for over twenty-eight years. What is the relationship? That must have been a heckle which was stored, retrieved and used, but could not be a response to what Mr Murray had said. Obviously deafness was evident, because he was not speaking to the issue at hand. Mr Speaker, if you think that was the end of the evident deafness, he who sits near to the first became the second.

We had this statement about Guyana under the People's National Congress/Reform importing sugar. The worst thing we probably ever did was to import sugar. This was not only a statement made in deafness, it was a statement made in ignorance. We are proud and we are very proud,

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that we exported sugar and that we imported sugar as well. We are proud about it. There is nothing to be ashamed about. We were sufficiently astute and prudent in our management to understand that when the price of sugar was low on the world market and we were benefiting from preferential prices which were much higher, it was prudent management of the economy to export all of our sugar and to import sugar at a lower price. You could not be listening to the debate to insult yourself with such an argument. We are proud that we were prudent in our management and we were able to export all the sugar available at preferential prices, and to import sugar at lower prices to the benefit of the economy of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, that member who sought to make this point started his presentation by saying that we must stop politicking and immediately what he descended to was politicking, because all that was said could be politicking. And so, again, when you are deaf, sometimes you do not hear yourself, and so he made the statement as one those statements that should be made, but he was unable to assimilate the statement and based on that assimilation, not to descend to the very act to which he was admonishing others against.

The show was not yet over. There was one Member, who rose and referred to one of the speakers on this side of the House as a stand-up comedian and having said that, not having even heard himself, because it is the deaf, he then proceeded to make the most comical presentation to this House. He seemed to have retrieved his handover statement from the previous minister and presented that as his Budget presentation. It was so comical that in our context that we could hardly laugh at the comedy. Mr Speaker, we have a situation where hopefully, being early in the day, the Members on the other side may have heard what I said and may be able to benefit from what I have said. Whether that happens or not may be determined by the way in which they speak later in the day. We have indications of whether deafness still prevails or whether they are prepared to take this House seriously to listen and to make this House into a consultative and participatory body. In the Speech by the Minister of Finance, he refers to these lofty terms *consultative and participatory*. Well, we look forward to that, having alerted you to the state of deafness, which hopefully is not permanent. Mr Speaker, I hope that the Members on the other side, if they heard me, also heard the metaphor in what I was saying.

I would now like to turn more specifically to the Budget for the year 2006. In general terms, I would like to endorse what my colleagues had to say about this Budget. What this Budget lacks essentially is cohesion, because of the absence of a backbone that runs through the Budget unto

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which everything else hinges. It is a number of measures here and there and everywhere, but does not pull together as a cohesive programme for the country for the period 2006. If one could go to this Budget and in the various sectors, one could find evidence of how transformation will take place; if one will find evidence of modernisation and partnership; then one could say, yes there is the backbone, but everything is hanging. We cannot find that and I hope the House benefited yesterday, notwithstanding its state of deafness from the definitions of transformation, modernisation and partnership, which were offered by my colleague Ms Genevieve Allen and come to realise that this Budget does not present that kind of transformation and modernisation and partnership as the definitions suggest it should be presented.

Mr Speaker, another fundamental problem about this and previous budgets is that we are told that this Budget is the continuation of the programme of the last year and so there is this massive how-many-years' programme. I do not know that is ongoing and each Budget is just a phase or a stage of that programme. What do you find? Let us go to that how-many-years' programme. Approximately three years ago, the Minister of Finance, in his presentation told us that year he will present a wages policy. Well, three years have passed, not only has he not presented it, but it has dropped out of the Budget; it is no longer there. But alas, it may be that there is such a policy in place. That policy might be the annual imposition of increases by the Government. So I might be amiss, I might not know what is happening. It might indeed be that the policy has come to fruition by virtue of annual impositions on the people of this country on increases. When the unions seek to make issue of that policy, they are told that they are getting involved in politics, and they are politicising, and most recently the teachers have been threatened on radio and television. The Permanent Secretary and the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education appeared on television this morning threatening the teachers that even if they bring sick leave they will not be paid because they are involved in political manoeuvres. A government is always right; never able to accept when they are wrong; never able to accept the way in which they have deceived the Public Service and the teachers over the years; they have never brought the wages and salaries' negotiations to conclusion. They have been imposing and we have a situation that imposition may now be considered to be the government's wages and salaries policy. So, I may be wrong in what I have said that there is no such policy and if I am wrong, my humble apologies. Nowhere in the Budget have we seen an articulation of that

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policy. What we see is essentially an imposition of increased salaries and wages at the end of each year.

Mr Speaker, this way of having a Budget that says one thing at one time and in the context of the wide programme, something else at another time, I can also point to the fact that last year, when reference was made to the Budget of the Urban Development Programme, and they were talking about the development of the seawall and the development of D'Urban Park, there was also talk about the development of the Stabroek area. I might have misread, so I might not have seen it this year, so I hope that when my good friend Hon Shaik Baksh speaks, because he speaks about these things that he will tell us where we can find the continuation of that programme in the form of the Stabroek area development, which was referred to last year. I will be very grateful, I am not saying that I am perfect, I might have made a mistake, and so I subject myself to your correction, but I made the point that there is obvious evidence that this grand programme has things that jump in and jump out; that are done and not done, and therefore we choose the programme to rhetoric - exercise in rhetoric. Mr Speaker, that is not the only exclusion, I will ask my colleague, the Honourable Minister Clinton Collymore, who I am told will respond to me, notwithstanding the fact that he is not the one making the commitment. The Minister of Finance, two years ago, told us that next year, fiscal transfers will be implemented. We are awaiting it. It is not in this year's Budget. Fiscal transfers have disappeared from the map. Probably I am wrong; probably when the high official goes around sharing out \$50 million here and \$40 million there, that is the achievement of fiscal transfers, I do not know. I might not know the jargons and I might not be up to the science. I may be schooled, but certainly, fiscal transfers, which were promised, have disappeared from this programme that spans a number of years. It is not there. There is nothing here to indicate that fiscal transfers, as I understand it, will happen; but indeed we do have a situation where the head of state walks around and shares out money in large sums. I am told that some of them are from the lotto funds; some of them are in the Budget and really it is not any form of sharing out, it is just theatre. We have a theatrical situation where you say something in the Budget, it is approved by the Parliament and having been approved by the Parliament, he then goes out there as if he is Santa Claus delivering one thing twice, like a double dip. You come to Parliament, you have a programme, you say what the monies are for and then you go out there and then you suddenly discover these problems, and you are sharing out goodwill and fooling the people.

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Mr Speaker, that is a general observation about the way in which these Budgets are created and brought to us with a whole lot of rhetoric. It serves a purpose one time, omitted another time and the jolly show goes on.

Mr Speaker, I would now like to turn to some very specific points in the Budget Speech of 2006.

Mr Speaker, I turn to Pages 2 and 3, where it has indicated that *in excess of \$800 million was identified to fund various activities in Georgetown and the flood-affected areas in Regions 3, 4 and 5*. The first observation that I would like to make is that it not until late in 2005 that in that handout arrangement some \$50 million out of this \$800 was made available to the Mayor and City Council of Georgetown. Mr Speaker, when the rains came in December and there was some uncertainty about the efficacy of the drainage system in Georgetown, the Mayor and City Council came under immediate attack for their inefficiency and probably for squandering the resources. They came under attack from those who are present and from those who are not present. As the rainy season progressed, it became evident that works had been done in Georgetown; it is still evident that works were done in Georgetown, because the water runs off much faster now. Those who were on the attack gradually receded and they are now claiming glory for the state of Georgetown. I am not saying that there is no glory to be claimed, but you cannot be a dancer, you have to face the facts. You cannot on one hand say something that suits your purpose and the next time say something else. You either have the truth or the untruth; you either have the facts or that which is not fact. So we have the situation here of the \$800 million and some handouts in Georgetown and there is some evidence of improvement, but this grand-man-ship, where on one hand if it does not work out it is somebody else's fault and when it works out it is your glory. That is the nature of how things are handled here.

I now come to Page 4 where the Honourable Minister made the point:

Constitutional and other changes over the past five years have resulted in Guyana having perhaps the most consultative and participatory governance framework in the Commonwealth.

I have made the point over and over again that we have got a Constitution where there are lots of things written in black and white, but a Constitution where much of what is written has not been implemented and has not been realised. We cannot take the Constitution - that document - as the basis for comparison with other countries. We have to take the practice as that basis. The fact of the matter is that those countries do not require our Constitution because they are working better

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without it. They do not need to have constitutional arrangements to make them do what is right. They are working without these kinds of entrenchments. It is because of our problems we have these entrenchments so you cannot compare apples with oranges; and even if you were comparing apples with apples, the fact of the matter is that our apples are on the tree and their apples have been picked and the fruits are being enjoyed.

Mr Speaker, on the question of Local Government; more specifically, on the question of Regional Government, I would like to find out where are the consultative and participatory processes.

Take for example Region 4. The Regional Democratic Council of Region 4 duly elected by the people of Region 4 is not allowed to participate in the allocation of lands in Region 4. You excluded them from that committee on some flimsy reason and then you come to this House and try to say to the world about participation and consultation. Who are you consulting with in Region 4 - yourselves? Deafness once again prevails.

So, Mr Speaker, we have a Budget here that seeks to fool the people and to fool the nation. The way in which the Budget Speech is being televised will help in that process. When you watch the Budget Speech (I watched on TV last night) you see all of the Honourable Member Shadick; you see all of the Honourable Member Xavier; you see a little piece of Hanoman then you cut to get some news flash and then you see another little piece and it goes on. So it is like a PR in PR - proportional representation in the broadcast of the Budget. So the speeches of the members of the People's National Congress/Reform cannot be broadcast 100 percent. You get 100 percent and we get half of a percent. That is the nature of the broadcast.

These things that I am saying today may well stay within this hollow House, because NCN, certainly the Nation's station where my taxes go, will not show my presentation in this speech. , Mr Speaker, we come back to the question of the projects - the seawalls, the race course and all of those places. On Page 22 of the Budget, we are told that last year \$45 million... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mr Winston S Murray: Mr Speaker, I respectfully move that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

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Mr Vincent L Alexander: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Not only did they not want to broadcast my speech, but they want to shorten it as well. *[Laughter]* \$45 million was spent on that site. Well, I am no quantity surveyor, but I saw some bulldozers, I saw some sand trucks and saw sand being dumped and being levelled, and I would really like to know where that \$45 million went in this land of plenty sand. It is not only a land of many waters; it is land of sand too. Sand is one of the cheapest commodities in this country - \$45 million of sand on that site.

Well, those people who talk of the Auditor General, it is one thing for him to go and audit receipts and purchases and it is another thing for him to audit value. Mr Speaker, we need an audit on value. We do not need formal audits only, where you show receipts and all of that, we need audit on value so that we can understand how \$45 million was spent on that sand. I do not want to see receipts. I want a value audit and then you will see where the money has really gone. So Mr Speaker, we have a problem where this largest Budget that we are talking about will provide even larger take-home for the boys. This is a milking cow where projects like those will allow the boys to have their pockets filled - \$45 million in sand. That is what this \$100 and something billion is about. *[Interruption: 'How this place was supposed to be graded Vincent?']* I do not have a grader. I heard that your family has, so you should know, because you did not come up here, you stopped by the Stadium, you did not come this side.

Yes, Mr Speaker, having being distracted, I come to Page 35 of the Budget and there are two points I want to make about what happens on this page. Here, the Honourable Minister outlines all the things they are going to do about the flood. I do not want to read them out, all the things here, there and everywhere about the flood. What he did not do, is to give us a comprehensive plan, which in the first instance identifies the problem or seeks to put mechanisms in place by identifying the problem and then a plan to correct the problem. What he has here is a set of *ad hoc* responses everywhere, but not a comprehensive understanding of the problems which are facing us in terms of flood; whether we need to go inland or stay on the coastland, whether we need to expand MMA or not. This is not addressed. Here again, we are going to be pouring money down into those tall pockets that will come for those projects, but our problems will not be solved. Mr Speaker, on this question of Drainage and Irrigation and Local Government, I heard Honourable Minister Sash Sawh in this House - no doubt, he will give us repeat performance later - to say, look in the distribution of these \$10,000, we have consulted with the people. They had a plebiscite. So they called out the whole village and you ask the people in the

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village to say which of them do not have a just claim, and you expect the people will say, *well that comrade do not give him money because what he write down is not right*. That is the approach, but, Mr Speaker, what one needs is a proper Local Government system where the Local Authorities will have records of the households and the farmers. So when there is a problem like this, you go to your institution - the Local Authority - and they can provide you with information that is authentic, that is verifiable, that is on the ground and on that basis one can then proceed to make allocations. What do we do? You do not follow the Local Authorities, you bypass the Local Authorities, and you go about and call a plibicite. Well, democracy has developed, but we seem to want to return to ancient Athens in our democracy. I do not know if that is why we are building the Stadium; if we want to call a national meeting to make decisions? You want to go back to ancient Athens. We need a system where Local Government is equally involved. They are elected. They were handpicked in 1994. Yes, they are elected and they are supposed to represent the people. They are local institutions which would have information and they are supposed to serve a purpose in the system of governance. Rather than having Ministers running about the place saying that they are looking after issues which the local people can look after those issues using the local institutions. But yet this Budget talks about governance, institutional strengthening when, in fact, continuously we have had in terms of Local Government institutional weakening - that is what we have had. Not even the rotation of the incompetent, they are also stable. There is stability there too. All these Chairpersons and Chairmen are stable from 1997 to now and imposing their critical state of stability on the people. So, I come to the latter part of Page 25 and in this part I will merely pose a question. I see here that the Hydrometeorological Project will be involved with the installation of a Doppler radar system. My simple question is where are we? Last year's budget on Page 34, said:

*In this respect under a €13.2 million regional weather radar warning system
Guyana will acquire Doppler digital radar.*

That is in 2005. I am not saying that they have not acquired it, because I am not into spin; I am merely asking a question. In 2005, under the project, you have acquired it. In 2006, what do you say to me -

*The Hydrometeorological Project involving the installation of a modern Doppler
radar system got on the way last year ...*

So you are saying that it started:

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... land was acquired and personnel were trained. Once completed, during the second half of this year, it is expected to improve weather and climate forecasting.

Now, I do not know. I can hardly discern from this mix of words what is being acquired based on what you said you were acquiring last year. I am seeing stuff about land being prepared, so I am at a loss and I merely asking a question, no accusations here; what is the position with this project that started last year and seems to be moving into this year? Hopefully it will not drop off this year like how other projects have dropped off in the past.

Housing and Water - On Page 41, one of the things that this Government speaks about is its glorious record on water. I just want to ask some questions. The Honourable Minister Baksh, on television telling the people about this camera which they acquired to go down in some well in Mocha, Arcadia and how much was spent on this camera, as if this camera is not something that GWI should normally have. You should not normally have it. They bought it for Mocha, Arcadia - *a sight for a people*. We bought this thing for you. GWI should have a camera in any circumstance. That is the first point.

The second point is, the need for the well in Mocha, Arcadia is the evidence of the failure of the project on the East Bank. The problem is not the well was not working when they took out that pump, which incidentally was a NGO pump, because those people are industrious in Mocha, Arcadia. When they took out that pump, the problem was not only the well. Do you know what the problem was? Well, it was not a problem as far as you were concerned. There is a project on the East Bank, where they are trying to create an integrated system and water was supposed to be delivered from the lines on the East Bank into Mocha Arcadia and it failed. Nobody wants to admit that failure, nobody wants to eat humble pie. So you are coming now with this fancy dangle about a camera that you bring, as if you rescued Mocha, Arcadia, when you imposed that state by virtue of the failure of the project to deliver water in Mocha, Arcadia. There are serious problems with the project. The question that arises here is value for money - millions of dollars. They cannot deliver water in the Mocha, Arcadia.

Look at these budget speeches, so many millions for design before you get to the project and when the design is finished and the project is implemented, the project is not working. All of them take the way of the Charity wharf. All want to take that way. So I am just asking a question. *[Interruption: 'You should go and see what is happening there.']* Go and see what?

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Go and see water not in Mocha, Arcadia, until you put in that new well recently. That is what I must go and see. It failed to deliver what was intended, be honest.

Mr Speaker, I ask on Page 42, what is planned for the sewerage system in Georgetown? And you know why I asked the question, Mr Speaker? I am asking the question, because we see here a sum of \$700 million, but I see no reference to the sewerage system. So my question has to do with an omission. If, in fact, something is going to happen here, but here, there is absolutely no reference and we know that the sewerage system in Georgetown needs urgent attention. All he talks about is the slush in Tucville. That was a crisis for years. That is not a part of the central system. I am talking about the old Georgetown Central Sewerage System. What is being done to that system? So, that question stands.

Amerindian Affairs has been one of the major areas of mouthing of this government. So I looked to see what is going to happen to the Amerindians. I see that there is talk about the Ministry being delinked from the Office of the President. I do not know in terms of delivery of services how much that really means, but I recognised that delinking. Congratulations, you are now a Minister in your own right. This year you have your own Budget. All the best! If I can help, I will help. *[Interruption: 'Test that.']* That is tested and proven already, not only in Amerindian Affairs, but in all other affairs, ask Jeffrey. I would stay far away from crime. So, you keep Home Affairs, I want to stay far from crime.

Mr Speaker, I ask a question: what are we doing for the Amerindians? We have here a couple lines about Health - a new health programme. Increasing access to Amerindian Communities, one could imagine one paragraph on our Amerindian brothers and sisters: no vision, no comprehensive programme, no plan - a paragraph. I have no doubt that under many programmes; there are many programmes with all sorts of names, as Minister Nokta will go around there sharing out chainsaws, tractors, and all sorts of things, boat engines, and things like that. The President sends this for you. I have no doubt that this would happen, but that does not represent a comprehensive approach to development. People do not want handouts these days, people want empowerment. Mr Speaker, one gets the impression that the intention is to keep the Amerindians subjugated un-empowered, so they have a begging bowl going to this Government for little handouts. *[Interruption: 'You sound like the PNC.']* I am the PNC. You want me to sound like you, the PPP. Yes! *[Laughter]*

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So, Mr Speaker, we are asking where is the programme for the Amerindian brothers and sisters? So that they may benefit, we do not want to hear what is going to happen - very abstruse - under SIMAP and all of those programmes where we do not get the fullness of what is happening at the level of this Parliament.

Mr Speaker, of tremendous interest to me is what is found in the Estimates on Page 413. I could read that is why I am going to that stage. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

Mr Winston S Murray: Mr Speaker, I kindly request that the Honourable Member be given an additional fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Mr Alexander.

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Mr Speaker, on Page 413 of the Current and Capital Revenue of Expenditure 2006, there is a heading 19005 - Project Development and Assistance. Under Project Development and Assistance, the Legend says *the provisions for subventions and municipalities*. That is okay *and Local Community Councils*. Mr Speaker, in this country, we have a situation where there is something called Local Community Councils, which are supposed to be registered in the Ministry of Local Government; something the Minister himself does not know about. There is one Parliamentarian who has been designated to be the Coordinator of Local Community Councils and unless she so designates you, you cannot be. So there are Communities where there are Councils in existence. She comes into the Community; she divides it and set up her own Council and uses these budgetary allocations to fund those Councils and then there is somebody on the radio who is telling me this is not an election Budget. She has been electioneering for the last how many years, discriminating against people in communities, sharing out monies without any known criteria, no transparency, in local parlance, *doing she own thing* with the state funds. I do not want to call her name in her absence.

Mr Speaker, the People's National Congress/Reform have grave concern about this allocation that will not be subjected to proper programmes, not be subjected to proper criteria for the existence of these bodies that will benefit from these monies and that in fact will be used as a slush fund for the elections. So Mr Speaker I am hardly amused when I am told that this is not an election Budget. We see in no uncertain terms when you come to the profiles of the projects that this money will go, in large measure, to local community councils. We know that there is no

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proper system of local community councils; we know that those are proxy PPP/C groups in areas where PPP/C groups cannot be formed; we know that used to discriminate against other groups where they have been formed. Therefore we do not accept that this body should exist and that our monies - the people of Guyana monies - should be dispense with through such a body which is highly political and highly discriminatory.

Mr Speaker, in this context I have no option, but to join with my senior colleague Mr Winston Murray in saying that the best thing to do with a Budget like this is to take it back, do it over, having been enlightened now that the ear supposed to be hearing, hear a bit and based on what you hear, do a bit and you may be able to speak a little with us about a proper Budget. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Minister in the Ministry of Local Development and Regional Development

Hon Clinton C Collymore: Mr Speaker, it is always interesting to rise to speak after Mr Alexander has spoken. *[Laughter]* He is an interesting speaker and he makes interesting points, but as I have already said he propagandised those points.

Mr Speaker, I rise to support the Budget and to point out that it is the most appropriate Budget under the circumstances. Our friends and colleagues on the opposite side speak a lot and they snort around the difficulties. In fact, they make heavy weather no pun intended of the things within the Budget. We have had last year two disastrous floods, but our friends seem to be gloating over the plight of the Guyanese people. Correct me if I am wrong, but this seems to be the perception that I am getting. You seem to be gloating over the plight of those two disastrous floods. The Economic Commission for Latin America looked at those floods and determined from their analysis that Guyana lost \$90.3 billion of its gross domestic product - sixty percent. Imagine a poor country like this loosing sixty percent of its GDP in floods - by any other means and you people gloating. Our friends know that there was a 100 percent increase in rainfall. The drainage situation and its installations were overwhelmed.

Mr Speaker, yesterday some member on the opposite side, I think it was Mr ... *[Interruption: 'Be careful.']* ...one of the guys on the opposite side, I remember his name. *[Laughter]* He remembered what is said in 1993 in this House, ... *[Jerome Khan]* ...when I was talking about

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the drainage canals silted up, so silted up that cows could walk across and we took endless photographs of this type of drainage situation. I also have a long memory like Khan and longer than Khan and I remember, when the present Leader of the Opposition, Mr Robert Corbin was the Minister of Agriculture and he was in charge of the MMA Scheme, when there was a heavy rainfall and floods all over the place. Do you know what he got up in this House and said? I was sitting over there on the front bench and he was over this side, he said, it is an act of God.

Corbin said so, but what happen to you people over there. *[Interruption: 'Corbin believes in God, he cannot say so.']* Vincent, I did not heckle you, I listened to you. What they are doing now is not recognising that this is an act of God.

Mr Speaker, there is something else that they are not recognising, all the engineers you have on that side, all the so-called intellectual people, the brains, they are not recognising one salient fact - global warming. They read a lot; everybody knows that the planet is getting warmer. If you do not know, well then you must be just as deaf as honourable member was talking. *[Laughter]* Not only that, but augurate, if you do not know that the planet is getting warmer. The ice caps are melting, the levels of the oceans are rising and therefore it means that the river levels will also rise. Do you not know that? Mr Speaker, I am not a scientist, but if the polar ice caps are melting, it must have an impact on the climatic conditions on this planet. Why are not we saying something about it? Look, you have an engineer over there smirking. Look, Kadir smirking and there is one who sits there, where is he? Why can't they talk about these things? Act of God - if God had a cell phone, I would have phoned him and say turn off the tap, but he has no cell phone.

Mr Speaker, I want to refer to the Budget on Page 1. This is the best that Mr Kowlessar could have done. We on this side of the House do not believe in obeah; we cannot work obeah and give you something better than this. This is the best that can be done and I challenge you to improve it although you are criticizing it.

Mr Speaker I want to quote paragraph 1.3 on Page 1. This is what the Minister of Finance had to say:

As I reported to this Honourable House during my 2005 Budget Presentation, the country suffered its worst national when heavy and persistent rainfall, beginning on December 24, 200, dumped nearly 60 inches of rain on the low coastal plain of Guyana. This situation was compounded by the overtopping of East Demerara

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Water Conservancy (EDWC). The areas that were severely impacted included the East Coast of Demerara and sections of North and South Georgetown. In addition, low lying villages on the West Bank and West Coast of Demerara were so inundated as to require a Presidential Declaration of disaster areas Regions 3, 4 and 5. Altogether, nearly 400,000 persons, representing some 52 percent of the population were affected.

And we are gloating and smirking.

Mr Speaker, if you would permit me to read just one more Paragraph 1.6 on Page 2, it says:

At the level of the economy, the Government commissioned the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), to undertake an economic assessment of the impact of the flood. The report, which was presented in March, estimated the economic loss from the flood to be \$93 billion, the equivalent of 60 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In addition, it predicted that the production of sugar and rice, two of the largest contributors to the GDP would fall precipitately. Taking these and other factors into account, ECLAC estimated that real output in the economy would decline to about 5.4 percent.

This is an honest Budget. He was still able to pay seven percent increase in wages and increase old age pensions by 75 percent. You have not praised us for that. Give us some praises man, we deserve it. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, let us put aside partisan politics for five seconds. What is happening to our planet? We are experiencing the impact of induced forces in the climatic equation on this planet. Over thirty hurricanes were registered in 2005, *[Interruption: 'In Guyana!']* ... in the Caribbean. New Orleans, that great city in the United States of America was damaged beyond recognition. Mr Speaker, those five seconds that I asked for are up.

Now let us have a word about the Local Government scenario. My good friend the Honourable Member Mr Alexander, we have a good relationship. He attacks me here, but he has his job to do, he has to sing for his supper *[Laughter]* so he is doing his job. A good friend, a very good friend, Mr Speaker, this is no joke, I said it before, I have the greatest respect for Mr Alexander, but he is on the opposite side; so we are on opposite sides. He was saying that Mr Murray made some points and we did not recognise them, because we are deaf. He is labouring under the false

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impression that that is so. The points that Mr Murray made about the Budget are where he questioned certain things that are illegal and unlawful. We have made a note and we are studying them and an appropriate response will be made at the correct time. So it is not true to say that Mr Murray spoke and we did not take into consideration what he had said. I want to tell this Honourable House that all the members on the opposite side who spoke, we made a careful note of what they said. It may not appear to them that we are taking them into consideration, but we know and record everything that they are saying and when they say something good, positive substantial, well we indicate that to them; when they do not we do not say anything. There is a deafening silence.

So Mr Alexander also spoke about another vexed question - fiscal transfers and he used that to try to trash the President he is always doing that. Mr Alexander knows that fiscal transfers are things the taskforce has been dealing with and we have not yet concluded the discussion on that. On the last occasion, when I spoke in this Honourable House, I did say that a bill is being drafted. Mr Alexander knows that as soon as the draft bill is in my hands, he is the first person to get a copy. All the local government Bills which are going to come to this House will go first to the Opposition. He knows that, they got the Municipal Bill and they will soon get a Local Government Bill and he is going to get the Fiscal Transfers Bill. There are other Bills and he is going to get them, but he is making propaganda.

Then, he spoke about Georgetown. Mr Speaker, it was only yesterday I met a delegation from the Georgetown City Council and this was a delegation which was supposed to be lead by Mr Oscar Clarke, but at the last moment he did not show up and it was lead by Mr Llewellyn John and consisted of about six persons and included the city engineer and some other persons. Mr Randwell Jordon who was the former Mayor and we had a very good exchange of views and when they left they were enthused with the interview with which they had with me. In fact, I was overwhelmed with their enthusiasm when they left my office. I do not know what the Honourable Member Mr Alexander is talking about. We have a good relationship, we discussed roads, we discussed drainage, we discussed the subvention, we discussed a proposal to expend certain sums of money from the City Council and they left satisfied. I do not know if they reported to Mr Alexander. In addition, I have agreed to give them some more money - to give each councillor some more money - and they were even more enthused about that. [*Interruption:*

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'Only Nokta can do it; you cannot do it'] I will show you that I am going to do it. *[Laughter]*
You do not know my portfolio.

The Honourable Member Mr Alexander also spoke about community councils; there are some problems with the Legend. The Legend should be Municipalities, Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and Community Development Councils, but they have tried to compress this thing and distort it. I do not want to defend the people, who put together the legend. It is wrong; it should have Municipalities, Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and Community Development Councils. *[Interruption: 'Look over your shoulder and tell her']* You just come back into this place so shut your mouth and listen. *[Laughter]* So for this year, on the Local Government situation, we want to put heavy emphasis on drainage; to look after the sluices; the kokers, the dams and the polders, because we realise that this aberration to climate is not only for 2005 - 2006 but it seems as though it is going to go on, it is a planetary cycle and therefore we have to come to grips with it.

Mr Speaker I thought Mr Alexander would have made heavy weather about the Urban Development Programme, but he did not say much about it. The Urban Development Programme is proceeding apace in the second phase and works are going to be done in all the municipalities:

- Georgetown;
- New Amsterdam;
- Anna Regina;
- Linden;
- Corriverton; and
- Rose Hall.

We are going to deal with roads, drains, outfalls the town halls and the markets. In addition, we are proceeding with the secondary towns programmes on several occasions, I made reference to this secondary towns programme, but the name has been changed to Community Services Enhancement Project. What is in a name? So we are trying to create four new towns to elevate existing NDCs into new townships and these are

- Bartica;
- Charity;

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- Parika; and
- Supernaam.

Altogether that project will cost \$3.6126 billion and the allocations for this year are \$566 million. Civil works alone is taking \$460 million, so we are expending a considerable sum. The funding is by the Caribbean Development Bank.

Where waste disposal is concerned, that has been a sore point and many in the society have been agitating. We expect the major waste disposal facility at Haags Bosch to get on stream within the next two months. They are waiting on the IDB in Washington to clear the loan. The cost of that project is \$4.5773 billion and for this year we are allocating at a start up \$558 million. So it gets underway. There is a steering committee already set up and the PEU is being put together. This PEU, Mr Alexander, includes some elements from City Hall so we are not excluding City Hall. This is no joke. Whatever we do, we are including them and they also exist on the Project Executing Committee. This Haags Bosch project has a catchment area including the city of Georgetown and all the NDCs on the East Coast of Demerara and the East Bank of Demerara. In order to save time and to avoid unsanitary situations on the East Coast, we have had to create a temporary landfill in the Lusignan Backdam and we are trying to implement all the regulations and the rules of the Environmental Protection Agency. Because of the emergency nature of the dumping of rubbish on the East Coast, we have had to utilise the spot without all these EPA procedures being put into place. I just want to tell you, because I do not want you to go there and say Collymore telling lies in the Parliament. We are going right now to deal with situation and to see that all the EPA procedures are put in place, but the people are complaining about the garbage. What are you going to do? While the cow is starving the grass is growing. So this is a confession and we ask for your forbearance, because this deals with the community environmental health, but we are definitely going to deal immediately with the EPA procedures. *[Interruption: 'What about landfill at Eccles?']* That is in full conformity of the EPA, because if you have a guy like Mr Alexander looking, you have to do everything properly. *[Laughter]* So, Mr Speaker, I just want to wind up (I do not speak long) by saying to this House what this legislative programme is. I mentioned a few bills. We have had the Evaluation for the Rating Purposes Act 2005 that was passed and assented to by the President. We have passed in this House the Municipal and District Councils (Amendment) Bill 2005. That Bill is at the stage of a Special Select Committee, where it needs the attention of a special select committee and we

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expect to get this select committee underway at the earliest possible opportunity. Soon to come up, after it clears the Office or the Chambers of the Attorney General will be the Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2006 and then we are putting in finishing touches to the Fiscal Transfers Bill. These fiscal transfers deal with how central government will use the sums of money at its disposal in order to properly apportion the allocations. It is accordance with the Constitution, because the amendment says that these transfers should be independent of the Minister. In other words, the Minister must not say well this Council gets this and that council gets that. A formula will operate independent of the Minister.

For this year, we are going to have \$475 million and it means when you compare it to last year, this in an increase by \$205 million. City Hall is going to get a larger sum than the \$16 million that they have been getting. Probably they anticipate what they are going to get they sent me a programme for \$41 million. They only used to get \$16 million; they sent me a programme for \$41 million so I had to tell them yesterday that they seem to be privy to information, not at my disposal. So we have to discuss at various levels and after consultation determine exactly how much these Municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils will get.

Where the Local Government Commission is concerned, there is a Local Government Commission Bill being finalised and we also have to present to this Honourable House in due course a Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill. This will deal with the electoral system. This system is still at a stage of indecision between the bipartisan forces on the taskforce and whenever a decision is made, Mr Alexander will be the first to know, because he is the co-chairman. This guy is a powerful guy, but he is pretending to be the underdog, he is not an underdog here. *[Interruption: 'He is watching Basil.']* He is watching Basil. So the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill 2006, will be coming in due course. One of the main impediments to the elections is being dealt with and that is the voters' list - once we have the voters' list, we can quickly finalise the electoral system and proceed.

Then we have on our agenda, the Pounds (Amendment) Bill 2006 and a Solid Waste Management Bill 2006.

Mr Speaker, I do not want to occupy much more time. I trust that I have said enough and my colleague Minister Nokta will be able to fill the gaps where the regions are concerned and certain other areas within his responsibility and his portfolio. I thank you, therefore, for listening to me.

[Applause]

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The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Mr Stanley Ming

Mr C Stanley Ming: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Budget Debate and as mentioned by the Honourable Minister Collymore, when ECLAC did their assessment, the losses to Guyana as a result of the floods were quite significant - 60 percent of the GDP.

In the presentation of the Budget and as was mentioned earlier, the Minister of Finance had indicated that in excess of \$800 million was identified to fund drainage activities in Georgetown and the flood-affected areas of Regions 3, 4 and 5 including short term interventions such as desilting of major canals and clearing of inter-street drains. I think, it would be fair to say at this juncture that some areas especially around Georgetown have benefited to some extent from the work that was done specifically areas like Albouystown and the immediate environs around Georgetown.

In the Presentation by the Minister of Finance, Paragraph 3.33 it says:

In the medium to long term, a comprehensive programme of reconstruction and physical rehabilitation of sea and river defences and drainage and irrigation, along with extensive rebuilding of the human resource base will have to be implemented.

Mr Speaker, it is encouraging to note that the government has recognised what needs to be done. However, I would like to refer to an article which was in the Editorial of the Sunday, Stabroek of 22 January and the heading says:

LESS IS MORE

If there is one thing that the floods of January 2005 and January 2006 demonstrate, it is that we really do not need politicians. We need first rate administrators who are informed by professionals in their field and by ordinary people on the ground. Administrative decisions in the technical sphere cannot be informed by politics. That is a recipe for disaster. The rain does not discriminate between one party or another in office and the floods do not care what the victims' political affiliation are. And by the same token what needs to be done to keep us all above the water flying does not have a political component.

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It goes on to say:

And let us involve all the engineers who have worked in the past in a senior capacity on our drainage system and who are prepared to make themselves available so the wider spread of experience would be at the government's disposal.

Mr Speaker, I would like to contribute to this Debate by informing my colleagues on both sides of the House of some of the observations that I made during the last year in my travels around the country. I did not go there to these places, because I wanted to interfere with the job of the government. I went to most of these places at the invitation of citizens of the country, who solicited my intervention so that I can represent their concerns in this House. I just want to share as a matter of information, because I think it might be useful to the Ministers involved or the officials involved if they can pay some attention to what was pointed out to me by citizens of Guyana.

Just recently, I had the opportunity of flying along the coast starting from the East Bank of the Essequibo up to the area just outside of Ogle. If one was to travel there at the present time by air, one would observe that there are many sections of the sea defence along the West Coast of Demerara and the East Bank of the Essequibo that have either collapsed or in a tremendous state of disrepair. The collapse of the areas outside of Leonora was no accident; it was under threat for a long time. Unfortunately, we seem to only respond when it becomes a crisis an emergency which invariably costs us a lot more and if we do preventative maintenance. So, my first suggestion is that the relevant authority pay attention to those areas where the seawall in some areas has already collapsed and it is only the earthen dams that exist behind that are holding the water at bay at this present time. I have those photographs that I can share with whoever is interested at anytime they request same.

There are several kokers along those areas that I speak about that are not functioning and the reason why they are not functioning are quite depressing. I was invited by the residents and the farmers at Salem on the east Bank of Essequibo, just a few weeks ago, who pointed out that there is a three-door koker that exists at that point of which only one is functioning. The reason why the other two are not functioning are simply that the winches are in a state of disrepair and some of the pulleys are missing. The cost for replacement could not be very significant in view of the

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fact that all three of these doors were new, replaced and repaired just over a year ago. So at the present time the doors are perfectly intact, but only one can be opened.

In the case of Naamyreck, which is the next area, east of Salem, there are metal gates that are used to control the flow of water out of that canal. One of those gates have rusted and have now wedged in position it cannot be functional. Two of them have been repaired, but the third one remains in a state of total disrepair.

Mr Speaker, as we can go along the West Coast of Demerara, at Windsor Forest you can see kokers there that are in disrepair, the sea wall there is undermined, because of erosion of the concrete and the steel. That is just a window into what is prevalent throughout the country I have no doubt and I do not think that anyone in this House would dispute the fact that during the early part of last year and this year, there have been incessant if not record rainfall. I recall growing up in Georgetown, when there was heavy rain within twenty-four hours, within which period you would have had two falling tides; the water that was on the surface of the land which caused drains to overtop would drain off. If we had twice or three times or four times as much rainfall that would have been normal, but basic common sense tells me that within two or three days that water should run off. However, what we have had since January of last year is that when the rainfall is two weeks, three weeks, four weeks and in some cases five weeks, the only reason why that occurred, has nothing to do with the excessive rainfall, it has to do with the fact that the system to get the water off the land is not functioning. We have to be honest about that. Mr Speaker, as you go along the East Coast of Demerara, the situation is no different from what I have explained to this House just now. Every koker that exists on the Atlantic Ocean, the outfalls are blocked, because of the built up of heavy sedimentation which comes from the Amazon. For many years those outfalls have not been de-silted and in some cases the main canals leading to those outfalls are also heavily silted up.

Now, during the heavy and excessive rainfall of 2005, we had what an engineer termed a lot of feel-good exercises. When asked what his personal opinion was by the subject Minister at the time, about the tractor-driven pumps or mobile pumps that were being mobilised, his comment was it is useful, but it is not helpful. I would not go into the details as to how he described that comment. I will tell you why it is useful and not helpful. I am not an engineer by profession, but I have worked with many engineers and many engineering projects around this country and I have learnt by working with them. The average tractor-driven pump or mobile pump that we see

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deployed around Guyana delivers water at the rate of 800 to 1,000 cubic metres per hour maximum, that is if it is working well and most of them in Guyana are old and do not work well. That comes out at 225,000 gallons per hour. A typical koker in Guyana is 16 feet wide on the low tide when there should be approximately four to six feet head of water on the inside of that koker. The flow through such a koker is 12,960,000 gallons of water per hour; that translates to 58 of those pumps that you see being deployed around the Guyana. So it equates the performance of a one door koker, you have to deploy 58 of those pumps and if you speak to the farmers and the fishermen at the various locations along the East Coast, as I witnessed two Sundays ago, when I stopped to speak with them, there was a pump being installed and they were all laughing, because they said that the only people that the government is fooling is themselves and not us.

Now Mr Speaker, for those of us who may like to understand the demands of drainage in this country if you go to the five-door koker at Land of Canaan there is a plaque on the bridge and it tells you that that five-door when opened, which is almost opened 24/7 when it needs to be, because it is higher than the Demerara River at normal tide and only have to be closed for two to three hours in the spring tide, that facility dumped water at the rate of forty-five million gallons per hour. I do not need to tell you how many pumps you need to do that, but it is over 200.

Now Mr Speaker, the solutions are not rocket science. As I said in the past, when I was young and you will remember too and most of you here who live in Guyana, that in the past when we had rains that within a day or the maximum two days the water went off the land and the reason for that is that there were many kokers that function and there were many drains that were kept and maintained to the right depths and the outfalls were de-silted. Now what we had a few days ago and I am sure most of you would have seen it, there was an article and photograph in the papers where a dredge, I think it said that BK International would acquired this dredge and the called the name *Nessi* and it was acquired to start de-silting of the outfalls of the rivers on the East Coast. I happen to know that dredge very well, because it was stored at a property which my company owns for a long time prior to being sold to Mr BK International. The dredge was attempted to be deployed on Thursday last in the Mahaicony River without adequate preparations being made. The first catastrophe they had was, because the proper preparations were not made and they attempted to launch it in the river, damage was done to the power steering system and its self-propelled mechanism so it cannot move on it own capacity.

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Subsequently, a boat was commissioned from nearby and the engineer who was present and represented the owner of that dredge indicated that it would not suffice the attempt to move the dredge to test it to see if it could work in those conditions. However, members of the BK International organisation insisted that they could make the necessary manoeuvres to make it happen. Suffice it to say that within minutes of moving off from the landing they were in difficulty, because they could not control the dredge as it proceeded towards the mouth of the Mahaicony River. Fortunately, the engineer whose property it was still at the time, lowered one of the spuds and affixed the dredge to the bottom until such time when additional boats could be summoned to help to bring the dredge to a place that was safe. Mr Speaker, the bottom line was that after a lot of activities and four hours later, a further emergency arose where they had to raise the spud and anchor the dredge among the trees. The engineer subsequently spent four hours in the tree, because he was scared that the dredge would end up in the ocean. Now that is typical of what has been happening throughout the country. In the attempt to give people the *feel-good* experience, proper arrangements and proper planning have been absent and the result is that as Mr Alexander said, we have not been getting value for money and we have not been fixing the problems that need to be fixed.

If that is not bad enough, we have a situation where in April 2000, there was a document published and an advertisement in the national newspapers, *Government of Guyana Civil Defence Commission* and I will read from the cover of the document:

*El Nino Emergency Assistance Project, supply of three gravel pumps
to the Civil Defence Commission for the National Drainage and Irrigation
Board.*

This was to be funded through the World Bank IDA Credit Number April 2000. It says here, for these three gravel pumps, the description - Part B:

The suction dredges are intended for quick de-silting of outfalls channels on the sea coast and riverbanks where flood control sluices are located. It is anticipated that the units would also be suitable for de-silting drainage canals and as such the units are required to be mobile and as compact as possible.

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This was April 2000. Mr Speaker, four companies tendered for that programme and I have here the results of that tender, but I will not deal with the details except to say that three of the companies were foreign or foreign represented companies. They were from:

- Trinidad;
- United States; and
- Holland.

In the three cases of the foreign companies, their quotations were just around US\$1 million, the engineer's estimates for these three devices was \$350,000. The local company that was subsequently awarded the contract ECI Engineering made a bid of \$430,000. Now, one would say that the local people are in a better position, because their wages are lower and their salaries are lower so that they can do it at a lower price, but I want to say to the House that as indicated on the cover note of this tender document, it says three gravel pumps. Now, I happen to know very much about these gravel pumps for the simple reason that I happen to be the Chairman of Industrial Engineering, when these pumps were designed in the early 1980s to be used in the gold mining and the diamond mining industry. The company Industrial Engineering has since had a patent on this pump. This pump was never designed to pump silt or compacted clay by any means. When the document was presented to the foreign suppliers, they all said that the specifications provided could not do the job and they would strongly recommend that a suitable cutter-suction dredge be used to do or attempt to do the job. That is why they quoted just approximately \$1 million for the units. Needless to say job was rewarded to ECI and the sad report that I have to say to this House is that none of the three pumps ever worked. They are lying derelict around the country side. Mr Speaker, this offers to this House a window into what is the problem throughout this country on many projects that are being awarded by a system that bears no significance on what is technically necessary and what is competent or what is properly planned. If we are going to address the problems of flooding and the removal of water from the various areas of the country, we have to become serious about the matter and stop playing around with the lives of the people of Guyana by feel-good experiences. *[Applause] [Interruption; 'Why you did not give advice on the barge? You are a technical expert']* I was not in government then.

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Mr Speaker, two weekends ago I was invited to visit Mahaica. At Mahaica, I witnessed an organisation which we all know - the CIOG - were in the process of unloading from trucks- one and a half truckloads of essential food items and other supplies - which they were taking up the river to families whom they considered were in need. I spoke with the representatives of the CIOG to commend him and his team on their efforts. He said to me that you know Mr Ming, unfortunately, we would have liked to do a lot more, but when we approached the Civil Defence Commission for help, they told us that the only help that they can provide to help us to distribute what we are setting out to distribute was a few gallons of gasoline when they went to Mahaicony, but when they were going to Mahaica, because of limited resources they could not get any fuel.

I mentioned this for the simple reason that a few days later, I attended a meeting that was summoned by the Red Cross to which all the various NGOs, PAHO and the other international agencies were summoned, to be told that the CDC had suggested that 20,000 food hampers be acquired by these NGOs and be delivered to the CDC so that they can undertake the distribution, because they were well placed to do it as against the various NGOs. This unfortunately mirrored what happened in 2005, when for very partisan reasons and cheap politicking, the Ministers of the government and senior government functionaries behaving as though they were Santa Claus giving out little gifts to various communities around the country and at this time they request 20,000 food hampers when the people of Mahaica, Mahaicony and Abary are losing their crops and their cattle is nothing short of cheap politicking, there is no other description.

Mr Speaker, I wish to conclude my presentation by referring to an article that was published in the Editorial of yesterday's Stabroek News. I want to say that I subscribe to what it says there and I think that most of you will if you want to be honest to the people of Guyana, it says here:

Absolute necessities

We have addressed previously what the priority should be and they should continue to be restated by all until the authorities take notice. First and foremost should be a rapid assessment of the coastal drainage needs in the face of the reported larger amount of rainfall and the consequential run-off from the back lands. This of course, should take account of the threat of the sea and the possibility of major problems simultaneously with heavy rainfall. One would

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hope that Guyanese experts both here and abroad would be marshalled for the task.

It goes on to list a few other items, but the final paragraph says:

The rains of emergency relief have to be put on firmer ground for example, in the hands of a well resourced Civil Defence Commission as obtained in many parts of the Caribbean and not in the hands of the President and his Ministers.

Mr Speaker, I hope that we all take cognisance of what the people out there throughout Guyana are aware and we stop monkeying around with trying to give feel-good experiences and do what is necessary to ensure the livelihood and well-being of the citizens of Guyana. Thank you.

[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Minister of Housing and Water

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: Mr Speaker, I rise in support of the 2006 Budget of the PPP/C Government.

I am indeed elated that the last speaker Mr Ming has on this occasion failed to mention anything at all on the Housing Sector. I am indeed elated because he has been a chief critic over the years of the housing programme of the government. Things are moving, I am elated and I am very, very happy that he now feels more comfortable and convinced that not only the housing programme moving apace, but also this old talk about marginalisation and discrimination in the housing sector has been taken care of by the PPP/C Government.

I feel, Mr Ming started out very, very sound by giving some good advice in the first half of his presentation about preventative maintenance; about the kokers, we must get the kokers in a state of readiness. These are things which the government shares. We share these views and we are moving a foot to ensure that all these things are in place - very good. Unlike other presenters before, he has acknowledged before that there has indeed been incessant and record rainfall in Guyana contributing to the flooding of our country. Again, he has mentioned that some of the outfalls are blocked and indeed one or two of them are blocked and they have been cleaned about one week ago - not all of them.

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Then he reduced his presentation to pumps; he spent ten minutes talking about tender procedures and the amount of money spent - \$450,000 for pumps, which are lying idle. We are not aware of this, if he as a Member of Parliament had a concern, he could have drawn that to the relevant authorities. There is the Economic Services Committee; he can go there. This government established an Economic Services Committee on which the opposition agreed and he comes here now with his presentation. We do not know whether this in fact so, about \$450,000, but I am quite sure that one of my colleagues will investigate this and in their presentation will counter that.

Then he cited the supply of items from CIOG. Any NGO who wants to assist in the flood relief must have a follow-through, they must have their little boats waiting and he himself just said that the Minister is going around and share the food stuff, let the NGO get their little boats and go into the creeks and rivers and share the food stuff. Why do they have to go to the CDC?

Then he spoke about the Red Cross meeting, where a request was made for 20,000 food hampers from the NGOs and he started to criticise the government and its ministers for going around distributing foodstuff and we have no apologies to make for that. *[Applause]* Because we are in partnership with the people at the grass root level and we will continue to do so; no apology whatsoever, that is what we were elected for to be with the people and as His Excellency the President said he did not appoint the Ministers to sit down in offices. The PNC Ministers used to sit down in offices and I had the experience of one of my colleagues at the University, who was the Minister of Finance, I could not even get access to him. I waited outside of the Ministry of Finance when I was working at the University of Guyana for hours and I could not see the man so the Ministers could not have access. You have access to the Ministers of this Government every single day, not only in the Ministries, but in the fields. I am glad that Mr Alexander made a point about seeing me at Mocha. Yes, I was there with the people of Mocha re-commissioning the well and every single day we are out there - the ministers of this government - and that is the reason why we will win the next elections. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, instead of criticising, hoodwinking and brinkmanship as Mr Alexander has just portrayed there and the other Honourable Member Dr Max Hanoman - very shallow and superficial presentations, you should be complimenting this government in all their problems, the internal problems and external problems - the floods. Look I have it here, the devastation of the floods for this country, the rising oil prices and yet we were able to give the working people of

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this country a seven percent increase in wages despite all of this. Look, these are experts. This is not like the Honourable Member Mr Alexander who is a political scientist, he must stay in his own field, do not venture into economics and engineering.

This is the ECLAC Report, the socio and economic assessment of the damages and losses caused by the January to February 2005 flooding. All Members of Parliament can have access to this and do not tell me that you do not have it. This is not a classified document, obtain a copy or ask and we will send one to the National Assembly for distribution and let me read to show you the impact of this flood. On Page 72, it says:

The impact of the flood is sizable even if compared to the effects of more potent phenomenon such as hurricanes and earthquakes that have ravished the Caribbean in the past year.

And they have a total table here. You all must read it again.

At a sectoral level the effects of the disaster were most visible in housing and agriculture the housing sector accounts for sixty percent of the total damage estimates.

And so on and so forth; a very good document, a very sound document by specialists in the field. Again, we also know the impact of oil prices on the economy not only in Guyana, but in many other developing countries in particular.

One member over there, instead of focusing on these things, of praising the government on establishing a hospital in New Amsterdam with Japanese grant aid for the people of Region 6, what is he talking about? He is talking about some garbage being dumped at the back of the hospital. Such superficial presentation, the people of Region 6 are benefiting from a brand new hospital and shortly the people of Region 10 Linden will benefit from another new hospital. This is a people's government and then they are talking about the expenditures. We are spending more money every year - \$102.9 billion. We are increasing the expenditures for the people of this country, more hospitals, more schools in putting in better drainage systems and sea defence systems. We have no apologies for that.

Mr Speaker, Mr Alexander has come on with two or three points for the Housing and Water Sectors. He stated that the D'Urban Park development ... I think he contradicted himself, because initially he said there is nothing in the Budget on the D'Urban Park development. Let me tell you that development is for the people of South Georgetown. They must have

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recreational and sporting facilities. We are developing that area there for the people of South Georgetown. We have had consultation with the people of Lodge and surrounding areas. I can assure you that is the partnership that we are talking about and he mentioned that there is nothing. In the end, he spoke about this \$45 million and in the beginning he said there is nothing in the Budget. If you look at Page 22 of the Budget, it says:

The implementation of the Georgetown Development Plan got underway.

We do not only make plans and leave it on a shelf; we are implementing the Georgetown Development Plan. Instead of complimenting the government for bringing a new Georgetown Development Plan into being - fifty years ago we had one. For twenty eight years, the PNC did not see the light of the Georgetown Plan and this PPP/C Government brought a Georgetown Plan into being and has implemented it. Compliment us for that. Part of the plan entails the conversion of D'Urban Park, which we called the horse racing park. Okay, it used to be an old horse racing area and Kitty seawall into recreational areas and in this respect, lights were installed along the seawall between Camp Street and Vlissengen Road in Kitty. I want to say that we have gone further; we have extended the lights towards the bandstand for the benefit of the citizens of Georgetown.

Last year, \$45 million was spent in grading, levelling and land filling the site at D'Urban Park. Efforts are also being made to install lights along the western end of the seawall (this is important) and to involve the private sector in the development of the bandstand area. Now let me tell you, \$45 million were tendered, bid documents were uplifted and tendered. They were evaluated by the Evaluation Committee appointed by the Central Tender Board; they were evaluated and submitted for a tender to be awarded and no objection was given by the Cabinet. We went through all the tender processes and an award was made. We have all the documents there for auditing - value-for-money auditing too. Unlike the PNC, with all those missing vouchers - thousands - you cannot account for anything. We have all the documents and we can have a value-for-money audit on that. Mr Speaker, the D'Urban Park development was a very, very low area. It has taken thirty thousand cubic yards; the measurements are there by our engineers - our professional people. We have a team of engineers, a consultant who gave us the designs and we have spent a lot of money in filling, a very low area subject to flooding. You saw the last flood; did you see any water on D'Urban Park? We also did work on the drainage. Mr Speaker, that would be great development for the citizens of Georgetown; we have a full plan

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for it. We did not Budget money here for it, because it is expected that both the Georgetown Development Plan and the Seawall Development Plan will be private sector driven -partnership with the private sector. Those sporting bodies already two or three sports bodies are gearing and waiting to set up sporting facilities at D'Urban Park. You will see it in the months ahead.

Mr Speaker, Mr Alexander also commented on the well at Mocha. He is now an engineer. I do not know; we will have to transfer him to the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Guyana. The well at the Mocha had obstacles. I have a tape and I will let GWI send one to the Honourable Member here and to see the huge obstacles. I have already telephoned them. We had a lot of difficulties getting out the obstacles, [*Interruption: 'A bore hole!'*] no, because you do not understand bore holes; ask the member from Bartica, she will tell you what a bore hole is. She will tell you about the bore holes. [*Laughter*] [*Interruption: 'The Speaker sits down; he may want to know if it is parliamentary language.'*] A bore hole is a technical language being used, yes - hydro-geology. We had tremendous difficulties and we did have a camera; it was an old camera and we decided to buy a new camera for \$8 million, but I am happy to report here that the people of Mocha here are happy. He saw them on the television; they were all in high praise, because they are now receiving water on the first floor level - all those people at Mocha I also want to report that the Eccles major Scheme on the East Bank is working. We are now metering to cut consumption down and if you know water technology, you will know unless you get the consumption of the population down, you will have difficulties in some areas. So we are metering all the people on the East Bank project area.

The next point Mr Alexander mentioned was the sewerage system. What is being spent? I will tell him, because we are now spending some money on the pre-slot facility at Tucville. We also intend to spend \$6 billion over the next five years for Georgetown water and sewerage; \$1.4 billion out of that has been earmarked for repairs and rehabilitation of the sewerage system in Georgetown. So I think that I would answer his question with that statement.

Mr Speaker, in the light of all the adversities the Budget has been formulated to ensure that the macro stability of the country is maintained. That is very, very important. Notwithstanding all the disasters, as I mentioned before, the government has been able to increase wages by seven percent; more than that, we have been able increase pensions by seventy-five percent. More has to be done, we recognise that. We have been able to give 10,000 pensioners across this country water tariff relief, waivers, exemptions to the tune of over \$80 million dollars. This is a people's

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government. This is what we have done notwithstanding the hardships and the Budget is a no-tax Budget, a tax-free Budget, imagine that in all of this and more than that we have increased the income tax threshold to give the ordinary man more money to take home. *[Applause]* All of these are things we have been doing; we have been managing this economy.

Let me tell you the donors do not give money by loans and I say grants and unlike what the Honourable Member Mr Jerome Khan said. He spoke about grants, there are no benchmarks and conditions for grants; they just look at a country and give grants to the people - such foolhardiness. Let me tell you what the International Financial Institutions said about the government's management of this economy. I will first go to January 2005 and then to December 2005 - over the year:

Guyana have made welcome progress in implementing its medium term economic programme ...

This is not short term this is the medium term economic programme

... while economic growth has been weak in the face of a difficult domestic and external environment...

Difficult!

Macro economic stability has been achieved; inflation is low; the exchange rate is stable and the external debt is lower following the HIPC initiative completion point.

This is what they had to say. Why you believe so much money is coming to this country? I tell you why? Furthermore, just let me read the next statement first. This is the release of December 2005 and these international organisations do not play around.

Guyana has qualified for IMF debt relief because of its overall satisfactory recent macro economic performance, progress in poverty reduction and improvements in public expenditure management, accountability systems, transparency systems are in place.

I will list some for you just now...

In particular since reaching the completion point in the enhanced HIPC Initiative Guyana has maintained macro economic stability in the face of an adverse external environment.

They have repeated it.

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Although achieving high growth has been a challenge...

It has been a challenge.

... inflation rate has been kept low, the exchange rate has remained stable and external reserves have been kept above three months of imports regarding the poverty reduction strategy seventeen were attained or exceeded.

A remarkable evaluation by an international agency! So Mr Speaker, we have been moving ahead to the extent that more and more loans have been granted, loans are being converted into grants. Only three months ago, the World Bank (they do not normally give grants) gave a \$12 million grant to the water sector to provide treated water to the population of Guyana. The Japanese have come in and have now followed suit with an \$8 million project for the Corriverton water supply. We expect that to be approved in March. So we go on and on. They have to be satisfied about your systems of accountability, proper auditing, so this talk about lack of accountability and so on, I do not know where it is coming from. We will talk about the corruption just now that they have bandied about in while.

So all and all we are on the move, we have a medium term plan and we have to progress forward with that plan. In terms of what the Honourable Member Mr Jerome Khan said about grants - grants are only given if the donor agencies are satisfied. They must be satisfied, otherwise it will not come. All the grants given to this country have conditions attached to it, in terms of accountability; in terms of performance he has not said so. The whole structure of government has to be satisfactory to the IFIs and we have been moving ahead with that.

Mr Speaker, also we are projecting growth, we have the plans in spite of the difficulties and look at the Go-Invest. Listen Honourable Member Mr Murray has talked about, I have the profile here, if he asks for it, it will be given to him too. Let him ask Go-Invest. For 2005 total Investment Projects 140; total investment both local and overseas to the tune of over \$68 million. You said that, foreign projects forty and local projects ninety a good mix of foreign and local projects. It is there. I have the whole list here, all the projects in detail. *[Interruption: 'Can you name ten?']* Do not ask me to name ten. Do you want me to name ten? There is a whole set of projects; ask for the materials and you will get them, in the timber industry, in the agro-processing industry, in the ICT, in services and so on. Jobs have been created by all of these. We have it by entity and you know about RUSAL. *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us have some order; you are getting a little bit...

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Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: You know about OMAI and you know about all of them. *[Interruption: 'Oh my!]* Yes, Omai, not my oh!

The Speaker: He does not have to respond to all of those.

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: So we are moving... Mr Speaker, we are moving by leap and bounds. I did not hear in any presentation by the opposition, because in previous years they criticized the revenue collection, the performance of the GRA and so on. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Mr Hamilton, Mr Hamilton will you please

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: The revenue collection which is the hallmark of an efficient administration, because you cannot spend what you do not receive in a budgetary sense. The revenue collection performance - GRA has been exemplary and I want to give you a figure from when this government restructured the GRA and its working, there is need for more institutional strengthening and we granted that. We are making use of the computer technology and that is in place now. A comparison between the years 2000, when the GRA was set up and 2005 shows that there is a substantial increase in revenue collection to the tune of \$14.9 billion or 39 percent over 2000, which is a good performance and we must give credit to GRA. More so, GRA has really performed well on the recently passed legislation for VAT and Excise legislation and we must give praise for that. They are assisting in the overall revenue collection of the government and that is very exemplary performance on the part of the GRA.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Housing Sector. I think six speakers from the opposition spoke and I did not hear anybody talk about the housing sector. As I mentioned, the year 2005 presented challenges, because of the flood and I quoted from the ECLAC Report, which shows that it was the hardest hit sector and we have had to rise to the challenge. I am happy to report that the Ministry of Housing had risen to the challenge and I want to pay complements to the staff in the Ministry of Housing in this regard. In 2005, I said in my budget presentation that it is the objective of the Ministry to complete the entire basic infrastructure in all the housing areas in this country, squatter settlements and housing schemes all of those areas which were established prior to the 1 January 2005, roads, water supply, drainage and bridges. *[Interruption: 'It is not finished in Bartica.']* I said that by the end of the year 2006. You were not listening Honourable Member. I want to report to this House that we are far advanced. If you go to any part of this country now and you will see the massive works going on. If you want you can walk to Sophia, you do not have to take a hire car or a minibus; you could walk and see the massive works going

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on in Sophia. If you are living in Linden, you could go to Block 22, you can go to Amelia's Ward, you can go to Wisroc go and see what is taking place. You go to Region 7 at Bartica, where the Honourable Member has come from and you will see Four Miles... [Interruption: 'That is only a trial at Four Miles. What happened at the Secondary School Housing Scheme?'] ... On a point of correction Honourable Member, we have built a road and we are building more roads at the Secondary School Housing Scheme. We have also built roads at the West Indian Association Scheme. [Interruption: 'Diamond have paved roads.']. Oh yes, I will respond. For the Diamond/Grove Housing Scheme, the infrastructures in so far as roads, drainage systems, drainage structures are concerned and bridges have been completed - paved roads for Diamond Grove. My friend you will have to pay a visit, if you go to Diamond Grove now you will see a housing revolution taking place, hundred of houses are going up. So we are moving. If you go to Region 2 - Charity, Anna Regina, Pomona, you call it, you name it, it has been done. Our work has almost been completed. There is an Honourable Member from Region 2 - almost completed in Region 2.

In Region 3, Tuschen has been completed; the squat areas at Zeelugt; Tuchen North; Cornelia Ida; Belle West in the making; Parfaite/Harmony in progress. Let me comment on Parfaite/Harmony, we have created 8,000 house lots; we are now developing the infrastructure at Parfaite/Harmony; we have already completed the basic roads for about 2000 houselots, but we have a programme with the Inter-Development Bank and the European Union for another 5,000 houselots, infrastructure will commence this year. So, Region 3 is covered.

Region 5 is almost completed.

Region 6 is about eighty percent complete all the areas from Ordinance Fort Lands, Glasgow will come under the EU Programme, construction work will start by the middle of this yea. Tain, No. 77, Corriverton Housing Project - 2000 houselots created at No. 77 for the huge development taking place there. Construction of roads will start by April-May at Corriverton. So it is all on the move. Mr Speaker, the MP can take a trip before he leaves, you are living in Region 4 and I am amazed.

Mr Speaker, before I speak about Region 1, the Ministry has been establishing housing developments in the hinterland areas. If you go to Region 9, at Culvert City we have a development there. We know that we have problems with the water supply. I will explain that under the water sector, we do have problems.

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In Region 10 at Kwakwani, we have new housing development there. As I have mentioned, people have started to occupy the lands. in Region 7 Four Mile Scheme.

In Region 1, we have a development at the Kokerite Hill. We have had problems there, we have now started the grading of the lands so the people can move in and why that was delayed is because of the problem with the water supply, which I would explain what we are doing - a major water supply for Region 1 - \$67 million will be spent and the Wanaina project to supply water to Kokerite Hill and Mabaruma.

In Region 8 ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, before you move on to Region 8, I think it is an appropriate time for us to suspend for our usual period. Before we suspend this session, I would like to remind members of the meeting of the Special Select Committee of the Municipal and District Council Bill that you have been invited to a meeting at 16:30 hrs for the purpose of electing the chairperson of that committee. Your notice has that the meeting will take place in the Library, I just want to correct that the meeting will take place in my Chambers and the Honourable

Members are:

- Mr Clinton Collymore
- Mr Zulficar Mustapha
- Mr Cyril Belgrave
- Mr Heeralall Mohan, and
- Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury.

From the Opposition the Honourable Members are:

- Mr Vincent Alexander
- Mr Basil Williams
- Mr Ivor Allen; and
- Miss Sandra Adams.

Thank you very much.

16:44H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

17:16H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

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The Speaker: Honourable Member Mr Baksh, you will need an extension of time to proceed.

Hon Gail Teixeira: Mr Speaker, I would like to ask for an extension of time of fifteen minutes for Minister Baksh to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member. You may proceed.

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: Mr Speaker, when I concluded at the break and I think that it was timely at that point in time I must thank you because I was able to get some visual evidence of what has been taking place in some of our housing areas. When I was talking about the massive infrastructural developments taking place across the regions of Guyana, the Honourable Member Mr Hamilton asked about three times; he questioned whether there are paved roads in Diamond and Grove or whether there are roads at all and here I want to present some evidence on the Diamond Scheme. *[Interruption: 'Do you have a projector?']* You can see it from that distance. As you can see here, from the Diamond Scheme - these are paved - you can see the machine working paving the roads. These were works in progress; these are completed. I want to assure this House that all the roads have been completed and all the roads are paved. Look here - more photographs - this is for Diamond Scheme. Also, on Grove side - look this was in progress a couple of months ago, this is Grove, this was a sand-loam base and with the bitumen surface on it. So, all the roads are there.

For the Honourable Member from Bartica, she is not here; we are giving the people of Bartica no less quality of roads. You can see here, this is like the Soesdyke/Linden Highway. Look at it; it is here; look at the roads, culverts and so on.

This is for Region 7, no lesser development. Again, the Honourable Member from Bartica queried whether we had built roads at Secondary School Scheme. I want to assure this House as a statement of fact that \$9,589,146 was spent to complete roads at Secondary School Scheme and West Indian Association in 2005. This is so. *[Interruption: 'Why are you repeating yourself?']* She doubted it, so I brought the evidence. I am repeating for your edification. So Mr Speaker across this country, we are having a network of infrastructure for our housing areas. I am not saying that by the end of the 2006 that all the roads will be paved, but the basic infrastructure will be in and will take perhaps another year or two to complete the paving of all the roads that we are doing.

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Lastly, I want to also show what we are doing in our squatter settlement in Sophia. You can see that we are testing the geo-technical ...next year, when we are elected to government again, you will see the paved roads at Sophia and these are the sand loam roads that have been built. The roads at Kaneville have just commenced so we have not taken any photographs, but for the squatter settlement at Block 2, again you can see all the roads have been built. *[Interruption: 'What kind of roads?']* You will have paved roads there. I can assure you.

In Region 8, there also is a scheme there. As I mentioned, the Settlements Planning Division of the Ministry has been planning settlements in the Hinterland areas and we do have a new scheme at Madhia. We have not opened the scheme as yet, because we want to ensure that water supply is provided for the Scheme and I mentioned that in my presentation on the water sector. So we have been moving to ensure that our allottees in the housing areas live in comfort and apart from that we have been moving also beyond the basic infrastructure of roads to provide electrification. Electricity is currently being installed in many, many of the housing areas. In Sophia and many of the other housing areas the poles are already up. It is something that will take a number of months more to complete. Under the government's UAEP Programme and under the Ministry's Programme, we intend to provide electricity for all of the housing areas and in this regard the squatting areas of this country, that may take a little more time to complete, but it is ongoing and the monies are already available for the electrification programme.

Mr Speaker, the housing programme is not only the government building the housing schemes, we have had participation by the private sector - partnership - through partnership - you see here, forging a partnership with the private sector. Well, I am giving you the evidence Honourable Member that in the Housing Sector, the public/private partnership is alive. Since 1992, the private sector has established over 100 housing schemes in this country. That is an achievement by itself. Why have they been able to do this? It is because we have been creating a facilitating environment. This is what the housing programme is all about - getting partnerships from the people and communities; forging a partnership with the private sector developers and so on. This is apart from 115 housing schemes established by this government since 1992. This is unprecedented in the Caribbean, if not in the whole of South America. I can send the list to the Honourable Member if he cannot come to the Ministry to collect it. I will send it by e-mail to him if he wishes.

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Now it is not only in infrastructure development, the private sector is building hundreds of houses across this country. If you go to Diamond, Grove, Tuschen and Parfaite/Harmony you will see houses built by the private sector of this country; take a walk you are Members of Parliament; go into the housing schemes and see what is taking place; do not sit in your offices. We are building houses, because the objective of the Housing Programme is to shelter, this is not an FCH programme, feed, clothe and house and nothing was done. The PNC gave the land to the big shots in this country. I have them at my fingers here. It is a disgrace giving the big shots the land and then they developed a couple of Co-op housing schemes scattered around the place. The co-op housing schemes which they created were failures - total failures. This government has had to come to the rescue of those housing co-ops and help them to build their roads, put in water supply. This is what we have been doing; this is not a gimmick; this is serious business. Apart from creating the facilitating environment, we have been assisting the low income people of this country to access mortgages. Every single bank in this country has a mortgage window. Unprecedented, every bank, Bank of Baroda, Bank of Nova Scotia and all of them, because of the fiscal incentives, the environment that we are creating, they all have mortgage windows and granting mortgages. I am happy to report to this House that because of the government's intervention and the creation of the facilitating environment the mortgage rates are dropping. Look at this, six percent just come out from NBIC for the low income people. I am giving you more if that was not enough, listen and learn: 5.5 percent followed by the New Building Society, look at it here and read. In effect, what is happening here is competition - very sound competition in the housing sector bringing down the rates, making mortgages more affordable to the ordinary people? This is really an achievement. Thousands of houses will be built in Guyana this year. Mr Speaker, people are accessing loans. Last year, the New Building Society lent more money for houses than any time in its history. It is there, you must read the reports. Mr Speaker, Members of Parliament must educate themselves, learn to read the reports and do not come and ask me here in the House.

Mr Speaker, very important also is that this government has a programme to provide security of tenure to the people. Even those old areas which existed under the PNC regime - Lethem - the Honourable Member is there, we have just sent for the endorsements and within a couple of weeks some people will get their titles at old Lethem and we will continue the conveyancing process for the other allottees. A team will be going up in another two to three weeks so they are

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getting their titles in the old Culvert City, in Old Lethem, in old Bartica. The PNC were never concerned in giving people titles for their lands. This government has delivered 20,000 titles since 1992. Last year, alone we have delivered 5,000 titles. We are giving the people ownership to titles; the land must never be taken away from the people. Mr Speaker, you know what this government has been doing, we have been creating wealth through the housing programme for the low income people of this country. We have regularised the Sophia squatter settlement and we have granted hundreds of titles to the people of Sophia and the land value has moved from \$58,000 to over \$1 million for a house lot in Sophia. That is what we have been doing.

[Interruption: 'That is what you are charging too?'] ... not what we have been charging, it is what the people can sell and get - the value. Mr Speaker, we are continuing and this year, we intend to furthermore issue another 5,000 titles until our backlog is eliminated. So we are moving.

Mr Speaker, the squatter settlements are a success story for the Ministry of Housing and Water and for the Staff. The hard working employees of the Squatter Regularisation Department, because we have all the squat areas that can be regularised and they numbered 165; they are under the programme, many of them are receiving titles, most of them have the basic infrastructure in place already and many of them are getting electrification, as I speak. This is what is happening. I urge some of my colleagues on the other side to walk around and see for themselves what we have been doing. Again, that is unprecedented because this is a caring government; this is a poor people government. Every year billions of dollars are being spent in the education sector, the health sector and the housing sector. This is serious business and they are making a joke out of it, but this is a serious government. We have to deliver to the people and I am quite sure that an appreciative people will return the government to office on the elections this year.

Mr Speaker, I now come to the Water Sector. The Honourable Member has left and this is the seriousness with which they are treating the Parliament; he just left and did not wait for my response. The Honourable Member cast doubt, but I will send it across there when I am finished. These are photographs taken by the camera to show the obstacles in the well at Mocha. I want it to be in the press so that they can see. This is serious business and it has been pointed out. GWI just sent this to me, where there were obstacles and it took many weeks to get it out; it is not easy

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to get obstacles out of deep bore-holes. I will send this to the Honourable Member and you can get it from him.

Mr Speaker, the water sector was faced with many challenges as a result of the floods. GWI had to repair in 2005 nearly 8,000 leakages on the East Coast alone - tremendous challenge - but I rose up to the challenge and with the support of Central Government who put a lot of money, hundreds of million of dollars into GWI, to assist them to restore the water supply network - the water supply infrastructure - across the coastal belt. It was a tremendous task and we have succeeded.

Mr Speaker, there is a strategic plan for GWI and I want to assure this House long before, the date for millennium goals that we will surpass. As a matter of fact, the objective is that within five years, we would have surpassed by leaps and bounds the millennium goals for the water sector and we are moving. This is not only for the coastal belt, because already we have several major schemes supplying treated water to the population. We have it at Pouderoyen, Eccles, LBI and Bartica. The Member from Bartica can criticize it; let me hear her when she comes to speak, because at Bartica they are receiving a very good supply of water. People must appreciate that. I am saying as an opposition your task is not only to criticize, you must contribute to the debate and to national development for the welfare of the peoples of this country. You represent a constituency, do not only criticize, stand up there and say what is happening with the water supply at Bartica.

On the East Coast, in Region 5 and Region 6, we are moving. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member your time is up.

Mr Cyril CL Belgrave: May I ask that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation?

Question put and agreed.

The Speaker: Proceed Honourable Member.

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: Mr Speaker, the plan for 2006, some new major schemes are coming into being to provide thousands of people ... let me name them for you; you will have to listen and learn. Under an IDA grant of nearly US\$12 million, we will be setting up major water supply schemes for treated water:

- Anna Regina, the population on the coast there will cover 18,000 households;
- Parika area water supply from St Lawrence to De Kinderen 22,000;

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- Rosignol 14,000.

We are talking about the thousands; we do not deal with hundreds when we are talking about benefits to people; we are talking about the thousands. The project has already started for this year. We have completed the designs and we are going out to tender by April/May for the works to be done for these areas.

As you know, in Georgetown we have already started the \$6 billion project for the citizens with treatment plants, new distribution systems, transmission lines and so on. We are moving ahead with the water sector.

We expect that a major scheme will start this year at Corriverton to supply another 25,000 people with potable treated water. So we are moving.

There have been problem areas and GWI have been working very, very hard to deal with some of them - failure of some of the wells. At Onderneeming in Region 2, this year we are moving towards in getting new wells drilled at Belle Vue and in Region 3, Noitgedacht and Met-en-Meerzorg and so on. These wells are twenty-five to thirty-five years old and we have to start putting in some new wells, but we are moving so that we can achieve this millennium goal of providing treating water to the population.

Mr Speaker, as if that is not enough, we have a very dynamic hinterland strategy being implemented at this point in time. At Lethem we have already moved; we have successfully drilled one new well, because the well had collapsed and I am glad about that because in the dry season the people suffer a lot. We have a contract in place to drill three other bore-holes at Lethem and which would be developed into wells. We have the money, but we have a lot of technical problems which we are confronted with right now. One was successful recently at Culvert City location and we will still continue, because there is no other source of water at Lethem. The river is polluted and we have to see if we can make a break through. We will not give up as yet. If you go across to Region 9, in all the villages we have done a lot remedial works, corrective works, windmill systems have been set up - the Guyana Water Incorporated supported by the Government of Guyana, a public company, the government's company.

We are also moving to Regions 7 and 8. In any of the villages, we are now increasing the number of solar systems in these regions - the new technology. The Honourable Member stood here (I will go back to the Hansard) and ask what we are doing in the water sector about using new technology. He asked the question; a year or two years ago you asked and I am providing

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the answer. We have five solar systems, one going to Aishalton; one going to Karow Downau; one going to Kato, one going to Sand Creek and one going to St Cuthbert's Mission. These are new solar systems provided by the Indian Government as a grant and we are moving to install them and this year, we plan another two or three solar systems. In like manner we are implementing the new technology of the windmill system as the villages become larger and larger. We are repairing hand down systems as well and so on. We are moving in the hinterland more and more of our population in the hinterland are benefiting from increased water supply and I want to say the hinterland communities do not pay any tariffs. This is a caring government and we understand the hardships and we decided that we would provide the service for these people. Mr Speaker, before I go there, many of the villages what we would be doing in the year 2006 we have identified about fifteen villages, where we would be bringing the water from the springs in the mountain, because of the hydro-geological formation and water bearing aquifers are not available. So, we have to bring the water two or three miles from the springs, it is coming down Bamboo Creek; you will see it at Purima, Monkey Mountain, Kurukubaru and soon at Mahdia. We know the problems at Mahdia, the streams at Mahdia are polluted. We will spend \$60 million and it will commence this year to tap the source to bring the water through gravity flow to supply the people of Mahdia with water. That project is already tendered out. I must say an award will be made and works should commence within a month or two. Again, the Honourable Member knows that at Wanaina in Region 1, we are bringing the water from the spring there and our research shows that the water can supply the whole of Mabaruma, Wauna and can go to Kokerite Hill and Mabaruma Settlement. So, I am very hopeful that by the end of this year all of those communities will get an adequate and improved supply of water. We are moving to supply all of our peoples with water.

I want to tell you that this year GWI will implement a new billing system. This has been a big problem. We have already awarded a tender was closed and we have made an award to firm to come in and set up a billing system for us.

Mr Speaker, it will be remiss of me if I do not end by dealing with a matter which the Honourable Member Mr Murray alluded to. He quoted Professor Clive Thomas, Christopher Ram, Transparency International - a perception index; he must tell this House that it is a perception index. I do not know if he knows the difference between perception index and reality. There is a difference between perception and reality and I do not want to deliver a lecture here.

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Mr Speaker, this whole question of corruption, they are making a mockery out of this thing, it is serious business again. We know that corruption is endemic in many, many societies, if not in all societies - systemic - but this corruption started a long time ago; corruption is not yesterday story, it was there a long time ago - a long gestation period. I am not finished with my presentation Honourable Member. *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Members, this House has become very rowdy. Unfortunately, I regret to say so, I am appealing to Members to allow the Honourable Member to finish his presentation. If you continue to disturb him the longer you will remain here this evening.

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: Thank you Mr Speaker, a long gestation period under the PNC, it was there and we recognise it. This government has been trying to minimise if not to eliminate this cancer from our society. What have we been doing? We have been taking so many in roads and we have been doing so many things. There is not one case of alleged corruption that has not been investigated and action taken by this government - not one. I challenge this government to name one case where we have not done several things. What have we done? All those cases which he cited in the Kaieteur News, it will take me another half hour if I have to deal with each one and rebut them, because he quoted liberally from the Kaieteur News as though the Kaieteur is an authority in this matter.

Mr Winston S Murray: On a point of order, I never quoted from the Kaieteur News, Sir.

Hon Shaik KZ Baksh: Mr Speaker, I am sorry the Stabroek News, you are right; one against the other; either here or there.

Mr Speaker, all matters which were listed in the Stabroek News, this government have investigated them. Persons were disciplined, persons were dismissed, disciplinary actions were taken against some, matters were referred to the DPP, we cannot tamper or interfere in the functions of the office if the DPP; matters were referred to the police; the police must take their action. Many of the matters have been in the courts; many people were convicted in the courts. We know that. Changes in institutional systems were effected. This government has changed many systems and we have done a lot of other things. So do not go about bandying about corruption. We are the last to deny that we have corruption in the society as in all societies, even

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in the developed world, the United Nations, Enron, all over the place you have it, but we as a government have been taking the necessary action and I can go through in each case, what action we have taken. [Interruption: 'What about the remigrants? What about the oil boat?'] I can deal with all of those. What have we done? Apart from what my colleague Minister Nadir has mentioned about ensuring accountability, that is one; I am saying it is a major step. From year one this government decided to ensure that the Auditor General presented his reports on the Public Accounts of Guyana, which you failed to do. We have to repeat this thing *ad nauseam*. We will have to continue if you persist, because it is a real nail in the PNC's coffin for not having brought one report from the Auditor General for years and years. I know it is hurting you, very badly. Now what else? Apart from that we have ensured a vibrant Public Accounts Committee. The Honourable Member over there is the Chairman and he is doing a good job. No I give praise, he is doing a good job and I say it openly, because I served as a member of that Public Accounts Committee in earlier years. [Interruption: 'When was that?'] Your memory is very short; you are new to this Parliament. They are going a good job and this has led to the government issuing for the first time the Treasury Memorandum. This shows the intent and we know there are problems, weaknesses and we must take corrective action. The Treasury Memorandum is largely as a result of recommendations coming from the Public Accounts Committee. We must acknowledge that and the government have acted. So, I want to be fair to the Public Accounts Committee and its Chairman. This is a step to correct weaknesses. I am not saying that we will do it overnight, but we are moving in that direction. More importantly, only two weeks ago - Fiduciary Oversight - we have set up the Integrity Commission, do not forget that. It is this PPP/C government which set up the Integrity Commission to ensure the declaration of assets. You did not know that? I told you that your memory is short. We have set up to ensure disclosure of the assets of public officials and what are we doing? We have put up proposals; I hope that you will support it. The Fiduciary Oversight - we want to strengthen the Integrity Commission. We want to bring in the Auditor General into all of this. We have nothing to hide; we are moving and you are talking about corruption. We are trying to lay the foundations for a transparent and accountable society. We are doing that; we are doing all of these things. I want to tell you that every account from 1992 can be audited and can be reviewed. We could not do this under the PNC's government. No, you could not do it. So, I do hope that the PNC's speakers do not use this as a red herring in the

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debate. Do not use it, because they will tempt me next time to rebut each case in detail, all those scams you are talking about. You know something; nobody is listening to you, because they know it is for political gains. Do not do that, because if that were the case all those international financial institutions would not have had confidence in the credit worthiness, the trust of this government to manage the financial affairs of this country and to bring more and more money to help us out and to help the people of Guyana. Mr Speaker, I end there. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Mrs Volda Lawrence

Mrs Volda A Lawrence: Mr Speaker, we just enjoyed a good game of blind man's buff. On Wednesday, 31 March 2004, Mr Robert HO Corbin Member of Parliament and Leader of the People's National Congress/Reform in his address to the participants of his party's congress said:

Fellow Guyanese, the nation is in crisis and I consider it my moral and constitutional responsibility as well as an expression of my own deep personal concern that I address you and share some of my views and those of my party on the way forward.

I sincerely believe that irrespective of race, religion or social class, we all yearn for a society in which we can live together in peace and harmony eschewing racial prejudices and conflicts, where we have a strong and sustainable economy that encourages well creating processes, develops the skill of our youth and work to the benefit of all, justly distributing the rewards of success, where the system of governance guarantees equal opportunity for all citizens to improve the quality of their lives; where job opportunities and services can be available to all without discrimination or corruption, where all forms of corruption entrenched privilege and inequity are eliminated; where crime would be minimal and where our environment facilitates peaceful and harmonious living.

Mr Speaker, any government whose aim is to *transform our country through modernisation and partnership* must take serious consideration of those utterances. If it is serious about upholding and advancing the human dignity of all Guyanese, irrespective of race, colour, religion, culture,

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ethnicity, gender or social origin. Such dignity must be based on self-reliance and self-help and the confidence in the ability of the individuals to promote development in their communities and nation at large. This partnership and cooperation of all, who are consumed will not just happen, Mr Speaker, it will only come about when citizens of Guyana feel secure; when this regime sets and implement policies and programmes which would ensure that every single Guyanese in this country is treated as having the potential to be a creative thinker, innovator and entrepreneur. Our people must be assured they will be given equal opportunity for personal growth, self-expression and participation in their own development.

When will our society address the needs of our elderly, who continues to live in abject poverty and our youths who are unemployed and underemployed in a fundamental and constructive way? It is only when these issues have been effectively addressed that we can say that we are making positive steps towards transforming our beloved Guyana in a cohesive way, which will bring about modernisation and partnership.

For us on this side of the House, the People's National Congress/Reform, the well being of our citizenry is out priority. We are committed:

- to the elimination of poverty to the provision of adequate opportunities for our youths, senior citizens and the less fortunate;
- to re-establishing standards of transparency, accountability, good governance and law and order;
- to ensure that the government resources are efficiently exploited for the benefit and welfare of all of our people.

Mr Speaker, ours will be a commitment to nurturing our cold values of equality, tolerance and mutual respect.

Mr Speaker, the time is ripe now more than ever for us to address the social development of our country in a meaningful and sustainable way. Irrespective of those factors that may be perceived as favourable, no significant unless we address those burning social issues for example:

- aging and pensioners;
- youth training;
- family assistance;
- dysfunctional youth and families and the physically challenged;
- various empowerment initiatives; and

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- grant programmes with emphasis on women.

Mr Speaker, we need to look at overall sustainable social development in a very much more holistic way. If not, we will continue to see the lack of involvement and total apathy like that witnessed at the presentation of the Estimates set out in the National Budget in this Honourable House on Monday, 23 January, 2005.

Aging and pensioners - UNFTA survey, conducted since the 1990s show that like other countries around the world, countries in the Caribbean are undergoing changes in their mortality rates and age structures. Life expectancy is greater, hence an increase in the number of older persons. Since then, there have been several reports by various organisations for example PAHO, WHO, the United Nations and CARICOM to name a few, underpinning the need of initiatives to cater for the needs of the elderly. It is imperative at this juncture that we examine and make fundamental long and short term plans for our aged, especially sixty year olds comprised about seven percent of our population, which this percentage is expected to grow significantly over the next three decades.

In doing so, we need:

- to review those laws and regulatory framework governing the pension rates;
- to enhance the capability, viability and the integrity of the National Commission for the elderly; to develop a national policy for the elderly;
- to utilised to the maximum the recommendations that were outlined in the Citizens Policy Development Committee Report submitted since 1998;
- to re-examine the provision of housing, subsidising of utility and medical bills and elaborate a better arrangement for water rates exemption;
- to monitor regularly and evaluate the management of the homes for the elderly;
- to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained;
- to care for the elderly some training must be emphasised; and most importantly
- to introduce a senior adolescent partnership programme;
- to equip teenagers with skills and discipline to effectively interact with the elderly
- in order to facilitate cross generation interaction.

Our nation youths - young males - must be the focal point around which Guyana's transformation and development must begin.

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We must ensure that they are provided with the tools and requisite knowledge to make a meaningful contribution. Hence, youth empowerment through training in areas such as agriculture, business, mining and other social skills must be a priority. However, to initiate this process, we must eliminate first the hopelessness and marginalisation which this group in our society is experiencing.

We must establish a programme for employment preparation which will seek to correct the deficiencies in reading and numeracy; ensure that they are literate using computer technology and provide skills for those who have left secondary schools and are unable to find employment. We must re-introduce national service, which will provide exposure of our young people to our environment, skills training and above all expose them to the disciplines of the semi military organisation. Mr Speaker, with no comprehensive programme in place, National Service can be restructured using the old model

Mr Speaker, the alarming rate of *teenage pregnancy* is caused for concern. Our young women can hardly take care of themselves, much less coping with the responsibilities of bringing up a child. We need to seriously evaluate this problem and introduce a programme which will recognize the difficulties young women face in accessing opportunities for support, counselling and development, skills development and to provide training in child care skills, prevocational training and family planning programmes.

Families -The commitment to have all citizens at a level of self sufficiency must be one of the objectives of any administration. Family structures vary; there is the nuclear, extended and the single parent. Unfortunately, not only in Guyana but the world over, a large percentage of families are headed by single parents. This situation results from migration, deaths, or sometimes family disputes. Whatever is the family structure, financial assistance is needed and more so in the third category.

Yes, Mr Speaker, government must provide programmes which will help to cushion the harsh economic effects experienced in most cases. It is their obligation to ensure that social health and rehabilitation programmes are put in place to bridge the gap in the system and target those needy persons. Be it public assistance, old age pensions, food, school uniform vouchers, spectacles or medical assistance, it must be based on a commitment to restructure the Public Assistance Programme to bring those persons to a level of self-sufficiency, to provide the basic needs which would allow them to apply the necessary tools for self development and attach a developmental

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programme through which resources are given or referrals made to institutions for participation in activities or micro entrepreneurial opportunities.

Dysfunctional youths, families and the physically challenged - Too many times these persons within our society are forgotten or left on the fringes of the plans and programmes of the administration, but the once quiet acceptance by these groups of individuals is no more and cannot be ignored. Every government must now wake up and listen to their voices.

We in this part of the world, must not only look at the many incidences which are taking place all over the world, for example the uprising of the youths in France or the young hired guns in the many African countries or the senseless gang killings of youths by youths.

We must remember our experiences too, street children, alcoholics in school, drug pushers in schools, rebellion of youths at the New Opportunity Corp to name a few. We must look at families in which the children are forced to work, while their parents remain at home, sexual, physical and verbal abuse, incest and neglectful parents and the list goes on.

Mr Speaker, time is not on our side; hence we must forthwith find innovative ways to address these issues, such as:

- to establish committees, comprising of professionals to make recommendations on the way forward;
- to establish a family court;
- to use youth forums to educate and enforce sound moral values;
- to ensure that qualified professional social workers are engaged in each local authority.

Mr Speaker, the *Disability Bill*, will be tables in this Honourable House and it is with great pride and respect that this nation is witnessing the strength of those persons who are disabled, utilising every forum to get it right. I could only speak for this side of the House and I can assure these persons that the Members of the People's National Congress/Reform stand solidly with them on this issue. *[Applause]*

Empowerment initiatives and grant programmes with emphasis on women - Mr Speaker, today we hear a lot about empowerment and should you speak to the man in the street, he will tell you that talk is cheap. We on this side of the House believe that we can positively and in a tangent way address this issue:

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- by supporting training in niche industry of specialised handicraft, which would target single heads of households;
- by establishing programmes centres in the various neighbourhoods, which will serve as a business incubator;
- by providing support in the research of markets and establishing community education and support programmes, which will focus on community awareness, geriatric and childcare and skills training.

Mr Speaker, the subject of my contribution is the government response to and plans for the social sector as outlined in the Budget for 2006, presented by the Hon Saisnarine Kowlessar, Minister of Finance.

I am disappointed once again and deeply concerned that this administration continues unabatedly and unashamedly to show that they firmly believe that the Guyanese people are not worthy of good governance and are incapable of proper stewardship of our resources and that rhetoric which appears year after year is dished out at them in the various budget speeches or on NCN hour by hour each day. Why should I believe the Minister, when he states that the economy having had all the difficulties in the first half of the year was able to perform exceptionally well in the second half, especially when one takes into consideration the performance of the main sectors such as agriculture, mining and industry.

Mr Speaker, this year we hear that the Honourable Minister of Finance speaking of:

Continuing work in the priority areas of the social sector and poverty reduction as elaborated in documents such as the poverty reduction strategy paper as well as tackling new priorities that affect the safety and the security of the society, including crime, sea defences, drainage and irrigation systems.

He goes on to tell this nation that this Budget:

Is continuing the work of other budgets to strengthen the platform for achieving our vision.

- I wonder whether that vision, includes equitable distribution of social services to the citizenry, irrespective of race, religion, social class or affiliation to political parties.
- I wonder if this vision has truth, honesty fair distribution accountability and transparency; and most of all

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- I wonder whether it has the upholding of the laws of Guyana and of bringing relief to the Guyanese people through a lean and clean government.

Mr Speaker, the critical question still to be addressed is employment. How are we going to address poverty without addressing this fundamental problem? Every year we hear of the large increase in the amounts budgeted for the social sector, in order to address the various social ills plaguing our society. We have heard from the Minister responsible for social services, of the many programmes on stream to address poverty, the aged, persons with disability, persons in difficult circumstances, yet, the difficulties persist and our people are struggling to get the bare necessities of life. Mr Speaker, jobs must be created if these social ills are to be adequately addressed.

Over the years, we have had so many promises for example to name a few:

- In 1993, we were told that all Guyanese who have attained the age of sixty-five years would benefit from old age pensions, only a few months later to have this very pension taken away from persons living at the Palms institution.
- We heard of arrangements being concluded with the new live group of Great Britain for the restoration of the Palms. Today, is 31 January 2006 some thirteen years after, we are still waiting.
- We were told that soon a national youth policy will be formulated; may I ask where this youth policy is?
- In 1995, we were told that the Poverty Alleviation Programme will assist the elderly especially those who do not qualify to get NIS benefit, through the assistance of ten thousand dollars every three years to assist in their medical treatment either surgery, optical or dental care.
- We were also told in 1995, that we will see the creation of a small factory for women in Mahaica by mid-year and this would be followed up with other similar in nature elsewhere.
- We move to 1997, we were told that the Senior Citizens Policy Development Committee completed its recommendation to government for implementation. As I stand here that recommendation is still sitting on the shelf.

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- We move to 1998 and we were told that homes for the elderly will be established in Regions 2, 6 and 9 and that all arrangements will be concluded for the establishment of the family court. We are in 2006.
- We move to 1999 and we were told that the family court is identified as a priority and will be established by September 1999.
- In 2000, we were told that sixty-five community counselling centres will be established in all the NDCs in our country and we were also told that legal aid will be provided to Region 3, 5 and 6 because the Legal Aid Clinic that existed in Georgetown had lost its mandate. I posed the question, have you forgotten all those promises?

Mr Speaker, the fact has been established long ago that the Ministry of Human Services, Social Services programmes are not aimed at assisting the peoples of this country in an even handed or equitable way. It is seen rather, as a divide and rule operation, had it been any other way, would not the Honourable Member Ms Bibi Shadick inform this Honourable House last evening about: the inequitable way in which uniform vouchers are distributed where forms are given out to entire communities regardless of their status and at the end of the process the distribution is done in a manner which favours the supporters of the PPP/C.

- I am quite certain that the Honourable Member Ms Shadick would have told us of the difficulty circumstances unit policy to favour highly supporters of the PPP/C over those who are not by the very amounts given them should they receive any help.
- Would she not told us about ordinary Guyanese, who experienced their public assistance being withdrawn without any explanation before they are ever given a chance to enjoy the programmes which offer training and assistance for self reliance.
- I am quite certain that the Honourable Member Ms Bibi Shadick would have told us that the National Commission for the Elderly would be up and functioning and not merely be one in name only and that the request by the Chairman of the National Commission for the Elderly is being addressed, thereby giving the aged in our society a voice; and that the nation will no longer be pedalled untruth about the relief of water rates.

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- We would have been informed that most persons wait one year before benefiting and must visit Mr Khan at the Ministry more than six times before they can see him.
- Of course, we would have been told that those pensioners who fall outside the Guyana Water Inc band must pay the difference since the allocation of \$10,800 only covers approximately two months and does not include sewerage costs.
- Certainly, the Honourable Member would have told us that those exemptions for the homes for the elderly are still being considered after three years and that while mosque and temples have been enjoying exemptions since the year 2000, it was only in December 2005 that a verbal agreement was given for leniency of other religious bodies.
- Certainly the Honourable Member Ms Shadick would have told us about the various programmes and projects for women being talked about at the PPP/C bottom house meetings such as the picked meat project in Region 2, the dry shrimp project on the East Coast and the Casareep project in one part of Region 1.
- Of course, the Honourable Member would have mentioned that such projects and programmes do not seek to capture women all across Guyana.
- We would have been informed of the lack of will to improve the probation and welfare department which after thirteen years still lack the required amount of qualified social workers not only in Georgetown, but in the various regions and that we will witness the employment of resident social workers for the various institutions such as the drop in centre and the New Opportunity Corp.
- Of course the Honourable Member would have mentioned that we would see a fundamental rehabilitation programme for our children who fall by the way side.

Instead, the Honourable Minister gave the impression, that this Budget was prepared in a substantial way for our pensioners, for cottage industry, for the improvement of the work in the Welfare Department and our early school leavers to name a few.

But it is lamentable that those areas have not been attended to. Right now in many regions, those poor pensioners have failed to retrieve their pension books one month into the new year.

Selected people enjoyed the distribution of uniform vouchers and social assistance. In a few months the People's National Congress/Reform will address these social issues. *[Applause]* We

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will address these issues in a systematic way with a well thought out programme. Mr Speaker, the People's National Congress/Reform has since 1997, taken measures to address these issues through the establishment of a Human Services Department, which to date has set up departments throughout the ten regions of Guyana, which are actively working and has provided assistance in areas of uniform distributions, medical outreach, food hampers and development training programmes for women to name a few.

We have responded to the plight of our citizenry providing flood relief and helping fire victims to name a few. Above all, we have prioritised our care for the elderly. During the month October, senior citizens month of 2005, the People's National Congress/Reform hosted lunches and distributed hampers in all the ten administrative regions. *[Applause]* We provided much needed household articles and equipment for the homes of the elderly.

Mr Speaker, this process is an ongoing one. We are constantly addressing their needs and not doing merely lip service. In the next few months, when the People's National Congress/Reform is at the helm and in Office, those persons who fall in and below the poverty line will benefit tangibly and more extensively from the progress that have already implemented.

In concluding Mr Speaker, let me assure this Honourable House that the people of Guyana including those on the other side of the House will not only hear, but be in integral part of transforming Guyana through modernisation and partnership by the People's National Congress/Reform government. I thank you Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Minister of Public Service

Hon Dr Jennifer RA Westford: Mr Speaker, I rise to also add my few words in congratulating the Minister of Finance in the presentation of yet another complete comprehensive Budget. Let me congratulate the staff of the Ministry of Finance, whom I know worked tediously to ensure that this 2005 Budget was laid into this House in a timely manner.

Mr Speaker, we have just heard a very, very emotional speech from the Honourable Member who preceded me, but I need to ask a few questions. I am aware that some time ago, a National Commission on the Elderly, which was passed in Cabinet and I know I saw Mrs Lawrence's name as a member of that Commission. I am wondering why is it that she is not much more vibrant in ensuring that at least that Commission holds a meeting, I am just wondering.

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Also, I know that a National Policy on the Elderly is now in its final draft and should be presented to this House shortly.

Mr Speaker, we heard a lot during that speech on the youth and what is being done for youths and particularly the elderly. I am going to defer some of those social services issues to the Honourable Member Mrs Chandarpal, who will respond to most of those issues, which was raised by the Honourable Member Mrs Lawrence.

Mr Speaker, we have heard from time to time every year at Budget time so many adjectives describing the Budget; we heard that it is useless and we heard it is a repetitious. I think that the time has come for us especially those Members on the opposite side of this House, to at least start giving us some constructive criticisms; criticism is good, yes, but only when it is constructive and I think it was the Honourable Member Mr Shaik Baksh, who reminded us, that not because we are in opposition ... when I say *we*, I mean when someone is in opposition that he should oppose all the time. There must be some level of constructive criticism and Sir, I yearn for the day when in this House, we will have such criticisms coming forth.

Mr Speaker, as I said once again, this year the 2006 Budget which has a theme of *TRANSFORMING GUYANA THROUGH MODERNISATION AND PARTNERSHIP* has been laid into this House. *Modernisation* as the Minister of Finance said in his Speech is here with us and as of December 1, 2005 the public sector modernisation project was launched.

This project Mr Speaker is aimed at ensuring that the public service of Guyana is one which will compete with the rest of the world, one in which we are going to have standards. Mr Speaker, in this day and age of globalisation and especially when we have our CARICOM brothers and sisters hotly on our heels with standards we have to compete with the rest of the world and we can only do so by modernising our public sector. Mr Speaker, this project which is going to be totalling approximately \$250 million will be looking at three main facets in the first phase; this project is going to be looking at the institutional strengthening of the Public Service which has the overall responsibility of ensuring that our public services are properly and efficiently manned. We are going to be looking firstly at modernising our current public service rules which we all know are archaic and those rules have been with us and the last revision was in 1987, those rules do not serve us any purpose if we are talking about development. They do not give us the tools for proper movement if we are speaking about moving forward. We are also be looking, we have had so many adverse reports about the performances of our senior officials,

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especially our permanent secretaries and our heads of departments. This first phase is going to be looking at formulating performance appraisals for these individuals; they would have to be accountable, more accountable for their performances and the performance as a whole of the system. Also Mr Speaker, this first phase is going to be looking at the local government structure in modernising that structure and the honourable member Mr Alexander, this morning said that the local government structure is one which he enlightened it to a patient which is critical but stable, I dare say that and there is at least one medical doctor here apart from myself, any doctor who can maintain a critical patient in a stable condition has to be a very good one, without them dying. *[Interruption]* My apologies, honourable member I did not recognise you returning, yes Mr Speaker, the local government system also being modernised. We will also be looking the semi-autonomous bodies and agencies ensuring that they perform to a level which would assist us in moving this country a trend which we have started and we will continue. Never mind we are hearing pronouncements that when the PNC/Reform will take over after elections, that we can all dream and I hope that when you awake from that dream you will not be afraid.

Mr Speaker let me go specifically into an issue where I have been hearing... the honourable member Mr Alexander mentioned it and I think the honourable member Mr Jerome Khan speaking about *[Interruption]* yes sir I do listen... speaking about the mode of the public servants or public officers, Mr Speaker, let me say that the public officers today they are more enthusiastic even though I am hearing on my right side some one is talking about strike, I will deal with that shortly. Mr Speaker, they are more enthusiastic, never before has public servants been more enthusiastic looking forward to something. They are enthusiastic because they can see the light at the end of the tunnel and mind you that light at the end of the tunnel is not a freight train coming towards them it is a light of progress. Mr Speaker, the public servants of this country, this government have ensured that the public servants of this country and this is no joke Mr Speaker, they have had exactly nine hundred percent in salary increases from 1992 to date. A movement from \$2801 to over \$24,000 Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker we are talking about cost of living I am hearing somebody talking about cost of living. Let us look at inflation from then to now and let us look at the basket of goods and then we can talk about inflation, let us look at the real value of that dollar, the dollar value today. It was this government that ensured that those very persons those very public servants, *[Interruption]* we will speak about contracts just now.

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It was this very PPP/C government that ensured and this did not start yesterday, it started under the honourable member Minister Jeffrey, this government ensured that the public servants got land to make houses Sir, never in the history would public servants at that level would have expected to own their own home. We know in this country what it means for someone to own their own home. Sometime ago Mr Speaker, I was reading a Hansard which was sometime in 1999 and the speech was from a former member on the opposite side of this House and she was saying apparently whoever was the Minister of the Public Service was speaking about salaries and salary increases and she said what good is it if you give people monies and they have good salaries and their working conditions are not adequate. We are also looking at that, we have spent millions and millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of dollars in ensuring that our public servants that working conditions are optimal. I dare say Mr Speaker, that it may not be all wide spread throughout the public service but it is continuous and we are currently ensuring that the very public servants the ones at the bottom are involved in deciding how and what they want. How they want their offices to be so that they can be comfortable. We are looking at ensuring that we do not only use the big stick method in ensuring that they work they have proper relaxation time. We are implementing relaxation periods whether it is Friday half day or which other day of the week. We are ensuring that they have proper lunching facilities and other resting facilities Mr Speaker and by this method we are hoping that we are going to have a good, efficient and harmonious workplace.

Mr Speaker, it is all well and good for some of the members on the opposite side of the House to sit and talk about conditions in the public service, I wonder how many of them are public service and if they are I think Mr Speaker, confession is good for the soul at times and we ought to call a spade a spade at times. We have to give jack his jacket and we have to give praise where praise is due and Sir, I hope that when those members on the opposite side of the House when they go to bed tonight, they can say you know what, at least I should have said that you have been doing work PPP/C government, the public servants are truly far better off today than they were ten years ago.

Mr Speaker, we heard the Honourable Member Mr Alexander speaking about empowerment and he was specifically speaking about the Amerindians, I am not there, there is a Minister of Amerindian Affairs here, but I am going to speak on one aspect that is training. I recall last week, when we were having the debate on the Motion, someone from our side was speaking

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about training of persons and to my right the Honourable Member Mr Alexander (and I am sorry that he is not here) kept saying oh, you train them and they all leave. Mr Speaker, the PPP/C government did not put in their Manifesto that we will train people and they will leave. People did not start leaving this country during the PPP/C's government reign; they started leaving before and because we do not run a dictatorship government and we are not tying any people legs to any chairs, people are free to move. This is progress, this is democracy and throughout the world this happens and this is not a Guyana thing as it is; this is an international thing. I think that some members on the opposite side of this House must attend international forums, where they will hear even first world countries are complaining about the flight of skills. *[Interruption: 'People are not leaving America.']* Yes, they are ma'am. Mr Speaker, we have been implementing policies to buffer this. We understand and we know that it is a problem. We know that we have shortages of teachers, doctors, nurses and we are dealing with it. We have increased our training programme tenfold in training our young people, because of the innovation of the President of this country.

In 2002, in discussions with President Castro, this country was given 300 scholarships in the first time in the history of this country, never had it happened. Mr Speaker, as I said, confession is good for the soul and we must give credit where it is due. Yes, the PNC government under Mr Forbes Burnham had a training programme, *[Applause]* but let me tell you, as of 1985 those numbers dwindled until, it was one person in 1989 that left these shores and then after 1989 it was again in 2001 that we started sending persons again. Mr Speaker, the records are there for anyone to peruse.

We have not only been dealing with Cuba, which is our largest scholarship giver. We are dealing with approximately eighteen countries to date. We give scholarships to students; we currently have 255 students out of this country on scholarships and within Guyana. We heard about youths being disadvantaged. Mr Speaker, any youth in this country whether they are early school leavers or not, they are offered scholarships in this country. We have scholars at GITC, GTI, the University of Guyana. The Honourable Member Mr Alexander deals with our largest band of students. The Honourable Member should be the last person to speak about empowerment of Amerindians. He deals and he knows the level of our Amerindian students. Mr Speaker, to ensure the empowerment of Amerindians, we have special programmes for our Amerindian children, where they are brought up to standard and can compete with any other

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child in this country at any other level. Mr Speaker, to date we have them doing medicine, engineering and you name the field, we have them doing. They will return here, they will work and they will serve us for their stipulated time. Human beings are of such that they will look for development wherever they think that life is better and at the end of that period of serving this country, they are free to leave. We will ensure that by the time that they are ready to leave; we will have others to take their place and that is the policy that we have put in place. Mr Speaker, I can stand here and I can tell you from now to 2020, how many graduates will be returning to this country every year. That is development; that is progress. We realise that there is a problem and we are putting policies to ensure that this is going on.

Mr Speaker, we have not only being looking at the wide scholarships we have also our workers our public servants to ensure that they perform their duties in an efficient manner. We have (what is called) Staff Development Programmes. Again, in twelve countries around the world; these are very short programmes ranging from three to twelve weeks in all the facets and in all the professional areas; we are seeing the benefits of those training.

Mr Speaker, we keep talking about the public sector; we talk about development and we talk about growth, but we need the private sector. The Honourable Member Mrs Lawrence in reading the speech that the Honourable Member Mr Corbin wrote, I hope that all of the members on the opposite side of the House read that speech carefully, study it carefully and ensure that they respond to it. Let us all ensure the peaceful Guyana, the cooperation that he is speaking about in that speech that they work towards that and not do things that will be interpreted as the opposite. Sir, I am serious and I hope that the members on the opposite side take that speech seriously. I agree that it is a very good speech and I hope that they take it seriously.

Mr Speaker, when I first started, one of the members on the opposite side was talking about strikes, the Honourable Member Miss Adams was muting strikes. Mr Speaker I now come to the thorny part of the mandate of the Public Service Ministry that is ensuring that we have a harmonious industrial relation climate. Mr Speaker, the Guyana Public Service Union which is mainly the largest union which has members within the public service. Mr Speaker, we heard the Honourable Member Mr Alexander and I am expecting the Honourable Member Mr Basil Williams to continue. Sir, I am pre-empting him [*Laughter*]. This thing about imposition - I stand here and I make no apologies on behalf on the Government of Guyana for the imposition for any salary increase to the workers of this country, because the Guyana Public Service Union has no

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intention - none whatsoever - in getting any increases for their workers, all they do is to spread propaganda and stall our negotiations. My Ministry at the end of every year, write the Guyana Public Service Union to start negotiations as soon as the new year begins. Fortunately or unfortunately, we do have our first meeting in January and that is where the stalling comes. All types of unreasonable demands and all types of unreasonable things come up by the union and it always ended up that in November of whichever year it was, we still have not gotten any agreement. We are interested in the workers, and I dare say, and I hope that the Guyana Public Service Union would put on its union cap and stop putting on its political cap at this point in time, and look at the interest of workers. I stand here and I speak as a trade unionist, as a former member and as a senior executive member of that very union. It is time that that union thinks about its workers and I hope that the head of the Union is realising that they are losing creditability with the workers. Our hope is not only thinking about a five percent or ten percent or fifteen percent increase. We want a holistic document, which is going to deal with the workers' welfare in a holistic manner. We want to see coming from them something else for the workers which is non-salary related. Mr Speaker, I dare say if they do not it, we are going to do it and once again I make no apology for that.

Mr Speaker, I am going to answer the Honourable Member Dr Joseph; every year we hear about contract workers. Workers have an option. When they come into the public service, the option they are given is that they either opt to be a contract worker where they get a contract gratuity, which means that they will not be entitled for pensions and gratuity when they retire or they can opt to be a pensionable worker. It is there; they have a choice; the option is there. This does not mean that they have any less favourable conditions coming to them and that is the thing about contract workers, Hon Dr Joseph. Any other information that any of the Honourable Members wish to have on the contracted workers they are free to do so; they can ask me in writing and that is going to be provided to them promptly.

Mr Speaker, we heard about marginalisation. We do not marginalise anybody especially when we are dealing with our training programmes. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Gail Texiera: I would like to ask for a continuance of fifteen minutes for Dr Westford.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

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Hon Dr Jennifer RA Westford: Mr Speaker, as I said, at times it really, really irks me, but then someone told me that this is politics, but put politics aside, I think at times we need to be truthful. This Government is inclusive. For the first time, never has it ever happened, all of our Guyanese students that we have, why I said *all of the Guyanese students that we have studying abroad*, we give them a full scholarships; and why I said that is because we have for the first time getting support from the government, students from the PNC/R who have gotten scholarships through the PNC/R; students from the GGG and other political parties. Sir never has this happened before and yet we heard people talking that we are not inclusive.

Sir, I think that people should listen and learn, Sir, we have Government of Guyana scholarships and we have the political parties who get their separate scholarships and Sir [*Interruption: 'That has nothing to do with the government.'*] I think that you should listen and learn. I do not want to tell you what the Hon Collymore told you a short while ago. What I am saying is that we are hearing that we are non inclusive. What I am saying is that it never happened. There is no PPP/C party student who went to study under the PNC, when the PNC was in government. They were not given any support from the government. None! None, Sir! I studied with some of them, they got nothing. This government is giving all of the political parties' students stipends and full scholarships like any other student that the government is sending out of this country.

[*Applause*] That is how inclusive we are. That is what we are doing and we will continue to do it, because we are interested in the development of the people of this country irrespective of race, political affiliations or religious affiliations. We are going to continue that and that is why, come the elections for 2006, we are going to be returned without a doubt unanimously. There is no doubt about that, Sir.

Mr Speaker, as I said before, I hope that we are all going to be striving for a country which all of us will be proud of; as the Honourable Member Mrs Lawrence said, a country which is free from crime or has minimal crime; one in which there is transparency, one in which there is good governance. Let us all strive for that. All of us in this House should be striving for those aims and goals for this country. Mr Speaker, I hope that all of us in the House as politicians will one day be able to stand together and think, brainstorm for the betterment of this country and not sit and bury our heads in the sand, all because we are from separate political parties and overlook the good policies that one side or the other side has been doing.

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Mr Speaker, once again let me say congratulations to the team at the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance and I know that the implementation of all of these pronouncements in this 2006 Budget are going to once more propel us to further things and further development. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Mr Abdul Kadir

Mr Abdul Kadir: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the Debate on the 2006 National Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I begin by first understanding where we are as a nation; where we ought to go and view the Budget as a major planning tool or vehicle to take us to that destination or at least to pilot us in the direction of the destination.

Before I go into details of the presentation, I would like to deal with three points raised by Members of the opposite side. As a professional engineer with more than thirty years experience, I would like to inform the Honourable Member Mr Collymore that in analysing the flood, we recognised rainfall as one of the contributing factors, but not the responsible factor. There is a variety of factors contributing towards the flood, rainfall was only one of them. The next point is that while the Honourable Member Collymore recognised all of these problems, I would like to ask him, what is he doing with that recognition?

Next, I would like to turn to Minister Shaik Baksh, who Baksh spoke at lib and even went outside of his waters to talk about OMAI creating jobs in Linden. Please let the statistics reflect the realities.

On 30 July 2003, 1,250 employees were made redundant by the then Linmine Bauxite Industry and as a result of privatisation and the Government of Guyana achieving thirty percent share and OMAI Bauxite Inc taking control of the industry, employment rose from then about 375 to what is today 600; out of the 600 that presently exist within the Bauxite Industry more than 200 have come from the previous OMAI operations in the gold mining industry, which means that out of the 1,250 approximately 300 have been re-employed. Therefore, to use the term OMAI creating jobs in the bauxite industry is truly erroneous and it surely does not reflect an understanding of the realities that exists.

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To continue Mr Speaker, at times it is good to understand our position from others outside of us who compare our status with a wider field, since our own emotional involvement can at times blind our objectivity, perception and analysis. Of course, the prejudicial perception will at all times not only be optimistically biased, but also prevents the powers that be from truly accepting the realities and hence start off from an impractical and incorrect footing or base. When you start off on the wrong footing most times you never catch your stride and you are never able to reach your destination in a timely fashion. This is what has happened to the Ministry of Finance and the Government, who even though appraised of the realities of our situation are not matured enough and are prejudiced to even benefit from constructive criticisms.

Mr Speaker, it is painful, to listen to the government baselessly ridiculing informed constructive and well-intentioned criticisms and proposals by the opposition. I would like to single out the contributions of my colleagues Mr Winston Murray, Mrs Volda Lawrence and Mr Stanley Ming in this Budget presentation.

Mr Winston Murray spoke about the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act and issues relating to the flood.

Ms Volda Lawrence dealt in depth with some of the issues concerning social welfare.

Of course Mr Stanley Ming very clearly and concisely showed the difference - which we should all appreciate - between the functioning of a koker and the functioning of a pump and which makes sense - logical sense - to put into operation.

Mr Speaker, please be advised that those who have politically polarised this country; who over the years have demonstrated the attitude of political immaturity and have instituted bad governance in general. Mr Speaker, now where are we? The picture painted by the USAID of our country states:

Guyana currently faces a multitude of development challenges, a weak economy, rising crime, poor security, continued out migration, the spectra of HIV/AIDS and a political climate that threatens its ability to consolidate democracy.

Guyana social economic statistics reflect this reality, growth national product per capita in 2003 was \$860, down slightly from \$900 in 2002. Maternal mortality is 190 per 100,000, live births and infant mortality is 54 per 1000, both reflectively high for Latin America and the Caribbean region. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Guyana is second to Haiti in the Region. Although no official figures exist for out

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migration, the country has been losing its educated professionals. This loss of human capital undermines the government of Guyana's capacity to provide quality health, education and other social services; impedes government's administration and management and fosters dependency on donors. The private sector also suffers from these human resources constraints, because the limited availability of qualified personnel requires the difficult choice between either increasing personnel costs or straining finances or lowering standards.

Mr Speaker, I read that description from where we are from an external source, so that we can understand our position as Guyanese from an objective source. Our own statistics reflect this reality, after more than thirteen years of continuous governance; the PPP/C has run this country down the road of economic and social decline, where our present status is as follows:

- In 2005, the decline in the real GDP is 3 percent and in actual 2004, 0.8 percent and that is against a capital GDP that dropped from US\$868.6 in 2004 to US\$857.3 in 2005.
- The inflation rate is 8.3 percent in 2005 and actual in 2004 was 5.5 percent. While the minimum public sector wage increased by 7 percent to \$24,828 per month or approximately US\$100 per month.

Mr Speaker, in reality what this tells us is that while inflation has moved to 8.3 percent. We recognise that the minimum wage increase of 7 percent gives a shortfall of 1.3 percent; hence the ability to survive in this economy has shrunk or has been reduced accordingly.

Mr Speaker, the Minister projects in 2006, an increase of real GDP of 4.3 percent and an inflation rate of 6.3 percent. While we, in Guyana swallow in this poverty, the government demonstrates its so-called commitment to the working class by dropping the tax threshold by a mere G\$5,000 per month while replacing the income tax rate of 20 percent and 33.3 percent to a single rate of 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ percent. Mr Speaker, this means that a person earning a meagre \$30,000 per month or US\$150 per month salary will save \$1,000 per month. This petty cash cannot even pay the transportation costs in a public minibus from Linden to Georgetown and return. Therefore, what is the benefit of this income tax change? Mr Speaker, for all of those who talk about their working class government, we should view this act and must see it as an anti-working class act. Mr Speaker, after forty years of independence and more than thirteen continuous years of

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PPP/C's rule in this country, our dear land of Guyana is ravished by crime and corruption at all levels.

Only yesterday, while we were debating this Budget a prominent Guyanese citizen was gunned down in front of his home and this is one of many such anti-social activities that the Guyanese nation has been forced to endure under this government.

Mr Speaker, never in the PNC's glorious and productive years of governance has this nation been subjected to such crimes, murder, corruption, insecurity, unemployment and under-employment coupled with out migration skills and human resources at all levels is rampant. There is at present a minimum of investments both inward and from external sources. Our youths have lost hope in the future under this regime. In Region 10 alone, more than 1,000 students graduate from the high school system per year and no job opportunities are there available to them; out of reach cost of tertiary education and no down stream opportunities to further their development or even to exist in a decent manner. The distribution of the nation's resource is inequitable and there is growing poverty, trafficking in persons and all forms of anti-social behaviours especially in the hinterland regions.

Mr Speaker how does the government attempt to remedy this situation as demonstrated in the 2006 Budget? That answer is questionable. Mr Speaker, I listened with rapt attention to the Minister of Finance, when he was presenting his Budget and of course, it did not miss me when he spoke about LEAP. Last year, I gave some details of the monies released to LEAP and it would not be out of place for me to repeat some of those monies. In the year -

2001 - \$18,461,000 was released;

2002 - \$182.5 million was released;

2003 - \$200 million;

2004 - \$265 million; and

2005 - \$585 million.

that total to date, \$1,251,381,000. Mr Speaker, we spoke about value for money, it will be a most interesting exercise to look into the Linden environment and find out in reality after the expenditure of \$1,251,381,000 how many jobs have been created and how the economic well being of the people of Linden has risen. Yet, in 2006, we find budgeted \$450 million. Mr Speaker, I live in the community of Linden. I give you empirical data and I speak from a standpoint of reality. The impact of this money in the community is negligible, infinitesimally

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small and cannot even be mentioned in the wide arena of unemployment, underemployment and frustration of the younger people, because of the policies meted out by this government in this country.

Mr Speaker, we should note that increased spending does not necessarily reflect or is it representative of effective spending. When we listen to the Minister of Finance and some of the presenters on that side of the House speak do glibly about increase releases projected for different sectors in this economy and we reflect on the effectiveness of these expenditures, we recognise it is like spinning top in mud.

I think it was the Honourable Member Mr Winston Murray, who said that we should look for verifiable indicators to identify the impact of expenditures on the target groups. That is the only way; the only method by which we would objectively be able to understand value for money. To deal with intangibles in terms in trying to assess the value for money is a waste of time, but this could only be achieved, if we start off from a proper base - a data base - with proper and effective statistics, then we will be able to target our expenditures against, expected outcomes, and of course at the end of the day, we can use these measurable indicators to identify the effectiveness of whatever programme we put in place and from those programmes what projects we put in place as part of the programmes.

Mr Speaker, the government is the government and the government must do their work. The government cannot expect the opposition to do their work for them. We will give cooperation for the sake of Guyana, because the PNC/R always put Guyana first. *[Applause]* But nevertheless, the responsibility is on the government's administration to utilise the resources of this country in a way that is beneficial to the citizens of this country.

When we come to look at issues relating to the flood, Mr Speaker, it is painful. The flood occurred in January 2005 and I am forced to mention the flood, because of the fact that we are dealing with a national debate and at almost every page in this Budget, the Minister of Finance mentions the word *flood*; he mentions a synonym of flood or mentions a flood related word that we can now term the Budget as a flood Budget.

Again drawing on my authority as a civil engineer, I say that the phenomena of rainfall is common and a proper engineer who is worth his work will deal with if it is a one in fifty or one in a hundred years' return period of flood intensity and design structures to accommodate one in fifty-year or one in one-hundred-year return of flood intensity. Mr Speaker, it is clear, while I

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would not go into the details at this point in time, because I do not want to rehash what Mr Stanley Ming had said that we are blaming all of our failures in the economy on the flood, I will say once more that the flood is a contributing factor, but the flood was not responsible.

Mr Speaker, we have seen deaths from leptospirosis come back to visit us and haunt us and billions of dollars lost, irreparable damage done to persons in the Pomeroon areas and in other sectors. As a small boy, I always heeded the call of my father and what he said? He said, never be like the carrion crow and I ask him daddy what do you mean? He said, never wait until rain start falling before you start building your house. This government has demonstrated a carrion crow mentality; this government has waited until the rain started to fall and the floods had come and then start deploying equipment left right and centre in an attempt to remedy the damage that has already been done. This government is behaving with a carrion crow mentality. Mr Speaker, the People's National Congress/Reform in government, will adopt a holistic approach toward these issues.

Mr Speaker, let us turn once more to the bauxite situation in Linden. I have already give a briefing of what the employment situation is, but I would also like to extend somewhat on this increase in production that was boasted so glibly by again the Minister of Finance. Linmine is no longer a national industry. Linmine is a privatised industry owned by OMAI with a thirty percent share by the government of Guyana. Please sit and listen, you might learn something. Mr Speaker, let us understand that the dividends to be paid to the government of Guyana for this thirty percent ownership will only be paid after profit and therefore practically speaking the people of Linden and the government of Guyana only stand to benefit from the multitude of production and productivity from OMAI and any such agencies in the form of employment. The only benefit that the people of Linden receive is the benefit of employment in the bauxite industry. I daresay one more that this employment level has shrunk from 1,250 to now a mere 600 or fifty percent. Therefore an increase in RASE production; an increase in CGB production; an increase in MAZ production do not translate to any benefit to the people of the community in Linden. Also we should recognise that within the arrangements put in place, there is no direct commitment by this industry or agency as a senior Corporate body to the community. Therefore, we have a situation whereby the people of Linden almost are passive onlookers to the development of the bauxite industry. The national patrimony is being dwindled and the people of this nation have a minimal benefit from it.

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Mr Speaker, let me turn to the question of health and of course we heard some talk about the new hospital, the new state-of-the-art hospital that will be built for Linden. The reality of this project is that this project is still in the design stage and while it is in the design stage, let this nation be informed that Linden the major hospital for Region 10; the major health outpost for the interior locations has been without an x-ray facility for the past number of months and therefore all persons who become injured by working in the timber industry, the gold industry and the mining industry, who would have normally stopped at Linden and benefited from that institution and benefited from that institution have to bypass Linden and travel straight down to Georgetown. Mr Speaker, unfortunately many succumb and many die as a result of this problem. So while the grass is growing the horse is starving and dying. Mr Speaker, this so-called caring government, how much will it cost to put the x-ray facility, which is essential in any proper healthcare industry? That is essential. How much would it cost? Or is it because the people of Region 10 are not known to be ardent supporters of this government, they do not care what happens to the people of that community? The reality speaks for itself, Mr Speaker.

In the area of education, we have a problem with lack of proper facilities and at the same time the distribution of teachers within that area is highly questionable, but my colleague will deal more in detail with that.

Mr Speaker, I want to glance over the drainage and irrigation issue, because it has become a sore subject in the Region 10 situation. Last year, \$15 million was allocated for the entire regional budget for drainage and irrigation. Region 10 comprises over 6,550 square miles and \$15 million was allocated for drainage and irrigation for the entire region. Mr Speaker, you know what one individual, one CDC in one street for someone who is subservient to the government was given \$14 million to clean some drains in one CDC block. So while the entire region was allocated \$15 million, the Poker Street CDC, by their own words, were given \$14 million to clean the drains in Poker Street. What kind of imbalance; what kind of inequity; what kind of uneven distribution of the nation's wealth is going on?

Mr Speaker, the People's National Congress/Reform in government will have a holistic approach with good governance. The People's National Congress/Reform will devise plans and programmes and will involve all the major stakeholders. The People's National Congress/Reform in government will once return this country to prosperity and progress. I thank you. *[Applause]*

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The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

This brings us to the time where we can safely take a suspension for a few minutes.

19:28H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

20:02H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues: Mr Speaker, I rise to extend my congratulations and support to the Honourable Minister of Finance Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar on his submission of Budget 2006.

In doing so, I am not unaware of the difficulties endured in 2005 and indeed early 2006, hence my appreciation to the Minister and his staff for doing the best in the circumstance.

Mr Speaker, before I go forward with my presentation, I want to make a few comments on what was said by the Honourable Member Mr Vincent Alexander. First, I want to say thank you for the kind congratulations you offered me with respect to the delinking of the Amerindian Programme from the Office of the President to the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

I am almost convinced having worked with Mr Alexander in the Special Select Committee on the Amerindian Bill that his heart is in the right place when it comes to Amerindian people. But he made a point on empowerment that I feel compelled to make a response to. Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member said that we should be focusing on empowering the Amerindian people, which suggests that they are disempowered. Mr Speaker, if there is anything that can disempower someone, it is preventing them from electing their leaders. Mr Speaker, it was the PNC, who legislated in 1976 that Amerindian Captains and Councillors be appointed by some chief officer with the approval of the Minister and to revoke any such appointment at anytime. I think that that was a big, big mistake and really a form of disempowerment.

He also spoke about not seeing in the Budget a plan for the Amerindian communities. Mr Speaker, when it comes to planning for this country, we include everyone, bearing in mind that some measures may have to be taken to cater for the peculiarities of some sections of the populace and I would speak of some of these measures in my presentation, but I would like to extend a personal invitation to the Honourable Member to come to the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs so that we can probably discuss in detail some of these plans. Mr Speaker, in most countries of the world and especially in countries such as ours, the needs of the people exceed

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the resources that are available. In fact, it is most common to have the emergence of a new need when one is met. Prioritising these needs is no easy task and in the process of allocating resources some things will be left out. It is not possible to fulfil the needs of every individual, but what is important is that whether at the individual community or national levels, people feel that they are part of progress and that their government is prudently managing the resources of the country. This is what the PPP/C government has done and continues to do. We are not a government that practises hanging our hats higher than we can reach and we are not inclined to deviate from this policy. This country has been here before and we have seen the consequences some of which we still live with today.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Minister spoke of the unwelcome and somewhat sudden rise fuel prices and the difficulties endured with sugar our main export. Mr Speaker, these challenges are not of our making and we must be forever mindful of the world we live in and the harsh treatment that can be bestowed on us, which sometimes leaves us helpless. But no one can doubt the strength and resilience of the Guyanese people. If there was any test that was needed to prove this, it was the flood of 2005. Our people have passed that test and during that period I witnessed a sense of community, which I am confident will continue to prevail.

Notwithstanding the many challenges and constraints, this government has received kudos from the international community for prudent macro economic management. This Mr Speaker, did not occur because of some magic wand waved over Members on this side of the House, but because of hard work by the PPP/C Administration, I know it is not very easy for a few people to accept the successes of this government hence, the barrage of criticisms released by the Honourable Member Mr Jerome Khan on the donor community seemingly because they have commended this government.

Mr Speaker, as the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs continues to work towards the improvement of the overall development of the Amerindian communities, we do so in an environment with several mostly unavoidable challenges and constraints.

To begin with, we are there to serve communities that are scattered across the most beautiful, but yet remote parts of Guyana, where access cannot only be difficult but extremely costly. The majority of communities are accessed mainly by aircraft and the cost of transporting one pound of cargo by air is not less than \$100. While those who live on the coast have had to deal with the rise in fuel prices, the impact pales in comparison with that on the hinterland communities of

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Region 8 and the upper and middle Mazaruni of Region 7, most of which are Amerindian communities. Today, gasoline is sold at a cost of more than \$1,800 per gallon in some areas, while the return airfare to Region 8 and other places is \$35,000. Mr Speaker, these factors along with others help to undermine the delivery of adequate services to the hinterland, but we have started to look at long term solutions and this may require some hard and costly decisions such as constructing roads. We have seen how the Lethem/Georgetown Road has reduced the cost of transportation significantly and I strongly believe this is the way we have to go in other areas. I know there are people who will not support the construction of roads for fear of negative influences and one can understand such sentiments. This was no different than when the Lethem road was being upgraded, but the benefits are now being seen. Mr Speaker until such time that we can sustain this nation with fuel, we will be plagued with high fuel prices for which we have absolutely no control at this time. We therefore need to look at ways to reduce the cost of transportation, and as I said before, I believe that the answer is constructing some roads to these areas and where the Honourable Prime Minister is looking at the issue of hinterland roads and hopefully we can move forward quickly in this regard.

The Honourable Minister Nokta and his team in the regions have already started work on internal roads within Region 8 and other parts of the country. But notwithstanding these circumstances, the government through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has to continue with our mandate, which is to work towards improving the lives of our Amerindian people and for this Mr Speaker, we would have an unmatched record.

Mr Speaker, notwithstanding the challenges I just highlighted the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has enjoyed a hallmarked year in 2005. Some of these achievements represents the culmination some of the initiatives taken by the PPP/C Administration on its assumption to Office. One such initiative was seen in March 2005, when a new building constructed at a cost of approximately \$50 million was commissioned to house the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. Apart from making much more space available and being more accessible to those we serve, the commissioning of this spanking new building is tangible evidence of the government's commitment to address, as far as possible, the needs of the Amerindian people. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the Minister of Finance in presenting the Budget to this Honourable House, indicated that the Amerindian programme will be delinked from the Office of the President in the second quarter of 2006. In the words of the Minister:

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The new Ministry will be in a better position to formulate and implement policies and programmes to facilitate and promote economic and social advancement and protect the rights of Amerindian people.

Mr Speaker, this further complements the work of the Ministry and signals the completion of what I call the metamorphosis and the coming of age of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

[Applause] No doubt, this will be a challenge and an opportunity for us at the Minister, but as we have demonstrated on many occasions, challenges can be easily overcome once you dedicate yourself to the task.

Mr Speaker, another of the initiatives that would soon reach its conclusion is the revision of the Amerindian Act. As you are aware, the report of the Special Select Committee was presented to this Honourable House a few weeks ago and a motion to move the adoption of the report will follow shortly.

I am sure that my colleague the Honourable Minister Ramsammy will go more in-depth with respect to the health sector as it relates to the hinterland, but let me say that I could understand the excitement of the Honourable Member Dr Max Hanoman to report on his day trip to the Matakai Sub-Region and the many discoveries he made in the health sector while on his visit.

Mr Speaker, I want to caution the Honourable Member about making statements that are not statistically substantiated and I speak particularly on the statement he made on HIV/AIDS. The Honourable Member said that the highest rates of HIV/AIDS is in the hinterland areas. Mr Speaker, these messages go out and can introduce unnecessary fear into residents of these areas and I would urge the Member to not make such statements without having the data to support it.

Mr Speaker, we may not know here, because some of us on the other side may not visit these areas as often as I do and I have been to communities, where people said that they would stop coastlanders from entering their communities because of HIV/AIDS and messages like this going out there can very well cause them to want to do things like that and that is why I caution that we do not make such statements without having the evidence or the data to support it. I could tell that that was his first visit to the area in a very long time, I want to say to the honourable member that I am happy that he took time out to visit the area, but he should have visited there thirteen years ago and he would have been better able to make a comparative analysis of the situation then and now. He would have known that there was no health centre at Arakaka, let alone a health worker. The Port Kaituma School was in a state of disrepair. Let me say that while Dr

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Hanoman indicated that the Honourable Member Dr Joseph was unable to walk after his journey, it appears that Dr Hanoman was unable to see and missed the Port Kaituma school complex where children are preparing for CXC, since he spoke of the absence of a secondary school. He would have known that a new primary school is being constructed to make more space for the secondary school children at the complex. He would have known too that \$30 million has been allocated for roads in the area including the Baramita/Matthews Ridge road link, but the weather conditions were not suitable for road construction and once the weather holds the work will begin, but I forgive him for not recognising these developments since he admitted in his presentation that there are sexier places to visit.

Mr Speaker, we know things are not perfect, we still have to do a lot in these areas, but things have improved maybe not at the rate we would like them to, but we have to live within our means.

Mr Speaker, continuing on the issue of health, together with the Ministry of Health we have embarked on a malaria control programme and as part of this programme more than 30,000 treated mosquito nets were provided to all households in Region 8, the upper Mazaruni of Region 7, some parts of the lower and middle Mazaruni, the Mabaruma and Matarkai Sub Regions of Region 1 and some communities in Regions 9 and 10. Each household was eligible for a maximum of three nets depending on the size of the household. Mr Speaker, the results of this initiative have been remarkable with the great majority of communities reporting a decline in malaria cases. This programme will continue in 2006 and already an order has been placed for an additional 30,000 nets. *[Applause]*

In terms of education, last year the Ministry expanded the hinterland scholarship programme from a total of 225 to 280 students. We have also witnessed improvements in the results at the common entrance and the CXC examinations with more than ninety percent passes at the CXC and a significant increase in the number of students qualifying for hinterland scholarships. This is in addition to the students who are attending secondary schools in their respective regions. In 2005, we started the construction of a school at St Cuthbert's Mission, which should be completed in another four months or so. It is our intention to construct a dormitory facility at St Cuthbert's as well to accommodate students from Santa Mission, Laluni and others. We will also rehabilitate a building this year to house students from the Morakabai village attending school at Mahaicony. These students are already housed in a dormitory there, but we need

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additional space, because we have seen marked improvement in the number of children qualifying for secondary schools

This year, we will also continue the school uniform programme in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9, providing school uniform to all - all Mr Speaker- every child attending not only Amerindian except for the lower Bartica area, which Minister Shadick would look at we would be looking at Regions 1, 8, 9 and the Upper and Middle Mazaruni areas.

Mr Speaker, like all other communities, Amerindian communities are also desirous of having modern amenities such as electricity and telephones. St Cuthbert's Mission has been one of the beneficiaries of electrification through the provision of a generating set and the project can be completed in another three months when it is expected that the majority of homes would be connected. Thereafter, the entity will be managed by the village council, who has benefited from training in leadership and accountability. This is what empowerment is all about, letting people manage their own utilities. This is part of our drive at the Ministry to have the village councils involved in the management of various aspects of the development of their communities. I should note that already the Morakabai community is managing both their electricity and water systems. Indeed, I must say that they have been doing this for the last three years without requesting a cent from anywhere. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in late 2005, a 125KVA generating set was also purchase for the Santa Rosa community, the largest Amerindian community in the country with a population of more than 6,000 people, this project is being done with the people of the community, who would be providing the lantern posts for the project and this would be completed later this year.

In terms of telecommunication, the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Limited installed several phone systems in some of the outlying communities. This included Matthews Ridge, Arakaka, Moruka, Wakapoa, Kabakuri, Orealla, Annai, Sand Creek, Kimbia, Moritaro, Kalkuni and Karia Karia. Communication is therefore greatly improved and my information is that the programme will continue in other communities. This is definitely in keeping with the theme of the Budget, *TRANSFORMING GUYANA THROUGH MODERNISATION AND PARTNERSHIP.*

Mr Speaker, as we seek to improve transportation within the various communities, in 2005 a bush truck was provided for the village in Kaburi in Region 7, while we commenced construction of a passenger/cargo boat for the Orealla and Siparuta communities in Region 6.

Mr Speaker, I should note that we have asked the contractor to ensure that he purchased all of the

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lumber required to construct this boat from the village and he has done so. Mr Speaker, we were able to let some of this money remain here in the village. This facility will be completed this year. This year, we will also construct a second such boat to benefit the Berbice river communities and in addition to this Mr Speaker, a tractor and trailer will be provided to benefit the South Rupununi communities, who have made a request for this.

Mr Speaker, we are looking at all angles to improve transportation. The residents of the Chenapowu community which is located approximately thirty six miles from Kaieteur have always had to travel from Chenapowu to Kaieteur in order to get a flight to Georgetown. Mr Speaker, the already high cost of air transport coupled with the additional journey of 72 miles return pose a heavy burden on this Patamona community. Mr Speaker, together with the community and I should say, lead by the community, the construction of an airstrip began in 2005. Mr Speaker, 100 percent of this project is being done by the community and all things being equal, we would be able to land an aircraft there in two months time.

Mr Speaker, as you know, one of the difficulties endured in the hinterland communities is access to credit, but we have not stood by idly in terms of finding ways to make credit available to the communities. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in collaboration with the North Rupununi communities presently manage a credit scheme in the North Rupununi, since this project has been fairly successful. In fact, recording a better pay back rate than the banks in Georgetown a second scheme has already been established in the Moruka sub-region with a capital of \$20 million. Loans up to \$100,000 will be provided in the first instance and will be made available to communities including Kwabanna, Warapoka, Santa Cruz, Manawari and Waramuri and Santa Rosa and later we would extend to other areas.

Mr Speaker, I am sure you are aware too that there are centres in most regions, where residents in various Amerindian communities will come for various services. These will include post office, visiting the hospital and police station or purchasing basic commodities since it is not possible to place some of these facilities in each community. Accommodation can sometimes be problematic and as such several Amerindian hostels have been constructed throughout the country. In 2005, we commenced the construction of an additional hostel at Suddie to cater for mainly for persons accompanying patients who come to the Suddie Hospital. This new facility is close to completion and will benefit several communities including Wakapoa, St Monica, Santa Rosa and Manawari. The lack of accommodation at Suddie was a problem for a long time, this

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will now be solved. Two additional hostels are also being constructed at Port Kaituma and Moruka to cater for the surrounding communities in these sub-regions. Residents from Asakata, Warapoka, Kwabanna, Canabally, Seaby Pie Star and other communities will benefit from these two hostels. The Ministry together with the communities continue the programme of equipping the various villages with village offices as many of these councils cannot carry on their duties, since they sometimes have to use the school and school is in session they are not able to do so. In 2005, seven offices were completed in St Denny's, Isseneru, Campbell Town, Chenapowu, Achiwuib, Potarinow and Moretaro and three others are nearing completion. I should note that these offices are constructed by the communities themselves, whereby we provide the funds to the council and they are responsible for the execution of the works. Again, we are here empowering the communities and they have demonstrated that they can manage finances maybe, some people can go there from other communities to learn the lessons. This year, twelve additional village offices will be constructed in the communities of Red Hill, Santa Cruz, Hobodia, Bethany, Moshabo, Waramadong, Parima, Kurukabaru, Monkey Mountain, Shulinab, Katoka, and Aishalton. Mr Speaker, we have started this programme in 2002 and already we have completed more than fifty village offices.

Mr Speaker, 2005 saw a great acceleration in addressing the Amerindian land issue. In September 2005, four communities namely Malali, Great Falls, Moretaro, and Wyruni received titles to their land. These communities are located in Region 10, while Orealla in Region 6, received an extension of their titled land. The communities of Kabakaburi and Tapakuma in Region 2 have also received an approval for an extension of their titled land, while Micobie and Campbell Town in Region 8, Kamwatta and Arukamai in Region 1 will soon receive their titles as Cabinet have already approved the various requests. Mr Allen, I am aware that you contributed to raping that forest too. Mr Speaker, these additions will bring the total lands belonging to Amerindians to more than thirteen percent of the country total landmass. We have also seen quite a number of communities requesting demarcation of their titled lands. I want to repeat the government's policy on addressing Amerindian land issues. It is simple, demarcation of legally owned land as described in the 1951 Act following titling of communities without titled lands - an extension of titled communities. Unfortunately, when sixty-four communities were given legal recognition of their land in 1976 and an additional ten in 1991, the areas were not demarcated or (as we say) surveyed as is normally the case. This policy therefore caters for

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completing that process, while addressing some of the discrepancies, that exist in those descriptions and there are many. This policy came into being in 1995, at a meeting with the late President Cheddi Jagan and Toshiro in Paramakatoi. Mr Speaker the Policy has often been distorted and several communities were confused and sometimes scared as they were told that their lands will be taken away from them and that outsiders and coastlanders will be brought in to occupy their lands. Mr Speaker, true is the saying, you can fool some of the people some of the time, some people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.

Today, Mr Speaker, a number of communities have recognise the importance of knowing their communities boundaries and having it marked on the ground in order to better able to deal with encroachment from miners and loggers. More than fifty-five communities have completed or in the process or now requesting demarcation. Communities that have requested demarcation and which is expected to be done in 2006 include Kopenang, Monkey Mountain, Kato, Paramakatoi, Wipa, Kamana, Kaibarupai in Region 8, Baramita, Santa Rosa, Kwabanna, Manawarin, Little Canaballi, and Hubudaia in Region 1 and Konashen in Region 9. This year, we will continue the demarcation programme, while addressing those communities that are yet to be titled and those requesting extensions.

Mr Speaker, I also want to let the Honourable House know, that at the moment nine community development officers employed by the Ministry and who are based in the regions are working assiduously, in collaboration of the Ministry of Home Affairs to have all persons in Regions 1, 8, 9 the upper and middle Mazaruni and the Amerindian communities of Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 receive birth certificates. This is a programme that we started some years ago, but we have intensified this programme because of the need of many persons to have their birth certificates in order to have registration completed. We have already in the last two years distributed more than 4,000 birth certificates in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. We recognise that this is an important document and we want all of our citizens to be equipped with that important document.

As I close, Mr Speaker, I wish to point out that these things that I have outlined they are not an exhaustive list, because many of the programmes managed by the other Ministries would include different projects for Amerindian communities as well and I am certain that my colleague the Honourable Minister Nokta would point to some of these. I also want to say that highlighting some of the achievements of 2005 and outlining the projections for 2006 are in no way meant to convey that all...*[Interruption]*

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The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

Mr Cyril CL Belgrave: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Minister be given fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

Question put and agreed

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues: Certainly, we would like to do more, much more. I wish to point out that providing adequate social and other services to Amerindian communities remain a challenge and will be a challenge for any government of this country. Mr Speaker, by outlining the progress made and which can be ascertained by anyone, all that I have said can be verified. I am confident that we have ably demonstrated our commitment to the Amerindian people of this country. The government will continue in this path as we work towards strengthening and building partnerships with the various communities, so together we can face and overcome and face the challenges that lie ahead and I invite everyone to join me in that process. I thank you.

[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member

The Honourable Member Mr Nasir Ally

Mr Nasir Ally: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, as I peruse Budget 2006 I can only draw the conclusion that it will not improve the lives of the Guyanese... *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us have some order please, Honourable Members. Let us have some silence please. Proceed Honourable Member

Mr Nasir Ally: As I said, as I peruse Budget 2006, I can only draw the conclusion that it will not improve the lives of the Guyanese. The GDP continues to fall and in some instances is below negative. The Budget does not give any positive indication that it will rise. All we see are dull and dismal days ahead.

Mr Speaker, I met a certain gentleman and I ask him why don't you go to church so that you can save yourself from hellfire and the gentleman said to me that every Guyanese will go to heaven and there is no doubt about that. I asked, how did you come to this conclusion? He replied, look there is so much punishment; there is so much hardships and suffering in Guyana already; that we are already living in hell so God will be sorry for us and take all of us to heaven.

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Before 1992 elections, there was one obvious silver lining. Since then that silver withered away gradually. There was hope now there is hopelessness. Guyana's economy has reduced and it keeps falling year after year. There is no hope for the Guyanese under the present administration. All you see around is frustrations, hardships, suffering and depression.

A Budget of \$203 billion will not be bringing relief. I cannot understand that the income tax threshold has increased, there will be no addition to taxation and yet the income of 2006 will have to be increased to \$203 billion. Where will the money come from? No one can prove to me that it will not come from the people's pockets and especially the poor man's pocket. Let us not deceive the Guyanese people. As I heard that in any communist country the poor will continue to live in poverty and subjection I hope that a similar pattern is not developing in Guyana.

Region 6 has been declared a flood disaster area. No one is describing it as a natural disaster, but an artificial disaster, because of the negligence of man and because of no interest in the welfare of the people.

A few weeks ago before the actual flooding in January 2006, I spoke to the regional chairman about flooding of Philippi Backdam and which can extend if the rains fall. He assured me that everything was in place to take care of the problem and he had several pumps at different locations. I warned him and he did not take heed. Subsequently in his press briefing he said that ninety-six percent of the works were completed in Region 6. When the floods came, it reflected what percentage it ought to be and not ninety-six percent. It also reflected how much money was spent, so it is a clear indication of probably mismanagement, maybe corruption or some other thing and further sub-standard works. Why fool the people when the people themselves know what was going on? It was said that with all the intense works done at Black Bush Polder there will be no flooding. As soon as the rains came, Johanna was under four feet of water. One woman nearly drowned, because she missed the bridge. Farmers were already suffering tremendously due to high cost of production, no technical advice and low prices for the paddy. With the flood they have been hit severely and reduced to nothing. As such, many of them are reluctant to go back to the fields. They are indeed frustrated. What is there in this Budget that will reverse the situation? Some of them were given \$5,000 per acre up to twenty acres. This is not adequate to revive them. What about the man who plants 200 acres? However, there is discrimination or marginalisation in the distribution of assistance to farmers. Some were given assistance while others were not especially the poorer ones from the villages. In the

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Macedonia/Joppa, No. 35 and No. 43 Villages rainfall and water flowing from Black Bush Polder drainage canal flood out the Epsom Dingwall Villages, Kiltairn and Eversham, were flooded by rainfall. From Old Years day to presently, these villages are still under water. Several complaints were made to the Region and the NDC office. This flood could have been avoided if the Regional Chairman and the NDC personnel had stopped and talked to the community and listen to their problems. Only when the leader of the Opposition went to the area, only then they stopped and had discussions with the residents. The Minister and Regional Vice-Chairman visited them; they sent a hymac and promised to return on 25 January 2006. They never turned up on that date. Severe damages were done to cash crops and livestock, the NDC Chairman said that no one give orders to put in for relief for flood victims. I do not know if this is what happened, but the six workmen of the RPA Chairman received \$50,000 in cheque; not even the medical team visited. The residents described it as a PPP/C affair, only supporters and good friends received assistance. No. 43 Village was given assistance, but Eversham was given nothing. This is absolute discrimination. No. 52 received their portion, but No. 51 Village was given nothing even though they lost over 100 acres of rice at that time. *[Interruption: 'How much did you collect?']* Well, I am not a farmer so I did not get any. There are other villages that suffered tremendous losses including Fyrish some parts of Port Mourant even like Ms Pheobe and no one visited. Agriculture is now to the lowest ever; this Budget gives no indication of revival.

Water Users Association, which was established about one and half years ago, have not yet commenced work. However, it is not yet decided whether they are going to get half of the subvention of the \$3 million, which is only fair. There is still some concern as to why government still controls primary canals and maintain from Manarabisi Canal to the distributary. The other concern is why the other consultant be paid \$1 million per month, when the farmers themselves ought to be the main advisers, because they are the people on the spot.

Is this Budget a true representation of all sectors of the economy, certainly not? I have not seen anywhere mention was made of the sawmilling and logging industry. Many sawmills are closed in Region 6. Maintenance and overhead costs are high; no saw-miller can afford to purchase new machines and equipment because of these serious problems. The Amerindians of Orealla and Siparuta are also faced with a dilemma for there is hardly any employment. They do not know what to do, but they leave the villages to seek employment elsewhere. With the closure of

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sawmills many are out of employment. The Honourable Member Mr Mustapha said on 29 December 2005 in this very House, that in the days of the PNC, people used to line up for kerosene oil, what he failed to tell us is the people are now lining up at Money Gram, Laparkan and Western Union to receive foreign aid sent to them by relatives so that they can purchase the kerosene oil. Which is more shameful is it working for your own money and purchasing oil or to beg overseas assistance. What is there?

Now this brings me to unemployment, over 18,000 persons left Region 6 over the last five years, because they could not find jobs or jobs that could make them survive. The unemployment rate in Region 6 is high and there is nothing in the Budget that can change that situation. The Region was promised 600 jobs for 2005 and it was told that 500 were already secured and the other 100 will be found for the New Amsterdam area. I have not seen one job being found by the government of Guyana, but all you see is a reduction of staff in every department including health and education. Consequently, young people are roaming or lining the streets and the roadways. A dangerous development is occurring; it has certainly increased the crime rate and is leading young people to other dangerous grounds.

What is there in the Budget to correct this situation? Rather to say merely to improve the efficiency of the police force. Now the Honourable Minister of Housing said in his presentation that he has no apology for certain matters, but I think he will have to apologise to the people of No. 77 in Corentyne, because all they did was to build sub-standard houses, which are now falling apart and the roadways have such deep holes that one can swim in them and only about a year or two those streets were built.

Education - What is happening in this field? The standard of education is falling daily. There has been a boast of the high number of passes at the CXC level, but is this education? The Minister would tell me that education is an all round development and to prepare the child for life.

Certainly, this is lacking I see money voted for NCERD and going back to basics perfectly well, but we did this in the days of the PNC. This is only a follow up. This is excellent, but what is going to take care of the indiscipline in the schools. At the last Christmas party it was discovered that senior students drank alcohol behind the backs of teachers and also some of them use drugs. I am not saying I all schools. *[Interruption: 'What are you doing about it?']* Well, I do not know what to do at the moment; you can be able to help me. The Department should concentrate more on training and employment of guidance and counselling teachers to help to bring back discipline

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in schools. Too much emphasis was placed on the construction of buildings, while internally the buildings are empty. In many cases, no teachers, no proper learning aids and equipment and most of all the dedication and commitment is not there. A building was constructed at Kingston Corriverton, which I was told is a technical institute, the construction was completed a long time ago and yet it cannot be commissioned for mainly three reasons:

- suitably qualified staff;
- enough students applying for entrance; and
- lack of teaching materials.

There also seems to be marginalisation in the location of these buildings. The Regional Education Department should stop discriminating and visit schools to get first hand information. In the field of health, despite the fact that a new hospital was built in New Amsterdam, there is hardly any improvement. We are somewhat 300 years behind in health. All the hospitals continue a serious shortage of nurses and there is a shortage of committed doctors at the Skeldon hospital. Nurses should be trained in psychology since there is one senior nurse at the Skeldon hospital, when the old folks look at her face; they feel like running even though they cannot walk. I was a victim of depression and I say no more.

Roads, sub-standard works continue on streets and roads. In New Amsterdam, streets were built narrow so that the edges are flattened and will break off shortly. Two additional votes were made for the Black Bush Polder roads and yet very little work commenced. All they did was, they scooped off the surface and since then it was left like that.

The koker at the back of Burnham's Park is not active, it is the responsibility of the Region to carry out the works and nothing was done and which subscribed to the last flooding as well. However, in other instances outfalls between the koker and river need clearing in the New Amsterdam area.

The government has not sought to develop new ideas and to have technological advancement; obsolete ideas still exist. Once we cannot meet international standards, Guyana will move backwards. Last year, every sector in the economy in Region 6 was falling. The farmers are dragged to no less than disgrace. Consequently every other sector, that depended on the farming community failed. The 2006 Budget is no guarantee that the lives of Guyanese will be improved. I thank you very much, Mr Speaker [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

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The Honourable Member Mr Ramesh Rajkumar

Mr Ramesh C Rajkumar: Mr Speaker, I rise this evening to support the Budget as presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance.

Mr Speaker, the theme of the Budget 2006 fortifies the vision of this government and that is *TRANSFORMING GUYANA THROUGH MODERNISATION AND PARTNERSHIP*. There could not have been a more appropriate theme at this juncture of this government's term, particularly as we are in election year. However, before I go further, I would like to deal with some of the issues raised by a few of the speakers on the opposing side and the position that the speakers took. In both regards, I refer to the Honourable Member Kadir and also Member Ally who just concluded his speech.

The position with regard to crime that both speakers have said that is rising in the country; if we look at the index, we would see at the back of the page of the booklet on the Budget 2006, at page 65 the report on crime. What we have is a situation where crime takes the front pages on the newspapers and albeit the newspapers that carry negative reporting against the government. What we have if you look at the year 2005, there has been a significant decrease in the number in the reports of crimes in the country and it is stated here as against previous years. So when the Honourable Member Mr Ally has stated that crime has risen, that fact cannot be accurate, because on this index you could see the figures stated therein and you could look at it and read it and you will see that crime has decreased in terms of its report.

Mr Speaker, we have had a significant discussion on the aspect of flooding and the last speaker Mr Nasir Ally spoke towards the flooding in Johanna and elsewhere in the Corentyne. But I would like to remind Honourable Member Mr Nasir Ally and this Honourable House that according to the statement made to this Honourable House by the Honourable Minister Satyadeow Sawh a few days ago, and this is what was stated:

To illustrate this information provided by the Hydrometeorological Department of the Ministry of Agriculture...

[Interruption: 'Again!'] I would have read it, because of the statements that have been continuously made as regards to flood budget and as regards the question of neglect and what Honourable Member Mr Nasir Ally has just stated and we have to remind ourselves that the percentage increase of rainfall and let me repeat the whole statement. It is stated here:

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The Hydrometeorological Department of the Ministry of Agriculture indicated compared to the thirty-year average rainfall was 159 percent higher in December and 67 percent higher in January for Mahaica and Mahaicony; 111 percent higher in December and 118 percent higher for Abary; 68 percent higher in December and 108 percent higher for Black Bush Polder.

Johanna is in Black Bush Polder honourable member Ally

And 96 percent higher in December and a staggering 300 percent higher in January for the Pomeroon.

So it is expected if you have that level of percentage increase of rainfall then you must have the difficult situation that we are facing and it does not have anything to do with neglect and the carrion crow attitude that has been spoken of by the Honourable Member. The figures are here to show the level of percentage increase in rainfall.

Mr Speaker, the question of the Corentyne Technical Institute, not too long about three weeks ago there have been advertisements on the television for the staffing of that institution and also for the filling with students of that institution and I am certain that that programme is moving ahead.

Mr Speaker returning to my presentation, I would like to point out this Budget 2006 is in keeping with the manifesto of this PPP/C government. When I say this, I would like to refer to what was presented in the budget of 2001 in this august House, Mr Speaker at Page 1 of the 2001 budget presentation at Paragraph 1.3, it is stated:

We have taken careful note of our people's demands their hopes and aspirations, indeed these have always been accorded with our visions for Guyana's future; a vision that we have shared continuously over the past years which we elevated in our manifesto for the recent elections. To restate it succinctly, we envisage a country in which our abundant natural resources are harnessed by a resilient and enterprising people. To create wealth that is then equitably distributed among the people for their benefit. We are single-minded in our resolve to establish a society in which no one feels excluded from the mainstream of development; a society in which a rich diversity of our people is used to strengthening the bonds that bind us, rather than accentuate those that divide us. We have achieved much over the years including improved growth rates, modernisation of the economic

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infrastructure, reduction in the foreign debt that has facilitated a higher expenditure in health, education, housing and pure water among other areas and a significant reduction in poverty.

This was in keeping with the Manifesto of 2001 elections and also presented in the 2001 budget. That is the vision that we have placed before this country and that is our Budget of 2006, is in keeping with that vision. So when the Honourable Members on the opposing side speak of the Budget lacking vision, this is where we could take a yardstick from not too long ago - the 2001 budget and the Manifesto.

We have, therefore, over the years crafted from the themes of the budget of 2001 and of moving Guyana forward together with a budget of 2002 promoting economic growth, accelerating social gains and therefore we see the connection of the 2001 budget to the 2002 budget and as we go on, we will see the confronting of challenges staying on course for a prosperous Guyana of a 2003 budget. That was in keeping with our vision.

In our 2003 budget, it stated there in our renewal and expansion of economic infrastructure to support investment and growth:

Mr Speaker, among the factors that rank highly in the decision of an investor to invest in a country, the state of that country's infrastructure and if we hold to the maxim that investment is the engine of growth then it follows in the condition country's infrastructure can influence the pace at which the country grows.

Therefore, we go on to the budget of 2004, investing for sustained economic growth and enhance social development. In that Budget again it is stated on Page 3:

Equally we are conscious of the need to build strategic alliances and partnerships, while we offer all stake holders opportunity for their full involvement and meaningful participation in planning and execution of policies and programmes.

And likewise in our 2005 Budget, we have confronting the challenges, sustaining growth and development and then we come to our Budget of 2006. So if we look at a five year period we could see a holistic approach towards the vision we have for this beautiful country of ours and that is how we have reached the stage of transforming Guyana that we have spoken so well of from 2001 right on to today's date.

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Mr Speaker, we have seen a rise from that period of time in the expenditure or the allocations in the budget from that time where we have seen a \$68.9 billion over a period of these years increasing by 15 percent in 2002, a further 5.3 percent in 2003, a further 14 percent over the 2004 estimates of \$75.6 billion and thus reaching the highest figures, the highest expenditure or the largest Budget that we have had or we will have in the history of this country and that is this Budget of 2006.

Mr Speaker, all of these things that I have stated is to outline clearly, that all these allocations are consistent with our development patterns. Mr Speaker, when the Honourable Colleague Zulifcar Mustapha spoke last evening, he stated that Berbice is the pride of Guyana. I would also like to add my bit to it and I will also state that Berbice, the ancient county is a model of modernisation and pride of this country, because over these years we have seen significant expenditures and allocation of funds in Region 6, which has provided for development in that region. We must state categorically too that we in Region 6 are grateful to this PPP/C government and administration for these large resources that are being made available for our development.

In so stating Mr Speaker, I would just like to point out a few of the areas that we have seen large expenditures over the years and I would speak within the vicinity of the not too distant past. We have heard, we have seen and we could see the benefits of the brand new, New Amsterdam hospital of some US\$13 million which is sited in the Region, which is functioning and is fully staffed with all the specialists, notwithstanding that the Honourable Member Dr Max Hanoman may have seen an unsightly piece of garbage there, but he could not have stated any criticism as regards the deliverance or the delivery of healthcare from that institution. We have had over 1,200 cataract surgeries successfully performed there at that institution.

Mr Speaker, there is then the Skeldon modernisation project that we are seeing ongoing in the Region and which will have a positive impact on the community not only that here it is will be impacting on the national economy, but on the economy in the Region it will bring with it the positive influences in the social sectors, which will demand from the social sector a better education system, because we will need to produce better and better students. As I mentioned, better and better students, as we have noticed and also Members of this Honourable House, over these few days of the debate, some students here and that is programme that has been initiated through the New Amsterdam secondary school by myself and others, where we are going to bring 100 students to the august Assembly to see what and how this Debate goes on, so as to

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have a positive impact on their learning ability and this will also be an ongoing trend of students from the Berbice area coming to this august House. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in this Budget I was very astonished to hear that the Honourable Members said that there is nothing positive in this Budget and so forth, but Berbice will benefit from one of the largest investments of the times and that would be in the bauxite industry, because we will see apart from Skeldon Modernisation Project, where millions will be invested into that programme we will see that over \$80 million or in the vicinity of US\$80 million will be invested through the RUSAL Company and another company as regards the shipping industry and this is stated at Page 28:

Earlier this month, the Government of Guyana and the Russian Aluminium Group (RUSAL) signed major agreements, totalling US\$80 million for the privatisation of the Berbice operations. The Russian Company will take over the operations from 30 March 2006. Over two million tonnes of bauxite will be sold to RUSAL over the next twenty years, while agreements were also executed with another company Oldendorf Carriers for the barging, transshipment and ocean shipment of bauxite for the next ten years. This company will be investing US \$60 million of the US\$80 million in facilities for shipping and barging bauxite.

There it is you will see a major capital investment which would carry with it also impacting on the social sectors of the Berbice economy. These are positive things which are going to happen not only as I said nationally, but also within the area of Region 6. We in the region all look forward for these positive benefits. As I turn to the Region of the Budget of 2005, it was stated therein at Page 24 that after years of dependence on Central Government for massive transfers to its operations, the bauxite industry is poised for take off this year. In 2005 that is what was stated. What do we see in 2006 Budget? It states here, the bauxite industry continued in its path of recovery. Showing substantial growth last year, partly reflecting the restructuring of a new investment in the bauxite industry production rose by 6 percent to 1,594,254 tonnes. Further, of significance is the fact that the output of the very high grade calcined RASC bauxite grew by 61.7 percent to 213,000 ounces. This is one of the significant positive impacts on the economy and in Berbice for us. We are very grateful for these positive impacts.

Mr Speaker, there are many other positive things that are going on in the Berbice Region and we will see in the not-too-distant future the resurfacing of the New Amsterdam to Moleson Creek

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Road, where the expenditure will be in the vicinity of some \$746 million; the Berbice River Bridge which will be US\$40 million or there about. Mr Speaker, we have seen in the past the Rose Hall water treatment system, where \$1 billion was spent there. In other words, we see Berbice as I indicated before, the ancient county as a model of modernisation and pride for us in this country.

Mr Speaker, never in this country has so much been provided for so many persons in such a short period of time, that is in the past thirteen years and especially for these five years and what we are seeing is this Budget for \$102.9 billion is testimony to the provisions being made.

Mr Speaker, in closing, as I have stated and what this Budget is saying on Page 53:

We have taken important steps and made strides in our quest to strengthen our young democracy and improve governance in Guyana and this is from the constitutional reform to Parliamentary changes. We have been forging and deepening a new democratic culture in society.

At this juncture, I would like to therefore ask all to support this Budget as presented by the Honourable Minister. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Mrs Rajcoomarie Bancroft

Mrs Rajcoomarie Bancroft: Mr Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this 2006 Budget that is before this noble House.

Mr Speaker, I had intentions not to mention flood, but as I was listening since yesterday, I noticed every member is emphasizing on flood, so I want to make a little opening comment before I actually go into what I want to say.

Mr Speaker, every year we come here to hear this is the largest budget ever, but with the rising of cost of living one would expect that you have to get more money. When you look at the minimum wage of today and compare it with the cost of living and if you have two or three children to maintain, your salary means nothing. However, to my mind this Budget does not offer much hope for people like me in the hinterland, only the flood victims and a lot of emphasis is being placed on the cricket stadium. That is where all the monies are going. I would like to state another example which is the road projects that are going on and there is where all the contractors have done substandard work.

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Now, I would like to turn to Region 8 proper. Mr Speaker, when you listen to the Honourable Minister of Finance in his Presentation about mining, Region 8 is in big trouble. I can tell you that. The small miners are being pushed out of this industry. There is no hope for them.

Mr Speaker, I want to bring to this noble House's attention - on Monday, 28 February 2005, I stood in this very position to tell this Honourable House the problems that Region 8 is faced with and to date nothing has been done to correct same.

Foreigners are taking over our main industry and more particularly the Brazilians, who own the cutter head dredges and are not employing Guyanese to work on them. This option by the Brazilian miners also contributes to a high rate of unemployment in the Region, which is still a major concern.

Mr Speaker, other than the health sector, the education sector and the staff of the administration of the Region there are limited job opportunities within that Region other than mining. Foreign investors are earning huge profits from the mining operations of our rich natural resources within the Region. I am referring to the small miners - the *pork knockers*. I want to use these terms because I want people to understand, who support the small business community, they are not being given the opportunity to work in the mines, because the block system and the allocation system are being more for the foreigners than the local people. This industry should be properly monitored by the Guyana Geology and Mines to prevent the illegal practices of non-declaration of gold and diamonds that are being extracted from our region and this contributes to the loss of revenue to this country that is the point I want to make. God blessed Region 8 with natural resources and we have lost all of it.

Mr Speaker, I would like to turn to Housing and Water. I noticed the Minister is not here, but I would like to quote from the Budget Speech, Page 42:

A sum of \$240 million has been allocated for service connection, implementation of the Hinterland Water Strategy, construction of ground storage tanks, procurement of hardware and software, and development of new networking systems.

I am not sure what percentage Region 8 will get. When I look into this Budget Speech that is so elaborate, maybe that is because it is flood, we have nothing to get. I want to bring to the attention of this House that in 2003, this government has promised water and housing for the people in Region 8 and to date this project has not materialised.

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Two areas were cleared for the establishment of housing schemes. The first area was handed over to the GT&T and the second area which was cleared and graded, bushes have already taken it over again.

I want to let this House know, a PNC/R government will not make promises that it cannot keep and when the PNC/R is elected back to office, the people of Region 8 can be assured that the pure water supply and housing scheme will be established as we had water under the PNC days. Mr Speaker, I would like to turn my attention to health and I listened to all the people who talked about health and everything else. Two years ago, the government built a x-ray unit at the Mahdia hospital. This unit is still a cream elephant and it is not functioning. This is another example of failure by this government. There is also need for additional staff at the Mahdia hospital. Mr Speaker, Region 8 has always been plagued with malaria and I want to tell this National Assembly as I stand to speak here, presently I am being treated for malaria - I have malaria not due to perseverance and my representation for the Region, I told myself that I have to be here. There is need for improvement in the Malaria Eradication Programme in Region 8. The staff who are involved in the implementation of the programme are experiencing difficulties with their payment of subsistence especially in Sub-region, which is a mountainous area. When subsistence comes to that area, the supervisor fails to sign them. So do not let us come to this House and smile and report all the nice things. I do not bring **lies** to Parliament. I am the people's person. The health centre in Tumatumari was built in 2005, but to date is still not functioning. So our residents of Tumatumari and Micobie still have to depend on the on the sole CHW all the way from Micobie to come and go house-to-house and to go to Morewau and go to Konawaruk and all the other places. So do have a health problem.

Mr Speaker, I would like to make mention to the Education Unit in Region 8. As I said, here I am again to tell this noble House about the failure of this government in this area. Last year while we were here debating the Budget the Honourable Minister Nokta mentioned that Paramakatoi and Mahdia are both equipped with dorms, kitchen and mess hall. Mr Speaker, I will tell you, as I stand here, one year later the dorms at Mahdia are still not functioning. The students of Micobie, Tumatumari and Prince Ville do still have a housing problem. Do not let us come here to tell this House that all is well. All is not well. He then further went on to state and I have the Hansard in which he mentioned the children of Paramakatoi and Mahadia of Region 8 will write CXC, that is not true. The Secondary School at Tumatumari is not gazetted yet, so we

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have that problem. The Education Office is still to have more staff such as accounting and secretarial and I want to bring to this House, Mahdia Schools both primary and secondary right now are in need of more trained staff.

Well the biggest shock in Region 8 is agriculture. I did not see anything for agriculture in this Budget. As far as I am concerned, there is nothing. As I read the page that states agriculture, I will tell you that there are no Agricultural Extension Officers in Sub-region 1 and Sub-region 2. The Budget did not offer, so there is nothing and no hope for the people of Region 8. In the past, we used to produce a lot of things. I am saying that if we had an Extension Officer, the farmers would have been advised on how to go about doing their farming.

Now, I will be going to infrastructure. Over the last few years, bridges and roads have been constructed and rehabilitated across the Region, that is quite true, but in sub Region 1 during the rainy season, the roads become impassable in the North Pakaraimas and that is why the Honourable Minister Nokta is sitting here, he cannot go visit the Region, he cannot go unless he is flying. Even as the circumstances prevailed, thus the government saw it fit to remove the only air service carrier GAC since they took office in 1992 and thus leaving us to the mercies of the private air service providers. Then I note when the Honourable Minister of Amerindian Affairs was speaking, she mentioned about the airstrip in Chenapowu. I know about all the development in Region 8, because I do travel Region 8 at length and breadth, but when the aircraft will there in two months; which aircraft are we going with - private owned aircraft. So it will continue to be the same thing.

Then I was listening to the Hon Bheri Ramsaran when he was talking about the cost of chartering flight to bring out patients, that is because this government sold GAC, gone are the days when there was an air ruling as long as GAC is in the area, if patients are there to come out, they get priority. It is the government's duty to charter the flight so why come to this noble House to complain. It is the government's duty, because if I got sick in Mahdia, obviously they got to charter a plane for me. So why complain?

Mr Speaker, in Sub-Region 2, there is where I live and the Hon Nokta do visit that area very often. I do not know why he is holding his head, because it is the truth, he was there the other day. *[Laughter]* I went with him to Micobie. I drove all the way to Micobie. I want to bring to this House's attention the cost for transportation in Sub-region 2 and how our residents will suffer, You can just imagine from Mahdia to Tumatumari, which is just about 21 miles to cost is \$4,000

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with a cruiser; then the cost to come to Georgetown which is 200 miles plus is \$5,500. We then have the road to contend with. Of course, the residents of Region 8, for instance those in Sub-region 1, if they are never sick to come out as a patient, they will never see Georgetown. Believe you me; they die on the aircraft whatever. Our brothers and sisters in the North get better treatment in Brazil, because it is easier to go to Brazil, just over the pond - the Ireng rive and they get medical attention and return..

Mr Speaker that is what I have to present about Region 8. Least but not last, Region 8 is still the region without communication. We do not have telephone and for the longest while the Minister said that we will have telephone, we will have water, we will have housing and I come here again for the third time to tell this House that all of those are promises. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Mr Heeralall Mohan

Mr Heeralall Mohan: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, I rise to give full support for the approval of the year 2006 Budget as presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar.

Mr Speaker, this 2006 Budget is the largest in Guyana's history, a hefty \$102.9 billion, which represents a 19.1 percent increase over last year's budget. This Budget will certainly bring about great changes and improvement in the lives of all Guyanese especially the working class.

In spite of all the hardships and constraints experienced over the past year, we have managed to increase the personal income tax allowance (threshold) from \$240,000 to \$300,000 per annum which represents an increase in the monthly income tax threshold from \$20,000 to \$25,000 per month. This for sure will eliminate 20,000 Guyanese from paying income tax.

The Budget also provides for an increase in old age pension and public assistance of seventy-five percent which will result in some 33,000 pensioners receiving \$3,500 per month each, while approximately 14,000 public assistance recipients will each get \$2,300 per month.

Mr Speaker, with most of the sector contributing to the recovery of the economy, it is projected to grow by 4.3 percent in 2006. With the fifty percent depreciation of the GDP in 2005, as a result of the January natural disaster compounded by the spiralling oil prices increase on the world market the economy still remains stable and well in 2005, with a slight drop of 3 percent in the Gross Domestic Product.

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Mr Speaker, production is projected to increase by twenty-eight percent in 2006 to 315,000 tonnes. Rice projected to increase by 4.5 percent to 200,000 tonnes; bauxite production should rise to 2,832,000 tonnes representing a mammoth increase 77.6 percent, while the service sector is programmed to play a major role in achievement of the planned recovery of the economy.

Mr Speaker, in spite of the many challenges due mainly to the natural disaster and external factors, government has managed to maintain stable macro economic framework; a stable foreign exchange rate; a single-digit inflation; a low interest rate increase; gross foreign reserve and provide incentive for job creation activities in all sectors of the economy.

Mr Speaker, the emphasis in the 2006 Budget is job creation through small business development. This is an ongoing process and the history of the administration has proven in all the past budgets that increased social economic benefits are delivered to all our people. More money is being spent on health and education, pure water, housing and workers.

Mr Speaker, during the past years, we have chartered an economic and social course that has brought renewed hope and tangible benefits to all of our people. This course will continue and together we are being asked to take on the responsibility to create and secure a brighter future for our generation.

This year, the Budget has set the pace like all other budgets for all round developments in every region, every town, every village and every community. At this juncture, I wish to focus in the Honourable House on some of the developments that have taken place; that are taking place and those that will take place in my region.

Being a predominantly agricultural region drainage and irrigation works takes priority.

To begin with, for the year 2005 over \$185.7 million was spent on capital works in my region. \$988.9 million was spent on current and capital works in Region 2. To avert flooding and have proper flood control over \$75 million was spent in the construction of the following:

- Five irrigation checks at Reliance, Middlesex, Devonshire Castle, Anna Regina and Bushlot;
- Two tail walls at Little Alliance and Reliance;
- Three regulators at Sparta, Delight and Better Hope;
- Seven box culverts at Johanna Cecelia, Bush Lot, Facade, Airy Hall Bush Lot Cross, Middlesex North Head and Perseverance;
- One Access place at Anna Regina;

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- Nine timber revetments at Adventure, Riverstown, Mc Nabb, Hampton Court, Devonshire Castle, Somerset and Berks, Dartmouth and Zorg;
- One timber bridge at Andrews;
- Rehabilitation of access dams at Henrietta, Lima Cross and Better Hope;
- One regulator gate at Better Hope - Evergreen;
- One relief structure at Good Hope;
- Desilting of trenches at Dunkeld, Paradise, Mainstay-Three Friends, Somerset and Berks, Eliza, Devonshire Castle, Evergreen Anna Regina North Drain, Middlesex, Maria's Lodge, Pamona, Queenstown, Hoff-van-Aurich, Cullen, Abrams Zuil, Reliance and Cozier.

Roads - The sum of \$37.12 million was expended for the upgrading of streets at Riverstown, Bushlot, Sparta, Maira's Lodge, Zorg, Queenstown, East and West, Richmond, Suddie Housing Scheme and Aberdeen.

21:35H

[Presiding Member Mr Neendkumar assumed the Chair]

Land development - The sum of \$11.998 million was expended for the upgrading of streets with chip seal at Anna Regina; Bush Lot; Walter Elliot, Henrietta and Vasthi Street, Henrietta.

Land and Water Transport - The sum of \$4.480 was expended for the purchase of one ambulance for the Charity Hospital and four motor cycles for the Regional Administration.

Health and Education is utmost important in my region. In education, for 2005 we have spent over \$560 million for the maintenance and general improvement of education in my region. We have 29 nursery schools, 38 primary schools, 7 secondary schools and one Technical Institute and a branch of the CPCE.

The sum over \$55 million was spent for the purchase of drugs, field materials, office materials, print and non-print, janitorial and cleaning materials and national events.

Good Hope and Anna Regina Nursery Schools with the extension of Wakapoa and Charity Secondary Schools were completed. Twenty-three other schools were refurbished to the tune of \$12.8 million.

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An average of \$36 million is being spent on teachers' salary per month and the sum of \$29 million is being spent on a yearly basis in securing school and school property.

Supervision of examinations - CXC, SSEE, CPCE, National Third Form and ETI are being done very closely and keenly at the cost of over \$1 million.

Mr Speaker, of these spendings and very clean and careful interest paid by the Department of Education along with the position of dress code, no smoking zone and the high morality of parents, teachers, children and community in the delivery of education, we have seen tremendous improvement in the attendance, punctuality and general behaviour.

21:40H

[Speaker resumed the Chair]

Mr Speaker, I must report that for Region 2 in the past four years enjoyed continued the higher performance in the following exams:

- CXC;
- SSEE ; and
- National Third Form.

It must be recorded that for 2005, three students of Region 2 were place first, second and third at the National Third Form Examination at the national level and we able to have two students placed first and second at the national level for the Junior Secondary School.

Health and health services in my Region have seen tremendous improvements for the past year. So far we have seen the establishment of 1eleven new health centres that is fully equipped with medical supplies and trained staff. These centres are constructed mainly in much needed remote Amerindian areas.

For 2005, the health team in our region comprised of a doctor, a nurse, a medex and a dentist and full medical supplies have completed sixteen medical outreach programmes which were done mainly in the hinterland areas.

In 2006, we have seen the construction of a new health post at the Mainstay Amerindian Community and another at Siriki in the Pomeroon and a new nurse's hostel at Suddie on the Essequibo Coast.

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A new ambulance for the Charity Hospital and the most useful and needy piece of equipment - an ultrasound machine - which is a gift of a very kind gesture from Guyanese brothers living abroad.

The sum of \$7,477 million has been expended for the purchase of a neonatal photo therapy unit, one ultrasound unit, one haematology analyser, one microscope, one penosteal elevator, a physical scale and other medical equipment for the hospital.

We have in our region nineteen health posts, eleven health centres, one District Hospital and one Regional Hospital that are offering the best of health care to all our people.

Housing and Water - The greatest dream of our young people in our region is to acquire a home of their own. The housing department in Region 2 has received thousands of application. On average a total of over 3,000 have been recommended for housing in Charity, Lima Sands and Onderneeming Housing Schemes. Titles processed 137; titles delivered 95, titles received 49. Sale of application \$53,400; application received 512; legal fees \$773,000; sale of house-lot \$4,519, 500.

For 2006, eleven new housing schemes in my Region will receive electricity. Poles have already being planted and some areas are only awaiting connection.

Amerindians - We have in our Region, nine well organised Amerindian Communities with a population over 7,000 Amerindians.

On Amerindian population, I wish to report birth certificates have shown that Guyana has the fastest growth of Amerindian population in the world and this is happening especially in my region. In 1920, Guyana's Amerindian population was a little over 6,000, by 1995, the figure has reached over 54,000 people. This year it has reached 65,000 people. This is a testimony to the fact that the Amerindians are enjoying a better way of life under this administration.

[Applause]

All these nine Amerindian Communities are equipped with the basic facilities like modern and well-furnished schools with trained teachers, health centres, health posts with qualified health workers and health supplies, telephone booths, radio sets, learning centres, soup kitchens, pure water supply, playgrounds and recreational facilities to encourage sports and relaxation during spare time.

Millions of dollars are being spent on a yearly basis to train Amerindian Communities in basic skills in handicraft, management supervision, agricultural science, reforestation, soil recuperation

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and the demarcation of Amerindian lands and the establishment of village offices in all Amerindian Communities.

The Acoushi Ants Control Programme is on stream, in effort to control the attack of these insects on hinterland farms. Mr Speaker, each and every community have received either a boat or an engine for the purpose of transporting school children or the tractor to help in their farming activities.

In 2005 we have seen an increase of \$7,000 to \$10,000 as stipend for Captains of all Amerindian Communities and this is very encouraging.

There is a special package for hinterland teachers that is a higher take home salary and every child of school age received free school materials, school books, school uniforms and I wish to report Mr Speaker, that the Amerindian students in my Region are making full use of the hinterland scholarship granted to them by this administration and to say that they are performing excellent at those institutions of learning.

Mr Speaker, most of the Amerindian communities in my region are being equipped with electricity power generators or solar systems that supply electricity for 24 hours a day. This helps in the area of health and education.

Flood in Region 2 - The flooding in my region has some strong effect and some areas minor. Mr Speaker, I wish to report on some emergency works that were done in my region since the beginning of the flood.

- Emergency to avoid flooding in Region 2 has started some two months ago to the tune of over \$10 million this is raising of the main canal embankment at Richmond, Coffee Grove, Henerietta, Reliance and Queenstown.
- Clearing of the outfall channel at Somerset and Berks; relief channel at Good Hope, Mainstay and Unu Creek;
- Raising of the Capoey embankment;
- Desilting of trenches and drains at Charity new and old housing schemes and Charity we had six tractor propelled pumps working twenty-four hours a day. We also have at various areas in Region six big new pumps operational.
- Work is ongoing on a daily basis to have proper flood control.

The most affected area is the Pomeroon both lower and upper, where farmers lost tremendously but they were not left alone. From day one of the flooding, regular visits were paid by Ministers

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and Regional Officials to make a daily assessment and to monitor very closely what was going on. Not a day was passed without a visit from the health team, agriculture team, a team from food for the poor, disaster relief committee, Regional officials to give some sort of support or a word of comfort to the suffering farmers. It even attracted a visit from His Excellency the President Mr Bharrat Jagdeo and a high level team of Ministers of the government where a keen observation and assessment was made and on the spot decision was made to give a comforting assistance of \$50,000 to each farming household along with two brand new excavators to assist farmers in empoldering and draining of the farmlands. This help was heartily accepted by the farmers and they were very loud in praise for such a wonderful gesture by their President. To date 1,127 households received cheques to the sum of \$56,350,000 that is 81.9 percent. Mr Speaker, a sum of \$60 million was allocated, but later there was an extension to \$65.8 million to accommodate more suffering farmers.

Mr Speaker, the January 2006 flood could not have been avoided, it was an act of God. It has a history. History has shown that the Cariana tribes whose land marks prevailed in the Siriki, Warapana and Wywaro highlands for over 3,500 years once lived in the Pomeroun River District. The eighty-five miles long Pomeroun River is bordered by the Cuyuni ridge Kumaka, Kwabanna Ridge and has a history of flooding when there is intense rainfall.

The catchments of the savannah areas between Kumaka and the left bank of the Pomeeroon is approximately sixty miles where small creeks like Moruca, Wakapoa, Akawini cannot drain this huge savannah land which is more than 500 square miles of the savannah water, but spilled over the left bank of the Pomeroun River more since the Akawini Creek runs for fifty miles parallel to the Pomeroun River from Cozier area to the mouth; farmers cannot occupy more than 500 rods in-depth to cultivate the fertile clay and sand formation which is a distance of 20 miles.

On the left bank of Pickers Gill to the mouth of the Pomeroun a distance of thirty five miles farmers can only occupy sixty rods inland for cultivation since the pagasse depth is that area varies from fifteen to twenty feet and as such high pagassee dams disappeared in ten years and block drainage which cannot guarantee against flooding when the primary outlet in the Pomeroun River is filled to its maximum capacity.

For the past fifteen years the new Cozier - Aberdeen and David James Schemes discharged into the Pomeroun River. The Dredge Creek savannah about forty-eight square miles also discharged into the Pomeroun River.

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The ecosystem has changed in the upper Pomeroon when loggers have cleared more than thirty miles of tributaries in the Arpiaro and Arunamai water shed. These obstacles used to detain or withhold the flow of water downstream. Another phenomenon which will always cause siltation at the mouth of the Pomeroon River is unlike the Corentyne, Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo Rivers which discharge in the Atlantic Ocean in a North East by East direction; the Pomeroon River discharges into the sea from the north west and by west direction and has reduced it's length at the mouth of the river by seven miles for the past 100 years. Since Moruca river was a tributary of the Pomeroon River.

The Pomeroon River history of flooding is caused the Dutch planters of cotton in the mid 17th Century to cultivate the right bank, where such drainage canals are still in existence.

Indentured farm workers in 1850 and Portuguese farmers since 1835 can account for flooding since 1915, 1934, 1949, 1972 and now 2006. The January flood is much more than the earlier flood with an exception of the 1934 floods, which saw the Essequibo Road from Richmond to Charity is submerged and Pomeroon river likewise. It ended with an epidemic causing many households to die out. An assortment for help should be categorised as unlike rice and cash crop which can be cultivated to be reaping in six months. Coffee takes four years to bear, pears two to three years, depends on the soil type.

Many farmers did not overcome the 1972/1973 floods which lead to the migration and abandonment of farms.

In an area of seventy-four grants, twenty-four have been abandoned. Of the fourteen coffee holding complexes only three remained in existence. One of the larger coffee complexes and estate located at Malgretout in the lower Pomeroon River was also abandoned.

Flooding in the Pomeroon has a tremendous effect on young farmers, most of whom are employed elsewhere. Farmers must be encouraged to occupy highlands with the necessary financial and technological help from the Ministry of Agriculture. Thousands of acres of estate land above flood are available. We need to promote a new culture of farming. Pomeroon is no exception.

In conclusion Mr Speaker, this Budget of 2006 seeks to further guarantee and secure Guyana's future. It has provision for further all round development in our Region. Assistance from a caring government is always expected.

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The Budget contains something for everyone. The challenges facing our nation are many, our people have the understanding that the administration cannot do everything at the same time for every one. No government in the world has ever done that. Everyone has their role to play.

Together, the government and the people of our region have commitment to work together to build and improve the social and economic life of our people. We fully recognise togetherness is the only way forward for our country and our people. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, there is initiative in the 2006 Budget that would take this country on the road to progress. At the macro level, there is massive spending on physical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, sea defence, drainage and irrigation, social and human infrastructure such as health, education, housing, water; more homes will receive electricity; more people will be able to access wider range of services offered in social sector; more jobs will be created in an expanding economy.

The future of this country is the future of our children and our generation to come. Mr Speaker, this responsibility is in the hands of all of us.. Let us not shed this important task.

Mr Speaker, I wish at this point in time to make a special appeal to the Honourable Members of this House. Our people would like to move on. Let us put this country and its people above all narrow partisan interest and objectives *[Applause]* and together in unity and brotherhood for the realisation of that lofty goal of *One people, One nation, One destiny*.

Mr Speaker, I wish at this point in time to extend my warmest congratulations to the Minister of Finance Minister Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar and his hard working team for crafting such a Budget, for such careful management of our country's financial affairs. I now commend this Budget to this Honourable House. May God bless all of us in unity and real brotherhood for the good of Guyana? Thank you *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable member.

The Honourable member Mrs Shirley Edwards

Mrs Shirley V Edwards: Mr Speaker, I rise this evening, in this august Assembly to applaud the Honourable Minister of Finance Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar on this 2006, \$102.9 billion Budget.

Mr Speaker, the Minister should be complemented for despite the challenges and hard work ahead, he was able to put this Budget the largest ever.

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Mr Speaker, 2005 started with a flood, which caused a great impact on our economy and careful management, this PPP/C government must be able to weather the circumstances. The floods have started again, the government will be successful once again in supporting the affected persons as they did in the past.

Mr Speaker, if the opposition is serious in making Guyana a better place, they should cooperate with the government instead of trying to destroy the country. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I sit here and listened year after year at all the alleged failures of this government from the PNC/R never once have they praised the government for the positive things that happened in this country.

Mr Speaker, I would like to enlighten this House especially the PNC/R on some achievements of this government which they have done since taking office in October 1992. Besides the continuous rebuilding of schools and roads, the four-lane highway on the east bank of Demerara has been completed bringing relief to the public. There are great improvements in the housing and water sectors. Sophia is in the process of receiving electricity; new housing schemes will also benefit from electricity by the end of 2007.

The Lodge area has been identified as a pilot area for the eradication of filaria and the Minister of Health has embarked on a programme of house-to-house distribution of DEC salt. There is also a medical programme for the residents of Lodge including the Lodge housing scheme and Meadowbrook areas.

Mr Speaker, the President Youth Choice Initiative building was handed over to the Lodge development community group. This building is fully utilised by the entire community, the youths particularly early school leavers and drop outs benefit from computer classes and first aid. Day-care facilities are also accessible to the working mothers and this goes a far way to support the young people and women. This project is only one example that ensures the poor in our society enjoys opportunity, which on their own could not have afforded it. This demonstrates the responsibility and caring nature of this PPP/C government. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, following the visit of the President in the Lodge housing scheme, people were motivated and supported by the government, a grant of \$3 million was allocated for the cleaning of the drains and parapets. Here again, the youths in the area benefit from a short term form of employment and made a tangible contribution in the enhancement of their community. This community government initiative is an ongoing one and again in the second phase Eleazer street

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will be enhanced. Mr Speaker, this is real partnership with a people and the government. Such relationships and bonding auger well for the future of this country. Our people are beginning to realise that this government means well and that the government is prepared to enlist the people's participation in their own development and the people have responded to this call admirable.

Mr Speaker, the Budget theme *TRANSFORMING GUYANA THROUGH MODERNISATION AND PARTNERSHIP* is truly being realised. Look around and see the transformation of our country, the small man has now become a real man. *[Interruption: 'That is a Burnham thing.']* He said so, but he was not a real man, but now he is the real man.

Mr Speaker, the PNC/R continues to be in a world of darkness. The Ministry of Finance is facilitating the employment of youths from the following areas:

- East and West Ruimveldt;
- North and South Ruimveldt;
- Alexander Village;
- Lodge and Lodge Housing Scheme; and
- Meadowbrook Gardens.

Youths from the area will be gainfully employed. They will be receiving \$24,000 per four day a week work. This result in two major impacts, drains, canals and parapets will be maintained. Employment will be secured and new attitude to life will be shaped. This will obviously result in lesser crime and criminal intent. Youths will see the benefits of being employed.

Mr Speaker, I now want to turn to the development of sport in the Lodge area. In the housing scheme area football and other outdoor games are frequently played. Competition among different areas and clubs are frequently held and this is a healthy sign that the government sports programme is benefiting the youths and adolescence.

Mr Speaker, this Budget explains the agenda for Guyana. No fault can be identified with its contents, which provides adequately for all regions including the city wards. I therefore urge the opposition to rethink their position and support the government in the road towards further development for this country. Guyana is our country and we all stand to gain from a better Guyana.

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Mr Speaker, our government development programme has chartered a course for a modernised Guyana and this has guaranteed our successful elections in previous elections and the upcoming PPP/C will once again be victorious.

In closing, Mr Speaker, I commend this 2006 Budget for the total approval. Once again I say thanks to the Minister of Finance for an excellent and early presentation. Never before in our history has a budget been presented in January. This is another milestone for the PPP/Civic government. God bless Guyana. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member. That brings us to the end of our business for today.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I move that the National Assembly stands adjourn to tomorrow, 1 February 2006 at 14: 00h.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. The Assembly is so adjourned.

Adjourned Accordingly at 22:10h