

# National Assembly Debates

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2007) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN**      **Part I of**

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15th Sitting

14:00h

Tuesday 13 February 2007

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## ***MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)***

### ***Speaker (1)***

**The Hon Hari N Ramkarran SC, MP - (AOL)**

*Speaker of the National Assembly*

### **Members of the Government (42)**

#### **People's Progressive Party/Civic (41)**

#### **The United Force (1)**

The Hon Samuel A A Hinds MP (AOL)

*(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)*

*Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications*

The Hon Clement J Rohee MP

*Minister of Home Affairs*

The Hon Shaik K Z Baksh MP (AOL)

*Minister of Education*

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey MP - (Absent)

*Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation*

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

*(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)*

*Minister of Health*

## NA-BUDGET DEBATE - 13 FEBRUARY 2007

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

*(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Esseq)*

*Minister of Amerindian Affairs*

\*The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP

*Minister of Finance*

\*The Hon S Rudolph Insanally OR, CCH, MP - (AOL)

*Minister of Foreign Affairs*

The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt MP

*Minister of Housing and Water*

The Hon Robert M Persaud MP

*(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)*

*Minister of Agriculture*

The Hon Dr Jennifer R A Westford MP - (Absent)

*(R#7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)*

*Minister of the Public Service*

The Hon Kellawan Lall MP

*Minister of Local Government and Regional Development*

\*The Hon Doodnauth Singh SC, MP

*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*

The Hon Dr Frank C S Anthony MP

*Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport*

The Hon B H Robeson Benn MP

*Minister of Transport and Hydraulics*

\*\*The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP

*Minister of Labour*

The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP

*(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*

*Minister of Human Services and Social Security*

The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP - (AOL)

*Minister in the Ministry of Education*

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

*Minister in the Ministry of Health*

**NA-BUDGET DEBATE - 13 FEBRUARY 2007**

\*Non-elected Minister \*\*Elected Member from TUF

The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP

*Minister in the Ministry of Finance*

The Hon Manniram Prashad MP - (Absent)

*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce*

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

The Hon Gail Teixeira MP - (AOL)

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal MP, *Chief Whip*

Ms Bibi S Shadick MP

*(R# 3 – Essequibo Is/W Demerara)*

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP

Mr Albert Atkinson JP, MP

*(R# 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)*

Mr Komal Chand CCH, JP, MP

*(R# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)*

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

*(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)*

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP - (Absent)

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

\*\*\* Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP

*Parliamentary Secretary*

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

*(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)*

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

*Parliamentary Secretary*

## NA-BUDGET DEBATE - 13 FEBRUARY 2007

\*\*\*Non-elected Member

\*\*\*Mrs Pauline R Sukhai MP

*Parliamentary Secretary*

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP - (AOL)

Mr Norman A Whittaker MP

*(R# 1 - Barima/Waini)*

### **Members of the Opposition (28)**

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

Mr Robert HO Corbin

*Leader of the Opposition*

Mr Winston S Murray CCH, MP

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl MP

*Deputy Speaker, performing duties of Speaker of the Nat. Assembly*

Mr E Lance Carberry MP - (AOL)

*Chief Whip*

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP (AOL)

Mr Anthony Viera MP (Absent)

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP

Mr Keith Scott MP

Miss Amna Ally MP

Mr James K McAllister MP

Mr Dave Danny MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr Aubrey C Norton MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr Ernest B Elliot MP

*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Miss Judith David-Blair MP

*(R# 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)*

Mr Mervyn Williams MP  
*(Re# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)*  
Ms Africo Selman MP  
Dr John Austin MP  
*(R# 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)*  
Ms Jennifer Wade MP  
*(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*  
Ms Vanessa Kissoon MP  
*(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)*  
Mr Desmond Fernandes MP  
*(Region No 1 – Barima/Waini)*

**(ii) Alliance For Change (5)**

Mr Raphael G Trotman MP  
Mr Khemraj Ramjattan MP  
Mrs Sheila VA Holder MP  
Ms Chantalle L Smith MP - *(AOL)*  
*(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*  
Mr David Patterson MP - *(Absent)*

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

Mr Everall N Franklin MP

***OFFICERS***

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs  
*Clerk of the National Assembly*  
Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah  
*Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly*

**NA-BUDGET DEBATE - 13 FEBRUARY 2007**  
**3<sup>RD</sup> DAY - BUDGET DEBATE 2007**

**PRAYERS**

The Clerk reads the Prayer

- **MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT**
- **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**
- **PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS, PAPERS AND REPORTS ETC.**
- **REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES**
- **ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**
- **QUESTIONS AND NOTICE**
- **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS**
- **PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS**
- **LEAVE**
- **REQUEST FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

- **MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**
- **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

### **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, we would now resume the debate on the Budget for the year 2007. The first speaker for today is Honourable Member Mrs Volda Lawrence.

**Mrs Volda A Lawrence:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, on this side of the House, I rise to add to the continued debate on the maiden presentation of the 2007 Budget laid in this Honourable House on Friday, 2 February, titled *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana* by the Honourable Dr Ashni Kumar Singh, Minister of Finance. Allow me, Mde Speaker, to offer my congratulations to Dr Singh.

It was just two Fridays ago when we heard the Honourable Minister of Finance speak of the many good ideas, plans, programmes, and strategies to modernise the economy, deliver high growth and higher paying jobs, and also of the distribution of the benefits, on a more equitable scale, among all segments of the population, in particular, the low-income workers, the unemployed, and our disadvantaged groups. Yet, Mde Speaker, it failed to excite

the imagination, passion, and commitment of the Guyanese who are turned off from, and cynical about, the political process. The presentation failed to touch the heart, and to appeal to our emotions. The Budget which should serve as a unifying force in our society just did not arouse interest, and barely comments.

Permit me, Madam, to turn my attention to Social Services and Social Security, for which I have responsibility as a Member of Parliament for the People's National Congress Reform -1G.

### **Social Protection of Vulnerable Groups**

Page 41- Paragraph 4.4 (8) of the Budget, speaks of the protection of this group of individuals, and goes on to outline some of the many lofty plans by the Government. Let me refer, once again ... Let me now refer, Mde Speaker, to the words of Professor Aggrey Brown, and he said, and I quote:

*It is not the transmission of information, but the transference of meaning from source to receiver."*

Mde Speaker, before I came to this House in January 1996, the then Minister, Mrs Indra Chandarpal, said the following, and I quote from the Hansard of 31 January in the year of 1996:



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*The Government has a critical role to play in ensuring legislative measures are put in place to protect women and children. Consequently, a committee, headed by Justice Desiree Bernard, was set up with a mandate to look at the following:*

- *To revisit the children born out of wedlock;*
- *Removal of discrimination*
- *Act with a view to upgrading the award of maintenance, and giving effect to the intent of the legislation*
- *Examine the Matrimonial clauses and Maintenance Act, and make recommendations thereon*
- *Examine all legislation on children as these relate to inheritance rights, interests etc. especially implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and make recommendations.*
- *Examine legislation and procedures, as these relate to family issues in the civil of criminal jurisdiction in the High Court, and make recommendations.*
- *Examine the Dependents Pension Fund, and make recommendations on mechanisms to improve the benefits accruing to dependents.*

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- *Examine the procedures and other issues involved in the enforcement of maintenance orders, and make recommendations.*
- *Examine the concept of Family Court, and determine guidelines for implementation*
- *Examine and make recommendations for the development of a Family Court.”*

Mde Speaker ... and the list go on. In 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001, these were repeated, with a few more additions, and eleven years later, Dr. Singh indulges in a mere repetition of aims. What was going on for the last eleven years, Mde Speaker? I cannot lay blame at the Honourable Member Dr. Singh for this, but I would advise him not to be short-changed next time, but to have someone research the things he is told, before making it part of his presentation.

On both sides of the House, Mde Speaker, our goal should be seeking to find ways towards formulating those vital social policies and programmes which will lead to the reduction of poverty. Whatever the model adopted, Mde Speaker, a critical factor in the reduction of vulnerability, and the related aspects of poverty, is the successful integration of social policy, with sound macro-economic policy which would provide a foundation for consistent economic growth and social development.

Mde Speaker, many of the changes which need to be done can be achieved, if there is the will to do so.

Mde Speaker, in my last budget contribution, I made several recommendations. I wish to draw attention to two, which were taken up by the Government, namely the distribution of Old Age Pension Books before January and in this year's Budget, the setting up of service providers to cash the vouchers in the far-flung communities, thus reducing the burden of transportation costs. Congratulations would seem to be in order, as my solid suggestions were implemented.

Mde Speaker, may I ask if there is any Baygon or so around so that I can spray this fly that seems to be bothering me. *[Applause]*

I wish, however, to call attention to another critical aspect of making life easier for our elderly folks, which has not yet been properly followed through. I refer to the promise that people in Government institutions should once again receive their pensions. Allow me to examine and, as usual, make recommendations for positive change in our social sector.

## **Family**

Mde Speaker, the family, as the core institution in any society, must be singled out for special attention, and in this regard, the Government needs to stop paying lip service to the establishment of a Family Court, and get on with it. We must also see the establishment of Family

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Courts in other regions, and not in the capital alone. It is also time for the commissioners on the family to begin work on a national family policy, which can be used for creating, and promoting, a friendly-society for the mainstreaming of family issues into wider sectoral policies. Such a policy, when drafted, should have the widest public consultation possible. More than ever, today, we have witnessed the dissolution of the village family life – the raising of children by a village, or a community. It is more of each man for himself, an attitude aggravated by the new Value Added Tax and, as such, we must take cognisance of what is happening around us. The new Value Added Tax regime, the high incidence of HIV/AIDS, the rising food prices, specifically in relation to the more disadvantaged groups among us, have become even greater burdens for those poor families who are merely existing on the periphery of our society. Therefore, apart from the provision of Public Assistance, I strongly recommend, without delay, that a Committee be set up to look at ways in which assistance can be given to families as a short, or medium-term initiative. These families need some help in cushioning the impact of everyday existence. One suggestion is a Certificate, or Debit Card, which would give the recipient, on a monthly basis, an amount to be used for acquiring basic food items from a pre-approved list. Let me refer to a letter in the *Stabroek News*, dated January 2006, by a single parent and it reads:

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*Dear Editor,*

*I am a divorced mother of two teenagers. I earn approximately \$29,000 per month in a Government department. After PAYE, NIS, Union Dues, and Medical Scheme contributions are deducted; I am left with approximately \$22,000. From this, I take \$3,200 for transportation. I live in Ogle and work in Georgetown. I am now left with approximately \$19,000. This was further reduced to about \$12,000, after I pay light bill, phone bill, and gas - \$3,000. I would encourage the Minister of Finance, and the President to do the Maths, and the analysis. No groceries, vegetables, meat or fish, or clothing have been bought as yet.*

*Mr Editor, I understand that the VAT is intended to widen the tax base, and to get those who are evading same, but we the minimum wage, low-income earners should not be made to carry this burden. We pay taxes on our small salaries. We are taxed at the bank, and we also have to pay rates and taxes to the City Council, or NDC. Why should we have to pay more taxes? After deductions, we are left with practically nothing. It's a starvation salary. No Government should be boasting of progress when their people are living in abject poverty. Our wages need to be increased to accommodate VAT, or we should be exempt from this exercise.*

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*I beg the relevant GRA authorities to re-think their strategies and implementations as this VAT is tantamount to 'squeezing blood from stone.' We should not be made to suffer like this. Our salaries are already an insult to our intelligence, and a threat to our very existence and quality of life.*

*It is hoped that good sense and good governance will prevail, and that GRA should have on their list their list, those millionaire and other big ones that are truly the targets for this exercise.*

Perhaps, Mde Speaker, a survey of living conditions would give us a better view of the levels of poverty in our society. Mde Speaker, the International Development Association, and the International Monetary Fund Second Annual Progress Report, dated April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006, reads on page 5, paragraph 13, and I quote:

*Poverty in rural and underprivileged areas persists. The APR details Government's specific interventions and with programmes to reduce pockets of poverty, especially in the bauxite-producing town of Linden, and its environs, and in hinterland rural areas, populated largely by Amerindians. The stark view is that, while there have been improvements in human development indicators nationwide, and progress with reforms, the provision of social services, and economic opportunities in rural and underprivileged communities, are not yet adequately addressed. Furthermore, there is a*

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*need to formulate an integrated strategy for more equitable geographic development, particularly with regards to the development of infrastructure, and access to basic health and education.*

Mde Speaker, our pensioners ... It cannot be denied that persons receiving Old Age Pensions have over time, been given minute increases, such as from \$3,500 to \$3,675 in their Old Age Pension. We know that these increases in no way can provide for all the necessary expenditures that our pensioners have to face. However, we must continually seek to provide as much comfort for them. It is noted, that while the UNFPA consistently reports of the ever-increasing numbers in the aged population, not only in Guyana and the Caribbean, but the world over, our Government seems to be contracting on the allocation made to the Old Age Pension programme for on page 40 of the Budget, we are told that 33,000 persons would benefit from this programme while, over the years - since 1998, it has been reported by the ministers responsible, that over thirty-nine persons are registered on this programme. I suggest that the Minister of Finance, and the Minister responsible, look into this matter with some urgency, for surely, I do not believe that some 6,000 persons could have fallen off this programme overnight.

I wish not to go over those recommendations which I made in January 2006 to this Honourable House, regarding pensioners, women, adolescents, and children, but I must call on the Minister responsible for Labour, Human Services and Social Security to develop programmes which

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are guided by at least two important policy documents: The Senior Citizens, Policy Development Report, the National Policy for Senior Citizens and to proceed with the establishment of a functioning commission on the elderly for, Mde Speaker, Government must fulfil its mission of meeting the challenges of a growing, healthier, and more active senior citizens population, which should include a feeding programme, senior day activity centres throughout the ten administrative regions - not only in Region 4, and more so, the provision of visiting health aide, which can be done through the assistance of NGOs and other bodies.

It is time that we have seniors' health time, health programmes can be established on our televisions, radio stations, and newspapers to help those persons who have seniors at home, and those who take care of them in various institutions.

What about subsidies, such as kerosene oil and transportation to assist our elderly, who must cope with the Value Added Tax as well? All these developments would take money, and here, I must mention that on page 40 there is mention of \$400M to provide shelter for the homeless, while the Palms and other homes for the indigent, and homeless elderly, will be upgraded. But, Madam, there is no mention of this in the Capital Budgets of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, neither the Ministry of Health, nor the Ministry of Works.

Mde Speaker, the Government, like all other Guyanese, is aware that rising inflation rates have eroded real disposable income in recent years, and thus, the retired public servants



are experiencing as much difficulty as the senior citizens. A responsible Government must seek to make provision to alleviate the hardships incurred as a result of loss of income. I propose, therefore, that a Commission, or Committee, be set up to look into those persons who receive such pensioned.

### **The Physically Challenged**

Recognition should also be given to those within our society who are physically challenged. Many of these individuals are from poor families, and are excluded, in most cases, from full access to education and employment opportunities: Yet, Mde Speaker, some of them do make invaluable contributions to our society, and I firmly believe that the special needs and concerns of these individuals must be addressed in order to alleviate their dire circumstances. We must consider that a disability grant be provided for these individuals in our society through the Commission on Disability; that a broad-based public-awareness campaign be developed, which would conduct workshops to sensitise government agencies and key stakeholders and, at the same time, that we seek to continually provide assistance for persons with disabilities, with the aim of helping those who can access the workplace.

## Abuse of Women and Children

Mde Speaker, like other societies, we must address the scourge of child abuse and seek to protect those vulnerable children, who are at risk, and who are facing a myriad of negative outcomes, including neglect, exploitation, malnutrition and even death. We cite the case of little Basmattie Seecharran, called Indi, nine years old, whose life was brutally taken at Parika Beach last month. The many gruesome stories we read about, or hear about, of our little ones tell a story of what is happening in our society to our children. A picture too often painted is one of rape, molestation, neglect, abandonment, sexually active children, pornography, cruelty, and child labour. I refer to the kind of environment which threatens the development of the child.

Mde Speaker, we have no mechanisms in place to fundamentally address the issues of children involved in commercial, sexual exploitation and drug trafficking, and this cannot continue. I call on the Minister responsible for Social Services and Social Security to address her mind, and that of her staff, to these burning issues affecting our children. (*Applause*)

Help and Shelter reported that between January to September 2006 that they handled three hundred and twelve abuse cases, including child, spousal, non-spousal and other domestic abuse. Two hundred and fifteen of the cases involved spousal abuse directed against women. Despite the much legislation passed for the protection of our women and children from various abuses, it is noted

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that, today, in our society, there is still a high incidence of sexual harassment in the home and workplace. The Guyana Human Rights Association reported on the lack of protection for women against sexual and physical exploitation and abuse, and said that institutional resistance in all sectors, including law enforcement, the judiciary, and legal profession seriously contributed to the increase in violence against women. Help and Shelter said that all magistrates and their staff need to be sensitised to the problem of domestic violence, and to their roles in ensuring implementation of the law and, in addition, to educate all police officers so that they fully understand the provisions of the law. Two weeks ago, there was a lot of talk of a child being married to an adult in the newspapers. Mde Speaker, even the First Lady spoke about this serious development; but today, the going thing - not only in Guyana, but the world over, is for older men, especially married men, to have affairs with young girls - even those at school. No one is talking about this abuse of our young girls by older men, especially those who hold high office, or are financially well-off. Is this not an offence too? What are we doing about it as leaders? Some of us cannot speak on this, because we ourselves are culprits of this act, (*Applause*) or our friends are persons who are perpetrators of this very act. What kind of double standards are we setting? Perhaps it is time we set up a Children's Authority Secretariat, which will, in effect, function as the guardian of all the children of Guyana, including Neendkumar.

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Our National Insurance Scheme, Mde Speaker ... I, like many Guyanese, understood that the National Insurance Scheme, set up under a People's National Congress Government, was to play an important role in our social protection system, particularly for our senior citizens, who we are told are increasing due to the increase in life expectancy. Of course, this places a greater responsibility on our National Insurance Scheme, as it faces an ever-increasing challenge to provide income replacement for retirees. Therefore, in order to keep pace with the movements in the cost-of-living, the National Insurance Scheme should have regular and periodic adjustments. The calls for the reforming of the National Insurance Scheme are too numerous to mention, especially since the people who usually depend on this Scheme no longer see it as a benefit, but rather as a burden. Firstly, Mde Speaker, the manner in which persons are addressed by the staff of this institution would turn the deaf away; Customer relationship is at an all-time low. Contributors to the Scheme cannot have accurate information of their records at any particular time. It takes months, or years, to have a response to one's request for an update on their records. When this is finally received, many years are missing, and then you are told to go and find information, and submit them, or that they are still upgrading the system and will further update you. In many instances, these records were correct and up-to-date before this computerisation process was introduced. I can speak on this matter because I myself have fallen victim to this treatment.

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Mde Speaker, if you travel outside of the city, you can become increasingly aware of the many senior persons who are victims of this Scheme. Many have never received any pension because of various issues, which are no fault of theirs, and others were not given any because they died before their problems could be resolved. It seems that Guyanese workers are taken for granted by this institution, since workers are given reimbursements such as \$500 for doctor's consultation fees, which range from \$2000 to \$3,000, and \$10,000 for spectacles, which cost from \$35,000 upwards, and Mde Speaker, \$12,000 for funeral cost, which start from \$65,000. No wonder Mde Speaker, that the Scheme is seen as a burden by its contributors.

We, the Guyanese workers, expect that at least, this institution would have prudent management, and a sound investment policy and, most of all, a close monitoring of contribution collections. Time for reform of the National Insurance Scheme is now - not tomorrow. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Ms Debra Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member ... I nearly said Minister, be given 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

**The Speaker:** Motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue. Go ahead.

**Motion Carried**

**Mrs Volda Lawrence:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Before concluding, Mde Speaker, permit me to say a word to those on the other side of this House, who persistently live in the past; and I would say to them:

*Be not naïve about your Party being in Government. This is not your first stint at governing Guyana. You did so before, from 1957-1964, and you failed miserably.  
[Applause]*

We, on this side of the House, are about progress and the future of Guyana. Perhaps the reasons for the PPP/C not getting it right with the economic problems Guyana faces, is because they are still looking back. One would have thought that the lessons of the past would be used to propel them forward.

We of the PNC-R 1 Guyana can just as well speak to the fact, that in 1964 when the PNC took office after a PPP Government, we found a Guyana filled with racial hate and tensions; a bankrupt Guyana Marketing Board, and many more. We in this House heard the many quotes from former Minister Carl Greenidge, who gave various Budget presentations, about Guyana's battles with various issues, which we faced as a developing country. Yet they have not told this nation, Madam, that many of those battles came about because the oil crisis in early 1970s, which affected the world, hence a large amount of our revenues was put into dealing with this situation, and despite this, they took over government in 1992, with the country having a growth rate of 7% *[Applause]* A large number of

investors; a social amelioration programme, and lest you forget, The Economic Recovery Reform Programme, [Applause] which this Government was able to utilise to the fullest. [Interruption: Mariddle mariddle Marie] I must join with the Honourable Bibi Shadick and call on those new and young members to read their history from the correct, unaltered sources.

Mde Speaker, in paragraph 3 of the foreword of the PNC/R 1Guyana Manifesto, the Honourable Member, Robert Corbin, Leader of the Opposition said, and I quote:

*Our vision for a transformed Guyana takes, as its starting point, our belief that God is the Supreme Master of the universe, and the recognition that the onerous demand of managing our country requires the collective effort of all our people. Our vision includes the building of strong families, with healthy family values; the strengthening of communities to solve problems at the point at which they emerge; enhancing our education system; reducing unemployment; improving health care, and removing the overwhelming cycle of terror, fear, and dependence, that the drug lords and the drug pushers introduced into our country. We perceive ourselves to be part of a team for development that includes all stakeholders in Guyana.*

Page 1: Paragraph 1:3 of the Honourable Member Dr Singh's presentation reads, and I quote:

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*“As have emphasised our vision is for a better Guyana; a Guyana where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoying greater cohesion and prosperity; a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours; and a society that is recognised for the care and attention it places on children, women, youths, the elderly, and less fortunate. We must therefore strive for economic success in order to establish a better society for all. We have to build safeguards, and act to sustain economic growth and stability, long into the future, and we must continue to work to find ways of sharing, more evenly, the benefits of our economic success.*”

Can it be, Madam that this perceived arrogance lies in the words of Professor Aggrey Brown, who said, and once again I quote: *“It is not the transmission of information but the transference of meaning from source to receiver.”*

In concluding, Mde Speaker, on this, my contribution to the 2007 Budget Debate, I wish to remind the Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, and the Minister of Human Services and Social Security, that it is not how much you say, or even at times what you say, but rather, what you do. Its action that is important. The Guyanese people, irrespective of whom political party holds the seat of Government, look forward to the strengthening of our social protection system, where the vulnerable have coverage in the face of the risk of vicissitudes that confront them. Mde Speaker, it is only when true team-work takes



hold of this beloved country, Guyana, that relevant and important changes would be accomplished. Is this not this we are aiming for? Thank you Mde Speaker. (*Applause*)

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister Priya Manickchand.

**Hon Priya Manickchand:** May it please you, Mde Speaker, I join with the rest of my colleagues, on both sides of this House, to offer my warmest congratulations to the Honourable Minister of Finance for presenting to us a Budget that promises us a modern and prosperous Guyana - not only the content of the Budget, Mde Speaker, but for an excellent delivery. So through you, Mde Speaker, I say to the Honourable Minister of Finance, congratulations.

Mde Speaker, I listened carefully to the words, of and the presentation, of the Honourable Member, Ms Volda Lawrence, and I was very heartened ... and I hope I'm not being naïve in my confidence in her promises to work together with us to realise a more modern and prosperous Guyana, and I heed her words very carefully, and for that reasons I am happy to say that I have been, even before your cautions this afternoon, tried to determine what our history is and, not only because I anticipated what you might say, but more because I brought for my Honourable Friend, Mr Everall Franklin, and to commend to the young - and very pleasant, Ms Selman, a book about her history, written by Father Andrew Morrison, called 'Justice,' and it describes to us, and defines to us, the period of our country, from 1952-1992 - forty years, called 'Struggle for Democracy in Guyana.' Mde Speaker, this is a book I recommend, not only to the Honourable Members on both

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sides of this House, but to Guyanese at large, so that we can have an accurate account. And the Honourable Madam Volda Lawrence asked that we don't distort history, and this is an accurate account of history. (*Applause*). This history ... this book tells us, Mde Speaker, about the years when our country was in the dark days of oppression, when party paramountcy was the order of the day, when undemocratic rule was what we were governed by. It tells us of the fairy-tale elections. It tells us of the thallium scare. It tells us of President Hoyte and the unions. It tells us about the power barge fiasco. It tells us about the elections that nearly flopped. It has a chapter entitled 'Big Brotherism,' and it tells us about 'Big Brother' against the Catholic Church. It tells us about 'Big Brother' against the media ... (*Interruption: You got that at Michael Forde Bookshop*) No I actually got it from Austins Book Services and it's going for the good price of \$2,500, and I commend the purchase of this book by this Honourable House. It talks about the use of direct violence against persons, Mde Speaker, who were fighting the system, and who were fighting for the very things that the Honourable Ms Volda Lawrence calls for today. And as I said, Mde Speaker, I commend this book to my young and, like I said, very pleasant friend - not to make her bitter, but so that she could pledge, along with me, and along with the other Honourable Members of this House, that we would do all that we can to work with, and for the people of Guyana, to ensure that we never return to the dark days described in the pages of this book. [*Applause*] Mde Speaker, I also do not wish ... and it is regrettable that I had to start my presentation, as it were, on a negative note,

but again, thank you very much for the recommendations. They would be taken on-board, and as you know, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member knows that she has a standing invitation to my office, and to my ears as does every other member of the Opposition, and of this Honourable House. But, Mde Speaker, I cannot help but regretfully note - and register, something that caused me great disappointment yesterday, and a little before yesterday, which I heard creeping in the debate into this Honourable House. I am not only very disappointed, Mde Speaker, I also am very saddened and troubled that we are going to embark on a course that will take us down this route.

I heard yesterday, Mde Speaker, and prior, references to ... We are defining persons, and the persons we serve, by the areas from which they come ... and if I may get a little crasser I believe, as the colour of their skin, and I urge, Mde Speaker, that we stop doing this. If we start talking about, or asking about where money is going to be filtered - to which area, and if we are talking about urban and rural areas; and if we are going to be asked to offer service to persons depending on the areas from which they have come, we are slipping into a terrible slope that would take us down a line of thinking that, as described in the pages of this book ... and I beg, Mde Speaker, especially the younger members of this House, not to go down that route. Let us serve people because they are Guyanese, and not because of the area from which they have come. I pledge myself, Mde Speaker, to serve persons who access the services of my Ministry because they are Guyanese

citizens, and not because of where they have come from, and I refuse to look up, at any given point, Mde Speaker ... and I had refused this even when I was at the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic, to tick any box that tells, whichever statistics person is going to come along, what race I serve; I am serving Guyanese, and I am refusing to tick a box that defies someone by their ethnicity, and that is why I believe, Mde Speaker, that when there are calls for particular areas, and services offered for particular areas, I believe that these are calls for us to define to whom we are offering services - not for Guyanese, but rather for the ethnic person we are offering services to.

Mde Speaker, I heard the Honourable Member's cautions and concerns raised about pensions, and our care for the elderly, and I say, with great pride, Mde Speaker, that we are on the right track; and that Guyana has seen a great improvement in the system of distribution of pensions. In 1993, Madam, the pension scheme was expanded to ... this is Old Age Pensions, to allow for everyone over 65 years to access that facility. The Means Testing that existed before then was removed, and as a result of that removal 22,000 new persons were added to that list. *[Applause]* Between 2005 and now, please Mde Speaker, there has been an 80% increase, which my learned friend referred to as a *minute increase* ... There has been an 80% increase in the amount of pension being offered to pensioners in our land, and that is being given to in excess of 33,000 pensioners, Madam. Mde Speaker, numbers often get misinterpreted. It means that every month, 33,000 persons, who are over 65, can go to the Post Office and receive the

assistance that this Government gives because we care. That is what that means; and it means that the 22,000 persons, who could not receive it in 1992, can now receive it. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we are not saying that the amount that we give is as much as we want to give, but we give it when the confines of our economy, and we have to be careful with how we spend; so while we would love ... I would personally love to give a lot more, unfortunately this is what we can afford, but what we can do, Mde Speaker, is to ensure that every person over 65 gets - not those who satisfy a means test. We can ensure that everybody gets it, and what we can ensure too, Mde Speaker, is that most of the difficulties that they face are removed. We are not saying at all, Mde Speaker, that the system is perfect. I myself find unacceptable the problems that pensioners face when they go to the Georgetown Post Office to get their pensions, and we are working very hard with the Post Office to ensure that these difficulties are removed; and so, when I heard of the tale of Mother Blair, a few nights ago by Dr. Austin, I thought to myself that I'd be most delighted to meet Mother Blair, and we should make arrangements, Mde Speaker - Dr. Austin and I, to visit Mother Blair, so that I can tell Mother Blair that she can now not only that now get pension ... and back then in the days that she longs for she may not have gotten it, because she may not have qualified; and I don't only want to tell Mother Blair that now she has free access to health-care from all the Government's and State's medical institutions; and I don't want to only tell Mother Blair, Mde Speaker, that now she can travel - like then, on all the Government's facilities - vessels and transportation, for free; but I also

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wish to tell Mother Blair, Mde Speaker, that this Government is going to work tirelessly to ensure that the difficulties that she may have faced, regarding the receipt of her pension ... and in any other area, that we would work very hard to ensure that those are reduced.

Mde Speaker, Mother Blair and other pensioners must know now, too, that not only do they get water in their taps, but that the Government is subsidising their water bills; so if you own your own premises, and you have to pay water rates, the Government is going to pay that for you. Mde Speaker, Mother Blair would not have gotten that under the PNC. [*Applause*]

I heard, also, the call by the Honourable ... Mde Speaker, I heard also the call from the Honourable Ms Volda Lawrence about alternative agencies that may distribute the pension which we so caringly offer. We are considering, Mde Speaker, alternatives. I had a meeting ... The Ministry of Human Services had a meeting with the Georgetown Post Office Corporation, and we expressed our dissatisfaction with the way that pensions were being distributed. We expressed our deep dissatisfaction with the difficulties pensioners were facing, and they agreed that these difficulties were going to be removed, by the fact that they would have - ready for pensioners, the money that they are to receive. Having said that, we are not opposed - if they fail to honour their undertakings, to review this system, with a view to ensuring that we can put in place a more effective system that removes, from the pensioners, those difficulties that they face when they go to the GPOC,

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over which we have no control. So we are not opposed to reviewing that system, Mde Speaker, all with a view to ensuring that the pensioners receive their pension in a timely manner, and I am sure that it is no secret the pleasure and gratitude that pensioners expressed when they got their coupons in 2006, for 2007. We intend to make this a permanent feature of the Ministry. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Ministry offers assistance too many persons, and the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security is tasked with taking care of those persons in our society whom may be deemed more vulnerable than others. So we are tasked with looking after the elderly, women, children, the indigent, and the disabled. Mde Speaker, we offer assistance in many respects ... and I heard earlier a comment from the Honourable Ms Volda Lawrence, that persons with disabilities are not assisted - sufficiently assisted, or not assisted. I wish to say, very clearly, that persons with disabilities can access assistance from the Ministry of Human Service and Social Security, through our Public Assistance programme. That is a programme designed, Mde Speaker, to assist persons who find themselves in circumstances - medical and economical, that prevent them from sustaining their lives in a way that we would like them to sustain their lives, and that is a programme that we offer at the Ministry, please Mde Speaker, that is accessed by in excess of sixteen thousand persons per year and this is something that this modern and progressive Budget caters for again this year.

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Mde Speaker, I wish to ... and I hope that I can be articulate enough about this so that it never arises again, or if it does, that it is not because of ignorance, but rather for other motives. There have been charges ... and I see questions from the Honourable Member, Ms Volda Lawrence, that would have to be answered - that there is some level of discrimination in the distribution, or determination of Public Assistance, and who gets it.

I wish to state, very clearly, Mde Speaker that I fail to see how there can be any discrimination in the system, given the way the system is governed. Mde Speaker, Public Assistance to distribution and governance, is provided for in Chapter 36:02 – The Laws of Guyana. I have not heard any charges that we have breached the Laws, and I wish to say that, this is how it's done: An applicant for Public Assistance applies, either with assistance from the Ministry's officers to fill up the form, or by him/her. That applicant's application is then reviewed by a Local Board of Guardians. The Local Board of Guardians is comprised of members of the community, so at no one point ... and I hate to indulge in this, would we find persons from Industry sitting on a Board for applicants from Buxton. My point, Mde Speaker, is that the persons who are determining whether or not the persons deserve or entitled to Public Assistance under the system, for medical or economic reasons, is the Local Board of Guardians. Those are the persons who sit there - nine persons, who determine whether or not someone can get Public Assistance. We, at the Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and, by extension, the Government of Guyana, facilitate



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the payments, but we do not determine who gets Public Assistance; and hereafter ... I am attributing the charges that were made earlier, publicly and otherwise, to ignorance, and by that I mean a lack of knowledge. Hereafter I expect to have no charges of discrimination. If there is any information, from any member of this Honourable House, or indeed any member of the public, that could inform us that a Board is not acting appropriately, please let us know, please let us know, because we would certainly put measures in place to correct that, but I want to make it clear, once again, that it is not the Ministry of Human Services, not the officer of the Minister, not the P.S - no officer in the Ministry who determines who accesses this fund.

Additionally, please Mde Speaker, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security will soon begin to assist persons living with HIV and AIDS, who have been deemed by their clinics to be unable to sustain their own lives, and we will expect the support of the Opposition, of course, and every other Member of this House when we begin that programme.

Mde Speaker, the Difficult Circumstances Unit is another department run by this Ministry, in an effort to tangibly demonstrate our care for the people of Guyana. This is a department that assists persons who find themselves in difficult circumstances because of personal tragedies, or national disasters. Mde Speaker, we access the resources with which we help persons who access this department

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from the Poverty Fund from the Ministry of Finance, and last year, please Mde Speaker, in 2006 we assisted 30,921 persons to a tune of \$14,427,230. This did not include the uniform distributions, Mde Speaker, which amounted to \$45M so, in all; the sum total of assistance offered by this department amounted to \$59,427,230. Mde Speaker, I have number here of the numbers of persons we assisted in each region, but because I refuse to indulge in this sort of determination of where service must be offered, depending on which region you came from, or the way you look I am not going to offer these numbers; but they are available at the Ministry of Human Services. What I can say, Mde Speaker is that I am satisfied, after having looked at the numbers, that there was no discrimination in that Department. However, in order to make the system - the department, more functional; and likely to make the assistance that we offer more likely to be viable, we're going to be placing a social worker full time in that department, whom we will expect would assess the needs of every applicant to determine whether or not that person, or that family, is actually in need. We also intend to place an Economic and Planning Officer - perhaps he would be called a different name, which can assist persons to ensure that the assistance that we give is viable to ensuring that they sustain their lives.

Every application by this department, Mde Speaker - every application by this department that is not routine ... and there are routine applications for ... once the paper work is satisfied, for funeral expenses, or spectacles for pensioners, or fire victims: Those we consider routine. If the

application is not routine, then it shall be reviewed by a committee made up of the Permanent Secretary, the Head of Department, the Director of Social Services, and the Chief Probation Officer, and that is the Committee that determines, Mde Speaker, whether someone is qualified to access funds from this unit or not.

Additionally, Mde Speaker, what we found was ... what I believe is that, because the department is centralised in Georgetown, perhaps persons who may have been in need in other areas could not have accessed much-needed assistance, and in that regard, please Mde Speaker, we have every intention of decentralising; but because decentralising takes a while, it is going to be to specific regions over a period of time, and I hope, Mde Speaker, that we wouldn't have to consider which region we serve based on any considerations other than need.

Mde Speaker, I see in the Minister's Budget where he indicated that actions would be taken towards the creation of a Child Protection Agency. Well, I am happy to report to this Honourable House, Mde Speaker, that we have established a Child Protection Services Unit in September of 2006. This unit, Mde Speaker, is going to be charged with the responsibility of ensuring that our children - our nation's children are protected, and I join with the Honourable Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence, to say that we are going to treat aggressively with those paedophiles who insist on raping our young girls. Mde Speaker, high on our agenda is a comprehensive approach ... the planning of a comprehensive approach as to how we are going to address

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this new phenomenon that has arisen. I am not sure if it's new; but it is now a publicly-made phenomenon of child marriages, and I hope we can count on the support and constructive, members of this Honourable House both Mrs Lawrence and other contributions to this programme.

Mde Speaker, additionally, I am happy again to report that the minimum standards for homes and orphanages have been completed and, very soon, we are going to begin to embark on a programme that would enforce the articles contained in those standards. What that would do, Mde Speaker, is put measures in place, not only to assist the administrators of the homes, but to ensure that the children in those homes are cared for - not only now while they are currently in the homes, but that there is some aftercare plan when they leave the homes, and that is the Child Protection Agency that we have begun. Additionally, Mde Speaker, in collaboration with the Ministries of Culture, Youth and Sports and Home Affairs, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security will soon be commissioning a facility that will hold and host juveniles who find themselves in conflict with the law, separate and apart from adults, who find themselves in conflict with the law, and we are very happy, please Mde Speaker, because we have read all the reports, and we are aware that this is a necessary step to further care for the children of our country.

Mde Speaker, while we are on the subject of children, I wish to call on this Honourable House - every member, on both sides of this House, to ensure that the Commission - the Constitutional Commission that should have been

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established a while ago; which is not yet established and which, I believe, is an indictment on every single member of this Honourable House - the Commission on the Rights of the Child, is quickly established.

Mde Speaker, I have heard reports about why that Commission, and the Gender and Equality Commission have not yet been established, and because I am heeding the advice of Honourable Member Mrs Volda Lawrence and do not wish to live in the past, I'll try to forget why that didn't happen and urge every single member of this Honourable House today that we work together, hand-in-hand, to ensure that these two Commissions are established.

Additionally, Mde Speaker, we recognise that the very foundation of a democratic society is centred on law and order and access to the laws in the Constitution that protects and defends rights that are given therein. In that regard, we recognise that there is urgent need for persons, across the country, to access legal services and, beginning in January of this year we expanded, in collaboration with the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic, which initially only served Georgetown and its environs because of lack of resources, but we have expanded legal aid services to include Regions 5 and 10. So, from now, on please Mde Speaker, an Attorney-at-Law would be based in the Regional Democratic Council Office at Mahaicony and at Mahaica on Mondays and Tuesdays, and in Region 10 at the Christianburg Magistrate's Court on Wednesdays, and that Attorney-at-Law would offer not only advice, but

representation. Mde Speaker, it is here that I wish to interject, and to provide an example of what I was speaking of earlier. When I took this decision to do this, it was because we had one officer in the Ministry whom I didn't think was being utilised fully. Mde Speaker, the decision to send this officer to Mahaicony and Christianburg was based on the fact that those two courts sit one day per week. It was not based on any ethnic balancing, because I would not involve myself in any decisions based on ethnic reasons; but I say this: If another court, in another area, was sitting on one day and Linden was sitting everyday - Christianburg was sitting everyday of the week, I could not have sent that officer there. He would have gone to another area, and I wish to point out to you that we have to work with the resources we have. While we intend to establish legal aid centres, or expand our services to Regions 2, 3 and 6, we can only do what we have resources to do. I have gone to Berbice, and I have met persons from Berbice at the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic who are in dire need of service, and I would say now that my priority is to provide legal aid service in Berbice, for no other reason but that the people in Berbice are in dire need. The people, irrespective of how they voted in Berbice are, in dire need; so I don't expect to see any criticism, nor will I heed any criticism, if we are to establish legal aid services in Berbice - when we establish legal aid service in Berbice.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence, spoke of several pieces of legislation that the Honourable Member indicated this side of the House had promised for many years. Well I wish to say this: The

Children Born Out Of Wedlock - enacted; Maintenance Laws – enacted;

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Minister.

**Hon Clement J Rohee:** Mde Speaker, I would like to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**Hon Priya D Manickchand:** Thank you very much, Mde Speaker. I am also happy to say ... and the Honourable Member is not unaware of this, that the Children's Legislation, which comprises of five pieces of Legislation, which are presently in draft form, are going to be completed very soon. The Attorney-General has given that undertaking.

Mde Speaker, this is where calls for consultations, and invitations for consultations, become important. Like the Honourable Member said, it is not what you say but what you do. So I expect that when we invite Honourable Members on the other side of this House, and on this side of this House, to consultations, that they would make themselves available to the service of the people of Guyana, and not wait until we come to Parliament to make comments, for the sake of grandstanding in front of the cameras, about the Bills that would delay the passage of these Bills in Parliament. Very soon, I am saying very

clearly Mde Speaker that comments and criticisms, suggestions and recommendations that can be made, can be made now, when there is a period of consultation, to which the Honourable Mrs Deborah Backer was invited but did not turn up. She has that time now to do it, and even though the Honourable Member did not come, we would still entertain, happily, any recommendations and suggestions. What I am saying, Mde Speaker is that I hope when we come to this Honourable House it is not then that we find the time to make those recommendations, which would further stall the enactment of these pieces of legislations.

Mde Speaker, that was to address what we are doing with the children's pieces of Legislation.

### **Sexual Offences Legislation**

I am happy to say that, yesterday, in collaboration with the partnership of UNICEF, we engaged a consultant to draft the white paper on the Sexual Offences Legislation, and what is needed; and I am very pleased that Mr Raphael Trotman of the Alliance for Change spoke to me yesterday afternoon, without knowledge that I had that meeting, to indicate his interest in helping; and that interest is welcome, and he, the Honourable Member, with as is the case all the Honourable Members of this House, will be fully informed of the progress of that Legislation as it goes along. We too recognise that this is a scourge in our society that we must stamp out together. We are going to



aggressively treat with rapist, paedophiles, and other persons who are bent on violating our women and girls.

## **Homeless Persons**

The Homeless persons, Mde Speaker, are another category of persons who, unfortunately, find themselves misplaced are also cared for by this Ministry. Those persons, Mde Speaker - It has been disclosed by the Honourable Minister of Finance that there would be an investment of a \$440M facility to house those persons. That investment would come on-board very shortly, and the Members of this House would be informed of that. Mde Speaker, in addition to that facility that we intend to build, and create, we run and operate the Shelter, which is formally known as the Night Shelter and, as of October of last year, that facility was opened up to be a shelter – period, not just a night shelter. Now persons can stay in all day, and make it a home, or a shelter, for as long as they want. We provide the persons and residents of that Home with food - three meals a day, counselling, assistance to find jobs, Public Assistance sometimes, and other means by which they can care for themselves. On any given day over thirty persons are at that shelter during the day. Mde Speaker, like I said, again we can get lost in numbers, but what it means for the persons ... What does this Budget mean for these persons? This Budget means that that man who has to sleep outside of the post office, simply because he had nowhere else to go, in the hot sun on the pavement, can now have shelter; can now access food; can now be cared for by us, and that

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is what the Budget means to him. That is what the Budget means to the woman [*Applause*] who sleeps outside of the Bourda Market because she has nowhere else to go.

Mde Speaker, in addition to that, we also run and operate the Drop-in Centre, whose name has to change, simply because the services offered thereat have changed. Drop-In Centre started under the Honourable Minister, Indra Chandarpal, who is currently Chief Whip of this House and Member of Parliament on the Government's side, and this, I have to say, was an incredible, an ingenious idea that became something that served, over the years, many, many children, who otherwise would have been displaced. This home has now evolved - this Drop-In Centre has now evolved into a Home, where children can stay there all the time, be given meals, be cared for, be placed in schools, be trained in other skills, and this has become, Mde Speaker, a good example of what this Government stands for.

We started initially caring for these children by opening a Centre where you are welcomed to come and have a meal; and that evolved over the years, with our hard work and dedication, and our allocation from our Budget to this particular facility ... evolved over the years into a Home where we can provide for these children. We also operate and run, please Mde Speaker, the Mahaica Children's Home, and that is an orphanage that is run by the Government. We intend to make that the model Home, from which other Homes can base their own operational procedures and policies. That Home currently cares for thirty-two children. Again, Mde Speaker, what does it

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mean for the children we care for there? Some of them would tell you that ... little girl there, whose name I shall not reveal, would tell you that, had she not had this place to go to, she would have been forced to marry a seventy-one year old paedophile, who exists on the Essequibo Coast, who was attempting to marry her; and so the Budget allocation to this Home, Mde Speaker, means for that girl - let's call her Sue-Ann, for that girl, it means she has a life again. That is what it means.

Very soon too, Mde Speaker, we will embark on consultations, to which I will invite all the Members of the Honourable House, to determine how it is we can help single-parents with something that we can call 'The Single Parent Plan,' or whatever else we determine would be a more gracious name; but we would embark on consultations to assist to determine how it is we can assist single parents. What kinds of assistance they would need.

Mde Speaker, we continue to subsidise ... The Budget this year continues, and has catered for, the continuation of subsidies to NGOs and organisations such as Help and Shelter, which was mentioned by the Honourable Madam Volda Lawrence, which provides for women who find themselves in difficult circumstances who need shelter, counselling, and other services. We have provided again for subsidies for that organisation, because we believe that we must assist persons who, like us, are trying to help the Guyanese people.

Mde Speaker, it is recognised by us that the Domestic Violence Act, which was enacted by this Government in

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1996, has not been as effective as it can be. That has not escaped our attention. We are aware that we have to work more collaboratively, and perhaps educate and advise other bodies and other organisations and authorities, such as the Police Force and the administration of justice, so that we can ensure that this Act is as effective as it can be.

National Task Force on Domestic Violence had commissioned a report, and that report is just finished - making recommendations as to what we should do. Very soon we shall embark on a programme that will draft the regulations that are much needed under that Act, with the hope that the Act will become more effective. I caution, however, that regulations without more, will mean nothing, and so we must work together, and insist that the judiciary, the magistracy, and the Police Force give us what we deserve under this Act, and give to women what they deserve under the Act – use the Act as effectively as it was intended to be used.

The Trafficking in Persons is recognised by us too, Mde Speaker, to be an issue that needs attention. We have continued our work in that Department. Last year we conducted eleven workshops, which trained in excess of 466 persons. There were 35 sensitisation exercises conducted, exposing 4,418 persons to this crime. Mde Speaker, these workshops and sensitisation exercises have been, I believe, fruitful; because in every single report that we got - seven of which have resulted in charges have resulted from the persons who were trained and sensitised in making reports. This department, again, is not without

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its own challenges and in order for us, as a country, to stamp this crime – this offence out, then the other bodies, such as the Police Force, and the magistracy, have to play their part, and it's my respectful view, Mde Speaker, that as we speak, they have not been playing their part as effectively as they could. Mde Speaker, last year the Honourable Member, Minister Bibi Shadick, reported that there were seven charges pending before the Court, and I have to unfortunately report that those seven charge are still pending before the Courts because of the sloth of our system. We cannot continue in this vein if we are to move up from a tier two to a tier one country, which would indicate that we are doing all that we can. So we recognise too, Mde Speaker, that, we have work to do in this department, not only from our Ministry, but in collaboration with the other authorities that recognise and deal with this particular phenomenon.

Mde Speaker, in closing I wish to say that I extend, again, an invitation to the Members of the Opposition, and to all the Members of this House, to let us work hand-in-hand and come together to put our shoulders to the wheels and ensure that Guyana can move forward - quicker than it can if we did it alone, because whether you come on-board or not we are going forward. We are simply uniting you to come on-board with us and let us work together. History is going to record you if you do that as making a positive contribution to Guyana, and to the lives of our people. I thank you Mde Speaker. (*Applause*)

**The Speaker:** The Honourable Member, Mr James McAllister.

**Mr James K. McAllister:** Mde Speaker, like a number of the Members of this Honourable House who spoke before me, I wish to congratulate the Honourable Minister of Finance for his presentation of Budget 2007. The Honourable Minister's reputation as a competent professional preceded him in this Honourable House. His confidence, his diction, and his poise were all highly commendable, while presenting his Budget Speech. I congratulate him.

Mde Speaker, before I go into my presentation, I wish to make some brief comments, as it relates to some of the things said by the Honourable Minister, MsPriya Manickchand. First let me say that I welcome the remarks by the Honourable Minister, that she is willing to seek cooperation, and that she is willing to work together with Members of the Opposition. We believe that, in order for us to adequately represent our constituents, we have to work with Government, and we expect that Government will respond; but I want to assure the Minister, that sometimes, some of the issues we bring to you - sometimes they are going to be bitter pills that you would have to swallow, because there are occasions where there are things that are happening that you might not believe are actually taking place in the society, but we know about them; so we would bring them forward.

Now, Mde Speaker, as relates to the issue of water and our Minister mentioned the fact that the Government exempts

pensioners from paying water rates. I just wish to mention, in passing, that under the PNC/R water was universally free, and so pensioners [*Applause*] were part of the general society that are getting free water from the Government.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Minister made a very important point this afternoon, when she said that she was not going to get involved in the issues of race, or where people are from, and where resources are going. I think this is a good standard to aim for, but sometimes, when citizens come to you with complaints, and issues, you have to bring those things forward, and we have to take it to the Government - to take it to the responsible Minister, and to say to the responsible Minister: *'Hear what is happening. Hear what we are being told.'* For instance, last Saturday, I was in Region 2, and some citizens came to me about some problems. One man came to me, and he told me he went for a job at a certain place. He knew that the job was available, and you know - the fact of the matter is that this gentleman was told *go to Corbin*. Now this is a Guyanese going for a job to be able to take care of his children, and the official is saying to him *if you want a job you go to Corbin*. In effect, what they are saying to him is that you are PNC, so you can't work. Mde Speaker, the Members on the other side are getting restless, but the fact of the matter is ... [*Interruption: I don't know if you don't know, but I am quite sure that the Honourable Minister Ms Priya Manickchand doesn't know*] the fact of the matter is that in Essequibo, Region 2, officials are head-hunting PNC-R supporters. [*Applause*] PPP officials are going to Government agencies to tell people *don't process this*

*man's transport, he is a PNC.* Can you imagine that, his transport? But you see, Mde Speaker, I wish the Honourable Minister, Ms Priya Manickchand, would take note of the reactions of some of her colleagues when they hear some of these complaints. The hostility, aggression - and you know what? What he is saying is friction. We do not even get a response to say: Okay, we will investigate ... *[Interruption: Give us the man's name. You can't give the name because ...]*

Mde Speaker, I want the Honourable Minister of Agriculture to look at this one, because this comes within his portfolio. In Region No. 3 ... and I put in a question on the issue of the criteria for the Government assisting cane farmers with ploughing of lands and so on, and you gave an answer, but I want you to go and investigate the situation in Good Intent with the Progressive Cane Farmers Society, and the Good Intent Cane Farmers Society; and the assistance given to cane farmers in that area by the project in Den Amstel, and you go and determine how that agency was picking and choosing to determine whose land they were going to plough. You go and check that out, and when you do that come back; because I want to know if you are aware of what is happening in your Ministry.

**Hon Robert Persaud:** I am.

**Hon James K McAllister:** Apparently you are not aware. You are not aware, because I asked you the question ... *[Interruption: so you are aware.]* So, Mde Speaker, I was trying to give the Honourable Minister the benefit of the doubt, but apparently the Minister is saying to us that he is



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aware of this situation, so it means that he is condoning it, but I hope the Honourable Minister is not promoting it. [Applause] So, Mde Speaker, I wish the Honourable Minister can go and investigate this matter.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Finance presented to this Honourable House a Budget of \$100B. The Minister announced a lot of impressive – sounding allocations - for roads, sea defence, health, education, youths, etc. Listening to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister of Agriculture afterwards, one would get the impression that Guyana has just broken the sound barrier for economic development. Indeed, if this Budget was to be taken in isolation, one would very well conclude that something very major was happening.

But Mr Speaker, I want to put this thing in perspective. In 1989 the late Mr Hugh Desmond Hoyte embarked on an Economic Recovery Programme. Major components of this programme were the re-establishment of Guyana's credit-worthiness; and to establish that Guyana was once again open for business. This effort by Mr Hoyte's government was highly-successful. Mde Speaker, the President of the World Bank, in a Memorandum dated 17<sup>th</sup> March 2002 to the Bank's Executive Directors, had the following to say about the PNCR's Economic Recovery Programme, and I quote:

*The challenge of the Government is to return the economy to the impressive rates of growth which followed the 1989 Economic Recovery Programme.”*

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And the Government we're talking about here is this present Government, and the IMF was saying that your Government has the challenge to take the economy back to the growth that followed the PNCR's Economic Recovery Programme, and it says here:

*Backed by substantial external, technical and financial support, the ERP eliminated virtually all price controls, abolished import prohibitions, unified the unfloated exchange rate, simplified the tariff structure, and established market-based interest rates. The outcome was remarkable; GDP grew by over 7% annually from 1991-1997."*

Mde Speaker, you note that the Bank took the period up to 1997, even after the PPP/C has come into Government. It is clear, here, that the IMF is conceding that the momentum that the economy had - going on to 1997, was as a result of policies implemented between 1989 and 1992 (*Applause*); and then the Report goes on to say, and I quote:

*However by the late 1990s, initial output gains from economic stabilisation, and the first generation of structural reforms, had been exhausted.*

It means therefore, that after the PNC/R had left the ERP in the hands of this Government, you had a situation where the gains were exhausted, in the fact that the momentum that was given to them, they were unable to maintain that momentum. Mde Speaker, as a result of this, the economy

stalled, and we were in trouble all over again. However, by this time, world leaders had begun to address the issue of global poverty, and in the late 90s the Millennium Development Goals were formulated, and world leaders, through the IFIs, committed to give the necessary support to ensure that Guyana, and other countries like Guyana, could achieve the MDG's. These countries were allowed to develop strategies that met their specific needs. Guyana, Mde Speaker, was given the freedom to negotiate with donors to design locally appropriate policies. You would recall that in 1989 the PNC government engaged virtually hostile IFIs and was able to construct the ERP, albeit with a bitter IMF medicine. In the late 1990s, however, after the PPP had squandered the gains of the ERP, the situation had changed. No longer was the bitter IMF pill forced upon countries. It was in this context that Guyana was allowed to formulate its Poverty Reduction Strategy - to have home-grown initiatives, and upon approval by the IMF of the PRSP, Guyana became eligible for all sorts of funding.

Mde Speaker, this inflow of grant aid, and other aids, made money available to the PPP/C Government ... *[Interruption: You're hurt about that, eh?]* However, it must be noted that it is not due to any innovation of the PPP/C ... *[Interruption: It was due to public accountability.]* All the Government was required to do was to tow the line and the funds flowed. There was no policy initiative, nor implementation of any new policies, or anything of the sort. The Government was required to tow the line, and since this effort was all about achieving

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the MDG's, the Government was given certain conditionality in respect to spending; spending on health to reduce child and maternal mortality rates; spending to reduce HIV/AIDS infection rates; and malaria; spending on education to achieve universal primary education were all mandatory. So, Mde Speaker, when members of the Government stand to trumpet - to say that they have moved the percentages spent on education, and on health, and on the social services so high, it is because the IFIs have given them conditionality, based on the monies that have been made available in order to achieve the MDGs ... *[Interruption: And the point is?]* The point is that you can't come and claim credit as if you have some policy initiatives, and that you are thinking along these lines. These things have been enforced upon you from overseas.

Mde Speaker, Guyana's good fortune did not end there. In 2005 the leaders of the G-8 met at Gleneagles in Scotland and agreed to two key objectives:

- 1) Promoting development to end extreme poverty, with special focus on Africa, and
- 2) Responding to climate change.

With respect to the former, the leaders agreed to:

- i) increase the aid budget to provide an extra \$50b per year by 2010, with half of this amount going to Africa; and
- ii) write off \$50B of debt to the poorest countries.

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Mde Speaker, it should be noted that the G-8 Summit was held against a background of rallies of thousands upon thousands of people, calling upon the leaders to make poverty history, and as a result of the proceedings in Gleneagles, the IMF, and the World Bank, cancelled the debt of a number of countries -countries primarily from Africa ... [*Interruption: Dr, Jagan started that process in the 70s.*] Mde Speaker, apparently the Honourable Minister is not aware of what is happening. This whole movement was a result of lobbies out of Africa, to deal with crippling poverty there. That is what it's all about, and that is why the majority of the relief went to Africa, and I want to say something here – that Guyana was merely allowed to board Africa's gravy train, because the focus was on Africa, but we were able to benefit. We got a windfall from that and, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr Winston Murray, alluded to the fact that this Budget is funded to the tune of \$36B by foreign grants and loans - a deficit of 36%. So when the Honourable Minister of Finance throws money around, I am not impressed, because this money is available to us because of a global policy on poverty and has nothing to do with the efforts of the Government. It's available to us because of a global policy on poverty. [Applause] In fact, the fact that we are included in this bunch of some of the poorest countries in the first place, is in itself a black mark ... [*Interruption: PNC mek we poor.*] Mde Speaker, the Government has done nothing to generate this money, nor were they required to even go to the IFIs to convince them that they should get the money. The fact of the matter is that, at the level of the G-8, and at the world leadership, it was decided that assistance would

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be given to poor countries to eliminate poverty, and we benefited from that. So, Mde Speaker, the haste on which the Honourable Ministers Robert Persaud, and Dr. Frank Anthony ... I understand two aspiring presidential candidates ... (*Laughter*) rushed to proudly associate themselves with these numbers is a clear indication of their political character. That means ... come on. You want to aspire, and then you have to do better ... (*Laughter, applause*)

Mde Speaker, the Government's side is so proud of this Budget that I thought I must read it over and over to see what all this excitement was about, and I read it, and I read it, and I read it again; but since the 36% deficit cannot be the reason for the excitement, I had to read it again, and since the aid windfall as a result of Africa's gravy train cannot be the reason for the excitement, I had to read it again and so I thought that may be the excitement was about this new thing they are calling 'Vision 2011,' and so I decided to look at 'Vision 2011,' and Mde Speaker, when I examined the so-called 'Vision 2011,' I am forced to conclude that the PPP Government is suffering from both glaucoma and cataract ... [Applause] The Government is as blind as a bat. The Government's vision does not go beyond its nose. Mde Speaker, for instance, let us look at the vision. On page 23 of the Budget Speech the Honourable Minister stated, and I quote:

*These three industries will continue to be the mainstay of the economy for the foreseeable future.*

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The Minister was talking about rice, sugar, and bauxite - three primary products. Now, what kind of 'Vision' are we talking about in 2007, where we are saying that we can't see ourselves breaking-free from primary products and moving forward into services, and other knowledge - based endeavours, where we will be in a position to ensure that we can pay workers more?

Mde Speaker, no one ... The Honourable Member, Mr Irfan Alli, was not in this Honourable House when the PNC/R brought a motion calling upon everyone to cooperate and come and stand together in the face of the European price-cuts for sugar. We brought it here because, as the major Opposition political Party, we are committed to the welfare of the Guyanese workers. Mde Speaker, it is this issue of primary products, and us being locked into this arrangement, that the Honourable Minister is referring to as his 'Vision 2011.' He wants us to be in a situation where we continue, for the foreseeable future, to be the acetoners of prices, rather than the setters of prices. Why is it that we must believe that we must continue to be involved in labour-intensive endeavours that will reduce our competitiveness and ensure that we cannot pay our workers the kind of wages so that they can live properly? Why must we do that? Why can't we look, and have a vision that would take us beyond that? I am not saying that ... I am not saying, for one minute, that we should step out of rice, step out of sugar, and step out of bauxite; but what I am saying is that how could you say that in the foreseeable future we cannot see ourselves being dependent on other endeavours, other rice, bauxite and sugar to the extent

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whereby those things take over? ... *[Interruption: Minister didn't say that. You go and read page 23. You cannot read and understand. I wonder what the MBA is coming to.]*  
*(Laughter, applause)*

Mde Speaker, The PNC/R is of the position that a total dependence on these three sectors, or rather, a dependence on these sectors as the mainstay - as the mainstay ... maybe the Honourable Minister, in his response, will get up to tell us about what's happening in forestry, what's happening in fisheries, and so on, but I am using the Minister's own words here, and he said that, in the foreseeable future, rice, sugar and bauxite would be the mainstay of our economy; and I am saying that, to the extent that they continue to be the mainstay of our economy, it is to that extent that we are going to be locked into poverty, and we have to break out, and we have to break free; and we are prepared to work with you, and where you don't have the ideas - where you don't have the ideas, Mde Speaker, we are prepared to provide those ideas, and to even hold your hands and take you forward.  
*(Applause)*

Mde Speaker, I have noted that the Minister, in his Budget presentation, spoke of prudent and responsible borrowing that is consistent with a long-term debt sustainability ratio. This was included as part of his 'Vision 2011,' and I wondered: Is the vision about borrowing or is the vision about foreign direct investment? Is the vision about generating wealth to ensure that Guyana can break free from these kinds of arrangements? I would really like the



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Honourable Minister to explain this, so that we can know what his vision is all about, and I have also noted that a major component of the Minister's 'Vision 2011.' His details of how Africa's gravy train money will be spent, okay? A major component is details of how Africa's gravy train money would be spent; and I am saying, Mde Speaker, that this is no vision, but this is merely a plan of how he is going to spend other people's money. What is visionary about that? *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, in today's world, any vision for the future must include a major component for the rapid development of the service sector, investment in human resource development in preparation for the evolution of a knowledge - based economy must be a necessity. It is these kinds of activities that would bring the high-paying jobs that the Guyanese people hope for; and this is what we thought that the Minister would be focusing on when he referred to 'Vision 2011.' Now for instance, Mde Speaker, the Honourable Minister referred to ICT development in his Vision. This is good. We support this, because we believe that this is part of what must happen to ensure that we develop the kind of human resource locally to facilitate investment, but let us look at the Government's efforts in this direction. If you go to the Minister's presentation, Honourable Minister Robert Persaud, you would see that the Minister reported to this Honourable House that the Government's effort in this direction was the hosting of a workshop. Now I wonder, in 2007, the Government comes to report to this House that their efforts, so far, in an ICT strategy, is the hosting of a workshop. Well, I wonder what

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kind of Vision is this, but then the Minister goes on to tell us ... Without setting aside any money, the Minister goes on to tell us that in 2007, we will work with stakeholders to develop and implement the plan. Well, I wondered what kind of plan we're going to develop and implement in a couple of months. This can't be any serious plan. Obviously, we haven't grasped the magnitude of what we are confronted with. We have a lot of catching up to do. We have to ensure that our people are equipped in certain ways, and the Government needs to have a comprehensive plan to deal with this; *[Applause]* but we just can't put two or three people together in a couple of months and run out there and say that we have an ICT strategy that we are implementing. We need to go much further than this, and we would like to hear from the Honourable Minister, if not now ... because I know it might be asking for a bit too much now; but, at sometime in the future, the Honourable Minister must come and tell us, and give us some detail, of the ICT strategy; and even if you don't give us a strategy, you must come to tell us how Government is going to proceed to develop the strategy - some details. It can't be a two-month story, because then we're clearly not talking about a serious plan.

Mde Speaker, I am tempted to expand a bit more but time does not allow me to do that, but I would say, however, that it's clear to me that the Government is in a policy warp. At the highest level there is a total lack of understanding of the policy agenda needed. For instance, a few days ago I saw footage of His Excellency the President

speaking at the opening of a COTED meeting in Guyana  
... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Mrs Debra J Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to ask that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given another 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**Mr James K McAllister:** Mde Speaker, as I was saying - a few days ago I saw footage of His Excellency the President speaking at the opening of a COTED meeting in Guyana. I was shocked to hear the President telling the meeting that agriculture is the way to go. I would not be carried away with focusing on services. I was wondering where, and what time span we were living in. No one is saying that we must drop agriculture and leave it, because we have to feed ourselves, and we have a responsibility to feed the Region; but we must understand, at the same time, that in order to create wealth, and to ensure that the people can enjoy a certain quality of living, we have to do different things. We can't believe that we can do the things we were doing 50 and 60 years ago better and become rich. We have to do additional things - and for us to be saying to the people in the Caribbean that Agriculture ... we are sending a very negative signal about Guyana and about how Guyanese think.

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Mde Speaker, when I heard that presentation, I said to myself *no wonder there is a void in the Budget of a policy direction*, and I therefore wish to assure the Honourable Minister of Finance that I do not blame him for this debacle. The blame goes higher [*Applause*].

Mde Speaker, I give the Honourable Minister an A+ for his very good presentation; but I give the Government ‘F’ for effort – fail, and with respect to the ‘Vision,’ it is clear that Government has totally misinterpreted the assignment. I therefore return it unmarked ... [*Laughter*] and give them ‘U’ – Unclassified ... [*Applause*] ... *have no Vision*.

Mde Speaker, I now turn to some issues related to the responsibility of the Honourable Minister, Mr Robeson Benn:

### **Berbice River Bridge**

Mde Speaker, a few weeks ago ... The Berbice River Bridge is in the estimates. A few weeks ago a motion was introduced in this Honourable House under my name, seeking to have the Government reconsider its decision to build the bridge between D’Edward Village and Crab Island. One of the main issues raised by this side was the findings of the Patricio Milan Report, which found that the Lois Berger Group’s Feasibility Study grossly underestimated the cost of construction and maintenance of a steel floating bridge. Milan recommended a pre-stressed concrete bridge between Augshurg and Providence. Mde Speaker, during this debate the PNC/R 1G advanced the argument that something was very fishy about the Berger

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Report, so we called for an investigation. The Government rejected our call for an investigation, claiming that the Lois Berger Group is one of the highest integrity.

Mde Speaker, I have since done some research, and here is what I have found: On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 2006 *Afro News*, an independent news agency dedicated exclusively to Africa, in its report '*Controversial U.S. Company wins \$700M South Sudan Contract*' stated, and I quote - I quote, Mde Speaker:

*The controversial U.S. Company Louis Berger Group has been awarded a \$700M contract for revamping infrastructure in the autonomous region of South Sudan, paid as development aid by the U.S. Government.*

And here is what they go on to say:

*The U.S. contractor has been much criticised for disastrous infrastructure projects in other U.S. protectorates Iraq and Afghanistan.*

Mde Speaker, the report goes on to say, that Louis Berger has earlier been criticised for its role in the reconstruction of other U.S. dependencies, especially its far-ranging operations in Afghanistan, has been termed an unmitigated disaster by *Corp Watch* - a U.S. non-profit group that monitored the behaviour of global companies on issues such as human rights, the environment, and corruption. In Afghanistan, schools built by the Louis Berger Group were twice the cost of similar structures constructed by Japanese contractors, a *Corp Watch* report said. The report further

cited a road construction project, overseen by Louis Berger, which had required maintenance, even before completion. Mde Speaker, this is the Louis Berger Group that the Government told us was of the highest integrity.

Mde Speaker, in another report, *Interpress Service News Agency*, in a report “Energization of Afghanistan,” again speaks of the Louis Berger Group. I am not going to read it, but I am going to tell you: They say here about Louis Berger being responsible for the construction of health clinics in Afghanistan, and they were supposed to build a certain chimneys said to be used as models, and even the models started to fall apart - water leaking, the roof collapsing, the ceiling collapsing, the walls collapsing – Louis Berger, the company that we brought here and believed that we would have to take their word - in the face of serious criticism by another professional, we decided we are going to go with them as if they are beyond reproach. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, given discrepancies in the Berger Report, and the apparent dubious reputation the company has developed elsewhere, there is sufficient grounds for an investigation into what is happening, or what has happened, at Berbice - Their relation to that feasibility study and how we got; what we got because we gave this Honourable House the information – before, the details of what went on - from ‘fig,’ come right down, and we were able to establish that something is very fishy with Berger.

Mde Speaker, the PNC/R 1G therefore challenges the Government to commission an independent investigation

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into the processes and procedures leading to a decision to build a floating bridge between D'Edwards and Crab Island – we challenge; you and we say here - we say here, that if you can't take up this challenge it would mean that you have something to hide, and we are not here now saying ... You don't have the option, now, to say that anyone is proposing that the bridge stop. That is not on the table. We are challenging you now to launch an investigation into what went on with Louis Berger and that feasibility study, and let us put this matter to rest, once and for all. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, another issue raised during the debate was the escalating cost of the bridge. Initially we were told the bridge was going to cost \$38M, then we were told \$40M, and I now understand that the cost now stands at \$46M. The Government claimed that the Berbice River Bridge Company signed a fixed price contract with a contractor Mabey-Johnson and Bosch-Rexroth. Mde Speaker, it is known that no contractor is going to absorb escalating costs that results from that kind of design; who is going to fork out this money? I am quite sure that it is not the investors in the Berbice River Bridge Company; so where will this money come from?

Mde Speaker, I understand that, under the Main Road rehabilitation project – Phase II Bridge Rehabilitation, the government secured US\$11.6M for the Berbice River Crossing Project. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2006, GINA reported that His Excellency the President informed Berbicians that the Government will spend US\$10M to build approach

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roads to the bridge on both sides of the river. Examination of the 2007 Estimates reveals that G\$500M, or US\$2.5M, was budgeted for the approach roads, therefore the big question is where the US\$8.1 M is? Even if we say we pay Berger US\$2M for the feasibility study, \$6.1M still has to be accounted for. Is this \$6.1M going to be used to meet the extra cost of the bridge? I would wish the Honourable Minister to explain this, and to tell us where the \$6.1M has disappeared to.

### **Weight Control Programme**

The Honourable Minister of Finance, in his presentation, announced that in 2006 we are going to spend a grand total ... well, roughly - because I sum some things, of \$3.1B for roads and bridge works.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Mrs Debra J Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to ask that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**Mr James K McAllister:** Mde Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Finance ... Mde Speaker, as I was saying; a grand total of \$3.9B was budgeted for roads, or rather, was used for roads in 2006. Mde Speaker, \$3.9B in 2006 was spent, but when we look at roads and bridges, we understand that roads and bridges are designed for standard



loads, and therefore, if a road is designed for a certain load, then we should not allow vehicles above that load to roll on the roads, or to cross the bridges. Mde Speaker, if we designed a road, say for HS 25, we can have cars run - thousands of cars run on it for the whole year, except for wear and tear, then we have no problem; but if we have one truck over the standard load, then that truck could trigger a process of degeneration that is irreversible, and then it's only a matter of time before the road is destroyed. It is for this reason that a sensible Government, after having invested \$3.9B, would have invested in an intensive weight control programme – not so with the PPP/C Government. Examination of the estimates reveals that \$5M is allocated for weight control in 2007. However, further examination reveals that \$60M was budgeted in 2006, but not one cent was spent. I now wonder about the sense of spending \$3.9B on roads and bridges, and then we do nothing to control the loads we put on them to ensure that they could at least last their designed life. Now, Mde Speaker, I can't understand this, and when you go back - even further, you see that, in 2005 – again, not one cent was spent on weight control. It might appear to be a very simple matter, but is something that is going to protect our investment, and when the Minister comes here and he says that he is going to spend \$3.9b on road and bridges, and he is going to spend \$60M on weight control, and then somebody gets stingy with the \$60M, I say that is 'voodoo economics.' You have to protect the investment, and I hope the Honourable Minister would be able to tell us how ... rather, that he is there to assure us, that he is going to implement this in 2007; because everyday that overloaded

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vehicles run on the roads, part of the \$3.9b is going to waste; and I am sure that the Honourable Minister would come to the Assembly within a few years to proudly announce expenditure on works that we have just spend \$3.9B on. Mde Speaker, I suppose this is what the Government terms *value for money*.

Mde Speaker, the issue for value for money is indeed a serious issue in Guyana. For instance, the roads in Sophia have disintegrated shortly after construction. When vehicles brake on these roads, the road surface moves with the vehicles, and shortly the Government will come again for more money to build those roads – again. I suppose this is value for money. Something is happening somewhere. Someone has an incentive to keep building things over, and over and, over again. We need to ferret out that person and deal with him.

Mde Speaker, for instance in Region 2, D & I works are being done. Contractors are being paid, but after then new contracts must be issued to repair damage that the previous contractor caused. What kind of contractual arrangement is that? But I suppose that would give the Honourable Minister an opportunity to proudly announce more expenditure and to be able to claim how the Government is spending a lot of money, but we need to have value for money. This issue of value for money was addressed by the IMF Joint Staff Assessment Advisory Note on the Poverty Reduction strategy Paper, and the Report was dated April 5, 2006, and the IMF spoke about the need for us to track public expenditure, and to assess their efficiencies,

including analysis of expenditure reaching the beneficiaries on a disaggregated geographical basis. It is here, because it is recognised as a problem; so it is not just the PNC/R coming here and trying to make a mountain out of a mole hill. The IMF is saying that we are spending money, and that we don't have the kind of mechanisms in place to collect data to determine, or to measure, the impact on the money we are spending, and not only on infrastructure, Mde Speaker, on the issue of poverty - under the whole thing of Poverty Reduction Strategy. We are spending all this money on Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Government doesn't have the measures in place to measure the impact of all the money we are spending. This I suppose is the Government's understanding of value for money.

Mde Speaker, for instance, there is a large allocation for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and we know that, for a long time, this Ministry didn't have an allocation of this size. Therefore the issue of internal capacity must be an issue. Could they spend this money? Do they have the infrastructure at the Ministry to deal with the issues that they have to deal with in order to get these programmes off the ground? How are we going to measure this? Do we have that in place, or is this just a case where we are throwing money around the place? The Minister comes here and he says that we are going to spend over \$1.5B over five years in the Ministry of Youth and Sports, but we hear nothing about capacity-building. I know that the Honourable Minister Benn wasn't there then, but when the major road rehabilitation programme came on stream with

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the amount of money that was placed at the Ministry, the IDB required that there should be capacity-building within the Ministry itself. Now what is going to happen at Youths and Sports in this regards? These are some of the issue that we haven to look at so as to understand ... because we spend money on education, but we don't know how it impacts, and what kinds of benefits we have is a motion from it, and we need to have these measurements, so when the Minister comes to us and tells us that *we have spent so much in 2006, and we have to spent so much in 2005*, at the same time he must be able to tell us *these were the impacts*, and then we would be able to say that we've had a good performance: But right now all we have is a lot of numbers about money being spent from the 'African gravy train.'

Mde Speaker, the Minister mentioned the issue of the Doppler Weather Radar - \$500M I think was put aside for this, but if I could remember, in 2005, the Honourable, the late Minister of Agriculture, Mr Satyadeo Sawh, he made a big splash about this Doppler Weather Radar, because after the floods the Government claimed an *act of nature*, and the Minister then said that we are going to install this radar without delay so that we would be able to predict storms, and we would be able to have better water management, because we know that in 2004 and 2005 the Government was caught with its proverbial pants down, holding water in the conservancy too high, and the rains came and flooded the place and the Government was forced to release water into the villages. I am quite sure you could remember that. Now, in 2005, Mde Speaker, no Doppler

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Radar; in 2006, again, no Doppler Radar, and we coming here for the third time, in 2007, to hear that it coming again - to tell us that they are going to have Doppler Radar in 2007. Well, I want to say to you ... I want to say to you that I don't believe you, and I would have to wait until the thing comes to reality before I can say that *yes, you are going to do that, because in three years you haven't been able to do it* but Mde Speaker, this thing has consequences, and I am quite sure the Honourable Member, Mr Anthony Vieira, when he comes to speak, would speak of at least one of the consequences of you not having the Doppler Radar, and causing you to rush to make guess decisions in relation to water management in this country.

Mde Speaker, the issue of the land-fill sites. When we had one of the financial papers we tried to get some information out of the Minister of Local Government about the situation about the landfill sites, because we understand that Mandela is about to be closed; Hague Bosch is not ready, and he is telling us something about Lusignan. We want to have an understanding - the nation needs to have an understanding from the Government what we are going to do about landfill. Do we have a solid waste crisis in the country? If we do not have a site identified with the capacity to take solid waste from Georgetown, then we have a solid waste crisis, and the Government must tell us - must tell this nation, the capacity of the site at Lusignan; and they might want to go on to tell us about the specifications with the design, whether in fact we are going to have another dump-site, or if we are gong to have a landfill site at Lusignan.

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As related to Miscellaneous Roads, Mde Speaker, a lot of money has been allocated every year. We allocate \$78M to Miscellaneous Roads, and I have a problem here, because there is a lack of transparency, because during the tenure of the Honourable Member, Mr Anthony Xavier, he said to me that the procedure is that communities must apply. I caused a number of communities to interface with the Ministry of Finance to cause the Ministry to go in, to try to get some kind of assistance under this Miscellaneous Roads; and I could tell you that on one occasion, in Le Retraite, the Minister sent down the Chief Works Officer, and he went there and they started the road in Le Retraite, and when the road reached half way, then the Government stop the road. That is what the situation is. So we have eight ... 7, 8, \$900M every year, coming from Miscellaneous Roads, and we have a total lack of transparency, and I would really like the Honourable Minister to explain to this Honourable House the process that is used to determine the communities that would be dealt with under this head, because I was told by the Honourable Member, Mr Anthony Xavier, that at the time of Budget, the actual projects are not identified, and that it is during the year you would, based on representation from communities, you would determine. If that has changed let us know, but we need to understand what's happening so that we can make representation, because the Honourable Member, Minister Priya Manickchand, said that there is no discrimination, so therefore we must be able to come and say that there is a community down there that meets the criteria, and therefore the Government would be very

happy for the assistance we would be giving, and they would do what is necessary.

As it relates to GUYSUCO, Mde Speaker, I just want to correct one thing here. I know the Honourable Minister, in his presentation, spoke about the Government having a foresight to put together a Strategic Plan. We know that we were in a major hurry, because we had – a long time, since 1990, the Uruguay Round started, when it was clear that preferences were going to go, and I am quite sure the Honourable Minister is aware of that, and we came through all these years, recognising that preferences were to go. I could remember that I went to a Government-organised workshop at the hotel there on the East Coast - Ocean View, and when one comrade, who worked for a number of years in the sugar industry, stood up there and told the people that no way preferences will go, and that Europe would never do away with preferences, because preference is about European farmers also; and so the Government was in policy warp, so when you come and say to us that you had foresight, and that you put together a strategic plan, that strategic plan came a bit too late because, right now, the factories finish, and we already have the price cuts. So what kind of strategic plan are you talking about if we were not in place in time? I thought I should just try to correct that.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member, Minister of Agriculture Mr Robert Persaud, spoke a bit about climate change, but when I went through the Budget presentation, all that he talked about the Government, there was nothing

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on this climate change - this very important thing - climate change - nothing in the Budget, and so I am wondering if it's fairy tales - if it's Me Riddle, Me Riddle Marie, My Father had a Tree. Okay? Mde Speaker, I wish to tell the Honourable Minister of Agriculture that climate change is not politics. Climate change is stark reality. *[Applause]* So don't believe you could come here now and just string together a couple of words, and try to sound nice, and believe you deal with the issue, because that is not going to change the weather ... *(Laughter)* and quickly, Mde Speaker, I wish to just mention the issue of sea defences, as it relates to emergency works.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Mrs Debra Backer:** Mde Speaker, I ask for 5 minutes for the Honourable Member to conclude.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 5 minutes to conclude.

### **Motion Carried**

**Mr James K McAllister:** Mde Speaker, on the issue of sea defences, I noticed, for instance that in 2006 we spent about \$1.3B on sea defences programme works, and about \$900M on emergency works, and this caused me to worry about the planning in the Ministry, as relates to the works that were projected. Obviously the monies are available, so why is it that we do not programme the works? Again I see, in 2007, a very large sum for emergency works. Is it they are saying that the Ministry is working by guess?



Don't you have an understanding of what is to be done? If you know what is to be done, then programme it. For instance, I know that Le Retraite is to be done. The sea defence at Le Retraite has been bad for a number of years. I took the Minister, Mr Tony Xavier there already, but nothing has been done about it. Why it is not programmed? And why every year you spend \$900M on emergency works but you are not looking at Le Retraite?

Mde Speaker, very quickly, I'll like to ask the Honourable Minister to maybe touch a little on the issue of the Engineers' Registration Bill, which, for a very long time, has been trying to come to this House, and I hope that we would have some kind of explanation as to where it is right now, as it relates to come to the House, and ensuring that the engineering profession is protected. I thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Minister, Mr Robeson Benn.

**Hon Robeson Benn:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, I rise to join with my colleagues, also too with the Honourable Members on the other side of the House, to congratulate the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, on his presentation with respect to the Budget, and particularly with regard to his theme 'Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.' I find this theme most appropriate at this moment because I think that we are at a signal stage of our history, where we have a new, young Minister of Finance and we are looking forward to five years of hard work, and where we are called ... all of us - all Guyanese, to put our shoulders to the wheel to continue

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the work of rebuilding and reconstructing in Guyana. Because, Mde Speaker, let us not fool ourselves. The main work that we have been doing over the years in the PPP/C Government is one of reconstructing, and there have been important phases of reconstruction for certain countries. I know after the civil war in the United States there was a long period of reconstruction, and I think, particularly after the 1992 period, after the period of the PNC's time in office, that we have mainly been doing the job of reconstruction in Guyana [*Applause*] and I think, just now, where we are seeing, on the ground, visible signs of the results - of the efforts of this reconstruction, where we have new roads, new bridges. We are building a modern new stadium with help from our international partners, and we are just about turning the corner, and this Budget, which was presented by the Honourable Dr. Ashni Singh, is one which is just saying that we're just about turning the corner, where we would be building anew; and particularly I would like to say that I am happy to be part of this process, because I think when we are doing it ourselves, particularly with our own resources – mainly, I think there is not a more honourable task for me to be involved with, and I couldn't find a better team with which to work at these problems ... [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, there have been conflicting positions raised on the other sides as to maybe how we became poor, or how we are poor. It is true that, at some point in time in our country's history, that a PNC Government inherited solid infrastructure, solid development, and did, at one point in time ... I am talking

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about 1964 that these things were inherited. We had a time - a period, when there was a rapid decline in all the infrastructure of the country - in sea defences, in roads, in bridges, in the ordinary lives of the common people, the infrastructure of this country, to the time of 1985/1990, was completely destroyed, and one of the reasons - one of the main reasons for the thorough destruction, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, was that the PNC government, in its time, never had the legitimacy, never had the support - the avowed support of the Guyanese people. [Applause] So if it is that we are able, in spite of fire - strange and mysterious most times, if in spite of floods 2005/2006; if in spite of all the efforts at destabilising the country and destabilising the economy, of making the country ungovernable; if in spite of all these things that we are now at a point where we are talking about 4.7% growth in this country, it is a testimony of the support of the Guyanese people - of all the Guyanese people to this Government in its honest efforts, in its integrity in working hard towards developing this country - towards reconstructing this country again. [Applause]

Mde Speaker, we are on the long road back - the long, hard road back toward building our country, and I like to constantly repeat that there is a miracle unfolding in Guyana today - a small miracle, and this miracle would only grow larger and larger out of the efforts, on this side of the House, and I want to enjoin ... I want to call on the other side of the House to join in this effort. I know that in spite of all the lights we put on the Highway, that some of them would never see; I know that, in spite of the fact that

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the time travelling from Georgetown to the Berbice River - the time to Rosignol ... the time maybe has been cut by an half an hour or more. I know that in spite of all of these things, there are some people who would never see because they never intend to see. I know in the minds, now, of Mr McAllister ... and he talked about 'Voodoo Economics,' I want to point out to his 'Voodoo Engineering' that he has been putting up. [Laughter... Applause] I thought we had completely put to rest this issue of the Berbice Bridge, and why it has been validated that the bridge, at the point which has been selected, has been financed and supported - not only nationally, but internationally by the Inter-American Development Bank and others. [Applause] I thought that this matter has been put to rest, and I now know ... and you may recall because you may have perhaps done some reading, that in the Second World War at Anheim there was a ... and I think you may also have seen a film called '*A Bridge Too Far*,' and I think, for you, a bridge to Berbice - bridging the Berbice River where it is, will always remain *a bridge too far*. [Laughter and Applause] Mde Speaker, we are taking, with this Budget, the deliberate steps to continue the reconstruction and the development in the country, and the 4.7% growth rate is ample evidence to the prudent financial management and good governance which abounds. In terms of good governance, I am very happy. I am also very happy that, our Honourable Members on the other side of the House have returned to these chambers, and that the genie is now back in the bottle - the genie which was running down the streets of Georgetown, creating the type of problems which resulted in the very things we have talked about. We have

been told ... I have raised the question of why we are poor. We went through a period where we have been told that there is no international partnership; nobody wanted to come to Guyana to invest; we are having problems with developing the country: But how did we arrive to that position? Why it was from a period – say, from 1997, and particularly from 2001 all the Guyanese have been running scared? Why is it that we had a situation where people were not prepared to come - maybe to invest in the country? But now we are back at a position where we are together in the confines of this Honourable House, and we can work together – again, and we know, and we note, your particular role on that side of the House, with respect to governance, is appropriate in the position of being an Opposition.

Mde Speaker, the role of the Ministry of Public Works and Communications is to maintain and build, and to facilitate the development of the country's infrastructure, to protect the economic assets, and to facilitate the production and distribution of people's goods and services, and in this task ... and being the new Minister too, I'd like to say that we had good work previously done by Minister Nowbatt, Minister Xavier and others, when one joins a new activity, and takes the leadership role, one wants to encourage people to take the view that there are improvements which need to be made, and that improvements are needed to be made so that we continue to build on what we have. We have been paying particular attention to some of the issues with regard to reworked jobs in the Ministry. I heard some talk of roads maybe not built properly and that there are

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efforts to rework. I want to say that no one would want to be constantly rebuilding some road, or sea defence, all the time. One would want to make sure that one builds something, once and for all, and then move on to the next task. So there is no intention in the Ministry, or there is no intention that anyone has ... and it's a bit demeaning to the work of the engineers and the technicians and their facilitators to suggest that anything that they want to do is to be constantly doing rework tasks all the time, and to waste the money. There is no such intention. We have been working and re-examining the issues in relation to policies which would result in improvements in the quality and style of work that we have, in relation to optimising the work that we do, so that we make the best use of the resources that we have, and so that we are able to continue proper development and training of the staff of the Ministry, and its agencies.

Mde Speaker, our response, basically, with regard to the new tasks which confront us - and the ongoing tasks, is that we want to improve the safety, the comfort, the quality of life, the efficiency and dispatch with which people travel, and with respect to the work that we do. So I don't think that we have a situation where one would want to see the unending drudgery that we've had, in terms of the Guyanese travelling public, with respect to their experiences in public transport, and their continuing woes, with respect to broken sea defences, and with respect to poor infrastructure. The work is difficult, but it will continue, and it will be sometime before we have dealt with all the issues in relation to improving the work; but

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there will be steady and continuous improvement with respect to the work that we do, and I think that there is a large opportunity that we have for optimising the resources that we use, and for doing a much better job, and if there is any useful critique/criticisms that Mr McAllister and others may want to present, with respect to the work, I would welcome it.

Mde Speaker, we have benefited, with our projects, in the financing of the projects with the work and the resources provided by the IDB, the CDB, the European Union, and others in partnership with us. The Minister of Finance, in his Budget Speech, stated some of the achievements we have had, with respect to the Ministry of Works and Communications, and I'll like to touch on some of those:

The three-year maintenance contracts which were awarded for primary roads maintenance, for the primary roads networks, which included maintenance of road services, levelling and cleaning of ditches and verges, as well as road safety requirements were continued in 2006, except for the Linden - Soesdyke Highway, which was completed in January 2005. The total cost was approximately G\$647M. The evaluation, in relation to the review of the Laws regarding signing and marking of roads by legal consultants, was submitted to the IDB for *no objections*. There was some suggestion in the presentation that the road work expected to be done on the Linden Highway has been held in abeyance for maybe some discriminatory reasons. I think we have reached the point where the constant claims of discrimination, of neglect, and so on,

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with respect to roads, has become trite and worn - and really should not be used, anymore in the House, with regard to the activities of the Ministry, and of the Government, when one looks at the particular spread of projects which have been done throughout the length and breadth of Guyana.

In 1998 we completed the resurfacing of the Linden Road - the Linden Highway, from the Soesdyke junction to the Kuru Kuru College, and from the Kuru Kuru junction to the Linden turn off, the surfacing of the road was done. It is now just again at the point where new resurfacing and new reconstruction has to be done, particularly in the areas where there has been significant ravelling of the roads. The technical reviews and evaluations are being done - are being prepared, with respect to this work. I think that it is very cheap shots, that every time you maybe want to create some emotive points, that you talk about Linden and something that you perceive as maybe being discriminatory; because maybe it has some negative connotations with respect to Linden, that you'd say it is as a result of discrimination and neglect, and that there is no need for the necessary technical evaluation for the best evaluations for the optimisation of the use of resources - for the very resources which you come to claim, and to complain about in this House, that are being misused and misspent.

*(see PART II of III Page 81)*



# National Assembly Debates

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15th Sitting

14:00h

Tuesday 13 February 2007

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## **PART II (cont'd from PART I of III)**

We have had the work, with respect to the Berbice Bridge, and the contractors Bosch Rexroth from the Netherlands have been awarded the contract for the construction at a cost of US\$34. Our work services group is providing the services for the construction of the access roads to the facility estimated to cost \$4M. Mr McAllister was somehow referring to some missing \$8M. I am not sure we are speaking of the same thing; but the access roads to the bridge, which are necessary, will be constructed and completed in time for the readiness of the bridge in 2008.

Lot 1 of the rehabilitation of the New Amsterdam to Molsen Creek Road was awarded to Dipcon Engineering, and we are now working on the issues in relation to establishing who would be the contractor with respect to Lot 2. The duration for Lot 1 is for 24 months, and construction commences in May 2006. Total cost will be \$3.4B for Lot 1.

We have been able to obtain approval for the funding of \$700M for the enhanced maintenance of the Black Bush Polder Road Works. A technical examination of the proposal made by the Ministry will be reviewed by the IDB. Mde Speaker, you may be aware - and other too, that

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we are, at the moment, preparing fifty traffic light intersections in the city of Georgetown for activity during the Cricket World Cup. The contract has been granted to CMS Traffic Systems of India - one of the leading international providers of such technology, and \$420M is being spent on this exercise: And I want to say that any temporary inconvenience with respect to this activity is regretted, but the facilitation with regard to our traffic management in the city would be much enhanced.

The Demerara Harbour Bridge enjoyed an overall trouble-free year, with no mishaps or disruptions to marine or road traffic. We've had three large pontoons made by Courtney Benn Contracting Company, produced in Guyana, similar to the ones supplied by Damen Shipyards, with respect to improving the Bridge. In 2006 over \$1.2B were disbursed on the rehabilitation of roads throughout the country under the Miscellaneous Roads Programme, and the Honourable McAllister – Mr McAllister, Engineer, did raise some issues, or some notions rather I guess, with respect to how roads are selected. The truth of the matter is where roads are in dire need of reconstruction/rehabilitation those roads are prioritised in all areas of the country. The NDC's generally supply, to the Ministry, for examination by the engineers of the Work Services Group, their requests for road-building programme, and, based on the resources that are available, and scheduling, those roads are prioritised and built. I don't think there is any situation where one could really conclude that there is discrimination with regard to the building of the roads. Of course, if I lived in one street and McAllister lived in another street and a road

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was built in my street he would conclude that there was discrimination. So we can't please everyone. We have limited resources and time, and we're making the best efforts to optimise the resources that we have, based on the best case value for money examinations and evaluations that we undertake.

We have the construction of 10 miles of asphaltic road ongoing at De Hoop; at Mara there is a construction of five miles of double bituminous surface treated road, and the construction of three wooden bridges at a cost of \$110M ongoing those works are about 70% complete.

In Region 4, seventy-two roads were awarded in early 2006 on the East Coast and East Bank of Demerara. Those include such places as Plaisance, LBI, Mon Repos, Annandale, Enmore, Beirut, Victoria, Unity and Ann's Grove, at an overall contract sum of \$500M. At the end of 2006, fifty-eight 58 of these roads were completed. I would like anyone, on the other side of the House, who may have an interest in it, to use whatever kind of mathematical discernment to determine whether there is discrimination in the selection and the building of those roads.

One Hundred and Ninety-two Million was provided for the rehabilitation of the Black Bush Polder Road for \$25M – 25 miles; and \$375M was disbursed under the urban roads/drainage programme in 2006. The Urban Road Programme projects included the following:

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- New Amsterdam Roads – thirty-five roads in such areas as Smithstown, Bermine Scheme, and Savannah Park: 17,000 feet of road has been completed with asphaltic concrete.
- In Rose Hall sixteen roads for a total length of 30,000 feet. Two concrete bridges and fifteen culverts in Rose Hall - \$385M.
- In Corriverton – 20 roads for a total of 5,000 feet at a cost of \$208M.

At the current time the Ministry, in collaboration with the Mayor and City Council and the Private Sector, has commenced a campaign to enhance the City of Georgetown in preparation for the Rio Group Meeting at the end of this month. For the Cricket World Cup, and for the ... later in the year - Meeting of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers, we have upgraded five avenues - Main Street, East Street, Thomas Street, Carmichael Street and Waterloo Street; and right now we are doing Cemetery Road.

There is an Urban Roads Development Programme, and Minister Kellawan Lall would give more information on that, which the Ministry is also helping and supervising, and I'd like you who ... maybe to attempt whatever - Markovian, Matrices, or whatever, to discern issues relating to discrimination and so on, with regard to the establishment of these roads.

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In 2007 we would continue our road maintenance system. We will continue our work in relation to the improvement of the roads on the East Bank Demerara, West Bank Demerara, East Coast, Soesdyke, and Essequibo Coast. Close monitoring will be done in relation to the construction of the New Amsterdam – Molsen Creek Road.

We will continue with the Miscellaneous Urban Roads Drainage Programme in 2007, and I am always open to Mr McAllister, who may have a particular interest in any particular road, but it will fall under the same criteria and selection process that exists for determining which road should be prioritised in our programmes.

There were some issues related to, and raised, with regard to the weight control on roads, and this, Mde Speaker, is an issue. It is true that we have, in some areas, overloaded trucks, maybe with sand and other aggregates, which are traversing our roads. It is also true that in some positions we have trucks carrying sea defence materials which are overloading the roads. We have an active programme in relation to this, and the Ministry's personnel have already been told to ensure that no truck leaves a boulder yard, or stock yard, without having the right weight - the safe weight for traversing the roads.

The Sea Defence Department has been told to ensure that we have landing sites established on the Coast close to the building projects so that there will be less need for the traversing of the roads by overloaded trucks, because barges will land against the costs at the project site and

deliver stone almost at site. So the issues with respect to the road management - the weight restrictions are being addressed. We hope, within two months time - less than two months time.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Hon Clement Rohee:** Mde Speaker, I wish to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue. Honourable Members, it is now five to five, and we would give the Honourable Minister those 15 minutes when we return. The House is now suspended for half an hour.

### **16:55H – Suspension of Sitting**

### **17:35H – Resumption of Sitting**

The Speaker: Honourable Minister Robeson Benn, you may continue.

**Hon BH Robeson Benn:** Thank you Mde Speaker. I would like to resume my contributions to the debate by discussing - or giving some information with respect to achievements in air and river transportation in 2006. There has been continuing effort to have improvements at the both the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, and at the Ogle Airport. Two thousand feet of new runway was constructed and commissioned in 2006 at the Ogle

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Municipal Airport, and I'll like to point out that this development is a result of the public/private partnership which, apparently, some people fail to see, and decry when it happens, but the developments with the Ogle Aircraft Owners' Association, in working with the Government to develop the new runway in order to improve the safety and efficiency of landings at the airport is laudable, and the Government is doing its part, just now with respect to improving access to the airport by reconstructing the road to the airport.

We have had an Airport Security and Management Training Programme, which was completed successfully at a cost of \$502M, and there have been training in specialised security disciplines with respect to issues at the airport to improve security and safety, and there have been purchasing of metal detectors, wind devices, radio communication units, digital cameras, explosive trace detectors, bomb kits, night vision binoculars, baggage scanners etc.

The Civil Aviation Authority - the regulatory body on aviation, performed creditably, and I'll like to say that we have, in 2006, some thirty-three local aircraft registered and operating – operable. There are six aircraft operators. We have 133 aerodromes, of which 64 are Government - owned and 49 privately-owned; licensed aerodromes are 49, and Government and private 17. We have had no accidents in 2006, and we've had 75 inspections for the year.

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With respect to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Corporation, there is expansion on the way, with regard to the facility ... and I must say that I was a bit surprised with the *Stabroek News* Editorial of last Sunday - the 6<sup>th</sup> where there was an article which related to displacement at the airport, with respect to Aubrey Williams' murals. In spite of what the editorial says, I am aware whilst that the people from Castellani House did visit the airport, with respect to determining what was the best option, at the then time, with regard to the expansion, in terms of the preservation of the murals. The murals are still there and there is no pouring of concrete on the mural; and I believe - like the Elgin Marbles, to which the Editorial refers, that at some point in time the major portion of these murals could be removed and reconstructed/re-erected in a different place.

With respect to passenger movement, we have had 198,457 incoming passengers, and 215,000 outgoing passengers. Aircraft movement was 4,035 - a significant increase on 2005, where there were 3,543 for international landing. Overall the total in respect of passenger movement was somewhat more, maybe as a result of issues relating to the elections, but we have 10 new international operators, including two cargo jet handlers. The new operators are Zoom Airlines, Tumaris, and Travel Span ... and I must say that, over the high season in November –December that the prices for travel to North America were significantly reduced by more than 50 or 60%, when the new operators came in – Zoom Airlines, Tumaris and Travel Span. So we are in a better situation, overall, with respect to international airline travel. We are in a better and



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safer position with regard to local domestic travel. I must also report that, in keeping with the developments ongoing in mining and other activities in local air travel, that there have been at least three new aerodromes in interior licences, and I of course want to applaud the industry for not having any fatal accidents in 2006, and we want to work to continue to make sure that that situation holds for this year, and we trying to - right now, buy new radio equipment for the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. We are planning in three phases ... and in expending maybe in the first phase some US\$1.5M, with respect to improving traffic handling at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport.

With regard to maritime administration and transport, we have had another successful year, basically. The general cargo landings - we have had 568 entering Port Georgetown in 2006. This is landings of general cargo, craft, tankers, container ships, and so on. We have had 127 of similar type vessels landing at New Amsterdam - not to mention the bauxite vessels at the Berbice Trans-Shipments Station - and work is on the way, as we speak, to redevelop - to recreate the maritime charts for the coastal and air-coastal waters, starting with the Essequibo Region, where we have some problems with respect to sandbars, and this will continue into the Demerara River, and into the Berbice River.

The work with respect to this Maritime Administration, in terms of supporting the Transport and Harbours Department, is critical at this stage. We have recently had to change the scheduling of vessels on the Essequibo

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River, based on tidal conditions. This is because we have had a great build-up of sand on what is called Chalmers Point, and while we have the major dredge, or the 'Steven,' under repairs, but we believe that by the second quarter we would be able to go out there and do the major dredging works, so that the passage over the bar would be on demand, and not related to tides. So, for those people who are travelling to or out of Essequibo they have to bear with this situation in having to wait a couple hours on and off the peak of the tide to be able to travel properly from Essequibo.

The Transport and Harbours Department is working on major improvements. We still have eight passenger vessels - ferries working. There have been no new additions. There's still continuous work needed to be done with respect to improving the comfort and safety on those vessels - and the improvement programmes have been identified. In 2006, there were 1,882,000 passengers carried, and this two million mark has more or less been achieved over the last 4 or 5 years. There has, in fact, been a significant problem over the years, particularly when we had the so-called crime spree, when passenger traffic towards Berbice declined dramatically during that period; and that is the most profitable and most active part of the operations for the Transport and Harbours Department, but now we hope to see a recovery in that situation, and we look forward to doing the things which will improve passenger comfort and safety. Still, the department has a situation where its income is \$1.1 or so billion dollars and the expenditure is \$1.5M, so it's about \$400,000 cash

neutral situation and we are looking at ways to find a cash neutral situation for the Transport and Harbours Department over the next 2 years.

The decision by the Government to build the Berbice River Bridge will release two important assets from the Berbice River to come over the Essequibo and Demerara Rivers to further support passenger and ferry traffic on the Demerara and Essequibo rivers. There has also been a decision to acquire 2 roll-on, roll-off passenger ferry and vehicular vessels and, with the advent of those vessels and with the additional support of the assets coming over from the Berbice River, we expect a significant improvement and a great de-bottlenecking of cargo and passenger traffic from the Essequibo area, which would be concomitant and will also be alias with what has happened on the Berbice River. So we expect that there will be a significant fillip to economic development and opportunity, with the additional cargo and ferry vessels going over to the Essequibo River, when the new ferry vessels are in place, when the additional assets are over there, and we have just now finished one of the new roll-on/roll-off terminals ... repairs in terms of the ferry vessels at Parika. So ... *[Interruption: 'When we'll get that, in 2008?']*

We've had continuing issues with regard to maintaining the timeliness of the transportation effected on the Transport and Harbours Department and we're working on this issue. There have been repairs done at the Light house. There are new buoys to be put in place on the

Essequibo River. This work has started and will move on to the Demerara and Berbice Rivers.

In terms of the projections, the improvement will continue at the Ogle Airport Incorporated, and we hope that the airport will not only benefit from improvements in local travel, but also be a Regional hub for passenger travel to the Caribbean, and to Brazil. One major project for the New Year will be an IKO Comprehensive Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme. Right now officers from IKO are in fact in Guyana and have commenced one important aspect of this audit.

In sea and river defences, Mde Speaker, the work has continued with regards to the critical aspects of maintaining our sea and river defences. It is true to say that with the high cost of doing sea defences, that the Government has to always be on the look-out for optimising the way in which we do our sea defences; and that we are working, right now, on ways of improving the surveillance, monitoring and maintenance of our sea defences, with regard to our operational practices. We are looking at ways of improving the equipment, the mobility; bringing in GIS and GPS capability, with regard to the sea defence system, and bringing the sea defence system in on the routine maintenance system of the Ministry. Work has been done at Capoey, Colombia for 1.9 kilometres, at Tuschen for 530 metres, at Meten-Meer-Zorg and De Kindren 690 metres, and Hague 745 metres, and we are very happy too, I think, with the response from the quarry industry, with respect to being able to provide us with

considerable supplies of armour layer, under layer, Damien Baskett rocks and stones, which are needed for the sea defence work. In 2007 the EU project for the rehabilitation of 4 kilometres of sea defence in Regions 2 and 3 will be completed in 2007. The Ninth EDS Sea Defence Programme will continue. There will be a reconstruction of 1.6 kilometres of sea defence in Regions 3, 4 and 6, and the rehabilitation and maintenance of sea defences in all regions will be ongoing.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Minister.

**Hon Clement J Rohee:** Mde Speaker, I would like to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**Hon HR Robeson Benn:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Under the Emergency Works Programme ... and I have to agree, to some extent, with Mr McAllister, that the quantum of money - which is assigned and determined, are called Emergency Works Funds, are maybe too high, and it does give a sense that there is unprogrammed, unplanned works being done. This is certainly not the case. In spite of some difficulties, the areas which are identified for sea defence work in any one year are generally identified. There is knowledge of the destructive mechanisms which are ongoing on the Coast - where they are, and what the

placement of the damage is. We'll certainly be looking again at finding a better word. This has already been discussed. There is no sense ... or there is no ... It is not a fact to say that it is unplanned. So under the emergency works programme the construction /rehabilitation of works will continue in vulnerable areas in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10. I think the only regions we'll be missing out are 1, 8 and 9, and again, I'll like to challenge anyone to find any discriminatory practice, or sleight-of-hand, with respect to the identification of areas with respect to the sea defence works.

Mde Speaker, I think, with respect, I did raise the question, or raised the issue of how we became poor in this country. The Honourable former Minister, Bibi Shadick, did talk about the experience her family have of being faced with the possibility of abandoning Leguan. *[Interruption: Do you believe that? Yes, I do. You believe anything.]* Madame Speaker, we're coming out of a long nightmare of dealing with the issues of reconstruction in Guyana, and being at the point of moving ahead; and when we talk about Leguan, and some of these places on the coast where rice and so is planted, we have to recall that we were in a situation in this country when we had to import rice and import sugar; where people were lining up for food. You had to get food at places called Knowledge Sharing Institutes - in the PNC parlance, and the fact that we have been able to, even when we had the floods, to continue some production and export of rice and sugar, because we're still one of the only Caribbean countries - perhaps the only Caribbean country - Commonwealth Caribbean

country, which exports a staple. The fact that we are still able to do that, even under these difficult circumstances, is a great credit to the PPP/Civic Government, and one that we must pay attention to. *[Applause]* Madame Speaker, while we talk about rice and small agriculture, and the developments in agriculture ... and I think the only word of grace, maybe mentioned by McAllister this afternoon, was his mention of the late Honourable Minister and Member of Parliament, Satyadeow Sawh, because, in the depths of the floods, and under all harassment, Sash Sawh was one of the leading actors and activists in restoring the confidence, and the hopes, of the farmers, and he has played a significant role in ensuring that we are back on track, with respect to our production in agriculture, with respect to our export of rice and sugar, and other agricultural commodities. *[Applause]* So I want to thank the Honourable Member McAllister for sparing a thought to Minister Sash Sawh, even though it was inadvertent.

There was some discussion from Mr McAllister, and I think maybe, to some extent, he made a wide-ranging presentation. I had hoped that as, I think, ministerial shadow for Transportation and Hydraulics he would have spent more time in relation to those matters, but he went into areas with regards to African debt relief, and how we are responding, or gaining the benefits from an African gravity train. I have had the emotional and humbling experience of going to Africa on two occasions. I have had the experience of eating African food with the African poor. I have had the experience of my first shock of maybe what the conditions are in Africa when I was on the docks

of Durban in South Africa some years ago, and one of the things that struck me on the docks was large piles of petroleum wax, and when I enquired what purpose - why there were all these quays filled with these large mounds of petroleum wax, I was told that they were going to make candles for the hinterland further north. There is no gravy train that one could speak of with respect to Africa. Any money that this Government is getting is getting it because it has demonstrated, by its record over the last 14 years that prudent financial management of this economy is deserving of the debt relief, and other benefits that had accrued to it. [Applause] Maybe there is less money around, but we continue to get money because they know that if we continue to be an exporter of a staple, then there will be one less person to be looking after - 100%, I think 95% given by the numbers from the Finance Ministry - if I remember them correctly, when the PNC was in office, so there is no African gravy train to speak of. We would be happy to be exporting rice and sugar to Africa, and we hope that the balance of trade and the arrangements which relate to international trade would move in the favour of us being able to export our staple to Africa, and further afield, and that we would never again be in a position of having to import rice from Italy and Spain and those other places - and sugar from Mexico, and be fighting amongst each other for a pint of fry oil, as occurred under the PNC, when it was in its knowledge-sharing mode. [Applause]

The Honourable Member ... There was also talk about bauxite, and I have to talk somewhat about bauxite in Linden, because I worked there for eleven years, and there



is some perception, and there is some talk about the Economic Recovery Programme and what it did for bauxite and other things. I knew then, when the changes were being made and spoken about in 1989, that the only intention was to get rid of bauxite as quickly as possible, and the mention being made of the Economic Recovery Programme ... I think Mr Norton was the first one who spoke about the Economic Recovery Programme, and he was praising Mr Hoyte and saying that it was one of his accomplishments. I thought that Mr Norton would have noted that he was Mr Hoyte's accomplishment. *[Laughter]* The fact of the matter is that the resources of this country were sterilized for many, many years. For over twenty years the resources - the forestry resources, the gold resources, which were known at Omai and other places; that all of these resources were sterilized for more than twenty years, and if they had been developed, and worked at, and facilitated in a way which they should have been since in the early sixties, we would have been in a better position, and we would not be in a position where those who created the conditions for abject poverty at that time, would be saying that, after they have burn down the house, that they are coming now to rebuild it, and that they have saved the day. All along the time - all along those years Mr Hoyte, I believe, was a Minister of Finance in the Government of Guyana. All of the years he was a travelling companion of Mr Burnham, and some others here were there too - they were all joined at the hip: So taking in - adapting an Economic Recovery Programme was in fact where, on instructions, and as a requirement

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from the IMF and others – the World Bank, you were forced to take the steps maybe then, and you couldn't avert the oblivion which occurred in the 1992 elections, even though you postponed the elections for two years.

So, Mde Speaker, there is no adventurism in this Budget, there is no adventurism in this Budget. There is no intention ... Somebody, I think it was Mr Norton too, who suggested that maybe he wanted to go to Switzerland, or some place. I want to say it's very cold there, and it's high, and the atmosphere is thin - not enough oxygen. You may need more. There is no need to rush off on excursions in order to create a façade that we are some high level economists, and going into a new period of adventurism with respect to our Budget. We would not be provoked into it, and I am sure that the Honourable Minister, Dr Ashni Singh, who has handled all the accusations and histrionics here, with great aplomb will certainly not be not provoked into doing anything which would put at risk the national patrimony, and the heritage, and the economic sustainability of the country, by doing anything that the PNC may want to provoke him into doing. *[Applause]* The Budget is one which requires hard work, deliberation, and we want all Guyanese to come together with respect to it.

Honourable Member, Khemraj Ramjattan talked about people being cynical, sceptical, indifferent, and he was quoting some things which suggested that Guyana was 117 out of 117 for brain drain; 116 out of 117 for something on the reliability of the Police; 114 out of 117 for illegitimate payments, 117 ... *[Interruption: 'That is true'.]* I don't

believe it Sir, and you ought to know better. You ought to know better. You ought to know better, Sir. If I discount many countries in Africa and in South America, there is no way that Guyana could be 116 and 117 - by any stretch of the imagination, of careful thought with respect to these indicators. Sir, if you got into an accident in the streets in Lagos, the police would beat you right there in the streets. So, Sir, don't try to lock this country and its people in with others and things in way ... I know you tried at the last Elections. There was some person who came ... You brought some person who claimed that he knew everything about statistics, and that he knew what the outcomes would be ...

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Minister.

**Hon Leslie Ramsammy:** Mde Speaker, I am moving that the Minister be given 15 minutes to conclude.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Minister be given 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**Hon Everall Franklin:** Mde Speaker, I would like to have permission to make a correction. The Honourable Minister is misleading the House; on a point of elucidation. Yes, Mde Speaker, just a point of elucidation, I think the Honourable Minister is trying to mislead the House by saying that if you get into an accident into the streets of Lagos the police could beat you. I trained in Lagos and that does not happen on a routine basis. *[Applause]* Mde

Speaker, right here in Guyana, the police beat people in the streets for less than an accident.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, could we have some order please, please, please. I don't think Honourable Member that ... I don't know who is doing the elucidation there. The Honourable Minister has another 15 minutes to continue.

**Hon BH Robeson Benn:** Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, I have a lot of respect for Khemraj Ramjattan, the Honourable Member, and I think that maybe he is demeaning himself when he makes certain statements in this Honourable House, and maybe he is taking advantage of Parliamentary privilege to lie about the Government.

**The Speaker:** There is a Standing Order which says that you cannot impute bad motives and ... Let me just find it. Cannot impute – I think it's Standing Order 41: "*No member shall impute improper motives to any other member of the Assembly*" and I really think, Minister, that you have been given a lot of leeway to speak, but not necessarily to ... You can continue, Honourable Minister, but you have to withdraw the remark.

**Hon BH Robeson Benn:** Thank you Mde Speaker. I withdraw the remark, but there was a suggestion from the Honourable Member and from others, that if you ... Well he was talking about the foundations and so on which you were building on. He did suggest that if you were ... that if you were ... He talked about splitting of contracts, so I

supposed that, if there was any situation where a Guyanese came into the activity - the action of doing things, maybe which were only done under the purview of foreigners before, even when it was more advantageous for the contracts to be done on time here in Guyana, and that it was of more benefit to Guyanese and Guyanese firms, that there was something wrong in it, if you make two or three activities out of the one, which was intended. He talked about creeping authoritarianism; and I could understand that the Honourable gentleman is conflicted, but I think that he has a greater ability, and a greater analytical insight and ability, than that which he presented here in the Budget. He said that there were bribes in Government contracts; that 15% of the contracts are a bribe. Who believes that? So I don't know why the Honourable Member is somehow making a concerted attack on Guyanese entrepreneurs; on Guyanese who are developing engineering capability in heavy construction, the overall institutions and persons - and the Government itself, in developing an indigenous engineering industry at this point in time. One of the reasons we were not able to carry on in the 80s and 90s was because we didn't have enough of local capability, and if it is that there are developing Guyanese engineering firms, which now have the capability to do roads and bridges and sea defences, and so on and so forth, one would think that they should be encouraged, and that anything they own - anything they identify as belonging to them, belongs to each and every Guyanese person too. So I don't know what the real motives for this attack are, but I want to decry it. I think

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that we should try to encourage our engineers, or people who want to be entrepreneurs in the engineering field - many of whom are now trying to go out into the Region and further a field to do engineering and construction works, and it is not encouraging and helpful to them for these types of attacks to be made in this Honourable Chamber.

In closing, Mde Speaker, I'll like to talk a bit about activities related to mining. I think the Honourable Prime Minister may have been a bit too modest in talking about the developments further, with respect to the mining industry. The developments and infrastructure in the mining industry have been particularly important in expanding its production, in approving accessibility. This is not only with respect to aerodromes, but with respect to roads. There has been significant expenditure of money to the North West District just now on roads, and it is not really true to say that Barama built the roads in the North West District. The roads were built by mining companies, and were expanded upon by Barama, and are now being maintained, rehabilitated, and expanded by the Ministry, along with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission.  
*[Applause]*

With respect to overall investment in mining, we have a situation now where there are over twenty companies which are holders of prospecting licences in Guyana. Investments in those licensed areas are significant. Significant, too, is that one of those companies - The Guyana Gold Fields, got last year some US\$5.7M from the

International Finance Corporation - direct investment by a World Bank agency, into a local Guyanese registered mining company, for a mining development; and this is extremely significant. We have expansion in the range of resources that are on board with respect to the exploration. There is exploration ongoing with respect to iron ore, uranium, copper, gold and other minerals, and, as the Honourable Prime Minister did say, we expect, in two or three years time, once the international conditions hold, that we will find full benefits from the investments which have been made - both international and local, because we do have local persons who are also obtaining large-scale licences, and who are also going to be taking part in the Prospectus and Development Association Conference in Canada just now, in terms of promoting their properties, that we will have great benefit, and a great opportunity to improve the lives of our people and our country as a result of one of the pillars of the Guyana's economy, which is mining.

Mde Speaker, in closing, again I would like to say that we, on this side of the House, and myself, particularly with the role of working in the Ministry of Transport of Works and Communications, with responsibility for Transport and Hydraulics, I am humbled by the opportunity given me. I feel excited and energised. I had hoped that persons on the other side would have been seeing those exciting opportunities and would want to join with me, and with us, to further those opportunities, with respect to development in the country. I want to say again, too, that a miracle is unfolding in Guyana, and that nothing will stop the

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miracle; nothing would stop the Guyanese people from coming together in their own, and best self-interest, under a PPP/C Government which has the integrity, the honesty, the vision, and the commitment to continue the reconstruction and development of Guyana. *[Applause]* I thank you.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Everall Franklin.

**Mr Everall Franklin:** Thank you Mde Speaker. I must say the last few days have been very instructive, but I really thought that I was back in High School, and in my history class. I wasn't very good at history. I think all of us are well aware - well aware of the importance of our recent history, and our history helps us to have a sense of where we would like to go, but it ought not to define us. This is the Budget of 2007, and if we always have to compare ourselves to things that have been weak in our past - not so good in our past, then we will always be troubled with mediocrity. I think we have to compare ourselves with those who are doing better, in order for us to reach where I think we deserve to go.

I must say also that every twenty-five-year old in this country is only conscious of the People's Progressive Party in government - conscious, and therefore, with them being probably around 30 35% of the population, we cannot keep going back and comparing ourselves with what was ... I call it the 'Who Done It Syndrome,' and I think it is important for us to look forward, to look at ways in which we can do what we are doing, even better, and I think, also,



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that we are little thin-skinned, especially on the Government's side. When you are in Government, I think you have to be able to take some criticisms, and filter out what will help, because, once you are in government, expect criticisms. If you don't expect criticism, I think charitable organisation is where you should be, but I think you have to be able to stand up. If you believe in your policy, if you believe what you are doing is correct, then you do not have to validate yourselves with something in the past to prove your point.

I will join the rest, Mde Speaker, the rest of this Assembly in congratulating Dr. Ashni Singh because, to my mind, it was a well-delivered, well-structured Budget presentation. Even those of us who have very little financial training could have followed the thought process, and what was laid out there. I congratulate him on that. From the outset I would say also that this ... being very pragmatic, this is the Budget that we have, and I think it is incumbent upon us to ensure that what is laid out in this 2007 Budget, is done, and done well, and it should be done with us properly scrutinising every move and ensuring that the people of this country benefits from each and every project. *[Applause]*

Areas where the Budget was very refreshing, I must say, because it shows that the Government continues to understand some very important areas. Allocation for Youth, Culture and Sport- excellent; Health ... I know if we had Grammy Awards for Ministers of the Government, Dr. Ramsammy would be carrying it away on a regular

basis. *[Applause]*He understands very well how to use the media and get his message across. You must commend the man for that.

On Education too, I must say it's all good, but I would like to say though, that a Budget should be more than just a statement of income and expenditure; debts and reserve. A national Budget should be able to stimulate the imagination of the citizens, allowing them to form a picture of their immediate future - medium and long term goals. It should therefore give its citizens an idea of where their standard of living is today, and where it's going. It should also give people - especially young people, a sense of direction and hope. They must be able to ask themselves questions such as: *What must I do to fit in? What must I learn? What skills do I require to be a part of any presented vision?* This Budget ... and this is probably unfortunate, because I understand that figures are now ... or a report is now available, made no mention of the state of unemployment; which, to my mind is crucial, because it is an indicator as to the economic health of a country. GDP alone is no measure for the well-being of a nation, since fantastic figures of GDP do not automatically translate into a higher standard of living, as we can see in countries such as Brazil, India, and even China, with the entire great growth rate. How many persons, especially the young school and university leavers are without jobs? It's important to know. How many university graduates have found work? What skills are needed now? These are questions we need some answers for. Are our tertiary institutions in sync with our developmental needs? Is it relevant - what is going on

at our tertiary institutions? I think these are pertinent questions which would set the Budget in some real context. We must train our youths. I don't think anyone in this House would disagree with that, and I think that we should definitely spend a lot of money on them. However, we still have to answer to what end, for which industries, and when? Because this would determine how we train them, how fast we train them, and what we train them in. I think that puts ... We need to do this kind of introspective analysis so that we do not waste, because money saved is money earned, so it's not just about spending the money on it. If we can save it, that's an earning.

There was no indication, also, to find an exit strategy from International Financial Institutions, such as the IMF and so on. One cannot simply say, as I have heard in this House over the few days of this debate, that as the economy of Guyana improves, Guyana would find its way out of the control and influence of IFIs. It doesn't work like that. We have to make ... There must be a conscious approach regarding this issue, even with successes in receiving relief from debts, we still have to consciously tell ourselves that this is not how we want to be all the time. I am pleased that the Government has set up the National Capacity Building Plan in aid of debt management and service, which should enhance capacity in this regard. However, what is the goal? It surely cannot just be to borrow, and then spend more. We have to find a way out of the IMF. At some point of time we have to move that way; and I'll like to use the housewife analogy, because any housewife ... If you love your wife and women in general, you would

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understand what I am trying to say. Any housewife who has to borrow between 20 and 30% of her cash to look after her family's needs, would be a very unhappy woman, and at some point in time, may become unfaithful in order to put food on the table, just to ensure that her kids have food on the table, and even some sweets for the kids. We must be courageous in attempting to create wealth by opening up new areas for development, using strategically positioned regions, such as 1, 8, 9 and the hub – Linden - Region 10, would be a start. We have to create trade zones in these regions to promote investment, such as agro-processing (listen, Agriculture Minister) to serve markets in Venezuela, CARICOM.

I am pleased to note that we may be now seriously moving to get the Brazil-Guyana link moving again: This is a move that not only has only have economic benefits, but also one that has implications in securing our existing borders. No meaningful consideration to move the developmental trust into more secure regions, where the threat of flooding, as Honourable Minister was pointing out - all the work being done on sea-defence is significantly lower, in spite of growing evidence that, in the very near future, the rising sea level would make life, if not impossible, extremely difficult on this narrow coastal strip. Allocations to defend the coast from the sea can only increase exponentially gains made would be swept away with each subsequent flood. This ought to be a central policy of the Government. A visionary approach would be to seek, within the next twenty years, the removal of our administrative centre to a much higher ground.

**Mr Everall Franklin:** Speaker, I move on a point of order. I ask that the Honourable Member takes back his statement about women being unfaithful, because since he said that Members of the Government side have gone into disarray. I don't know if he is imputing anything ... any mal intent against them, so I ask that he takes it back, because they seem to have gone into total disarray since he made that statement. So in a ... [*Interruption*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, could we have some order here? I don't know ... I wasn't well attuned to what the Honourable Member said, but I have just been given a note wherein ... It seems that ... Honourable Member, you have incurred the wrath of the women of this House. Sir, Honourable Member, I am addressing you Mr Franklin, please. I am addressing you, so if you would stop cross-talking, I would be able to tell you that you have incurred the wrath of the women of the House, because you have cited an example of women ... 'given if housewives don't have enough' ... I think it's a very bad example to use, you know. Perhaps an apology to the women of the House that not all women, even when they cannot make ends meet - not all women would go unfaithful, but something of that nature you said, and I can't ... [*Interruption*]

**Mr Everall Franklin:** Honourable Members, I have the greatest respect for women, and if you construed that to be an assault on all women, I take that back. If I had said probably a Mother Blair, I might not have gotten such a response, but I take it back, I take ... and I said *maybe* - *maybe* should be the word to go in there ... may be forced

to do things that they ought not to do. No mention ...  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members ... Members, can we have some order? Mr Franklin has withdrawn and qualified his statement it's not a point of order, technically, but we have now devolved into a kind of disorder, so shall we get back into ...

**Mr Everall Franklin:** Thank you Mde Speaker.

**The Speaker:** Mr Franklin, please choose your examples a little better the next time. *[Interruption]*

**Mr Everall Franklin:** No mention was made, specifically, on the National Industrial and Commercial Investment Limited (NICIL), which is responsible for the sale and management of State assets. Was NICIL responsible for the reduction of the deficit, 2005-2006, of the Central Government, and public enterprises by \$2.2B? We don't know. I couldn't find it. Maybe it was hidden in the non-financial institutions, but I think, if we hire a real estate agent, we would want to know what progress he has made in selling our property, and I think the nation deserves an answer with regards to NICIL. Large sums are being expended on infrastructure. This is good. However, we must find a way to involve the Private Sector at home, and abroad, to play a major role in developing such infrastructure, allowing Government to focus more resources on the social sector, policy, and good governance. We have to think outside of the box if we are

to catch up with rest of the world. The conventional approach will not do it. We also need to get value for money. Not much was said about that in the Honourable Member's presentation. As all housewives know, it's not only how much money you spend, but how you spend it. How else can we explain the fact that people survive on the wages and salaries paid. It has to be very intuitive. We have to also reduce waste. Waste reduction was not touched in any detail. The reduction of waste in all sectors, not just garbage - not just that, money saved is money earned. Government must involve communities in which infrastructural works are being carried out, in all phases of the project - phases of the project, where they can act as partners to ensure that quality work is carried out, and to receive a higher standard of work from the agencies executing, as well as the contractors.

With regards to power supply, it is apparent that, for every \$10 spent on electricity, \$4 goes to waste: 40% loss - technical as well as commercial, is unacceptable. The Prime Minister stated in his presentation that self-generation ... self-generation is not cheaper. However, if we look at a number of large manufacturers, all of them have come off the national grid and, therefore, that doesn't stand up to ... lot of the private businesses, manufacturing - Banks D.I.H. for one, who may be in a position now to sell power back to the grid, so I don't think that would stand scrutiny. The high cost of power has a negative effect on investment, manufacturing, cost of living, but not all can be blamed on just high oil prices. We ought not accept the inefficiency in such a crucial sector - one that

affects the very bottom-line which the Honourable Minister of Finance spoke about in his presentation.

New generation will not make power cheaper if these inefficiencies are not corrected. Some money and expertise must be allocated to this area in order that consumers can eventually benefit from any proposed new generation. It is hoped that, this time, some progress would be made regarding loss reduction.

Money being spent on education is commendable, these points to the Government's acknowledgement of the importance of this sector. The continuing expenditure on infrastructure, though necessary, has not brought any innovation such as improvement in the design of schools to reduce construction cost, and improve the maintenance, security, and even the wider utilisation of buildings for community activities. It is my opinion that much can be saved if some thought is given to such matters. The savings which may accrue from such innovation may well be used to improve, even further, the salaries and conditions of the main movers of this sector – the teachers.

The need for more economic pillars was expressed which, according to the Minister, would create thousands of jobs within the next five years, and fight poverty. One such pillar would be gold mining, hopefully on a large scale. Care, however, must be taken to ensure that our people benefits immediately from any such ventures. Companies should not be allowed to hide behind their accounts, and prevent this country from being a beneficiary from any



investment. Those companies are exploring for iron ore, manganese and uranium is heartening. We certainly look forward to communities in those areas being protected and benefiting from such enterprises.

The promotion of micro enterprises and small businesses is most welcomed. Economic growth and wealth-creation is fuelled in non-oil producing countries mainly by small to medium sized businesses. The mega projects make the GDP look good, but these are normally longer-term projects, with years of concessions which, although creating employment, cannot match the vibrant medium-sized businesses, which create many more jobs over a more diverse ... to a larger and more diverse population. The flexibility of small to medium sized businesses is a superior buffer against shocks experienced in the world economy. Therefore it would seem logical that much more emphasis should be placed here. However, it is imperative that conditions for such enterprise be improved to foster such development. In this regard, the Factories Act must be reviewed most urgently in order that our small manufacturers, especially in agro-processing, can be legally facilitated. At this time, our small producers are at a distinct disadvantage, when competing with our CARICOM neighbours, due to our inflexible laws, and definitions pertaining to factories. Yet we import quite a few products, especially from our CAIRCOM countries, and they do not have to go through a lot of the hassles that our manufacturers have to do.

**On tourism** - Once away, while studying, someone came to me with a book, and it said 'Real Estate! Big, Breezy, Beautiful' and when I collected it ... it was my German roommate reading from a brochure, and it was about La Repentir Cemetery. So you can sell anything if you package it well. Perhaps this time the Government is serious about tourism playing a major role in the country's development, and measures to build capacity in this sector is a good sign. As stated on page 26 of the Budget I quote:

*Skilled and semi-skilled workers will be needed to be trained, but for all these investments to pay off, we need to succeed on the promotion front.*

But which comes first? In order to attract visitors the human capacity has to be strengthened and maintained. I see, therefore, that a in-depth analysis of the sector, matched with real commitment by the administration, is needed. Building capacity in this sector must be seen as an investment, similar to the building of bridges, schools, roads; the entire country has to project the product that is for sale. Therefore, we must correct our problems in our forestry industry, which gives the world the impression that we are reckless with the very resource, which is the base of the tourism product which we are trying to promote. It is clear that the various sectors play an integral role in promoting Guyana as an eco-tourism destination, and piece-meal attempts will fail.

Why currently must people move into areas without roads, water and light? There must be a better way to provide

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dignified, affordable housing for our citizens. Investment in modular designs must be explored in order that the State –sanctioned - slums do not continue to grow, presenting other social problems that accompany such uncontrolled development. Spend a few million dollars on a competition, for example, for individuals, architects, even the university, to come up with designs which are easy to build, cost-efficient in the use of materials, and has the potential for expansion. Where would the money come from? Partly from the savings in foreign exchange and labour for a start, due to efficiency of design and construction, and the rest from billions of dollars from banks and insurance companies - realistic fees for forestry and other such enterprises, and maybe casino gambling tax. Ultimately, the owners will repay the mortgages.

On water - we know how important it is to life and to any modern society in particular. There are serious implications for the nation's health, and standard of living. Therefore this sector deserves the attention that it is currently receiving from the Government. The company responsible for delivery of the service has complained, on numerous occasions, about the cost to supply this most essential product to its citizens. At the same time, citizens purchase potable water from various suppliers ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member

**Hon Raphael Trotman:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude.

**Motion Carried**

**Hon Overall Franklin:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Allow me to do a rough calculation. If 15,000 households, and businesses, purchase only one five-gallon bottle of water each week, if 50,000 households and businesses purchase only one five gallon bottle of water each week (that's deliberately underestimated) at \$200 per bottle pre-VAT, the accumulated value is in excess of \$500M. From this rough calculation one can see that there is value in improving the quality of water, reducing wastage, and improving the maintenance facilities. The economic and social cost of poor water supply far exceeds the money invested in this sector. Time-wasting in fetching, loss of school, however, more emphasis must be placed on the quality delivered to citizens, since poor quality means that money is being wasted, as illustrated above. Money saved is money earned.

I have noted recently that the Government has terminated the Severn Trent Management Contract. This is indeed admission that better could have been done in this sector. I commend the Government, however, in showing some courage in this instance. However, the Government must guard against micro-managing such entities. Baby-sitting personnel in these sectors would not build capacity benchmarks and goals must be set, and the Government must ensure that they are achieved. I look forward, also, to

the refurbishment of the Georgetown Sewerage System, but I expect, also, that we would be doing road repairs again. I think we have to plan adequately.

## **Security**

There is no doubt that security of the citizens has been under attack for some time. It may be the single most important issue facing citizens after the economy. Therefore all measures taken, with a view to improve security of our people, must be supported. In this regard, special attention must be given to the remuneration of police officers in any reform process. There cannot be improvement in this area if salaries of the policemen remain as it is. In order to implement new technologies and methods in fighting crime, a higher level of education of recruits will be necessary. Therefore, incentives to attract such persons would be of vital importance.

Now, about prisons - For instance, I do believe that for minor infractions more community service sentences should be applied. This would reduce custodial sentences and thus the population within prisons. This would free resources, which can then be used to improve conditions in all facilities. We must also review mandatory sentences for drug users - and note, not pushers, drug users, who must be seen as victims, rather than criminals. It's about time that the Government's finance programme is implemented to deal with the rehabilitation of such persons.

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Mde Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about reform of the Judiciary. The backlog of cases denies justice to too many. It should be no surprise that backlog is the order of the day, when our judges and magistrates copy proceedings by hand, taking more than 80% of the court's time doing so; so why are we surprised that we have backlog? Do we need special assistance to change even that? Time is money, and much of it is wasted here.

Monies being spent on youth and sport are long overdue. One would have thought, however, that a plan for this sector would be formulated before the money is allocated. Some suggestions to further that plan on youths, in conjunction with an improved army corps of engineers - some of the items outlined in the Youth Development and Empowerment Plan, such as employment, education, training, skill development, voluntarism, community service, civic responsibility, and patriotism can be effectively administered from a well-supported engineering corps. Such collaboration can also serve as a unit that would render assistance to various communities on special projects, such as bridge building, and maintenance, minor repairs, and other suitable tasks that would fulfil two objectives: Firstly, training, and secondly, service delivery in a cost-effective manner to communities. It would also provide a disciplined environment for our young people. I certainly look forward to development of sports facilities throughout the country, and would expect that collaboration with the Ministry of Education would be ongoing to ensure that each school has reasonable access to some sports facility, or playground. This seems to be a

thing of the past, this lack has led to our children being unable to play safely and interact in a healthy way with each other. They, our children, are becoming electronic junkies without imagination. We have to reverse this process for their future to be secured.

### **Social Services**

Notwithstanding the macro-economic stability achieved by this Government, which must be commended, we can see for ourselves the number of persons on our streets living in destitution. No bright macro-economic figures can dispel this reality. As the Government focuses on presenting the vision of building a modern and prosperous Guyana, definite short, medium, and long-term intervention must be taken, in order that economic figures begin to match the reality on the ground.

We often comment on the meagre sums that our pensioners receive. It is indeed a very sore point. Even the Government admits that. But I think that there are some things that we can do to improve the standard of living of our pensioners. For example, each region - wherever possible, should be suitably outfitted with buses that can provide for the elderly and wheelchair-bound persons, to travel - free of cost, on predetermined routes.

There are a few questions that I would like just to leave with the Minister of Finance before I end, and seeing that my Party Whip told me that I have to get this done. The Demerara Harbour Bridge has not made a profit, and has to

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be subsidised. Is the Berbice Bridge expected to be different? What percentage of our GDP is estimated to be due to the informal economy? What have foreign forestry companies contributed in US\$ to the Treasury within the last five years? What effect do you expect CSME to have on skilled labour in Guyana? How would it affect the Government's short to medium term plans? What percentage of VAT revenue is expected to be derived from services which were not taxed directly previously? Will it be fair to say that the cost of living will be negatively affected due to this? Has overall production in the last ten years fallen in the following industries -Rice, Sugar, Bauxite, when we compare figures from 1997-2006?

Mde Speaker, as I said before, this is a Budget we have, and I think we have to work with it, and our jobs as representatives of the people, is to ensure that the people are well served; and that their interests and needs are met, here in the Assembly. It is our duty to demand that our people's rights are upheld. This includes also that their money, whether earned or borrowed, is well spent. The Government must therefore understand that, on this side of this House, that on this side of the House - this on side, of the House that this side we would be watching, probing and demanding answers whenever, and wherever necessary. It is our Budget - whether we agree with everything or not, and we would have to work in order to ensure that the monies allocated are well spent, and benefit the people of Guyana. Thank you. *[Applause]*



**The Speaker:** The Honourable Minister, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy.

**Hon Dr Leslie Ramsammy:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, I am glad that my comrade, Debbie Backer, is in a good mood tonight. Before I begin I know that we corrected the Honourable Mr Franklin, but I still owe it to my colleagues - the women representatives on this side, to reiterate those women - and all women in Guyana, all women in Guyana, that we've had a difficult history in our country. We've endured colonialism. We've endured some bad years after independence. We always faced challenges, and women have always been in the forefront of the battle and struggle, and when times are difficult women find ways of ensuring that they work hard and make sure that the family is okay; and their option is not to do what Mr Franklin suggests; so tribute to the women, especially tomorrow being Valentine's Day. I think the Honourable Mr Franklin feels badly enough right now.

But, Mde Speaker, we are in a Budget Debate, and no one ought to expect that the debate will be tranquil throughout the days and the hours that we spent. We've spent more than two days, more than two dozen speakers. We expect to be civil, and by and large we have been civil; but it's not been tranquil at all times. We should expect a budget debate to be a battle of ideas, however, that play themselves out in fierce arguments. I think my comrade, Moses Nagamootoo, knows Milton well. It was Milton who said:

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*Where there is much desire to learn, thereof necessity will be much arguing; much writing, many opinions, for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.*

This is the frame of mind that I usually come to Parliament with - for any debate, especially debates, particularly at Budget time. But alas, Mde Speaker, I have been disappointed thus far. There is a Budget in front of us - a Budget presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance; a Budget with many good ideas - many, many, many good ideas; but we are not exploring these ideas. We come up with some absurd criticisms; we find fault with words, but no one has yet really tackled the substance in this Budget, nor discussed the ideas. Sometimes there have been some fire in the House - The Honourable Member Ms David, Mr McAllister; but I think the Opposition has failed, thus far, to bring some ideas. I think there was some attempt by Honourable Member, Volda Lawrence, Sheila Holder - and I think Mr Franklin tried. I think Dr Anthony was correct after all. Dr Anthony - talking about Paul Keen-Jones, about the choir, 'Mouth Open Up, Nothing Comes Out,' that is what we have seen, but Mde Speaker, the 2007 Budget, under the Theme *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, was crafted, taking into cognisance certain realities. It was crafted with a couple of backdrops and the first of these realities is that, not so long ago, the Guyanese people had an opportunity to consider the political parties, their records, and their programmes, and by an overwhelming majority, they gave the PPP/Civic a mandate for five more years [*Applause*] But it isn't just a

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mandate. It's not just a mandate, Mde Speaker, because, in that Election, the people did something else. They endorsed a set of policies and programmes that were contained in this document, which is the PPP/Civic's Manifesto [*Applause*]- 'A Brighter Future for all Guyanese' this is what happened in 2006. The Guyanese people, Mde Speaker, in their own deliberate judgement, determined that the PPP/Civic had a good programme, and they wanted them to continue in Government so that we can realise the programmes in this document; and there is a vision that we were following ... and I hear lots of discussion that there is no vision; but this Budget is crafted in order to ensure that these programmes become reality, because there is a vision - and I'm not going to read it, but it's contained in page 29 of the document.

The Budget, though, is crafted with a second reality, and that is, since 1992, the PPP/Civic Government embarked on a series of policy agenda, and the reality within which this Budget is crafted, is that we wanted continuity ... continuity so that the set of policy agenda that we started in 1992 can continue. We knew in 1992 ... and we've continue to work, and this Budget reinforce it that we have to manage our debt; and we have seen the debt being reduced - prudent management, from 94% of our revenues down to below 20% - and other colleagues would deal with that. We see a policy agenda that addresses the growth of the economy, and I know the Honourable Member McAllister and others talked about the GDP and growth and, that they were not impressed by it and so on, but there are certain realities that we have to face. The fact is that in

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1964 ... I know you don't want go back there, but in 1964 the GDP in this country was more than US\$350 per capita, and in 1991 it was \$231 per capita. It contracted after almost three decades. That is a reality; and now it is almost US\$1,000 - It's actual \$990 - check the Budget. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, the reality is that tax reforms had to be embarked on, and we embarked on those in 1992. This year, we have introduced VAT, but previously we also addressed the Income Tax Reforms and, indeed, we addressed the issue of the threshold; references were made to the threshold. We must remember that the threshold was G\$4,000 per month in 1992, and now it is \$28,000 in 2007; and it is true that maybe it should be higher ... many of us here would like to see it higher; but we have never been reckless, and maybe this is a very cautious approach, but the fact is that the adjustment from \$25,000 to \$28,000 has brought 16,000 people off the tax row, and would move more than \$1B away from Government coffers into people's pockets. That is a reality. And we had said that we would review, and we would adjust the threshold, and we have kept that promise. I guarantee you that that is not the last time we would adjust the threshold. The PPP/Civic government would continue to review it, and we will adjust it further, as our means permit it. So these are some of the realities that form the backdrop by which this Budget was crafted

Mde Speaker, the 2007 Budget reflects the continued commitment of the PPP/Civic Government to the social sector. One of the characteristics of a PPP/C Government's programme is its strong commitment; it's unequivocal

commitment, to the social sector; to the welfare of the Guyanese people, especially the poor. This is true of the PPP/Civics' first Budget in 1993, and this theme has resonated throughout the terms - of Cheddi Jagan, Sam Hinds, Janet Jagan, and now Bharat Jagdeo; and the Honourable Member, Aubrey Norton ... he teaches at the University, so he ought to know. The PPP's commitment, Mde Speaker, to the social sector preceded HPIC long before, going back to 1950. The PPP/Civic has always been committed to the social welfare of the people of Guyana, *[Applause]* and I will show you the evidence; I will show if you just stay quiet. Between 1957 and 1964 you see this - a country's commitment to the social development of its people is a fundamental aspect of good governance. Health, Education, good sanitation, access to water and housing are key areas of development - indispensable components of good governance. It is for this reason that the People's Progressive Party has been consistent in championing this linkage for more than fifty years. It represents fundamental pillar of our equity vision. It is one of the fundamental pillars on which Cheddi's *New Global Human Order* is based. A measure of how caring a Government is, how responsive it is to the social development of people - rich and poor alike; how serious it is in investing in people, in reducing poverty, is how much of its Budget targets the social services, and for me, this is a fundamental good governance issue. The fact is that the 2007 National Budget commits about \$37B to the social sector. The fact is that almost 40% of our National Budget, in 2007, targets the social sector. In 1964, Mde Speaker,

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my friends James Kennedy McAllister, and Aubrey Norton don't know - in 1964, 30% of the National Budget, under a PPP/C Government, was ... [*Interruption: 'Which Budget? Show me.'*] ... allocated to the social sector. By 1985 that was reduced down to 20% of the National Budget; and in 1991 it was reduced down to 8.9%; and now we are back up - to about 40%, and that's the difference between the two sides. And this is not coincidence, it's not a coincidence because, if you look back in the 1984 ... Mde Speaker, in 1991 it was 8.9%, and as I said, it wasn't a coincidence; it was deliberate, because if you look at the Budget Address in 1984 and 1985, the then Finance Minister made it clear ... His argument was, that any responsible government must make certain choices, and you either satisfy the social welfare needs of the people, or you invest in the productive sector; and this is what he said and, in fact, he went on to identify the things that need to be deferred; he went on to identify the things that need to be deferred – things like wages, wage increases, improvement in housing, a wide variety of food, health and education. These are things that needed to be deferred. The people's welfare then was of secondary importance, and investment to support social welfare and social justice was considered inappropriate. The consequences were a neglect of Health, Education, Water, Housing, Social Security, and all the social services that contribute to poverty reduction, and overall development of the people; and we know what the consequence was.

The PPP/C leadership, and PPP/C led Government would never consider it Mde Speaker, as a temptation to spend on

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the social development our people, regardless of the circumstances. We will never ask our people to defer their needs. Indeed, we would always redouble our efforts. We would move mountains to empower our people in order for them to meet their social needs. This is good governance, because it's a contract with our people that we would never abandon their needs. *[Applause]*

The fact is that, in 1991, between 1989 and 1991, we spent an average of US\$12 per capita on the social needs of people, and in the 2007 National Budget, we are allocating approximately US\$240 per capita on the social welfare needs of our people, *[Applause]* and that is good governance. That means good governance. It's a social contract with our people; and so, Mde Speaker, when our colleagues wonder why we are so proud, and why we boldly proclaim to the world that we are a caring Government, it is because of this. *[Applause]* It is because of this. We do not have to be embarrassed and ashamed. The fact is that, in spite of the circumstances – yes, the oil price went up even more phenomenally than it went up in the 1970s, but we did not ... In adjusting to these realities, we never cut social welfare programmes in this country. *[Applause]* We never did: And the consequence of this commitment to the social welfare needs of our people is that the health sector has benefited significantly.

Every Budget presented by the PPP before 1964, and since 1992, has shown significant emphasis on the health of the Guyanese people. I have been privileged, and I am encouraged by the vitality of the work being done to link

health and development – globally, and there is now consensus – globally, that health and development are linked, and that there cannot be development without health. But this is not new for the PPP. The PPP has always seen the link between health and development. The PPP recognised this link since its inception, and thus started a strong primary health care system in this country. It's this link, Mde Speaker, that saw ... in the colonial days you had a doctor named Dr. Waterloo, who was followed by Dr Giglioli and others. They were colonial medical officers who travelled this country. They used to go to Mabaruma once per month. They used to go and provide health-care, and they established a health-post there, and that health-post, under a PPP Government, developed into a full-scale hospital. That's where Ms David was born. She said that she saw the light in the Mabaruma Hospital for the first time, right? 1960 - PPP Government, right? I don't know when Ms David was born, but Ms David informed the nation that she was born in 1960 in the Mabaruma Hospital, and that she saw the light for the first time. That was a PPP Government hospital, [*Applause*]and yes, it had an x-ray. It had a mobile x-ray. It had a mobile x-ray, and by 1970 the x-ray fell into bad times, and then, somewhere in 1982 - maybe Mr Corbin, the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Murray know; but somewhere in 1982 either the Government or some organisation donated an x-ray. It was in the crate, and it was moved from Georgetown to Mabaruma in 1982; and in 1993 - in 1993 Minister Gail Texeira went with the U.S Army and installed the equipment, and now we have a new x-ray awaiting the



completion of the new Mabaruma Hospital that would provide upgraded service to the people of Region 8.  
*[Applause]*

All the PPP/C lead governments have worked from the principle that the health sector will not, and ought not, to behave as a mendicant for public policy attention, and if my colleagues will allow me, I want to be talking more to the Minister of Finance at this point, because we would not beg. We in the health sector would not beg for support on moral and ethical grounds. We come to the table offering to contribute to development. This is the basis on which the Ministry of Health demands priority attention in the Budget, and this is the basis on which, as Minister of Health, I would express my gratitude, on behalf of my colleagues at the Ministry, to the Cabinet and to the Minister of Finance, and his staff, for ensuring that the Health Sector benefits, again, with another increase in our Budget; *[Applause]* and yet I am saying to my friend and colleague, the Honourable Minister, that the health sector will need even more support if it is to provide the high quality, fully-accessible service that we must provide to our people. It is a PR - a Poverty Reduction Programme issue. It's a developmental issue. We must worry colleagues. We must worry, Mde Speaker, about the repercussions of ill health. It leads to under-development. The fact is that demands for health services continue to grow, and keep outpacing the ability of countries to meet these demands - whether we talk about Guyana as a developing country, or the United States as a developed country. There is a global gap - a real global gap, between

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resources, and between the demands for health; and Guyana has a real gap when it comes to meeting health demands with the resources that we have. This gap is not a new one. It existed in 1950, and Mde Speaker, when in 1964 the per capita expenditure on health was US\$16, there was a real gap that existed between our needs, and what we have, and in 1991, when the per capita investment in health had dropped to under US\$7, there was a grossly inappropriate gap that existed between our health needs, and what we had.

Today, with the 2007 Budget, the allocation provides a per capita allocation of US\$6-7. *[Applause]* About 90% of the health needs of our people are provided through the public sector - approximately \$1B. Approximately \$1B will be expended as out-of-pocket expenses in the Private Sector in our country, and another \$1-2B will be fed into the system, through our collaboration with organisations such as Global Fund, such as PAHO/WHO, UNICEF, and others; which means that the health sector of Guyana - the combination of public-private health sector, would see an investment of about \$13-15B, and yet, that overall pool of money will not be sufficient to meet the health demands of the people; and I speak now, not as PPP, or against the PNC or so. I want to establish the realities that we have in this country. Now we are spending about 11% of our National Budget on Health, and in that sense we are caught up in a publication - the Report in the Caribbean Commission on Health and Development ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Minister.

**Hon Clement Rohee:** Mde Speaker, I would like to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue. Honourable Member, we would take the second suspension, and when we return, the Honourable Minister will continue.

### **19:30H - Suspension of Sitting**

### **20:03H – Resumption of Sitting**

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, the Sitting is resumed. Honourable Minister Ramsammy ...

**Hon Dr Leslie S Rasammy:** Thank you Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker, at the break I was saying that the national health budget was about 11% of the total Government expenditure, and that we are catching up with other countries in the Region, as referring at that point to this Report of the Caribbean Commission on Health and Development, which was chaired by Sir George Alleyne, and included Dr Clide Thomas, and we see that, in the Bahamas they spend 13.9% of their Budget on Health; Barbados 11.1%; Antigua 10.8%; Belize 5%; Cuba 11.2%; Grenada 12.4%; Jamaica 5%; St. Kitts 11.4% and so, in terms of percentage of the Budget devoted to Health, we have caught up with our Caribbean sister nations. The problem is that 11% of our National Budget comes out to US\$67 per capita, versus - say Barbados, with 11.1% of their Budget devoted to Health, which comes out to

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US\$450 per capita, and if we were to catch up to that, we would have to use up more than 60% of our National Budget in order to spend that kind of money per capita. The overall increase in money for health interventions in Guyana has presented us with an imperative to develop effective strategies for health investments, including ensuring that resources reach the district and community levels. In a study done by the Macro-Economics Commission on Health, headed by Professor Jeffrey Sacks, it was estimated that a minimum of US\$34 needed to be spent on a package of essential health interventions, and indeed, globally, more than seventy countries now fail to reach that \$34 minimum expenditure. We have reached that. The problem is that this essential package of essential health intervention does not include any hospitalisation cost. It does not include prevention, and diagnosis, and treatment for chronic diseases. It does not include interventions for many of the programmes Guyana and developing countries struggled with, and so the rationale here is that at least \$34 must be allocated to meet these essential services, and the rest of it would have to be met through cost recovery and other mechanisms. The Guyana Government has pronounced on this - that it has developed a comprehensive package of publicly-guaranteed services that would be free. We do not support the cost-recovery mechanisms, and yet that present us with challenges. As we examine our priorities in health, the MDGs are firmly in our sight, as the Minister of Finance said. The MDGs established a set of targets and indicators which provide a useful measure for progress in countries. Guyana's 2007

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Budget is very aware of our obligations towards the MDGs. I would not be focusing much, however, on the targets established by the MDGs, and would reserve them for other occasions, since we have many more opportunities to discuss them; but I wanted to seize this opportunity to flag one of the ugliest gaps in the MDGs themselves, and why the MDGs cannot be the only focus for our National Health Plan. We are, or we must become aware that the MDGs do not capture all of Guyana's health priorities. The MDGs, for example, make no mention of the non-communicable chronic diseases and lifestyle risk factors. Four of the five causes of deaths in Guyana are from the chronic non-communicable diseases. We cannot ignore them. The chronic non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, and Diabetes, account for 60% of deaths worldwide. Indeed chronic diseases kill and disable more people – globally, than HIV, TB, and malaria. There is also this misconception that chronic diseases are diseases of the affluent and developed countries, and communicable diseases are the diseases of the developing countries. Indeed, that is a misconception, and the fact is that developing countries face double-jeopardy. They face death and morbidity from communicable diseases, and they face death and morbidity from communicable diseases - eighty percent of the deaths caused by cardio-vascular diseases occur in the developing countries; so indeed, it is the developing countries that carry the burden. In Guyana and the Caribbean more than 51% of our deaths are caused by chronic diseases.

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A study done in Jamaica, Mde Speaker, in 2003 showed that the cost of treating diabetes alone was US\$33M. In the U.S. itself, it is estimated that diabetes cost, on an annual basis, \$92B. In Guyana, we do not have a study, but the Ministry of Health has a working estimate of what it would cost us to provide drugs and commodities for treatment of diabetes - for the prevention and treatment of diabetes. The cost for 2007 is projected to be \$1B, and this does not cater for related services. This cost does not cater for opportunity losses also; that is due to time spent away from work, school etc. So the chronic diseases constitute a major burden for us. Heart diseases are another of the chronic diseases we must deal with. It is a number one cause of death in Guyana. It accounts for 18% of deaths that occur in our country. Complete diagnosis such as Doppler, ultrasound and Exercise Stress Test is now available for the first time; angiograms are available for the first time, and let us not underestimate the implications for financing in the sector because of these developments. Persons would now want to, as they ought to, access these services more, and earlier. Diagnostic services for cardio-vascular illnesses would now be taking on an entirely new perspective, and this would raise issues of financing in the sector. It is also now possible for angioplasty to be done in Guyana. It is possible, and indeed we have finished more than a dozen angioplasties stenting is possible, and open-heart surgery is possible and, indeed, we have prepared a list of candidates, and open-heart surgery will be available, momentarily, in our country; and these are developments that we all should be proud of in this country. It is not a

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political issue. We all should be proud of this. [Applause] The cost for covering these services in 2007 is likely to be more than \$400M, and this is going to be a great stress on the Ministry's Budget, and this is likely to be a real gap. It is likely to be a challenge and for sure, the future sustainability of such a programme is a major problem, and must be high on our priority. How we would fund this remains a major question, and I could say to this House, and say to this nation that in our 2007 allocation we have not allocated \$400M to cover these charges, and so that's going to be a challenge.

Cancer is another of the chronic diseases that must demand our attention, as we expand on our capacity to diagnose and treat, the cost implications would add to the challenge of financial resources meeting the demands for health services in our country, and we are not unique in this. Every country faces this. Cancer is now ranked as the number 3 cause of deaths in our country - a rank that it also occupies globally. In 2007, we have an ambitious programme to tackle cervical cancer ... I'll talk about this a little later. We have expanded our diagnosis for cancer; and we have expanded our capacity to treat cancer. For the first time we have a capacity to provide radiation therapy in Guyana. People do not have to leave Guyana for radiation therapy. [Applause] The cost has been greatly reduced for people, but the fact, though, is that the treatment in Guyana would demand another \$120M in 2007. We have also increased chemotherapy capacity in our country, and this is also likely to add \$100M to the Budget. [Applause] We have increased our diagnostic

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capacity, and this is likely to add another \$50M to our Budget, and the fact is that, after we have taken into consideration our allocation in the 2007 Budget, we are likely to have a deficit of about \$100M to cover these costs.

Mde Speaker, the immunization programme has grown, and has been internationally recognised. Guyana continues its aggressive comprehensive immunization programme. The immunization programme, this year is likely to cost us about \$350M. We have 95% coverage - there are still pockets of our children ... especially in areas like Region 1, which we must find and ensure that every child in this country is immunized. Guyana has a proud record, going back to the early 1960s, on immunization. We have added vaccine over the years. MMR was added in 1993. Heptavalent was added in 2001.

Guyana has maintained a polio-free status since 1962. Our last reported case of Measles was in 1991; our last reported case of yellow fever was in 1968; our last reported case of whooping cough was in 2002. This is, by any standard, a successful programme. [Applause] That's why, in 2001, Guyana gained international recognition for our programme, as we were awarded the Gold Medal for Expanded Programme of Immunization Surveillance; [Applause] and in 2006, Guyana was again recognised, as we were awarded the Henry Smith's Award for maintaining high coverage for immunization. [Applause]



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In this coming year we would add three new vaccines to the programme. We're going to, before the end of June, add presumptuous Vaccine for immune-suppressed children, as a starting point for universal coverage among our children. This is a vaccine that would lead to reduced morbidity and mortality in children because of pneumonia and so on. Then we would introduce a Rotavirus Vaccine, and this will reduce deaths from diarrhoea. We would also introduce the Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine for young girls, and this would be ... [*Applause*] and this would be important for the prevention of cervical cancer; and as we add HPV, now that it's known that virtually its known that virtually all of cervical cancer is linked to Human Pamplona Virus Infection, it would become necessary to be able to test so that we could screen all women in Guyana for HPV, because we would now be able to identify those women who are at risk for Human Pamplona apropos cervical cancer.

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Minister.

**Hon HR Robeson Benn:** Mde Speaker, I request that the Honourable Minister be given another 15 minutes to continue his speech.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Minister be given another 15 minutes to continue his speech.

**Motion carried**

**Hon Dr. Leslie Ramsammy:** Thank you Mde Speaker, Thank You Members. Mde Speaker, in terms of testing for

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HPV, we have allocated \$8M to acquire PCR Technology that would permit us to start big Human Papilloma Virus testing in our country. I want to talk a little about the Neglected Tropical Diseases. The WHO has identified thirteen diseases as Neglected Tropical Diseases, and they are referred to as Neglected Tropical Diseases because they affect developing countries and the developed countries, spend very little on research and in developing a new drug and so on for these diseases. Globally, more than a billion people are affected by these diseases. In Guyana's case there are five of them that we should pay attention to, and these are the soil-transmitted helminthiasis - intestinal worms. Regular deworming treatment against intestinal worms reduces mortality and morbidity in preschool children, improve nutritional status and academic performance of school children, and improve the health and well being of pregnant women and their babies. We have budgeted for mass de-worming programme in 2007, which would be carried out in the communities among preschool children, children at school, their parents, pregnant women, and adolescents.

The second one is Lymphatic Filariasis. This is the Dec Salt programme. Lymphatic Filariasis continues to be a public health issue in Guyana. It's a large-scale treatment that we embarked on, and large-scale treatments plays critical role in Guyana's Lymphatic Filariasis programme. We have promoted the use of Dec Salt as one of the control measures, and this programme Mde Speaker, was launched in 2003. Since then there has been a 38% reduction in Filaria cases in Guyana. In Region 2, where more than

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80% of the people use Dec Salt regularly, there has been an 85% reduction in filaria cases. We would add Abendizole to the mass treatment in selected communities, in order to accelerate the demise of Lymphatic Filariasis in our country. Our target is to eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis by 2015 in Guyana. *[Applause]*

Leishmaniasis is another one of the neglected diseases. This is 'Bush Yaws.' In 2006 we were able to diagnose thirteen cases. We have always suspected that 'Bush Yaws' as a disease, especially in our hinterland areas, because our border countries have this, and now we have developed a diagnostic capacity and treatment is available.

The fourth of the neglected disease that we pay attention to, though we have not identified any case in Guyana, but it is present in Brazil, it is present in Venezuela as Shagas Disease, and then the last of the five of the thirteen that we are focusing our attention on is Leprosy, or Hansen's disease. In 1991 the World Health Assembly passed a resolution for the elimination of leprosy by year 2000, meaning that, by 2000, countries should have a prevalence of 1 per 10,000. Our present rate is 0.52 per 10,000 so Guyana is one of the countries that have met the target established by World Health Assembly. There is ... we do not have oncoprosoriasis, which is one of the thirteen of the neglected diseases, but we are focusing on the five that are present in the Americas.

Mde Speaker, the single most important lesson, from the last decade, is that emerging infectious disease threats,

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such as SARS, Avian Virus, are tenacious, and we need to be just as tenacious in our vigilance against emerging, and re-emerging virus threats. At the moment, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, and with the Private Sector, have a National Oversight Committee that has prepared a response for the potential of Avian Flu and for an avian pandemic in our country and we have talked about the details in this. Guyana's National Preparatory programme for Avian Flu has been lauded throughout the Caribbean.

Mde Speaker, Mental Health must not be ignored, and the National Psychiatric Hospital is one of the things that we have to pay attention to. The PPP/Civic Government has announced that this would be a priority, and in 2007, we will make preparations, and we will start the mobilisation of resources to reconstruct the National Psychiatric Hospital. In collaboration with PAHO, we have developed a human resource plan to provide enough nurses throughout the Primary healthcare systems. There is a substance abuse programme that is going to be expanded this year, and Mde Speaker, I haven't talked about malaria, about HIV, and about TB, and because we are running out of time, and because we have many other opportunities, I am not going to talk about these areas, but substantial funds have been allocated. In the case of malaria, in 2006 - because we distributed about seventy-nine thousand impregnated bed nets in 2006, we saw a 50% reduction of Malaria cases in this country. *[Applause]*

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Dr Ramsarran will be talking about infrastructural development in our country, but Linden Hospital is on pace for completion in March 2008, and a new inpatient building at Georgetown Public Hospital will start this year. Our Blood Bank is now collecting about 5,000 units of blood. It has grown from about 2,000. Whereas we used to have about 5% of the blood donated voluntarily, we now collect about 37% of all blood from voluntary donation.

Dr Ramsarran will talk about human resource development. We are about to take in our second batch of post-graduate surgical programme, that we have developed at the University of Guyana, and with the Canadian Association of Surgeons. We have the new anaesthetic programme for doctors and nurses starting in September. Our dentistry programme started last September, but there are other levels of training, and Dr Ramsarran will deal with them. There is an eye care programme that my colleague, Sheila Holder, is interested in, and the Minister will talk about it.

There is reference to climate change ... and Mr McAllister talked as if it was because of the Stern Report, and other recent reports, that we are only now interested; but the PPP/Civic Government has a long history of recognising global warming and climate change. *[Applause]* Going back to 1993, and indeed we are a party to the Cuyoto Protocol, and we have ratified the Cuyoto Protocol long before the Stern Report and others, and indeed the Stern Report and other reports are now confirming that the position that the Guyana Government took in the early 1990s was a correct one; *[Applause]* and so, Mde Speaker,

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because of time, I am not going to go into greater details on the many myriad of issues that we should talk about. We have crafted a Budget ... and I can talk with tomorrow on this. We have crafted a Budget that balances our options as we address important issues affecting our people. After the fierce battle for ideas, after the torrid arguments, we need to keep our voice clear and strong, and to accept that the vision contained in the document – *A Brighter Future for All*, and in our 2007 Budget - that this vision is possible, but for that we must dream a little. But this Budget also cautions that we must dream, not beyond the feasible, but to the limits of what is feasible and this is what will inspire our nation, as Mr Franklin said. Let us speak boldly together, Mde Speaker. Let us speak boldly together, as we complete the debate on this Budget - not to separate sides, but as one on behalf of all our people. If we do so then we would have fulfilled our task as well as possible. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member Mr Anthony Vieira.

**Hon Anthony Vieira:** Mde Speaker, Mr Patrick Manning, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, during his 2007 Budget Presentation in October 2006, said this:

*Mr Speaker, it is for this reason that the government has chosen, as the theme of this year's budget, Vision 2020 - Moving Onward.*

The label for our Budget this year is 'Vision 2011,' I don't know if it is a coincidence, but what I do know is that

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Trinidad's slogan is 'Budget 2020 - Moving Onward.' And based solely on the content of our Budget, Mde Speaker, ours may as well be 'Vision 2011 - Not Moving At All.' Mde Speaker, so that we do not get bogged down in our own perceived self-importance, let me remind the Honourable House that the Trinidad and Tobago Budget for 2007 calls for the expenditure of US\$6.3B, whilst ours calls for the expenditure of only US\$0.5B, making the Trinidad and Tobago Budget twelve times bigger than ours: So I agree with the Honourable Ramsammy - probably for the first time ever, that with the small amount of money that we have we have, to spend it very carefully or we are going to end up in a lot of trouble.

Mde Speaker, just so that we do not get bogged down with our own ... In addition, since I saw in the Trinidad and Tobago's Budget Speech these words spoken by Mr Manning, and since there were things written in the newspapers about our Dr Singh I thought that I would bring it to his attention that Mr Manning said this:

*Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I wish to thank all the individuals and organisations, in the public and the in private sector, as well as civil society organisations, who have contributed to the formulation of this Budget.*

In our case, our Guyanese Minister broke with tradition and did not even invite submissions or comments from the local stakeholders, including private businesses, the labour movement, or consumer advocates; but even, Mde Speaker, when consultations did happen in the past,

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evidence is now surfacing that their submissions were ignored. That's why we are so poor, and that is why we are destined to remain so. I don't care how much oil we find, or how much natural gas we find, or how much hydro-power we generate; a substantial sector of this nation will live in permanent poverty and misery, and they will have recourse to no justice at all. Now, before someone says that Trinidad is full of oil and that's why they could afford all these things, let me say this: Barbados, with 280,000 people, and is an island which could fit in the mouth of our Essequibo River, has a Budget of nearly US\$1B this year - double the size of our Budget. In September 2006 the World Bank published a study, Mde Speaker, which they called 'How Do Countries Score on Governance?' They found clear evidence that countries which have a freer press also have a more transparent and more effective Government, and more control of corruption. The research cites countries such as Chile, Portugal and Canada as nations where vibrant democracies and very little corruption is in contrast to countries which the Report calls 'Protesting Voices and Accountability Challenged Countries,' such as China and Russia, where corruption tends to prevail. I need hardly to point out that these same two countries - China and the Federal Republic of Russia, are currently doing heavy business with us regarding our bauxite and our sugar industries. Birds of a feather, apparently, do flock together.

To identify what corruption does to a nation, the World Bank has labelled it the 300% development dividend. Mde Speaker, this means that a country, which improves in governance, gets three times more income per capita in the long term – from a thousand to three thousand, and from three thousand to nine thousand. The worldwide



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governance indicators measure six covenants of essential good governance:

- 1) They allow dissenting voices, and are accountable.
- 2) They are paying attention to, and measuring political, civil and human rights.
- 3) They have political stability and absence of violence.
- 4) They are effectively measuring the likelihood of violent threats, including terrorism.
- 5) They are effectively improving government effectiveness through their legislative and regulatory actions.
- 6) They are effectively cherishing the rule of law, and are in control of corruption.

The Honourable Member, Mr Ramjattan, quoted from the Economic World Forum Study of the 117 sovereign nations on this planet, and he is right. I disagree with the Comrade, the Honourable Member. As a nation, we come last in quite a few categories, so the claim that Guyana, and its Government is a corrupt one is supported by a

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substantial international investigational opinion, and the conclusion is that we are three hundred times poorer than we should be, and will continue to be so unless we become a nation which, according to the World Bank, cherishes good governance and embraces the six World Bank criteria, which could make us so; and I appeal to all here that it can happen. You just have to pay attention to the deleterious effects of corruption.

Now ladies and gentlemen ... *[Laughter]* Mde Speaker, Honourable Members, at first glance, this Budget looks like a photocopy of the 2006 Budget. It visualizes almost exactly, the same expenditure of around \$100B. Like the 2006 Budget it visualizes a deficit between what it will collect in revenue, and what it will spend - \$10B in '06, \$5B in '07. It visualizes almost exactly the same collection of Current and Capital Receipts of \$95B. The Revenue Authority visualizes collecting exactly the same amounts - \$58 in '06 and \$60 in '07. It visualizes exactly the same 17 or \$18 billion dollar amount borrowed from the IDB. It visualizes similar amounts obtained in HPIC and other grant aid - which is 11 billion in '06, and 9 billion in '07, and it visualizes almost exactly the same local borrowing of \$3.9B in '06, and \$4B in '07; and a second glance at the Budget there will show that the lack of content of the thing is confirmed and there is nothing new in this Budget. It is a photocopy of last year's Budget.

Mde Speaker, I would like to correct the misrepresentation made by the Minister of Education in this Honourable House regarding the education cost to this nation. During the period 2003-2007, the salaries of teachers ... this is the actual employment cost of the Education Ministry,

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increased from \$1.78B in 2006 to \$2.05B in this year. That is, during the five-year period their salaries increased by 15.6%. Now, Mde Speaker, how can it be reasonable that the salaries of teachers increased in five operating years by 15% - an increase of only 3% per annum, when inflation is running at around 5% per year - that is, a total inflation during the same period – 2003 to 2007 – 20 percent. Who does the Honourable Member think she is fooling? In the introduction to the presentation of his Budget Dr. Singh, in the third paragraph of his four-hour speech, said this about Guyana:

*Today, we are a country where our people live in perpetual harmony, enjoying greater cohesion and prosperity; a society where our quality of life competes favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours.*

Perhaps the Honourable Gentleman would like to go to the *Stabroek News* marketplace and repeat these words; but if you do, make sure you are wearing good, comfortable shoes because you would have to run.

Mde Speaker, the wealth of individuals in a nation is contained in its GDP per capita, and so I thought that I would see if I could confirm that we were doing as well as our neighbours, as was alleged by the Honourable Member. Mde Speaker, Barbados has a per capita income of U\$18,200 per person - per capita; in Trinidad it's US\$19,700 per capita; Suriname is US\$7,100 per capita; the Bahamas is US\$21,300 per capita; but Guyana was only U\$4,700 per capita in 2006, so we are not doing all

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that well, Mde Speaker, and to substantiate my perception that our economic situation in this nation is very precarious, and that the Honourable Member is being less than truthful, I note in the Appendices of the Members' own book - Budget 2007, that our average national salaries are less than US\$1,000 per year.

Mde Speaker, the Honourable Member said, in this House, that sugar production grew by 5.5% to 259,588 tonnes in 2006. Mde Speaker, our sugar industry is not growing, it is contracting. The average sugar production - from 2000 – 2005, according to the Bank of Guyana's statistics, was 293,683 tonnes. The 2006 production, placed in this context, was in fact only 88% of what it was in the previous six years average. Mde Speaker, there was indeed a deluge in 2005 in this country. There was not a deluge in 2006. The Abary drainage system collapsed, which caused problems in 2006, but this was based solely on incompetence. In 2006 there was no deluge. The entire month of January in 2006, Mde Speaker, accounted for about 18 inches of rain. In 2005, Mde Speaker, there was a legitimate cause for a disaster because, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, the 17<sup>th</sup> of January, and the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, 2006 five inches of rain fell every single day, and the total for the five days - from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> was 26 inches of rain. That's a disaster. A disaster can't be what happened in 2006 when, in the entire month of January, there was only 19 inches; so claims of a disaster in 2006, Mde Speaker, are unfounded and incompetent, but then, additionally, quite a substantial part of the damage that was done in 2005 was due to the damage that B.K. Tiwari did to the Lama Dams, which we had paid him \$400M to build six years before; and it was due to a non-functional drainage system, after

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many years of low rainfall. Yes, there was a lot of rainfall; but yes, the PPP made this country bear the fruits of their own inexperience in not understanding the level to which they were guilty of neglecting the drainage system.

Mde Speaker, on 11 January 2004 I forecasted that the damage done in 2005 would happen. [*Interruption: 'Another weatherman?' "No, no, you should check it"*] My Commentary, 'Rainfall,' which was aired on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2004, said this, and I will quote it. Now I can say it because now I am quoting directly:

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the PPP has been very lucky that, in the eleven-odd years they have been in power in none of those eleven years had they had to deal with the traditional high rainfall this country experiences, especially along the Demerara Coast, from Abary to Uitvlugt, and they have been complacent in the way they have maintained the existing infrastructure on the Coast since coming to power, especially in Regions 4 and 5.*

Mde Speaker, as I said ... This is on the internet for anyone who wants to check it, to go and see it. This Government is famous for saying that we should offer advice, but I saw it coming and I spoke about it one year before it happened, and no one listened. [*Interruption: You sound like Sharma you know.*] Now I want to go on record saying a few things about the Minister's Flagship Project at Skeldon. Now, to bale the sugar industry out of its current crisis this flagship probably will not float when they launch it; because already the flagship is sinking in the waters at

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Skeldon. Mde Speaker, we have the Head of the Skeldon Expansion Project, Mr Paul Howe - the Booker-Tate man in charge of that expansion, we have him on tape telling us in January 2007 ... in January 2007, Mde Speaker which the Skeldon Project would require three large pumps to drain the extra water that the expansion would bring under the plough. I also warned about this potential to flood Skeldon two years ago in a Commentary I did on the Skeldon Project, which was aired on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2005, when I said this:

*The expansion at Skeldon will necessitate the supply of one hundred and ten tonnes of sugar a year to the factory, almost three times of what it is now. These huge expansions, almost always result in lower tonnes of sugar per acre in the existing cultivation, as well as in the areas of expansion. Also, inevitably, the expansion will include areas of low fertility, which will suppress yields. The drainage trenches have to be dug longer since, as the cultivation becomes deeper, the further back you will expand and will inevitably result in poor drainage unless something is done to enhance the drainage in the front part of the estates.*

And this was never done: But if the gentleman from Booker-Tate knew that the expansion will require three large new pumps, where are they? Surely he ought to have known that he could not possibly have started to bring the swamp water from the expansion through the estate two years ago without these pumps which he now says that he needs. Surely, he should have installed them before he attempted the expansion. What is the result, Mde Speaker?

Well, I will now quote from the agricultural audit that was done for the Boast estates after the spring first crop of 2006. *Due to the industry producing 7,650 tonnes of sugar less than was budgeted, causing us to lose income and making us an unreliable supplier to GUYSUCO's customers.* Mde Speaker, these are GUYSUCO's words. These are not my words. I specifically [*Interruption: 'Where did you get that? I got the Audit. Where did you get that from? I got the GUYSUCO Audit. Where you get that from?' "It fell out the back of a truck. It comes out the back of a truck. You want to hide information? You can't hide it from everybody all the time"*] I specifically referred to what the agriculture audit team reported about Skeldon Estate in that report:

- 1) *Heavy rainfall resulted in poor drainage, which was compounded by the additional drainage load from the expansion. This affected cane growth and development in the cultivation proper.*
- 2) *The outfall at No. 76 Village drainage sluice was badly silted up and this has impacted heavily and negatively on the drainage efficiency.*
- 3) *The estate was instructed by the Agricultural Operations Department; Mde Speaker, I would like to repeat: The estate was instructed by the Agricultural Operations Department to increase the latest estimate and show a higher yield of 3 tonnes of cane*

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*per hectare in the estimates. Interruption:  
That is false]*

- 4) *The additional drainage load provided by the expansion area of Block 10 required better planning, according to the audit team, with the need to address cultivated versus uncultivated areas, and the installation of an efficient network of drainage in the estate.*
  
- 5) *Having awareness of the siltation of the 76 outfall channel opportunity should have been taken to desilt it at the earliest possible opportunity, rather than two years after it was known to be blocked.*
  
- 6) *Central Executive should not influence the submissions made by the estates, as regards cane yield.*
  
- 7) *The estate is indeed under flood conditions, averaging 51.4 GD from Spring Gardens to No. 83 Sections in the facades.*

This is GUYSSUCO reporting to GUYSSUCO; is nah me saying this:

*This was a direct result of water coming from the 10 expansions through the estates, and these*



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*areas should have been cordoned off and regulated, the report said, rather than allowed to run freely into the estate cultivation.*

So for two years, Mde Speaker, the estate was practically flooded under water.

Mde Speaker, what is disturbing about all of this is that nowhere else - anywhere, does this plan which Mr Howe now say that he has, concerning the installation of pumps, featured anywhere in the equation when the agricultural audit team visited and reported on Skeldon in June 2006, leaving me with the distinct impression that they are playing it by ear at Skeldon, and that the plan is unfolding, even as they plunder through the project and therefore disaster is always near. *[Interruption: 'You aren't ashamed?']* If the expansion warranted pumps, then they should have been bought and installed before they cut the channels with swamp water from the expansion into the Skeldon cultivation. Because of the high water in the Skeldon cultivation, Mde Speaker, the estate's cane quality, which used to be the highest in the industry, is now worse than Uitvlugt. The poll in cane of Skeldon, Mde Speaker, is less than Uitvlugt today, and it used to be the highest in the industry. One-third of the expansion at Skeldon will be from farmer's canes - mostly located in the Molsen Creek area.

Mde Speaker, I was astonished to discover that Mr Paul Howe's attitude to them was that their capability to expand to supply the new factory is heavily dependent on their getting financing to do so, and that that was a matter

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between them and their bank. Mde Speaker, he is talking about farmers who are going to be supplying almost one-third of the cane to this mill, and he said that their biggest problem was going to be financing, but that the Government and GUYSSUCO had nothing to do with that, so these people are going to have to go and talk to a bank. These farmers need financial help on a very important matter of national importance and this should be given to them by us.

Mde Speaker, the first sugar crop of 2007 is a small crop. Mde Speaker, the first crop of 2007 is a small crop. This is due to the large acreage this year's first crop being reaped last year, in the second half of the year, to produce the 259,588 tonnes the Honourable Member. Dr. Singh, told us about. That is, they reaped the first crop of this year's cane at six months old to make up the shortfall last year. For this reason the first crop of 2007 will occupy the following time periods:

- Skeldon - 1 2 weeks
- Albion - 12 weeks
- Rose Hall - 11 weeks
- Blairmont - 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  weeks
- Enmore - 8  $\frac{3}{4}$  weeks

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- LBI - 7 weeks
- Wales - 7 weeks
- Uitvlugt - 6.5 weeks

Mde Speaker, the PPP would not have to close the Demerara Estates, because they are closing it themselves down. As far as the other crops are concerned, I have already given the current levels of production, including the year 2005, and already, Mde Speaker, if one takes year 2000 as a benchmark year, and use that one year as a 100% index of achievement, here is how our agricultural production appears on paper at the end of 2005. Unfortunately, Mde Speaker, 2006 - even though it's February, the Bank of Guyana's statistics for 2006 are not yet available which is in itself an indictment. Now sugar ... In 2005, sugar was only 90% of what it was in 2000; rice was only 93%; coconuts was only 75%; cassava was only 44.7%; plantain was only 15.4% of what it used to be in 2000; bananas went up to 142%; mangoes went down to 42%; pineapples were only half of what it was in 2000; citrus was only 42%; hot peppers was only 20%; bora and tomatoes were only 18% and 17%, respectively, of what they were in 2000. These are significant shortfalls, Mde Speaker and one can only hope that there would be some improvement very shortly, or we would have to start importing plantains. *[Laughter]*

Mde Speaker, the Minister of Finance's observation that this sub-sector rebounded by 7% in 2006 is laughable, to

be honest. In view of the massive shortfalls that recorded, and which were recorded by the Bank of Guyana itself, it is no accomplishment to rebound by 7%.

Mde Speaker, I am not going to spend too much time on the forestry industry, suffice it to say that the three Asian companies - Barama, Demerara Timbers and UNAMCO, currently operating here, are butchering our tropical rainforest, with little or no benefit to the Guyanese living here. To say a 3.4 in his Budget speech that the forestry sub-sector expanded by 11% without having regard to the fact that our forests are being raped wholesale by these foreign 'carpet baggers' is really obscene, and we are conducting less value-added activities in timber today than twenty years ago. At some point in time Mde Speaker, this propensity that the Honourable Gentleman on the other side of the floor has of telling us how many billions of dollars we spent on this, and how many of billion dollars we spent on that will have to stop, and someone will have to start telling us exactly what spending that money has achieved. After all, we did pay Tiwari \$400M on the Lama Conservancy Dam, and after the money was spent the dams were in worse off condition than they were before. The PPP's track record in building infrastructure is not without numerous flaws. Generally what they build is very expensive and generally they don't last.

Mde Speaker, for years the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture was located in a building opposite the Brickdam Police Station. Three weeks ago they were removed so that this building can house personnel for an 18-month rice development project, and the forty - odd employees of the fisheries department were being relocated

to the Ministry of Agriculture's compound on Vlissengen Road ... [*Interruption: 'and Mon Repos' ...*] There are serious questions whether the Ministry's building can accommodate such a large number of people.

Mde Speaker, I want to point out that in 2005 fishing earned more for our nation's GDP than did rice. This type of action by the Ministry is hardly one which is likely to instil, in the trawler and fish-processing owners, any feeling that this Government cares about that sector. When one adds the shortage of central staff to run the sector, the situation becomes even more sinister. Mde Speaker, there is no Chief Fisheries Officer at the Fisheries Section of the Ministry of Agriculture. There is no Fisheries Officer which the Organisational Chart for the sector sees as a crucial person in the sector. There is also no Principal Fisheries Officer. One Ms Dawn Mason, who is substantially a Senior Fisheries Officer (Ag) in that position, there are no acting or otherwise Senior Fisheries Officers, and they require two. Mde Speaker, there is no Marine Biologist, or any other person or groups, who are monitoring our fishing grounds to ensure that we are reaping our catches in an intelligent and responsible manner, which guarantees that we do not destroy our fishing grounds.

Mde Speaker, unlike the Asian 'Carpet-baggers,' who are raping our forests, the trawler people have been forcing self-regulation on themselves, and they voluntarily rest the fishing grounds for a few months every year; but when they do rest their boats, to their own economic detriment, so that the grounds can replenish themselves, poachers from all over the Caribbean, and from Venezuela, are

raiding our fishing grounds and the Government is offering no protection whatsoever. Mde Speaker, these are our national fishing grounds, so I urge that more security be given by the G.D.F. to ensure that the grounds are protected during these periods when they are supposed to be replenishing themselves. *[Applause]* So, Mde Speaker - including the Marine Biologist and his assistants, we have almost six of the most senior and important positions in the fisheries department vacant and running by remote control. This is no way to treat one of the most important industries of this nation.

Mde Speaker, I had planned to say a few words on rice. My thoughts on how the rice sector is run ... They have a gentleman over there - a goodly gentleman from Region 2. The Honourable Member had reported that his area, Region 2, had produced a million bags at 32 bags per acre. Mde Speaker, if the WTO becomes a reality, and this country would like to compete ... *[Interruption]* Mde Speaker, if we are to compete in the world, we would have to produce far over 32 bags per acre throughout the Industry. *[Interruption: 'How much?'* "Well forty, forty-five" 'I came from the rice industry and we are getting forty' "No, you aren't touching forty and I don't care where you come from"] Mde Speaker, I decided not to say too much about the rice sector at this time because, what is reported here by the Honourable Member ... *research is currently on the way that would see a doubling of rice yields nationally, and the Guyana Rice Development Board is being reorganised to better lead the Sector.* These are good initiatives, Comrade Minister...

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Mrs Debra J Backer:** Madam Chairperson, I respectfully move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

### **Motion Carried**

**Hon Robert Persaud:** Aye. Let him continue.

**Mr Anthony Vieira:** Well, he is very magnanimous. You have to give Honourable Jack his Honourable Jacket ... *[Laughter]* Madame Speaker I therefore find that the words used, and the structure of the words used, say *research is currently on the way that would see a doubling of rice yields nationally, and the Guyana Rice Development Board is being reorganised to better lead the Sector.* For the time being, I would take that on good faith that something is being done, including precision land-levelling in the rice sector, so that we use our water more efficiently and effectively, and we can double the yield ... I don't think you could double it, Honourable Robert, I think if we increase it by 35% it would .... *[Interruption]* More or less, Mde Speaker, that is what I wanted to say and thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Honourable Member, Mr Anil Nandalall.

**Mr Anil Nandalall:** Mde Speaker, after the gloomy and very pessimistic presentation of Mr Vieira, Honourable Member, I rise to support the 2007 Budget, presented in this National Assembly by the Honourable Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and like the speakers who preceded me, I would like to extend to the Honourable Minister a congratulatory hand - not only for presenting a Budget that is comprehensive and compendious in its treatment of all the major sectors of our economy, but one that is consistent with the Manifesto with which we went to the people during the General and Regional Elections of 2006 [*Applause*] - a Manifesto that the people of this country approved and voted on and so returned us to office with a landslide victory at the polls. [*Applause*] In other words, Mde Speaker, this is a Budget that has already received the approval and the imprimatur of the majority of the people in this country, and we are now seeking the approval and imprimatur of this Honourable Assembly, so that we can implement our plans, our policies and our programmes in building a modern and prosperous Guyana. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, I take this opportunity to invite the Honourable Members of the Opposition, both of the PNC-R and the AFC, and of course Mr Franklin in solitude, who share our vision, who share our dreams, and who share our aspirations of a modern and prosperous Guyana, to unshackle themselves from the manacles of narrow partisan party politics; to liberate themselves from the chains of political opportunism, and come on board with us as we continue our task, as we persevere with our mission [*Applause*] to build a country of which we could all be proud of - a society and a country where all our people can have an equal place, irrespective of class, creed or race; where our dreams, and the dreams of our children can



become a reality, that is what this Budget holds for Guyana, Mde Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, I ask you to envision how the economic, social and political landscape of this country would be transformed forever if the four companies that would begin oil exploration, in the second half of 2007, source oil in commercial quantities. Mde Speaker, I ask you to envision the financial reprieve our people would enjoy, and the economic boost our country would receive, when the hydropower project at Almalyia Falls in the Potaro Region becomes functional and produces 100 Megawatts of power for the National Grid. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, can you envision how the tapestry of our Commerce, Trade and Industry will be revolutionised when that highway from Bon Fin in Brazil to Linden in Guyana is completed. Mde Speaker, these are the types of potential that this Budget projects for this country, and for our people.

Mde Speaker, for too long our people been labouring in the cane fields and the rice fields; for too long our people have been labouring in the Mining Industry, this Budget represents the first of a five-year plan that can take our people to the promised land. *[Applause]* That is why I ask this National Assembly to release the potential of Guyana to its people, and to support the Budget, as we traverse together along the highway of building a modern and prosperous Guyana. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, as you are aware, our Constitution divides governance into three branches - The Executive, The Legislature, and the Judiciary. It is on the important

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institution of the Judiciary that I would like now to express some views. Let me state, categorically, Mde Speaker, that the PPP/C Administration holds steadfast to the view that no society can advance without a system that administers justice fairly to its people; *[Applause]* that no democracy can truly flourish without a system of justice that enjoys functional autonomy and independence; that no nation can truly develop without a system of justice to which all its people have access, irrespective of race, class, creed, or geographic location. *[Applause]* This Government has therefore not only repeatedly declared, but considers itself bound by the Constitutional doctrine of Separation of Bars...

*(see PART III of III Page 163)*

# National Assembly Debates

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15th Sitting

14:00h

Tuesday 13 February 2007

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## **PART III (cont'd from PART II of III)**

*[Interruption: 'Speak about the lotto fund' "Lotto Fund has nothing to do with the Judiciary. Speak to your Leader and Mr Murray and Basil Williams"]* ... doctrine which not only guarantees the independence of the Judiciary, but one that ensures that in its functioning, the Executive does not trespass upon the sacred province of the Judiciary, as that which used to happen twenty-five years ago *[Applause]* that I'll go back to this background Mde Speaker, and from this perspective that one must view the Budgetary allocation, in respect of the Judiciary at page 45 of the Budget Speech, under the heading 'Modernising Judicial Administration,' where the Honourable Minister of Finance has informed us that the Government is currently implementing a \$5B Justice Reform Strategy for the modernisation of the administration of justice in this country.

Mde Speaker, I pause here to mention that I have perused the 1992 Budget Speech of Mr Carl Greenidge, Finance Minister as he then was, and I borrowed it from my friend Mr Neil Kumar, and I did not find ... I did not find a single word, in that very long speech, about the Judiciary - not a single policy statement on the Judiciary, and 1992 was a year that the PNC, in power, was going to Elections. That was the position of the PNC on the Judiciary. It therefore,

Mde Speaker, can clearly be seen how the PNC administration and this Government differ in their treatment in the administration of justice.

Mde Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I do not remind this Honourable Assembly that not so long ago - not so long ago, Mde Speaker, it was widely accepted as axiomatic and a trite fact that the Judiciary was a subject of political control and manipulation of the PNC Government. It commenced in 1970, Mde Speaker, when the PNC government abolished Her Majesty's Privy Council as Guyana's Final Court of Appeal. [*Interruption: 'So why didn't you bring it back?' "We bring back the CCJ, I am getting to that"*] All doubts about the true and ulterior intention behind that move was soon dissipated when, in 1974, the PNC declared itself to be paramount, that is, to be above every institution in the State, including the Judiciary. All subtlety was thrown to the wind when the PNC hoist and flew its Party flag in the compound of the Guyana Court of Appeal - the then apex of the Guyana Judiciary. Mde Speaker I pause here to ask you to imagine what will happen in this country if the PPP flag is to be flown in any court in this country; but that was the norm ... That was the norm that transpired in this country, Mde Speaker. That is why I have to disagree with my friend Franklin when he said that we must not go back. Mde Speaker, we can only measure development forward if we know from whence we have come. Unless, Mde Speaker, we address our minds to our history. Mde Speaker, history is replete with instances that punish a people to repeat what they have forgotten. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, I turn to a book. I would like to refer ... I would like to put the Judiciary in the political environment and atmosphere in which it functioned under the PNC when Mr Robert Corbin was head of the Y.S.M. Mde Speaker, I want to refer to a book written by Dr Bertram Ramcharran ... and listen to the qualifications of this man: Barrister-at-Law of Lincoln's Inn; Attorney-at-Law of Guyana; is a Commissioner of the International Commission of Jurists and a Member of the Permanent International Court of Arbitration. Since being admitted to practice in England and Guyana, he has spent a number of years at the United Nations, where he is currently the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights ... *[Interruption: 'I have not heard of him' "I am not surprised"]* This is a Deputy Commissioner of Human Rights of the United Nations. When Mr Ramjattan, Honourable Member, was President of the Bar Association, he invited this gentleman to address the Bar Council - ask him. *[Interruption: 'Basil doesn't know about this. Maybe Basil was not invited. Ramjattan and Basil never really got along.']*

Mde Speaker ... *[Interruption]* that is the function of the Judicial Service Commission. We have independence of the Judiciary. Why don't you petition the Judicial Service Commission to do its work? We don't interfere. Just like how you wanted us to interfere with the Elections Petition ... the Elections Commission. You remember you wanted us to interfere with the Elections Commission. We are not interfering with independent functionaries of State. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker ... [*Interruption: 'If there are judges to be confirmed then that is the purpose of the Judicial Service Commission.'*]

Mde Speaker, I will like to quote from this book, under the heading *Acknowledgement of Rigged Elections and Human Rights Violations in Guyana 1968-1989* ... [*Interruption: Because we have an independent Judiciary. It's an independent judiciary - and why was elections declared rigged?*] From a historical point of view, the Annual Report on Human Rights published by the U.S. Department ... since 1978, provide one of the best sources of evidence on the attitude of Governments in Washington towards the non-democratic regime that ruled Guyana between 1968 and 1992. The U.S., having decided on Burnham to head the post-independent government of British Guiana, backed the government from 1968-1969, despite well-documented claims, throughout this period, about the government's abuse of power. It is appropriate to mention that, in 1968 in preparation for the Elections, the voters ... [*Interruption: 'Basil Williams got Benschop in jail, he lost the case ...' "If I was Benschop's lawyer, he would have been out ..."*] ... the voters registration list, and the identification cards have been closely supervised by a U.S. company called *Registration System International*. Mde Speaker, "The Country Report on Human Rights Practices published in 1978, and that of 1979, backed the Government, despite evidence of fraudulent elections in 1968, and in 1973, by Forbes Burnham. The charges made by the Opposition on irregularities were dismissed as being the usual function of an opposition party. On the charges of corruption by

government officials, the U.S. declared themselves to be satisfied with Burnham's enforcement campaign, which they claimed have been aimed at correcting alleged abuses." Mde Speaker, there is a whole chronicle of instances ... of litany ... of documented abuses; of documented interference with the Judiciary, and I wanted to quote ... to put into context, Mde Speaker ... to put into context the situation under which the Judiciary of Guyana functioned when the PNC was in Government. I understand that it hurts; I understand that it hurts. Not only was the Judiciary demoted of its independence and integrity, but it was starved for resources. In consequence, almost all of its physical infrastructure and buildings fell into disrepair - Law Reform, the library and law reporting, and other such facilities - vital for the efficient functioning of a Judiciary, were almost non-existent.

Since the People's Progressive Party/Civic assumed the reins of government in 1992, almost every court building has been repaired. At present the Guyana Court of Appeal building is undergoing massive reconstruction; the physical structure of the High Court building has undergone a complete metamorphosis; and some courts within that building have even been air-conditioned - a luxury that many lawyers and litigants thought they would never live to enjoy ... [*Interruption: "Basil, be honest. Did you ever think that you would get air-condition in the High Court? Be honest. Do you want to deny the air conditioning unit in the High Court?"*]

There is now an impressive law library in the High Court compound to which judges, lawyers, and even law students have access. A High Court building has

been constructed at Suddie, and now, for the first time in the history of this country, Essequibians do not have to travel to Georgetown to have their civil cases litigated in the High Court. *[Applause]* For the first time in the history of Guyana, we have an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, whereby persons can have their cases amicably resolved by mediation outside the adversarial court system. Ms Debra Backer is functioning there very effectively ... *[Interruption: 'Thanks to the PPP']* Yes, thanks to the PPP.

For the first time in the history of Guyana we have a specialised court to deal only with commercial cases. *[Applause]* Often times we hear how important a functioning - and an expeditiously functioning judicial system is important for the investment climate. Well this Government, in response to that need – in response to that call, has established a Commercial Court, which Mr Williams goes to on a regular basis. This Government played a significant role in the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice. We played an important role in the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice. *[Applause]* Guyana now - for the first time, has an Appeal Court. After thirty-seven years of your abolition of the Privy Council, we have established a court - another tier of the court system, outside of Guyana, so that our people, who are dissatisfied with the rulings of our local court, can now go back internationally for justice. *[Applause]*

We have made resources available to ensure that the Judiciary devises mechanisms and strategies to aggressively tackle the backlog of cases awaiting trial, so as to improve



the speed with which justice is delivered to all our people. All of the above reforms, Mde Speaker, have been accomplished outside of the Justice Reform Strategy, to which Dr. Ashney Singh spoke, and for which we have now \$5B to spend. *[Applause]* Everything that was spent – that I spoke about is outside of the \$5B. I now come, Mde Speaker, to how we will spend the \$5B that has been made available in this Budget.

The Justice Reform Strategy, for which budgetary allocations have already been made, is intended, as its principle objectives, to assist the Government of Guyana in taking initial steps towards:

- 1) Strengthening the accountability and the administrative efficiency of service-delivery in the justice sector;
- 2) Enhancing Justice Sector institutions; and
- 3) Improving access to justice..

At the end of this programme, the Justice System in Guyana will be completely transformed into a modern, efficient system that delivers justice to our people - with impartiality, with competence, and with dispatch - at an affordable cost. *[Interruption: "I am getting to that - one-step at a time."]* The Justice Reform Strategy, Mde Speaker ... *[Interruption: "When?" "It is being implemented now. It is being implemented now ... have patience."]*

The Justice Reform Strategy manifests itself in various components and sub-components - the details of which are too expansive for me to outline in a speech of this type. I can therefore only summarise some of its salient features, as I will now do.

Under the Heading of 'Enhancing Institutional Capacity,' the following areas are slated for reform:

- The Judicial Service Commission will be completely transformed, with changes to the recruitment and accountability of judges, magistrates and court staff.
- A new Code of Conduct and Ethics will be crafted for judges and magistrates, and enforceable timelines will be set for the delivery of judgements and orders.
- Constant training programmes will be organised for judges, magistrates, and their support staff.
- A new system will be designed and implemented to deal with reducing the current backlog of cases both in the High Court and in the Magistrate's Court, by way of case-flow management, and court-connecting mediation which will now be extended to the Magistrate's Court. It currently exists only in the High Court.
- The Administration of the Supreme Court and its staff is slated for wide-ranging reforms, which will include the provision of modern equipment,

improved training and greater system of accountability.

- A programme will be designed to enhance the skills and productivity of judges and magistrates. This will include the provision of training in specialized areas of law, online facilities, and a modern and well-stocked library, etcetera.
- There will be a continuation of the ongoing rehabilitation to the physical infrastructures of the courtrooms and the courthouses throughout Guyana, and they would be furnished with court-recording and IT equipment, and staffed with trained court reporters.
- Improvements are also slated, specifically for the criminal justice system, where the DPP's office will be modernised and reorganised.
- Police prosecution in drugs and drug-related matters, and serious indictable matters, will be gradually phased out
- Satellite offices at the DPP will be opened outside of Georgetown.
- There will also be institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, in both its functional and operational capacities, to increase its efficiency in discharging its mandate.

- There will be an initiative to modernise antiquated civil and criminal procedures and rules, and new ones will be drafted in their stead, and Honourable Member Backer, you can testify to the fact that our new rules of civil procedure are soon going to be promulgated in the High Court. [*Interruption: ... 'Don't stifle your conscience'*].
- There are several pieces of both civil and criminal legislation that are listed for amendments and revisions. New guidelines for bails, sentencing, cause, appeals, hearings, and trials are expected to be promulgated.
- There will be massive expansion in the provision of legal aid service, not only to the citizens of Georgetown, but also to the citizens of New Amsterdam, Essequibo, Region 10, and other outlying regions.
- There will also be a special effort to update the Laws of Guyana, and the Guyana Law Report, and there shall be established a Law Revision Commission that has not existed in this country since the 1970s. The end result, Mde Speaker, the end result will be, when this project is completed, is that we will have a completely transformed and modern system to which our people can turn for justice.

Mde Speaker, before I close, let me quote what the PNC Manifesto says on Justice. Listen to the big plans that the

PNC promised the population of the country when it traversed this nation campaigning for Elections. This is what they said - one, two, three, four lines:

*... fast track law reform to address unfinished business in the protection of women, including gender-based, collateral reform, for example, small claims, family law, child and death protection.*

That is all. That is their plan for the reformation and development of the Judiciary. That is why they are making so much noise when I am speaking. *[Interruption: 'Ow, shame Basil, you aren't ashamed?']* This is our programme, Mde Speaker. Our programme, which the Honourable Minister outlined, and that I outlined, was part of our Manifesto, Mde Speaker; it was part of our Manifesto.

Mde Speaker, in closing, I invite every single member of this National Assembly to come on board with this Administration, as we chart a course to take the ship of Guyana into the glorious harbour of progress, peace and economic prosperity. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Ms Jennifer Waithe.

**Ms Jennifer Waithe:** Mde Speaker, before I go into my presentation, I must say to the Honourable Member he will do well in the highways and byways to win souls to God's Kingdom. He has a good voice ... He has a good voice.

Mde Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, I rise to participate in this debate on the 2007 Budget, which is before this House with the Theme 'Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.' Mde Speaker, we have in this National Assembly real life. We therefore need muscles to demonstrate the power of real life. No talks, Mde Speaker, or empty promises - no ink on paper can deliver same. It is my sincere hope, on this occasion, that all the promises in this Budget will be a reality, and not just talk - having experienced that in the past.

Mde Speaker, Region 5 is my constituency, and as Parliamentary Representative, I feel the pain of my suffering people. Mde Speaker, this is evident, as I draw this Honourable House's attention to page 12 - 'Completion of Ithica Road, and extension of the Drill Bypass' at a total cost of G\$294M. Yes, the Government did those roads. I want to say tonight, thank you. However, the massive substantial work on these roads has already seen deterioration. The road at Ithica, Mde Speaker, has become narrow. Already there are large holes at various sections, and the Drill Bypass road sections have already sunk, and there is evidence of cracks, Mde Speaker. The Government boasts of building roads, but what can be seen is poor quality for huge sums of money.

Mde Speaker, there is no level playing field when it comes to rehabilitation of streets in my constituency. Villages like Bath Settlement, Bath-Hope, Expectation - they all benefit from chip seal and bitumen streets, while villages like Number 8, Number 9 - just to mention a few, they have

loam streets, and these residents have to put up with dust - day in and day out. Sometimes they cannot even open their windows and doors. Mde Speaker, villages like Litchfield, Lovely Lass, Number 28 - all are in a terrible state. Streets leading to these villages' burial ground are in a deplorable condition. In rainy seasons they become worse. Complaints to the various NDCs and RDCs are to no avail. Mde Speaker, during the Cabinet Outreach, in the run-up to the General Elections, lots of promises were made throughout Region 5. I want to thank the Government for fulfilling some of these promises, especially for the pumps at Trafalgar, Honourable Minister of Agriculture. However, in the Abary River - listen to this, the banks have been destroyed, which is the main cause of the floods that affect the residents of the Abary-Catherine area.

Mde Speaker, the bank of the Western side of this river needs to be upgraded, urgently, to stop the overflow of the river. Mde Speaker, the sluice at the Burma Canal, and the Abary Creek needs urgent revetment works on the southern-eastern side, because on a daily basis, the canal and the creek bank continues to collapse, and as we all know, the rainy season is fast approaching.

Mde Speaker, the residents of Burma ... Minister of Water, listen up. The residents of Burma continue to suffer for one of the main ingredients of life – potable water. Mr Minister, listen up. Mde Speaker, it seems like no one cares for the elderly, the children, and the young people in that area. This community has been without portable water for a long time. Minister Bibi Shadick knows about this. For a very long

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time residents have been receiving five buckets of water per week per household - anymore needed will have to be purchased. What about those who cannot afford to purchase, Mde Speaker? The question is, is it because it's Burma, and not Novar or Bush Lot? Because, Honourable Minister Bibi Shadick knows of that problem a long, long time ago. Mde Speaker, is this the way we are going to build a modern and prosperous Guyana? I said earlier that I feel the pain of my suffering people. Mde Speaker, do you want the people of Burma to hit the streets in protest? Why does the Government have to respond only to pressure from some areas? Mde Speaker, I urge the Honourable Minister, there is need for a well to alleviate the situation in Burma urgently. *[Applause]* They are suffering.

Mde Speaker, power and light distribution, alluded to by the Honourable Minister on page 14 in the Budget ... I want to bring to the attention of this House, the Un-served Areas Electrification Programme. In the various Regions, published in the Kaitaur News, Friday January 26, 2007 - here is it. Mde Speaker, it's over four years that the people of the Number 8, Number 9 - back streets; the residents of Catherina Lust, and those of Catherine-Calcutta have been clamouring for electricity, only to be told - recently, that they will benefit from this programme in the first quarter of 2007. Mde Speaker, lo and behold, in the Guyana Power and Light publication of the areas to benefit in the first quarter of 2007, the areas that have been promised are notably left out, and only Bath ... Listen up - Expectation 1C, Hope 1F, Waterloo 1F and 1L, Plantation Farm, and Number 4 villages will be electrified in this first quarter.



Mde Speaker, the Government is talking about a vision for a better Guyana, of people living in harmony, enjoying greater cohesion and prosperity; a society in which our quality of life compares favourably with our immediate and distant neighbours; and a society that is recognised for the care and attention it places on children, women, youths, the elderly and less fortunate as mentioned in the Budget in Page 1. Mde Speaker, how can the Government say these things - with our mothers, our children, our youths and elderly suffering with lamps, flamboeaux or the opening of doors and windows to enjoy the lights. Mde Speaker, we look forward for the continuation ... You listen to this: We look forward to the continuation of the lights on the public road, especially in the area ... [*Interruption: 'Belladrum. Belladrum has lights'*] ... Especially, Mde Speaker, in the light of what is happening in our society today, and we say thank you to the Government for the areas that have received so far.

Mde Speaker, my other area of concern is the future of our young people in Region 5. We all know that this Government boasts about Presidents Youth Choice Initiative Programme ... Where is Mr Lumumba? ... But as I speak today, these buildings are all white elephants in Region 5. Mde Speaker, these projects are all in a crisis, and it is my hope that someone will listen and bring an end to this grave situation, because we look forward to our young people being trained in Information Technology to cope in the modern age.

Mde Speaker, in all the areas of this Budget the Honourable Minister made mention of a caring Government. The time has come, Honourable Minister, when we must address the social issues before us. In Guyana today, there are women who have to go through life without the support of anyone. We need to face reality – there is no opportunity to allow many single women to enjoy self-sustenance, or invest in income-generating ventures. Mde Speaker, time is the evidence, and has show in many instances, that our single women are belittled by those in high offices. Mde Speaker, I refer to the Board of Guardians in this country. It is appalling to witness the humiliation that our women go through when they approach this entity for assistance. They are exposed to too many details of their personal life; hence the reluctance of most of them to ask for such needed help.

Mde Speaker, during the 2006 floods, various items were sent to affected regions. However, Mde Speaker, the people of Mahaicony complained of not receiving cleaning materials when the waters receded. This allegation by the residents was refuted by the Regional Administration. Yet, Mde Speaker, on Friday February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007, five hundred and thirty-eight gallon bottles of Marvex bleach were removed from a room in the sub-regional, and over fifty were damaged as a result of poor storage. Evidence of this is at the stores department of the Regional Democratic office at Fort Wellington, West Coast Berbice right, now as I speak. How sad, Mde Speaker, how sad.

Mde Speaker, on the Government-run radio station, on the programme, ‘Afternoon Delight,’ on Friday February 2<sup>nd</sup>,

2007, we were informed that the New Guyana Marketing Corporation will be sending lorries with basic food items that are zero-rated to assist residents from the clutches of some unscrupulous business people. To the disappointment residents of Region 5 of the Lorries stopped only at Bath Settlement, West Coast Berbice. If we are speaking of all-inclusiveness, we need to do better than that, Mde Speaker. Mde Speaker ... [*Interruption: 'The thing went to twelve villages. It started at Bath Settlement, hence I say no more. You take a walk to Region 5 and you would know, Honourable Minister. You cannot be in your office and know these things'.*]

Mde Speaker, I must congratulate the Honourable Minister for the early distributions of Old Age Pension books I say thank you. A suggestion made by the Honourable Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence, sometime ago, for access to payments without incurring cost, especially to those in the far-flung areas, for that we must also say thank you, because that was also on-board. However, Mde Speaker, as I speak to you, lots of pensioners in Region 5 are still without these books, due to some mistakes that were made, and subsequently these books had to be returned to Georgetown for corrections. Honourable Minister, please take note because, while the grass is growing, the horse is starving.

Mde Speaker, all is not well in the health sector in Region 5. There are problems. I welcome the Guyana-Cuba Diagnostic Centre project at Mahaicony. Yes, it will boost health-care in the Region. However, Minister, what will become of the Fort Wellington Cottage Hospital on the West

Coast of Berbice, which has a well-equipped operating theatre, but only needs a surgeon. Mde Speaker, as the Diagnostic Centre is being constructed, the Fort Wellington Hospital is being used to provide medical care for the people of Region 5; yet no effort is being made to have a functioning generator in the event of blackout. The incinerator, Honourable Minister, is not functioning; and there is no proper disposal of waste material. The water system to the hospital is inadequate. There is need for a two-inch bore from the main to the hospital connection to allow water into the reservoir, then to be pumped into the overhead tank. Every day, Honourable Minister, there is a water problem at this institution, although the Regional Administration was informed. Mde Speaker, there is also an urgent need for the establishment of a Health and Safety Club at this institutional, so as to sensitise workers. Honourable Minister, we also need systems to be put in place so that autopsies can be done in our Region to assist the poor from going all the way to New Amsterdam.

Mde Speaker, in any agricultural area, Minister of Agriculture, drainage and irrigation is absolutely necessary. In the Belladrum and No. 28 rice farming areas, no D & I works are being done. Farmers have to resort to pumping of water into their fields, and out of their fields, which is a very costly exercise. Mde Speaker, only some areas benefited from the D & I works. Mde Speaker, there is also a shortage of fertilizer, along with the high cost - to the detriment of the farmers. I hope that the Honourable Minister will urgently put systems in place to bring some relief to our farmers.

Honourable Minister, cattle continue to ravage farmers, and destroy infrastructures in Region 5. We need a system in place to deal with this situation. [*Interruption: 'Everything I'm saying is true because I'm a Christian and don't tell lies'*] Mde Speaker, I need to mention that we had a system that would have assisted ... Honourable Minister, listen to this: I need to mention that we had a system that would have assisted with the D & I works in Region 5. In 1998 four Water Users Associations were formed in Region 5 - the first ever in the country, namely Section D - Onverwagt Bush Lot, Kingsley-Chester, Moore Park - Belle View, No. 40 - Washington, all registered organisations. There was a signing of terms of agreement with MMA-ADA, bank accounts were opened and Board members trained for weeks to carry out the works by Mr Eon Jones of NBIC and Mrs Kathleen Whalen, Consultant. Honourable Minister, in 1999 September, rehabilitation works started in two areas by a contractor who left for the Christmas season, never to return to continue - only to remove his machinery. This matter was brought to the attention of the then D & I Chairman, Mr Ravi Narine, the then Minister of Agriculture, Mr Reepu Daman Persaud, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and the then Chairman of the MMA, Mr Singh, Honourable Minister, to restart these projects to assist the farmers, but to no avail.

Mde Speaker, I made mention of these things to show how farmers could have been managing their own affairs, and proper D & I works would have been in place. What a waste of money and time, Mde Speaker. Sometimes we look and look, and never see; and listen and listen, and never

understand. Today the same system is re-introduced, Mde Speaker.

Quite recently the Honourable Minister, the Government and GBTI introduced the European Commission Rice Financial Facility. Thank you, welcome farmers. Farmers are happy, but only to be faced with a long list of requirements. Why Minister? There is a long list of requirements that they are unable to meet. It's too long. I want to ask the Honourable Minister - do you really want farmers to benefit from this loan? Why offer the loan with the right hand and take it back with the left hand? I say to this Honourable House, we need less politics and more development. *[Applause]* Honourable Minister, farmers need financial helps, please ... *[Interruption: 'Must arrange for them to pay the rates. You can't pay rates and you are not getting the facilities for that']*

Mde Speaker, for us, on this side of the House - the PNCR-1G, our priority is the well being of the people of Guyana. We are committed to ensuring that all the people of Guyana are treated with respect. Mde Speaker, I will end by saying that, in order to build a modern and prosperous Guyana, we have to create a pleasant atmosphere, where everyone is treated equally - regardless of race, religion, sex, social origin, or political persuasion. In so doing, Mde Speaker, only then we can say that we are building a modern and prosperous Guyana. *[Applause]* I hope, Mde Speaker, in the end of this Debate, I pray that God will give us utterance, and that self will die, and the Holy Ghost will take control. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Albert Atkinson.

**Mr Albert Atkinson:** Mde Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution in support for the approval of the National Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2007, I wish to state that the theme of this Budget is a direct reflection of our vision to continue to transform our country into one where all will continue to benefit from the political, economic, and social strides that have been made, and where each of us continues to make a positive contribution for this transformation.

The crafting of this Budget by a team of young and vibrant technocrats, by no means overlooked the challenges that we would face, especially so for our interior regions, challenges that are not insurmountable, but nevertheless requiring prudence in financial management, and an environment where all stakeholders have an input in planning and implementation of policies and programmes.

Mde Speaker, Region No. 8 - Potaro-Siparuni is one of the regions that present a great challenge for us in pursuing Government's policy. The good news however, Mde Speaker, is that to confront these challenges much preparatory groundwork has been accomplished. Firstly, Mde Speaker, from a once-isolated and totally neglected Region in '92, we have been able to move to one where we are now featuring regularly on radio and television, and in the print media. The average Guyanese is now familiar with names such as Karesparro and Chenapou, and Kaibarupai, and Toruka. This, Mde Speaker, is the result of the

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progressive growth in allocations over the last 14-year period in order to build roads, build and upgrade airstrips, provide road and riverrain transportation, build bridges, providing better health-care and educational access, providing water and communication for the Region, and as such, Mde Speaker, making the Region more accessible for our projected developmental plans. For this year, Mde Speaker, with a total allocation in excess of \$390M, the emphasis continues to be placed on the social services, and public works and communication. These are the two sectors that would subsequently bring more relief to the people, and to cushion the effects of the many past years of neglect.

Mde Speaker, our Government, the PPP/C, in its commitment to fight and alleviate poverty, realises the pivotal role of education and health-care delivery in combating this scourge. As a result, the highest allocations for the Region are in these sectors. Previous allocations would reflect that, from Budget '92 to Budget '06 that twenty-eight state-of-the-art schools were built in twenty communities, encompassing the nursery, primary and secondary levels. [Applause] In Sub-Region 2 – Mahdia-Tumatumari schools and teachers quarters were built in four communities – Micobi, El Paso, Princeville and Mahdia Proper. Textbooks, exercise books and materials, administrative office equipment, have all been provided in adequate amounts - adequate amounts - adequate amounts. Prior to these constructions, it was the motivation of the communities themselves to provide for school and teacher accommodation, unless the denominational bodies intervened at that time. An allocation of \$344M last year



for the various sectors has met with considerable successes in Region 8. This, Mde Speaker, has been attributable to the participatory planning involving Village Councils ...  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, it's now one minute to ten. I have had ... This is the second night running ... You can't wait until ten o'clock to ask for the adjournment, or for the House to continue. I have spoken to the Whip on the Government side; this is the second night running. She had an opportunity before this Honourable Member began to speak - to do it, so that she wouldn't now break his stride. Would someone – a senior member of the Government side, and head of Government business move to have this done?

**Hon Clement Rohee:** Madame Speaker, let me offer to you my sincerest apologies, and to say that we, on this side of the House, would like to propose, or call for the suspension of Standing Order 10 (1), and call for the session, or this Sitting of the business, to continue uninterrupted until the conclusion of this business Sitting.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the House continues until the speaker is finished. We have four other speakers, so we will continue until they conclude. Mr Atkinson, Honourable Member.

**Mr Albert Atkinson:** Thank you Mde Speaker. This, Mde Speaker, has been attributable to the participatory planning involving Village Councils, Civil Society, NGOs - with everyone's contribution being recognised, and working out

the best course in the interest of the target groups in the Region, and this, Mde Speaker, is vital to this House. If both sides of this House could take a page out of Region 8, in terms of their planning and the manner in which they do things, we would go a long way..

Mde Speaker, the continued growth within the sector was not confined to only infrastructural works and the provisions of equipment, since significant sums were channelled to improve teacher and pupil performance, with greater successes at the S.S.E.E. and C.X.C examinations, such that the present dormitory will have to be expanded to comfortably accommodate the present one hundred and eighty-four intake.

Two students secured scholarships to study medicine in Cuba, creating history for the Pakaraimas for the first time. [Applause] The GIBET and BEAMS project have impacted to such an extent that much more of our local teachers are entering C.P.C.E and returning to serve their communities. [Applause] Mde Speaker, the Region now boasts two fully-equipped state-of-the-art secondary schools when, previously, the nearest secondary schools were in excess of 70km away, namely Lethem and Bartica. Four fully-equipped resource-centres were established at Paramakatoi, Mahdia, Monkey Mountain and Cato to cater for Distance Education, Information Technology, and a Language Laboratory, using solar power electricity.

Mde Speaker, our humble friends on the other side of this House persistently accredits themselves to having addressed

the issue of education during their term of office. I say Mde Speaker, that had it not been for the PPP/C Government, Kandarafai, a remote community in the upper reaches of the Ireng River, with a population of four hundred-odd persons, would have continued to remain neglected and illiterate. No one spoke English in this village - up to 1994. It was not until 1994 that the first school was built. This is what this Government is all about, Mde Speaker. *[Applause]* Fulfilling our mandate as a Government, and as stipulated by our Manifesto, this population is now confident about the future, and have an optimistic outlook because for the first time, they have access to primary education and health-care, the availability of river transportation, radio communication, teachers, and trained medical personnel. Health-care delivery has a very impressive record in Region 8, apart from two state-of-the-art hospitals and fully-equipped health posts in every community. The Region now boasts two hospitals, three health centres, with qualified medexes and community health workers, and a Microscopist to read malarial smears. Our immunization programme has been deemed the most efficient in the country, with the medical staff accomplishing over 95% coverage. We still have some hiccups in our Medivac but, notwithstanding this; we have been able to sustain our evacuation with the able performance of Air Services Limited, and because of our openness and adherence to democratic values, NGOs, Guyana Adventists Medical Aviation Services and Remote Aviation Medical Services, do respond to some of our emergencies; hence, Mde Speaker, partnership in governance.

Malarial infection has been considerably reduced with the introduction of chemically-treated nets, which were distributed to residents at no cost; the provision of adequate supplies of anti-malarial drugs and adequate medication for other illnesses. In September 2005 there were thirty-seven thousand cases of malaria, but in December 2006, there were only fourteen thousand cases - approximately a drop of 50%; and this is as a result of adequate provisions being channelled into the health sector. Mde Speaker, many of our settlements, apart from Mahdia, do not have regularised housing conditions, but we have ensured that potable water is made available to the main institutions at Monkey Mountain, Kopenaam, Paramakatoi and Cato. Access to the Region is no longer confined to air travel. Over the last five years we have been able to plough \$25M to interlink the Lethem Highway with the Pakaraimas, and established fourteen feeder roads to interconnect all the villages. We have established one hundred and seventy-seven miles of feeder roads. Although these are vehicular trails, Mde Speaker, the benefits have already begun to filter into the Pakaraimas, with a decline in basic food prices at Monkey Mountain, Paramakatoi, and Cato, with projections for further decline in prices, as you venture to further villages; namely, Copenaam and Chanapau, and as we continue to expand resources to improve the roads. Heavy-duty bridges have been constructed to make access easier to Maikobi, Mahdia, Monkey Mountain, Cato, Paramakatoi, Orinduik, Copenaam, Chinapow and Toruka. Mahdia and Tumatumari have greatly benefited from the road system, as costs in transportation have been cut by 50%, and basic food

commodities, in some cases, are on par with those in Georgetown. *[Applause]*

The delivery of services for construction and industry has been enhanced. Contractors and businessmen transport food and equipment at a cheaper rate to the residents of the Region, and building materials are able to reach the Pakaraimas at a reduced cost. Tourism is going to be boosted with overland tours to Mahdia, Tumatumari and the Pakaraimas. Employment is going to be created by the multiplying effect emanating from the various ventures the roadway will create. Mde Speaker, guesthouses have been built in every single community, and at Mahdia we have a state-of-the-art hotel recently constructed. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, these have been established in anticipation of the boom in eco-tourism in Region 8. In every single village, Mde Speaker, there is a rest-lodge financed by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

Mde Speaker, mining traditionally has always been the main source of employment, with our massive road drive and its expansion, and the establishment of regularised mining, and the opening-up of new properties will create new job opportunities for our residents, and for this reason, Mde Speaker, considerable sums are going to be spent into skills - training of our youths so that our people can access jobs when they become available in the Region. Part-holding and open-cut mining for the small miners will continue, and the necessary mechanisms are in place to safeguard their rights. The Ministry of Sports and Culture will continue to upgrade sporting facilities, and to this end, Mde Speaker, all

the facilities that need repairs will be repaired this year in order to hold seminars for capacity-building. Mde Speaker, traditionally our food base - our food security base was rooted in cassava production at a subsistence level. Mde Speaker, we are now producing hill rice - not on a commercial scale, of course, but enough to sustain the communities and this has been further enhanced with the introduction of rice hullers to Itabak, Kanapang, Waiapa, Kurukabara, Cato, Monkey and Cheongmow from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. *[Applause]* So we can see, Mde Speaker, that in every sector Government has placed inputs to bring Region 8 to the status it now stands at, a status that is now a springboard where we can now meaningfully move on. There is much more to be done, and the vision of this Budget, and the allocations provided, will continue to bring relief to the people of Region 8. With the concerted effort of all, and the team spirit that is very evident in our Region, great things are ahead to be accomplished for the residents.

Before I conclude, Mde Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister of Finance for his timely presentation of this year's Budget, and I am confident that this Honourable House will give the Budget their fullest support. In the Minister's own words, the future looks bright, but it will be what we make of it. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Steve Ninvalle.

**Mr Steve Ninvalle:** Mde Speaker, I rise to support the Budget presented by my colleague, Dr Ashni Singh, the

Honourable Minister of Finance. It would be remiss of me not to congratulate the Honourable Minister, and his team from the Ministry of Finance, for putting together a Budget that every rational-thinking person would applaud. Mde Speaker, this does not mean that I am suggesting that the members of the Opposition are irrational.

Mde Speaker, the fire which members from the other side of this House tried to set to the Budget has been adequately handled by those spoke before me, therefore I would not have to use my time to throw any water. However, Mde Speaker, whether we talk of fire, or water, one thing remains, and that is that we, on this side of the House, remain committed to the task and continue to rise, despite the limited resources available in Guyana. Mde Speaker, there are numerous examples that I can give, but this evening I would stick to sports.

Kowlessar said, and I quote:

*In the areas of sport and recreational development the premier activity is undoubtedly the building of a modern five billion dollar multi-purpose stadium. Although this project is being executed principally to fulfil a key condition for hosting Cricket World Cup, its completion nevertheless fills a void for proper facilities for the hosting of international sporting and cultural events in Guyana. Other key initiatives that the Government will be taking in 2006 includes 1) The injection of \$20M into football to support the*

*development of forty clubs throughout the country  
and to assist footballers with their education*

Mde Speaker, the donation of \$20M - exactly \$500,000 to each football club, is the initiative of President Bharat Jagdeo. *[Applause]* It collectively remains the largest single injection of finance to that sport in the history of football in Guyana. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, I have been privileged enough to be among footballers, and to hear the gratitude that they have expressed. That donation, Mde Speaker, went into the hearts of football clubs, assisted in strengthening club structures and developing football clubs from Lethem to Corentyne. *[Applause]* This has not only resulted in the sport being better administered, as many clubs now feel a sense of independence, but must be linked to Guyana's recent unprecedented showing in the international arena, where we reached the final round of the Digicel Competition ... *[Applause]* when this country played thirteen international games without a single defeat. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, it was laid out in the last Manifesto of the PPP/C that Government will support the strengthening of Club structure. The donation by His Excellency, President Jagdeo, is just another way of proving that promises made by this side of the House, are promises kept. But, Mde Speaker, this administration did not stop there. It has supported the Kashif and Shanghai Competition on a yearly basis. This competition brings an economic boost to the mining town of Linden during the month of December. The first and third prize is shouldered by the Government, and



there is also additional support that comes in the form of providing of transportation for teams from the interior. Floodlights have been installed at the MSC Ground in Linden to complement several that were going dim, following years of use. This does not benefit football alone, Mde Speaker, but also activities that are held on the ground during the evening. But again here, Mde Speaker, the Government is not resting on its laurels. The MSC ground in Linden has now been earmarked for further development. Billions of dollars will be spent to take this venue to an international standard so that it can service all sports. This is another promise made, and in due time, will be added to the list of those promises kept. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, there is the President's Cup Football Competition sponsored by the Government, where the largest of money of all ever offered in the history of football in this country can be won. Mde Speaker, if we should turn our heads to cricket, we would see that GUYSUOCO has spent millions of dollars in fixing and maintaining grounds around the country, such as Wales, Albion, Rose Hall and Blairmont. This is a plus for not only cricket, but also for other recreational activities. The National Sport Commission has also seconded coaches to assist in the development of cricket. Mde Speaker, Government has, through bilateral arrangements with China, secured the service of Chinese coaches for Table Tennis and Wishu. A Table Tennis coach will be returning this year to further assist in the development of that sport. While here, the efforts of the previous tennis coach has benefited that sport immensely, to the point where Guyana is now confident

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enough to send a team to the World Championships in Croatia. *[Applause]* This team, Mde Speaker, is not going to make up numbers, but has a legitimate chance of giving the best in the world a tough time, and maybe, just maybe, to come back with a medal.

Mde Speaker, let us just focus on boxing for a moment. It may be by some stroke of luck that the PPP/C was in Government when Guyana secured its first World Title; or maybe fighters felt that they would have been properly rewarded under that Administration. But enquire from Andrew 'Six Head' Lewis, Wayne 'Big Truck' Braithwaite, Vivian Harris, and even Gwendolyn 'Stealth Bomber' O'Neil and the story will be told that each of those World Champions was handsomely rewarded. Each was presented with a plot of land, duty-free concession, and \$5M. This, Mde Speaker, speaks volumes for the commitment of this Government. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, let us also glance at the Young Achievers Gym in Albouystown. For years it used to be housed in a derelict building, where wood ants and rats remained the main occupants. There was hardly any equipment, and a very low charactering. This was a gym where Andrew Lewis, our first World Champion, and others were taught the fistic sport by George Canchi or Prem. Mde Speaker, do you know that prior to 2004 this country never had a modernised gym dedicated to boxing. This must be the biggest-kept secret, but Mde Speaker, the Government got wind of that secret; and in April 2004, the Young Achievers' Gym became the Big Achievers Gym. Over \$17M was

spent by this Government on a state-of-the-art, modernised gym where the Young Achievers Gym once stood. *[Applause]* That gym was opened on April 3 and renamed in honour of Andrew ‘Six Head’ Lewis. *[Applause]* Now in Albouystown, Mde Speaker, gone are the days where boxers had to train under conditions more suited for animals. Now, because of another timely intervention by this caring government, youths in Albouystown, which has produced some of Guyana’s finest boxers, have a place to go in the evening to sharpen their skills and become true young achievers: And it is not only the youths in Albouystown who train, Mde Speaker, our Former World Super Featherweight Champion, Gary Sinclair, while back in Guyana, also chose to train in Albouystown. Others use it as a means of keeping fit. This, Mde Speaker, shows a Government that cares again - a Boxing Academy used to train youths in the finer arts of the sport was set up in 2006. It is the first of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean, Mde Speaker. The Guyana Amateur Boxing Association has set up outreach programmes in several communities, assisted by this Government ... in several communities such as Sophia, Mocha, and Albouystown. These, we know, will churn out more ‘Six Head’ Lewis’ and Wayne ‘Big Truck’ Braithwaites. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, our swimmers continue to do us well. The Government has realised this; hence an Olympic-sized swimming pool is on the agenda, but even without such a facility, there is still a hub of activity in the department of swimming. In athletics, Mde Speaker, Guyana has been steadfast. We are proud of the achievements of Cleveland

Forde, who brought back a gold medal from Argentina, and we are also proud of our brothers and sisters who are disabled, or are differently-abled, who continue to train and represent us with distinction. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we are now seeking partnership with foreign agencies to promote physical fitness in sport. Physical fitness is important to Guyana as a country - the fitter the population, the less burden it would be on our health sector. A population that is fit will produce more, and not too long ago, the Honourable Minister of Health spoke of the expense to treat Diabetes. This is one disease in which the risk can lessen with daily exercises, Mde Speaker.

Through other programmes, the PPP/C has constructed twelve basketball courts across the country since the turn of the millennium. Later this year, Mde Speaker, we plan on repairing the stand at Burnham Court in Georgetown. Seventy-four sports bodies have received sports equipment and accessories. Fifty grounds have been upgraded, with eighteen being in Region 2, and Region 4 having fifteen. In Region 8, alone, pavilions have been erected in twelve communities. All of this, Mde Speaker, speaks of progress. Whenever the PPP accepts the offer, they fulfil the task. This is a Government that talks the talk, and walks the walk. *[Applause]* And Mde Speaker, as we forge ahead to the future to rebuild a modern and prosperous Guyana, I would like to leave this House with a parting thought, especially targeted to the members of the Opposition. Eric Kopper, writing in the Vanguard Management said, Mde Speaker,

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*In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future; the learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.*

The PPP/C has accelerated the pace of development, and if the Opposition doesn't learn to play, they too would be left behind. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Honourable Member, Mr Keith Scott.

**Mr Keith Scott:** Mde Speaker, please permit me to offer congratulations to the Honourable Finance Minister, as we on this side of the House have been doing all day for the timely presentation of the 2007 National Budget entitled 'Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.' As the word *building* is repeated, I wish to respond to the Honourable Member Nandalall. In building a modern Guyana, I noticed that air-conditioned courts have become - and have taken the place - the pride of place, over the delivery of speedy justice, when a languishing, unconvicted Mark Benschop can be incarcerated for four years, and still remain listed at 99 out of 102 cases to be heard. How efficient is the delivery of justice the Honourable Nandalall is raving about? *[Applause]* How efficient and how independent is this judiciary when the Chief Justice functions also as a Chancellor, because the Administration refuses to accept the natural successor to the top position in the judiciary. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the Budget offers some airy, fairy proposals which, on the surface, gives some semblance of being positive, but which, in actuality, is bereft of practicality.

The Budget presents a bamboozling array of figures to the tune of millions of dollars. What we can't find is the economic vision behind the spending of all these millions. Show me the five-year plan to produce a team of scientists whose role will be to design a plan for local food production to replace all food imports; or a team of engineers, who will design bridges, and plans, so that we don't have to import foreign experts, and foreign contractors, at great cost. If you can't visualize plans for this, then we will just have to keep borrowing and spending what we do not earn, plus condemning future generations to a cycle of perpetual debt-repayment.

One could not help but feel that this Government has once again missed an opportunity to offer a meaningful budget, involving all stakeholders in a meaningful building process. By the refusal to invite churches, trade unions and the private sector in a participatory discourse on the Budget, it calls into question the sincerity of the pledge of the President, and when we say the President, I expect my good friend, Neil, to be humbly silent in awe ... the sincerity of the pledge of the President when, on page 5 of his address to Parliament, he said:

*... the underlining pillars of the new political framework will include meaningful engagement with all political parties, reform of legislative and judicial branches of Government, and the continuous engagement of the progressive Civil Society in the governance of this country*

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Mde Speaker, if some of these views were heard, and included, today we in the PNC/R 1G would have had no difficulty in lending full support to this Budget, which in time would have become the beacon for inclusiveness and real growth; which is so desperately needed for Guyana to take its rightful place in CARICOM, and in South America. Mde Speaker, during the debate on the Gambling Amendment Bill, we were regaled by the Government - by all the speakers - speaker after speaker, about the great potential for tourism. We were led to believe that casino gambling is the flagship for this mighty industry that will deliver our country from being the poorest in the English - speaking Caribbean, to becoming one of the great tourism destinations south of the border. Yet Mde Speaker, this Budget is silent on the projected returns that casino gambling will bring into the consolidated fund. Perhaps there is one Minister in this House who is anti-gambling. It's a pity, however, that he does not have a vote. Listening to Minister Maniram Prashad, one would feel that tourism is slated to take its place as a pillar for foreign exchange earnings; while he enthuses about bird watching, yachting excursions and eco-tourism - all healthy activities which we support - he has been allocated the miserly sum of \$65.6M. Tourism clearly is not a priority for this Government. They prefer table activities at nights.

Mde Speaker, we all agree that housing and water are two areas that are of utmost importance to the wellbeing of this nation. We must therefore expect a substantial allocation to this sector, and a progressive housing plan that will ensure that everyone has a roof over his or her head. Instead, the

Budget allocation for this year is \$1.7B - less than 2006, which was \$1.9B. Is it the hope that the Private Sector will take up the slack in the construction of houses, or that the Government feels that 70,000 house lots that they boast about are sufficient? Have you taken note of the new squatting areas? Have you taken note of the new squatting areas that have risen since 1992? Okay! For example, Beirut, Enterprise, Plaisance South, Vried's Lust, Good Hope on the East Bank, Martyrsville, North and South Ruimveldt, Plastic City in the Best Village, Parika back at Sea Dam. Now, these have all arisen after 1992 and you have been boasting about regularisation, comrades. Comrades, I want you to remember that your watchword is regularisation. We'll get back to that later. Some of these squatting areas would not be perceived as such, since they were given sanction by this administration. Of the 50,000 house lots, Mde Speaker, can the Minister tell us how many houses have been built? Not squatter settlements, not house lots - of 70,000 house lots, tell us how many houses have been built, and what is the present position of the infrastructure, particularly the roads, water, and electricity. Is it true that the majority of these house lots are in unserved areas for electrification, and that the residents that you go to, for example, Sophia, cannot afford the cost of electricity supply and water installation. Have you done your homework? I say to you go - start with Sophia, and you would be surprised to see that they still have darkness because of the cost - the unconscionable cost that has been attached to implementation of electricity and water. But, Mde Speaker, let me ask the other side of the House what



really is the fetish about house lots. You always hear the Government boasting about the distribution of house lots. You never hear them talk about houses, only house lots. What is this fetish? Is this the path to modernisation that the Government speaks of? We cannot give house lots without understanding that the proper infrastructure must first be in place. Placing people in mud is merely moving them from one slum to another. Where is the pride? When we speak about Melanie Damishana, Atlantic Gardens, Durban Backlands, we see examples – Comrades - we see examples, comrades - not only of planned housing schemes, but examples of housing schemes that are today an example to those of you who do not know how to build houses. This is the way to deliver houses to people.

Mde Speaker, the distribution of house lots by this Government has lead to untold dissatisfaction with allegations of discrimination, leading to racial acrimony, rather than helping to build a unified and prosperous society, it appears as if the actions being taken by this Government, in this area, is leading to disunity, intolerance, marginalisation of our population. Infrastructure works at Beirut on the East Coast, Parfait Harmony on the West Bank, and Sophia need to be expedited. *[Applause]* For too long residents have been living in atrocious conditions, and attempts by the Government to give token service - like putting down three standpipes in Beirut over a year ago is to fool people that they are being served, and this is an affront to the intelligence and dignity of our people. *[Interruption: 'You are the one that is boasting about progress, you must therefore demonstrate progress']* Mde Speaker, we are not

keeping pace with the demand for houses, because the Government has no housing plan, and attempts made to build the units, and to provide essential services, as I said before, are moving too slowly. The IMF, in their Poverty Assessment Review of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, commented on this very fact, when they wrote:

*High and sustained growth would have to be maintained over the medium term; regulatory forms and good governance would matter; political stability would be critical, and the Government would have to expand the infrastructure to complement the Private Sector growth. Violence and crime would have to be contained, and social cohesion will be essential.*

We need to widen our building capacity so that more than a favoured few will get houses. We will provide jobs for our skilled personnel - the few that are left here, and root out some of the corruption by expanding the register of contractors to include all Guyanese contractors, other than the favoured few. Under the PPP Government there is integrity, honesty etcetera that comrade Benn referred to. That is what he said that the Government has – that it has integrity. [Interruption: ‘It is true. That is true, yes. It is true?’ “Okay, tell me then under whose watch do we find the gold scam, the dolphin scam, the scam in the Treasury, and all with no prosecution? Where is the integrity that you were talking about? The stone scam?”] It is obvious that growth is not moving apace. There is nothing close to good governance. In fact, the Government’s situation is

deteriorating as it inexorably moves towards a dictatorship ... [Interruption: 'May the Lord forgive him for he doesn't know what he says.'] Well, let me give you an example - towards a dictatorship, a creeping dictatorship. The withholding of assent to bills without giving reason, as demanded by the Constitution, is one of the most arrogant examples of dictatorial behaviour. [Applause] However, there is no need for you to feel so bad. We here will show you what is needed, brothers and sisters, comrades and friends, in a genuine commitment to inclusivity with the Opposition, with entrepreneurs, as quoted on page 120 of the PRSP, which reads:

*Such efforts would have to be made to stem the flow of Guyanese, especially skilled personnel and entrepreneurs, It is therefore important that the causes of migration are adequately addressed.*

Mde Speaker, the Budget has earmarked \$1.7B to speed up the distribution of house lots, but no provision is made for would-be homeowners to acquire affordable mortgages. The backlog of title acquisition still exists, thus creating a difficulty for the occupiers of land to acquire mortgages. The Government erred in scrapping the Guyana Mortgage Finance Bank. This entity provided low-interest mortgages for all housing programmes that were executed under the PNC government. For example, Mde Speaker, all self-help programmes like Vried's Lust, Corriverton, Anna Regina, North Ruimveldt, Linden - just to name a few, were thus financed. Today owners, and would-be owners, are forced to go to the commercial banks and borrow at a high lending

rate, and with low salaries. This has resulted in the small man having extreme difficulties to qualify to obtain loans. Mde Speaker, I wish to remind you that such problems never existed during the past PNC regime. *[Applause]* I can show you what I mean by that. We must understand, brothers, that if we are in Parliament we must listen so that you can understand what I mean by that. You must understand that I just said to you that the role of the Mortgage Finance Bank - nothing you have today can take that place; in the commercial banks, the Government does not control the lending rate for mortgages, unless they subsidise and remove the Corporate Tax, hence they do not have the position to cushion the small man's needs in housing. We are showing you how to find the way forward. *[Applause]* I wish to remind you that we must therefore resuscitate this bank, if we are to be serious about giving low mortgages for homes, so that the small man could have some hope of owning a home.

Mde Speaker, this Government just does not have a housing programme, and this Budget does not offer any hope for the small man. The PNC had a slogan - as you remember 'The Small Man will be a Real Man.' this was achieved. You have to admit that this was achieved through the self-help housing programme. The small man became a real man because opportunities were created for him to acquire his own home under that programme. That is why I am recommending to you:

- 1) The resuscitation of the Mortgage Bank, and

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2) Let us re-examine the aided self-help position - that you can, as a Guyanese, really assist those persons - those 70,000 persons, who would like to forget about squatting; and so from having house lots to owning their homes.

Mde Speaker, I am saying that this Government must introduce, now, the aided self-help programme, obviously necessary to alleviate the problems that exist. In 2005, my good friend, the former Minister, had stated that his objective was to complete the entire infrastructure in all housing areas. Today, we still have squatting settlements waiting to be regularised, and the promised electrification programme is still to be completed, while eviction of poor dwellers in certain areas is zealously pursued by a Government which is incapable of delivering on its promises. For example, in Tucville, and in Sophia, squatters have been living there for over eight years, in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. No attempt by this great regularising company called the PPP/C no attempt was ever made to move them to acceptable lots during the process of regularisation, or even to offer them some of the unoccupied and repossessed houses. Instead, they had to watch the callous dismantling of their life's dreams, and were left homeless. For example, in Tucville and Sophia, squatters have been living for years, and no attempt was ever made to them, during the regularisation process, to give them lots. Instead, they had to watch the callous dismantling of their life's dreams and were left to fend for themselves. How caring is this Government? We urge the Government, again, to re-examine the PNC/IG self-help programme, with a

view to reactivating it to assist these people. Mde Speaker, I wish to refer directly to reference No. 147 of Volume 3 of the Budget. *[Interruption and Laughter]* I am of the view that the outline presented is designed to confuse. For example, Item 7 'Description of Project' reads "*Provision for infrastructural work in low-income settlement schemes, such as Farm, Lusignan, Enmore, Haslington, Plantation*" and so on.

- 2) Development of new housing areas such as Parfait Harmonie, Bell Vue West, Cummings Lodge, Sophia, Glasgow; provision for the regularisation of squatting areas; provision for community services; provision for technical services.

Mde Speaker, it refers, and intends to cover Regions 1-10. One would have thought ... and I hope somewhere within the Ministry of Finance, that this had happened, detailed account on what is to be spent on each project, and each region rather, than broad outlines. For example, provision of community services. What community services are provided? Another example is Provision of Technical Assistance. What Technical Assistance? Mde Speaker is this the way of hiding the funds, or is there some hidden agenda? We need to have specifics. Each project must be detailed, rather than just being lumped together to hide what can be done. I can go further. I can show you that there are six projects and you earmarked \$10M. One project alone can get \$8M, and then you can juggle with the other two. So we are saying that we want specifics for each project in

each area. You go into the Budget and you will see what is missing.

Mde Speaker, *The Stabroek News* of Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2007, informs us of the termination of the Severn Trent Contract, days after the Budget allocated \$2.9B to water and sanitation; definitely this company was set up for the fall. This consulting company could not make a major decision without the seal of the Minister. The system for them was set up for failure. The Government has promised to provide safe water to 95% of the population. This is good. This is admirable. They plan to rehabilitate the sewerage systems, and to clean the existing outfall but, Mde Speaker, although I see water around me - water, water all around me, but tell me where I can get potable water. There are signs everywhere saying water is precious, do not waste it ...  
*[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Time, Honourable Member.

**Mrs Debra J Backer:** Mde Speaker, I rise to move that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**The Speaker:** The motion is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

**Motion carried**

**Mr Keith Scott:** There are signs everywhere saying water is precious, do not waste it, but can we waste what we don't get. Can we waste what we don't get? On page 19 of the

President's address, he vows to continue to invest large sums of money in the water sector that deliver potable water. Why then has the money previously spent over the past years - over the past five years at least, yielded no results. Today, six years after the creating of GWI, and frequent increases in billing for water, water is still to be delivered to the first story of our homes, as is required by Law. Like the housing programmes, we would like to see a structured plan to deliver potable water. Mde Speaker, there are several regions where people do not have access to safe water. Tell me, can the ordinary man in Georgetown afford potable water? Very often, on radio, TV, and the press, there is urgent advice for us to boil our water before use. The cost of kero, the cost of gas, drives the cost of potable water up to us. We dare not drink from the tap. No wonder so many water depots have sprung up like mushrooms - even at Bush Lot, West Coast Berbice, where the Government claims to have total control and full support, one of its supporters carries on a thriving water depot. Mde Speaker, is this non-provision, of potable water a plan by the Government to enrich some of its supporters? We spent \$2B on water and yet we can't get it. My colleague, James McAllister, questioned, in this Honourable House, the lack of potable water at La Grange. The people took to the streets there to protest, the people of Mocha and Meten-Meer-Zorg cried out for the well, which they were promised will be operational by December 2006. In answer to Mr McAllister's query, the completion date has now been pushed back to July 2007. Why? Are you aware that people living in Mocha Barnwell North, school children have to get



up at five in the morning, walk through the backdam, cross over the punt trench to fetch a pail of water, just to bathe? Yet so far they still can't get water? This is disgraceful. We ask if water is precious - if water is life, why then is the Government depriving the ordinary persons of the right to life in this country?

What we are faced with is a Budget that is lacking in details, in terms of fund allocation. Large sums are earmarked for projects, but projects are lumped together to hide the real intention, and perhaps to fiddle with funds. Again, Mde Speaker, I wish to refer to Volume 3, Reference 150, and Subhead 7 'Description of Projects:

*The project entails provision for construction of water treatment plants at Lima, Vergenoegen, Cotton Tree and Corriverton; rehabilitation and drilling of wells; installation of transmission and distribution mains and service connections; development of billing systems and institutional strengthening; support for consultancy service management assistance; upgrading of minor systems in all Regions.*

Again, I wish to reiterate that I am disappointed that this Budget - especially as it pertains to housing and water, are essential for rehabilitation if we are to have a better life. These are being denied the people of Guyana. Mde Speaker, if we continue to deny them these essential services, will we have people who will be able to think and thus properly partake in the next Elections? Will they be able to partake in the next Regional and General Elections? The answer will

be *no*. Let us hope that these comments that we, on this side of the House, have offered will be taken seriously, and if this is done, together we can really genuinely, in the spirit of inclusively, move this country forward. Thank you.  
*[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Ms Shirley Edwards.

**Mrs Shirley Edwards:** Mde Speaker, I rise today, in this August House, to congratulate the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, on his 2007 - \$100B Budget presentation. This Budget further secures Guyana's future.

Mde Speaker, since the PPP/Civic took over office in 1992, there has a development in every sector and region of our country. Each year, huge sums of money are allocated for developmental programmes and projects. The Budget records real growth at 4.7%. This means that our economy has strengthened; I'm using the words of the Finance Minister:

*Maturing the Economy - our Government, the PPP/Civic, has completed, successfully, the reconstruction and rebuilding phase, and is ready to move on to addressing the goal of building a modern and prosperous Guyana.*

*[Applause]* As one of the Parliamentary representatives for Region 4, I will highlight some achievements of 2006, and outline some of the plans for capital investment this year. But before that, Mde Speaker, I will deal with a few matters. Before I deal

with the matters in my presentation, I would like to deal with the constant accusations on corruption.

Mde Speaker, I would like to tell a story to this August House. This is factual - not fictional. There was once a PNC government. All government entities were in their control - GUYOIL being one of them. During their reign Victoria gas station was built. Mde Speaker, when the government changed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1992, the PNC from Congress Place sent a letter demanding rent for Victoria gas Station, claiming that the building belonged to them.  
*[Interruption]*

**Mr Robert HO Corbin:** On a point of order Madam, this is a matter that is before the Court in litigation, and the facts don't start in the way the Madam is suggesting.

**The Speaker:** Mrs Edwards, the content of your speech must not include - let me quote Standing Order 41. Standing Order 41 (2): "*Any matter which is subjoined should not be brought out in this National Assembly,*" so if you could ... If you would omit that and continue your presentation ...

**Mrs Debra J Backer:** You get set up.

**Mrs Shirley Edwards:** Nobody set me up; the matter was finished in Court.

It was finished, and GUYOIL won.

**Mr Robert HO Corbin:** I repeat, this matter is still subject to litigation. There is an appeal pending before the Court of Appeal on this matter.

**Mrs Shirley Edwards:** Mde Speaker, Region 4 is the hub for the economic activities in Guyana, and the allocation has been huge. This raises the standard for development and provides improved social services for residents. Mde Speaker, in 2006, Region 4 was allocated \$105.9M. The Region spent \$90,368,000. To give a breakdown of how this was expended I would now provide figures:

### **Economic and Productive Infrastructure**

Bridges: Eleven Million dollars was spent to construct bridges at first Laluni Creek, Yarrowkabra on Soesdyke Highway, and Buxton on the East Coast of Demerara.

Roads: Twenty Million, one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars was expended on rehabilitating roads at Laluni, Industry, Triumph and Dazell Housing Scheme.

Agricultural Development: Twenty-Two point three million dollars was spent on the construction of greenheart revetment at Clonbrook and Cane Grove, and the rehabilitation of the drainage and irrigation systems at the east canal at Beterverwagting, and Jungle Canal to Wide Koker, Grove and Craig.

## **Social Infrastructure and Equipment**

*Buildings for Education:* Twenty-three point eight million dollars. Schools were rehabilitated at Enterprise, Kuru Kuru, Grove Primary Schools; completion of education office at Friendship.

*Buildings for Health:* Three point five million dollars was spent on the rehabilitation of the Health Centre at Friendship on the East Coast of Demerara, and the construction of the CHW living quarters at Dora, Demerara.

*Furniture for Education:* The sum of \$5.579M was spent to provide furniture at various schools in the Region.

For furniture for Health and equipment, \$6M was spent to upgrade Health Centres within the Region.

*Furniture and Equipment for Administration:* \$2.35M was spent.

*Equipment for Health:* The sum of \$499,000 was spent on dental chairs and examination couches.

Mde Speaker, the latest estimate for the 2006 expenditure for Capital Projects for the Region is \$90.6M, or 85.33% of the Budget sum of \$105.9M. Obviously, there has been an improvement in the capacity for implementing the Region's programme, and I recommend that this be improved for 2007. Region Four should at least be able to execute and implement their Capital Programme to the fullest.

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The 2007 Budget allocates \$130M for capital projects. We must recognise the increase in this sum. The Regional Administration should ensure that the allocations be spent for the intents and purposes, and that no excuse should be given for not utilising the budgeted sums since the sums are expected to improve the services in health and education, rehabilitation, and construction of infrastructure that will provide support for poor farmers in the agricultural sector.

Mde Speaker, our development works completed in Region Four are the enhancement of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, the fencing of Ogle Airport. One hundred and forty-one million was spent in 2006 for the purchasing of high frequency equipment and x-ray units to the cost of approximately US\$175M, and a G\$94M for maintenance and installation of lights at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport.

I now turn to providing the figures for 2007, so that my constituency would be aware of it, and follow the developments and implementation rates of the Region. Despite the deviant behaviour of some members of our Region, who destroyed the Regional Administration Headquarters, the Government has provided sums amounting to \$25M to rebuild the Admin complex. This sum could have been allocated for the further improvement in the lives of the residents in the Region. I would like to support the Honourable Neil Kumar in his proposal that the RDC building be constructed at Triumph. *[Applause]* This location is more central, and will encourage and provide easier access for all residents in the Region.

Infrastructural development will continue, given Guyana G\$9M as allocated to be spent on the rehabilitation on the bridge at Alliance, Cane Grove, construction at Ann's Grove, and east connector main canals at Cane Grove. For the enhancing of educational facilities for the delivery of a better service, and to benefit both students and teachers, G\$26M will be spent in the rehabilitation of nursery schools at Kuru Kururu and teachers quarters at St. Cuthbert's Mission, and to construct a new Nursery School at Lusignan on the East Coast of Demerara.

The capital projects for this regional health system are expected to see some \$10M being spent to rehabilitate health centres at Mocha Arcadia and Buxton. *[Applause]* We will see more improvements in the road network in our Region, as the Region now has at its disposal funds of G\$25M for realisation of the construction of roads at Victoria, Strathaven, Bladen Hall, Golden Grove and Mahaica.

We will continue to see development in our agricultural sector. A sum of G\$23M will see the improvement in drainage and irrigation systems at Mahaica, Cane Grove and Timehri. We will see expansive D & I works for the Mahaica area, and our agriculture-based communities. Middle Walk canals of Helena and Good Hope will be rehabilitated, while the outfall sluice at Supply will be rehabilitated, and revetment work will also be done at Mosquito Hall, Mahaica. These will provide support for our small farmers.

Money will be budgeted for the construction of revetment of the main irrigation canal at Cane Grove, Alliance and Timehri ... [*Interruption*]

**Mrs Debra J Backer:** Mde Speaker, on a point of order, I think it is highly disrespectful to have four people there - three of whom are Ministers, sitting where they ought not to be sitting, and speaking. I think it is a breach of the conventions of this House to be not in your proper seat, and to be speaking.

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, I think ... It's a Member of your side that is speaking. I think really... I think you should at least be quiet and allow her to speak.

**Mrs Shirley Edwards:** This year the Region will continue to enhance the health and educational facilities, as \$5M and \$6M, respectively, is allocated for the acquisition of furniture and equipment in both sectors. These investments are expected to improve educational and health facilities in the Region on completion, and better social services delivery to residents of the Region.

Mde Speaker, G\$113M to improve the land-fill site of solid waste at the Mandela Avenue facility. This will improve the solid waste management programme and improve garbage collection. The Region is expected to see the commencement of another solid waste disposal site at Eccles, and it is anticipated that the waste disposal problem in our Region will be resolved and our Region will become a more environmentally-friendly one. However, I implore



the residents of Region Four to begin seriously to develop a discipline for discarding their waste in a proper manner. This would support the tourism development, since tourism is identified as the sector that is expected to support our growth in the economy.

This year, the lives of slum dwellers in the city are expected to improve as government's Squatting Regularisation Programme continues to address this issue. The Honourable Member, Philomena Sahoye-Shury alluded to this in her presentation yesterday. Slums and squatters are expected to benefit from infrastructural development on low-income housing schemes. This is supported through the IDB Low Income Settlement Programme and the EU. The IDB project started the delivery of 11,517 lots per housing scheme, and 6,000 lots per squatter settlement. This is an ongoing programme, and the IDB fund covered civil works and institutional strengthening of the areas.

Mde Speaker, so many important sectors in our country's economy has been improved, and there are still many more development issues to be addressed. Despite the constraints and the two recent flood disasters in our country, our PPP/Civic Government has been able to keep steadfast on a progressive path. *[Applause]* It is commendable that our Government has been successful in eradicating hunger from our society while, at the same time, addressing the social ills and still have some holds on the pockets of our population. To demonstrate this point, I would like to refer to our Government's successes in reducing poverty: In 1993, 43% of our population was below poverty level, but by 1999, our

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Government was able to bring that percentage down to 35%. *[Applause]* This is a tangible evidence of Government's responsiveness in addressing poverty. I am sure that when the new figures are calculated, the percentage of people living below the national poverty line will be much lower.

Our Government is going to be successful in transforming our country into a modern and prosperous one, and Region Four, in the future, will be transformed to a paradise on earth. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, in concluding my contribution to this debate, I give my fullest support to the Honourable Minister of Finance for the 2007 Budget, and I urge the full House to do the same. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Honourable Member, Mr Parmanand Persaud.

**Mr Parmanand Persaud:** Mde Speaker, I stand to support the 2007 National Budget, presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, and I want to commend him for that wonderful piece of presentation in this House here. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, the three long hours of presentation, with \$100B Budget, reflects the PPP-Civics' continuation of an ongoing work in the various sectors targeted at improving living standards of every Guyanese, and further enhance the physical infrastructure required to propel economic growth, create wealth, and generate employment. Mde Speaker, I stand to represent my geographical constituency, Region

No. 2. First, I want to tell you that Region No. 2 can be classified as a three-tier area: 1) is that the coastal land which is situated on the Essequibo Coast, consists of 79 villages - the Pomeroun, which is a riverain area, has 55 villages, and we also have nine Amerindian communities; and the people residing there are of all six races. Mde Speaker, Region Two is the most peaceful, hospitable, and a fast-growing Region where people live in harmony. *[Applause]* It is the best place to live in Guyana. Mde Speaker, I want to just comment on two points made by the Honourable McAllister: One is that he made mention of someone who went for a job at the Region and was told to go and contact Mr Corbin. I want to refute this, Mde Speaker. Anyway, Mde Speaker, there was an incident in the Region ... and I must say that it's not at the Region. The workers employed by the D & I Community Enhancement Programme, attached to one of the NDCs, was asked to go and do part-time assistance within the Anna Regina township and one individual refused to do so, the Chairman of that NDC indicated to her, that she had to go because it's a group of you – the entire group that were being sent; and then she mentioned that *I have better people to contact*, and that is how the argument came about. It was not a Regional decision, and it was not for a job. It was somebody who was already working with the D & I system.

Mde Speaker, I also want to rebut the issue D & I of contracts that were given out, and while the contracts were on, the same contracts were advertised. Mde Speaker, I can never recall such a thing ever happening in Region No. 2.

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Mde Speaker, I wish to focus on some educational matters. Education is very important for our young people, and our Government is seriously emphasising on, and investing a lot of resources into education. Mde Speaker, in our Region we have twenty-nine nursery schools, and when we took charge of this Region in 1992, we only had twenty-six. Some of the areas - small children of kindergarten school age were to paddle canals in the riverain areas such as the Wakapou - sixteen miles to reach to a nursery school. The PPP/Civic Government saw their plight and we constructed eight brand-new nursery schools there, *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we also see the plight of children going far distances to schools on the Essequibo Coast, and a huge population started there and the school became overcrowded, so we had to build annexes in Reliance and Adventure, which satisfied the needs of the people living in those communities.

Mde Speaker, I want to go to primary school level, and I want to utter a word to my good friend, Honourable Fernandes, who mentioned targeting one hundred literacy by the next five years, and that when we can construct nursery schools - that is where education starts from, that we can say that we are close to reach to that figure - 100% literacy within the next five years. In Region 2 we have thirty-eight primary schools, Mde Speaker, and it's this Government - the PPP/Civic Government, which has already rebuilt, refurbished, or did repairs on most of this school in the Region. *[Applause]* In fact, Mde Speaker, 90% of the primary schools in Region No. 2 have already been constructed. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we also constructed two brand-new schools for areas which never had schools

and those are vast Amerindian communities, and I want my fellow brothers from Region One to see that we are emphasising on Amerindian development. *[Applause]* Yarrosirai in the Wakapou, Mde Speaker, children had to paddle eighteen miles to reach to a primary school in order to get primary education. This Government saw the plight of those people and we constructed a brand-new primary school in Yarrosirri in the Wakapou area. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, in Karawag - the furthest village in the Upper Pomeroun; that village was established over forty years ago, and when this Government took office, Mde Speaker, those people never had a school there, they had to paddle nineteen miles to Saint Monica to attend a primary school, and the PPP/Civic Government constructed a brand new school there. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, I also want to tell you that all the primary schools across Region 2 are adequately staffed. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, on secondary education, and I can tell you ... and if you go into all the hinterland communities, our people can tell you the plight in the early period - that secondary education was totally impossible in some of the areas; and Region 2, Region 3 to an extent, suffered the same crimes. Mde Speaker, we inherited secondary schools at Anna Regina, and Abramsville on the Essequibo Coast in 1992, and for people to travel from Supenaam Creek and the hinterland communities to reach to those two schools, parents could not have afforded it, and I can tell you, Mde Speaker, that many of our young people's education ended immediately after the primary level. What the Government

emphasized on was that first we look at Charity ... People say charity begins at home, but jokingly, this one ends in the Pomeroun. People from the entire Pomeroun and Charity area never had access to secondary education, unless they had relatives on the coast around Anna Regina area so that their children can live at relatives and attend secondary school, because the dorms could not have accommodated these people. The PPP/Civic Government established a brand new secondary school, with dorms, at Charity. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, the people from Machabo, Bethany, Supanaam Creek, and around the Supanaam area suffered the same crime. The PPP/Civic Government then took up the challenge and established a secondary school at the top of the Aurora Primary School, and they are fully-staffed secondary teachers. *[Applause]* Last year, Mde Speaker, last year - thanks to the Ministry of Education, which financed a brand new secondary school at Pamona, we now can accommodate all those children - nearly eight hundred and sixty-three children, at Pamona – a brand-new Secondary School. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we also inherited three community high schools ... and I can recall my father saying that when we finished primary school and go then to the community high school it is like a garbage bin, because you have no where further to go. The PPP/Civic Government, and the Regional Administration of Region No. 2, carefully examined the educational structure of our Region, and we applied to the Ministry of Education, and we made the community high schools in Region Two junior secondary schools, doing CXC programmes, and writing CXC exams ...*[Applause]* More so, Mde Speaker,

more so Mde Speaker, there are sixty-three miles from Charity to Wakapou, and from Wakapou to Akawini, which is a neighbouring Village, is another sixty-three miles, and next door to that community, on the other hand, is another thirty-two miles. Mde Speaker, last year our administration met; and we went and did a survey, and we now have a secondary top with secondary staff in the Wakapou community, and we recently constructed brand new dorms so that people can live and acquire a secondary education there. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, when you spend money, results are necessary; and I want to tell you that - from nowhere ... When the PPP/Civic took office, in the Regional Administration; we used to employ persons who were qualified with only S.S.P.E. Certificate. What we are doing now ... and I want to tell you about results. At the primary level in Region Two, for the past three consecutive years we've copped top places - first and second and third place in the country. *[Applause]* At the secondary level, Mde Speaker, for the past two years we are copping third place in the country; *[Applause]* and last year, our third-place person in the country managed to win The Annie Blue Scholarship Award. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we in Region Two finally saw that there was a big problem in training teachers because, when we come to CPCE at Turkeyen there is a problem for housing. The dorms saw it fit that we set up an In-Service Training Centre - a branch from CPCE, at Anna Regina, and we are training our teachers on the spot. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, we also have, in Region Two, the Distance Education programme of the University of

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Guyana, which is now in Essequibo. Mde Speaker, after our people left the secondary schools, it was difficult for them to come to Georgetown to further their studies, especially in pre-vocational training, so the PPP/Civic Administration set up the Essequibo Technical Institute. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, I want to tell you the Mission Statement of that school:

*To develop in students the knowledge and skills for promotion of standards, inculcate the right attitudes, maintain interpersonal relationships, and use the principles of Science and Technology to apply innovation to satisfy the perceived needs.*

Mde Speaker, I want to bring you some results - brand new Vocational Training School - the Essequibo Technical Institute. I want to give you some results of 2006, Mde Speaker:

Information Technology – Elementary – 94% passes;

Information Technology – Intermediate – 86% passes;

Information Technology – Advanced – 100% passes;

Small Engine Repairs – 83% passes;

Carpentry and Joinery – 100% passes;

Fitting and Machinery – 100% passes.

Basic Radio and Television Services – 100% passes;

Electrical Installation – 100% passes



Mde Speaker, this shows what the PPP/Civic government is all about. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, I want to touch on some parts of Local Government, because I know that later on matters on Local Government will be dealt with. Region Two consists of five NDCs and one township; and I can tell you that we are very much thankful for the subvention that had been given from the Ministry of Local Government to do rehabilitation works on drains and streets in these areas. Because of the prudent management in Region No.2 and the fast growth in the areas, Supenaam and Charity are now earmarked as secondary townships. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, the Anna Regina area is a fast-growing area, and I invite anyone of my colleagues to go and visit and see what Region Two is all about. It's one of the cleanest parts of Guyana. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, in 2006 we managed to rehabilitate the municipal markets. We managed to use the subvention to do culverts, streets, and to build a wonderful car park at Damon Square - for those who know the famous Damon Square. Out of this sum of money - the subvention, Mde Speaker, we managed to do ... and I want to tell you that this is the last set of streets to do crusher run, or metal surface within the Anna Regina township: upgrading of streets in Windsor Castle, La Belle Alliance and Lima; construction of concrete culverts in Walton Hall, Sparta, Devonshire Castle, Hampton Court, and Anna Regina main area. Mde Speaker, I want to touch on some public works - Maintenance of the Main Highway shoulders - a \$60M contract - and I can tell

you that if you want to see good work, and then go on the Essequibo Coast, because we don't accept sub-standard work. Mde Speaker, a brand-new wharf, to the tune of \$574M, is being constructed at Supenaam. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, massive sea defence works at Columbia/Capoey, to the tune of G\$2.3B. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, I want all of us to recall that, after the PPP/Civic took office on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1992, that on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November there was a massive high tide, which shoved away the entire wall. This is what we inherit in 1992, and now the PPP/Civic has reconstructed it. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker, I want to touch on electricity; and I heard Honourable Members of this House complain of supply of the electricity. When the PPP/Civic took office, Mde Speaker, prior to then, blackout was the game of day. That was the game – blackout, and Anna Regina and the entire Essequibo Coast used to suffer tremendously for the want of electricity. In 1993, Dr. Jagan commissioned two brand-new Wartsilla plants at Anna Regina, and we today have so much electricity that, if we could have put it in bags, we could give it to the other areas. *[Applause]*

Mde Speaker - on water ... I see my Honourable friend 'Dave Danny' is smiling. I want to tell you that in the mid-80s, going on to 1989, the residents of Essequibo used to have to search where the black-water trenches were ... and right in front of Mr Dave Danny's parents' place had a black-water trench, and a long line was going there to dip that water for human consumption, with all the chemicals

coming from the rice fields. Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, and that are only one area. If you wanted a little water from the pipe, then you had to dig holes to get to the main so as to get water, Mde Speaker. I want to tell you about the situation in Region No. 2 today, and to invite my colleagues to come and see - that Guyana Water Inc. has established an inter-connecting system so that, even if one of the pumps break down, the next one can send water throughout the Region. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, as I mentioned before, we have nine hinterland communities, and I can tell you about development work that has been going on there. Eight of those nine villages now have brand-new Village Offices, constructed and financed by the Amerindian Affairs Ministry. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, I want to also speak about other projects in the hinterland communities we have recently ventured into. With the assistance of the Amerindian Affairs Ministry, the students of Machabo Primary School ... The Regional Administration, with the Private Sector, discussed as to how they can assist the people of Machabo Primary School, and we have established a hot meal, on every school day, for every child in that community. *[Applause]* Mde Speaker, Mde Speaker, we start to cook the food and feed the children under a Jamoon Tree. The Regional Administration subsequently sent in materials and made a shed, and last year, the Machabo Amerindian Village Captain came to Anna Regina and uplifted a \$2M cheque to build a complete concrete kitchen facility. *[Applause]*

In conclusion, Mde Speaker, I just want to ... I think I ... its late and I want to close. I don't want to continue much

longer, but I want to tell you, Mde Speaker, that in this year - 2007, we, in Region No. 2, will continue with the rice production of 32.5 acres. Lumber is a major exporting material from Region No. 2 now. We expanded our coconut production, especially in the Pomeroon. We are now exporting other crops from the Pomeroon to Barbados and other parts of the world. *[Applause]* Fishing is a major business and economic venture now in Region Two, and we are exporting fish to Venezuela. Industry and commerce are growing fast in Essequibo - in Region Two. Tourism is another important area to look at, and the hotel industry is now improving.

Mde Speaker, in this year's Budget, I want to commend the various ministries which can afford, or which have indicated that they can afford to establish the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture - a new multi-sports complex in Region No. 2. *[Applause]*

#### *Ministry of Health*

Very soon, we will open a brand-new state-of-the-art hospital at Suddie. *[Applause]*

#### *Ministry of Agriculture*

Construction has started at the Dawa Pumping station and soon it will be handed over to the Water Users' Association. *[Applause]*

#### *Ministry of Housing and Water*

We promised, in this year's Budget, to have a brand-new water-treatment plant which we never before had in Region No. 2 [*Applause*] and

*The Ministry of Public Works*

They will construct a brand-new roll-on/roll-off stelling at Good Hope on the Essequibo. [*Applause*]

Mde Speaker, I thank you very much, and I wish, with these comments, my fellow brothers and sisters, and all Honourable Members on the opposite side, can support the 2007 National Budget. [*Applause*]

**The Speaker:** Honourable Members, this concludes our business for today.

Honourable Minister of Home Affairs ...

**Hon Clement J Rohee:** The House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> February, at 2pm.

**The Speaker:** The House stands adjourned until the 14<sup>th</sup> at 2.00pm.

*Adjourned Accordingly At 23:45H*