

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2008) 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 IV

44th Sitting

14:12h

Monday 3 March 2008

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

The Hon Hari N Ramkarran SC, MP

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

(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

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

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Esseq)

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Minister of Amerindian Affairs

*The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP

Minister of Finance

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

Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt MP

Minister of Housing and Water

The Hon Robert M Persaud MP - (AOL)

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Agriculture

The Hon Dr Jennifer R A Westford MP

(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 - (Absent)

Minister in the Ministry of Education

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

Minister in the Ministry of Health

*Non-elected Minister **Elected Member from TUF

The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP

Minister in the Ministry of Finance

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The Hon Manniram Prashad MP

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

The Hon Gail Teixeira MP

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 - (AOL)

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

*** Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP - (AOL)

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Housing and Water

***Non-elected Member

***Mrs Pauline R Sukhai MP - (Absent)

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of

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Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP

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 of the National Assembly

Mr E Lance Carberry MP

Chief Whip

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP

Mr Anthony Vieira

- (AOL)

Mr Basil Williams MP

Dr George A Norton MP

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP

- (Absent)

Mr Keith Scott MP

Miss Amna Ally 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

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(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)

Mr James K McAllister MP

- *(AOL)*

(ii) Alliance For Change (5)

Mr Raphael G Trotman MP

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan MP

Mrs Sheila VA Holder MP

- *(AOL)*

Ms Latchmin B Punalall, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr David Patterson MP

(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

14:02H

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the **Prayer**

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS,
ETC**

By the Hon Minister of Tourism, Industry and
Commerce:

*Value-Added Tax Order 2008, Order No.
11/2008*

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**EXCISE TAX AMENDMENT BILL 2008, BILL NO.
3/2008**

The Speaker: Hon Minister of Finance ...

Hon Dr Ashni K Singh: Mr Speaker, I would like to present the Excise Tax Amendment Bill 2008, Bill No. 3/2008, a Bill intituled an Act to amend the Excise Tax Act 2005, and I move that the Bill be read for the first time.

The Speaker: Let the Bill be read for the first time, please.

Bill read the first time

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PUBLIC BUSINESS

(i) GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

(1) BUDGET DEBATE 2008

The Speaker: Honourable Members, we can now resume the debate on Budget 2008.

I would like to thank Mrs. Riehl for presiding over the proceedings on Friday last and I would like to thank you for the cooperation which I understood that you extended to my colleague Mrs. Riehl.

Our first speaker for today is Honourable Member Mrs. Deborah Backer ...

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

I want to start by assuring you, Sir, and by extension the entire House, that though I may be shadowing the Minister of Home Affairs, I promise not to threaten or to behave in any way inappropriate towards you or to any other member of the House. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: I have every confidence in you, Mrs. Backer *[Laughter]*

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: ... Thank you very much, Sir, and that feeling is reciprocated.

Mr. Speaker, I would entitle my conversation this afternoon *The House – At the Brink*. The big question,

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Mr. Speaker, be it the 2008 Budget or Crime and Security, is not, why? The big question is ... Will the \$13.7 billion allocated for Crime and Security, make us, as a people, less insecure than we were in 2007? Will the \$13.7 billion allocated to Crime and Security for this year bring us back from the brink? Or will we, despite this allocation, like the legendary *Old Kai*, go over the brink?

Mr. Speaker, the same security threats that challenged us for the last 6-7 years continues to challenge us today. The security threats, Sir, I happen to have, for convenience, put into two groups:

- Firstly, what I call *the Transnational Crimes*; and
- Secondly, what I call *the Domestic Crimes*.

The Transnational Crimes includes, as expected, drug trafficking, trafficking in arms and ammunition, fuel smuggling, smuggling of consumer goods, for example Polar Bear, and the illegal movement of persons in, out and through Guyana.

Our Domestic Crimes, on the other hand, Sir, include murder, violent crimes, white-collar crime and corruption that Mr. Benn is so unhappy with ... sexual crimes and domestic violence, to name a few.

During 2007 and as we entered 2008, piracy

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and torture of our citizens, by ranks of our Disciplined Forces, while not new offenses, took on, Sir, alarming proportions.

I turn initially, Sir, to Transnational Crimes. Guyana is not a cocaine producing country. However, several reports from regional and international bodies over the years, including the US Department of State, Annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, whose 2007 Report was released on the 29th and which report is featured in today's Stabroek, and other reports, clearly show that, Guyana is a transshipment point for cocaine, originating in South America and moving northwards to what is called, *the Developed World*.

National Drug Strategy Master Plan 2005-2009

Indeed, Sir, and the Government of Guyana itself, in the introduction to its National Drug Strategy Master Plan 2005-2009, which is still, by and large, to get off the ground, they accepted this fact. And I read, Sir,

In fact, it is now recognized that possibly the greatest threat posed to democracy in the English-speaking Caribbean is the narco trade and its complimenting activities such as illicit trafficking in arms, prostitution, heightening criminal activities and violence.

That is our own, the Government's own National Drug

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Strategy Master Plan 2005-2009. And Sir, for those who may yet not be convinced; permit me to quote from the Stabroek News of Saturday, 1 March of this year, and it says this in Volume 1 of the Report, which deals with narcotics...

This is the US Crime and Drug Paper that I just spoke about.

...the US Department of State says that co operations among the Law Enforcement Bodies are fragmented. It spoke about weak border controls, and limited resources for law enforcement, allowing drug traffickers to move shipments via river, air and land, without meaningful resistance.

Sir, the recent discovery by the Guyana Defense Force, in December 2007, of an illegal airstrip, 80 miles upriver from Oriala, with a burnt-out aircraft, all-terrain vehicles and a bulldozer, together with a previous find in May last year, again by the Guyana Defense Force, this time a mere 6 miles away from the village of Oreala, are chilling examples of how unprotected and porous our borders are with Venezuela, Brazil, Suriname and indeed, Sir, the Atlantic Ocean.

Added to illegal airstrips are our legal airstrips, which are not adequately manned and from which airlines carrying various illegal items, can land and take off without any real threat of detection. Also, flowing through our porous

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borders are illegal fuel, guns, contraband and people.

Indeed, Sir, as far back as 2003, His Excellence President Jagdeo stated that:

Fuel smuggling was costing the state about \$6 billion annually.

Sir, the Honorable Minister of Agriculture, in January of this year, at the opening of a seminar stated that:

Our local fishing industry contributed 5.7% of our GDP in 2007.

A few days ago, while speaking on this very budget, the Minister of Agriculture spoke about:

The intention to get involved with deep-sea fishing ...

Sir, for our fishing industry to continue to grow, we need to offer our fishermen some protection. In 2007 and continuing to this year, there have been several attacks on fishing boats, resulting in millions of dollars worth of engines, fish and fish glue being stolen, and in some instances, Sir, our fishermen have been killed ... have been murdered.

During 2007, the Minister of Home Affairs met with fishermen on several occasions and during these meetings, he promised them several things including, Sir, the drafting of the Hijacking and Piracy of Fishing Vessels Bill – in his words, *to make piracy non bearable.*

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And even more importantly, he promised them *the better equipping of the Guyana Defense Force and the Guyana Police Force, by giving them the necessary resources*, and I quote, Sir, *to crush piracy*. In one of his statements to the Press in fact, Sir, Minister Rohee, the Honourable Member, said this, and I quote:

*If we cannot respond to their wishes
(meaning the fishermen) and their cry, then,
as a Government we have failed.*

Mr. Speaker, at random, one can pick up papers for the year, I do not want to go back to last year, and judge whether they have failed or have not failed.

Mr. Speaker, to help stop the flow of these commodities through our porous borders, patrol our numerous rivers and creeks, and give the necessary protection to our fishermen, the Guyana Police Force and, or, the Guyana Defense Force, needs to be equipped with helicopters, with planes, with fast boats, all terrain vehicles and with modern surveillance equipment.

That is why I said, Sir, the question is, will the \$13.9 billion allocated for Crime and Security adequately deal with these needs? Nearly \$1 billion, Sir, has been promised for the purchase of two helicopters. This sum of course, Sir, was only hurriedly allocated as a result of the two horrific massacres at Lusignan and Bartica. But the horrific massacres, or the slaughters, at Lusignan and Bartica, have nothing to do with our porous borders, at

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least, not on the surface of it.

There is a capital allocation, I must accept, of over \$100 million for the Guyana Police Force, and the legend in his usual vague way says:

We expect, Sir, the Honourable Minister to tell us how much of this \$100 million have been allocated for boats and outboard engines, and what reduction in piracy and transnational crimes he expects as a result of this allocation. The Budget is not a shopping list; we must not just put down figures; we must say *look, we have spent \$13.5 million, and as a result, these are our expected results*. That is what a budget should go on to tell you about. *[Applause]*

No money, Sir, none, has been allocated for the purchase of any boats or planes for the Guyana Defense Force, although I see a figure in the capital sums to repair the marine wharf. At best, Sir, this allocation is hugely inefficient, and we seem set as a nation to see drug trafficking, trafficking in arms and ammunition, fuel smuggling, smuggling in other un-costumed goods, the illegal movement of persons and a high level of piracy continue well into 2008, and possibly beyond.

The Kaieteur News put the 2007 murder rate at 113 which is accurate, Sir, and makes it the lowest since 2002. Painfully, Sir, any illusions we may have had about a steady falling murder rate were brutally shattered with the massacre, nay, the slaughter of twenty-three of our

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citizens in a three-week period; eleven at Lusignan on the East Coast on 26 January and twelve at Bartica on 17 February, both in this year.

Sir, violent crimes are often perpetuated by persons with guns, and these crimes continue to be a feature of everyday life in Guyana. In fact, so routinely do these crimes occur that we are numb, we are not even moved by them. Once the person is not dead, we feel grateful. In fact, the Press has now gotten into the habit that, once the person had not died and does not have millions of dollars involved, it is placed somewhere on Pages 7, or 8 or 9.

We are aware, Sir, that whatever figures the police have, the figures are in reality higher; because we all know that many people, unless they are really battered and bruised, do not even bother to report crimes to our police. So confident they are, Sir, in the investigative capacity of our Guyana Police Force.

Sir, these vary from fraud and embezzlement of large sums of money from established institution to the evasion of taxes and kickbacks from the award of contracts, usually called *grafts*. The Honourable Members, Mr. Murray and Mrs. Laurence, both addressed this issue eloquently.

However, Sir, in short response to Minister Benn, who is absent ... that may be a good thing ... when one looks at today's Stabroek News ... and I am reading from the Editorial of today, at Page 6:

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The report acknowledges that neither the Government of Guyana nor the US Law Enforcement body has invested sufficient resources to ascertain the quantity of illegal drugs flowing through Guyana ... and therefore, all projections are speculative.

So the US is saying *we are not sure*, just like we are saying *we are not sure as to the exact amount*. But you know what the US is saying?

We are sufficiently sure that we are not giving you money.

And that is the perception that the other side speaks so glibly about, the negative that perception can do to our country.

Sir, on sexual offence, I want to compliment my colleague, Minister Manickchand – *STAMP IT OUT*. The effort is laudable and we commend her. Sir, the PNCR/IG, fully supports this effort, and indeed, Sir, not trying to steal her thunder in any way, because she deserves it. But in our 2006 Budget, Sir, this is what we said about sexual offences, and I quote:

The PNC-R is recommending strongly that we implement, as soon as possible, a Sexual Offences Bill, which has already found its way into the Law Books of Trinidad and Barbados.

And we went on to say:

In fact, there is a CARICOM model, since 1997.

And when one looks at Annex 2 of *STAMP IT OUT*, one sees some similarities, in fact, Sir, a great deal of similarity with the CARICOM model. And we have no problem with that because as we said, there is no need to invent the wheel, because the wheel has been here, since 1997 by CARICOM.

Sir, domestic violence continues to be a persistent crime and common crime, committed primarily against our women and children. It is often said, Sir, that *a country is judged by how it treats its women and children*. I am confident that, like the PNCR-1G, all Members of the Government and also other Members of the Opposition, are unsatisfied with the persistent height in incidences of domestic violence.

I therefore, Sir, challenge Minister Manickchand, to take up the challenge thrown out by the new UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon. They have launched, Sir, a seven-year campaign, *Say No to Violence against Women*, and if I may be permitted to quote, it says here:

There is one universal truth applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never

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tolerable. A simple truth one might think, so how is it that so many people do not seem to get it?

So we challenge the Minister Manickchand to take onboard, they *Say No to Violence against Women*, with the same jest, vim and vigor that she is taking *STAMP IT OUT* to various parts of our community.

Sir, these then are the main crimes that continue to confront our nation. To meaningfully tackle these crimes, the PNCR-1G has long posited the view that, *we must address the causes and sources of crime*. This position, Sir, has been stated years ago and it was stated very, very clearly in our 2006 Elections Manifesto.

Sir, the 2002 Report of The CARICOM Taskforce on Crime and Security, to which Guyana is a party, listed the following – not the PNCR-1G; the 2002 Report of The CARICOM Taskforce on Crime and Security listed the following:

Seven leading causes or sources of crime:

- (1.) Poverty;*
- (2.) Unemployment, social marginalization and inequality;*
- (3.) The illegal drug trade;*
- (4.) Corruption;*

Whether you spell it with a *c* or with a *k*; it does not

matter.

- (5.) *Trafficking in firearms;*
- (6.) *The deportation of criminals; and*
- (7.) *The ineffectiveness of our existing Criminal Justice System.*

Sir, this Government has studiously avoided the acceptance of the proven nexus between poverty and crime, and between crime and unemployment, social marginalization and inequality. They Sir, have found it more suitable to pin the high incidence of crime on such factors as... guess what? The PNCR-1G.

Not surprisingly, when the Lusignan massacre occurred, the PPP/C immediately went into its *Blame Others Campaign* – BOC, using, Sir, in the most vulgar way, Channel 11 and the Guyana Chronicle, both owned by the people of Guyana, to spew their crass comments and opinions that clearly, Sir, cross the line from political to campaign into seeking to stir up racial unrest. And we condemn then and we condemn then roundly. *[Applause]*

Fortunately, Sir, all the people of Guyana rejected their attempts, and the PNCR-1G wants to place on record, our highest congratulations to all of our people. *[Applause]* All Guyana hopes that in their quiet moments, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs and Honourable Ministers Ramsammy, Benn, Webster, Westford and others, all deeply regret their most

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unfortunate and inflammatory statements. And I have almost a heckler from the back reminding me, *do not forget the Honourable Minister Nadir*, and I do now so remember him, Sir.

Permit me, Sir, to share two statements made by the Honourable Ramsammy and the Honourable Minister Rohee, reported, Sir, not in the Stabroek News or in the Kaieteur, but in The Guyana Chronicle. This is what the Honourable Member Ramsammy said:

It is unfortunate that while Guyanese are trying to heal from the incidents that left 11 persons including 5 children dead; certain sections of society are trying to justify why the criminals carried out such horrible murders.

Sir, if that was not enough, he went on to say and this is in brackets or parentheses, as they say. And I quote:

It is reprehensible that Mr. Corbin and others like Oliver Hinckson tried to justify the killings. I heard too, on one hand they are sympathizing, and on the other hand, they tried to say there is some other justification for the persons who committed these horrible crimes and that they have a social grievance. But look who are attacking innocent, vulnerable people!

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Hon Minister Rohee, of course did not want to be left out, and this is what he said:

We have to go back sometime ago when there was clear evidence that leaders of that party (PNC) were cavorting with the elements in Buxton.

[Interruption – ‘That is true’] If that is so, Sir ... but we will get to that, Sir. *[Interruption – Is that not true?]* Another factor... I will come back to that in my closing arguments.

Another factor contributing... *[Interruption ... ‘I am glad that they are awake, Sir’]*. Another factor contributing to our high level of insecurity is the refusal of the Government to accept that purchasing of hardware for our Disciplined Forces, in itself, will not produce a more efficient and highly motivated policeman, soldier, prison officer, or indeed fireman. Sir, such a person is just as important, if not more important, than the acquisition of sophisticated weapons.

On various occasions, Hon Minister Rohee has lamented, that with all the money he has spent on our security forces, he was surprised that excuses were still being made about the capacity of our police force. Surely, Sir, the slowest minister in the Government must understand that they have to raise and raise immediately and in a substantial way the remuneration packages presently enjoyed by all of our Disciplined Forces. *[Applause]*

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Sir, I was embarrassed to find that, a constable in the Guyana Police Force earns \$34,219 per month. I know what they will say. They will say that that is fifteen, twenty, thirty-times more than in 1992. But you know what? That does not matter. Because, today, in 2008, he cannot live on \$34,219 per month and that is the liquid test. That is the test. Can any of us here, honestly, live on \$34,219 per month? Can any of us, honestly, here today say *that we can go out and find five young people, who are prepared to join the Guyana Police Force or Armed Forces at that figure?* How many of us here can encourage our children to join the Disciplined Forces for the paltry sum of \$34,219?

Sir, right now, our Disciplined Forces are inline. When they are inline, they do not get anything. They do not get any overpay or overtime. They get nothing. And in addition to that, of course because they are inline, they have to live at the stations which they are attached to the packs. And I understand, Sir, and I will be as nice as I can be; the conditions that they live in are *nothing to write home about*.

The questions we must ask ourselves, Sir... yes, the Hon Minister of Finance cannot afford to tell us that, he cannot find the money for the Disciplined Forces, because if he does not find the money to attract the right people, if he does not find the money, the bright young people, would not just trickle into the Disciplined Forces, as I am sure they may be doing; but flow, in the same way that drug is

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flowing in; if we want bright young people to flow in, we have to pay them and then they will come. *[Applause]*

The Hon Minister of Home Affairs in his presentation, Sir, will no doubt tell us extensively about the Citizens' Security Programme, which was launched last week, and Security Sector Reform Plan lead by the UK Government, which is about to be implemented. When mentioning the Security Sector Reform Plan by the British, Sir, the Minister must be frank and tell us about the recurring risk that is recorded, under all *11 Priority Areas*, perhaps, with the exception of one. And I tell you, you know what the recurring risk is, Sir - the financial and human constraints to effect the programme. The financial and human constraints to effect the programme, and the lack of transparency and accountability ... So we will not leave here feeling that we will be safe once the Citizens Security Programme is effected and the Security Sector Reform Plan is in place. We need that but, Sir, we need much more than that. Sir, before we undertake these let me clearly say that we have already given our full support to these programmes, and we continue so to support. *[Applause]*

Our concerns remain that there are many initiatives that this Government could have taken long ago, and which, if taken, would have enhanced our security as a nation and we would not, Sir, be today like Old Kai at the brink and deciding whether it is easier to just go, or whether we should try to pull ourselves back from the brink.

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Sir, I have, indeed the PNCR-1G have... some concrete recommendations to make; but before I do so, Sir, before I in transit from the past and the present, to the future, left me deal with the Hon Minister Rohee. Sir, the Hon Minister is, at best, an anachronism. Put another way, Sir, we consider him a manual typewriter in a computer age [*Applause*] and we say to him *go, and go now, and go quickly*. He must go, Sir, because he has shown by his many utterances that he is unfit for the important Office of Home Affairs ... [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: I think Honourable Member, under the Standing Orders, there is clear provision that if an Honourable Member is going to be criticized... I believe you are familiar with the provision; you can only do so by way of a motion for that purpose. I will ask the Clerk to search for it, in the meantime, while you are speaking. But I think the provision is clear on that point.

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: Sir, as I promised before, I will bow respectfully to your ruling and move on... [*Interruption – ‘You have to skip that piece’*] [*Laughter*]

Sir, the responsibility of keeping Guyana safe rests, largely, in the hands of any Minister of Home Affairs. I have already quoted, Sir, what the Hon Minister of Home Affairs had said after the Lusignan massacre, when he and Minister Ramsammy ... Sir, I want to share with this House three other statements that Minister Rohee made, and then, let us judge if he is the best person for the job at

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the moment, or if he is like the banners that greeted him when he went to Lusignan – A SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE.

Sir, after the unfortunate killing of Donna Herod, and I am reading from the Stabroek News Editorial, Page 6 dated Wednesday, 12 September of last year.

The Minister saw it fit, to use this sad occasion of the woman's death, to deliver a sermon on the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Amendment Bill, which makes provisions to penalize persons engaged in harboring criminals. Why mention that, if there was no likelihood that the dead victim, Mrs. Donna Herod, was involved in consorting with criminals? Unbelievable ...

And I skipped a bit:

...and seemingly unaware...

And I am quoting:

...of how crass his comments might sound, Mr. Rohee went on to express the hope that, the incident (which is the killing of Donna Herod) would have a positive effect on the relationship between the police and the community, warning menacingly, that bearing in mind that the residents would want to live in peace; rather than to have

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*the police shooting at bandits and
endangering their lives. He seems...*

Sir, I am quoting from the Stabroek News Editorial:

...to show no remorse for the loss of life, no regrets about the standing policy of gun enforced policing, and no resolve to improve the quality of public safety in that community.

Sir, I turn now to piracy. The Honourable Minister met with fishermen in February of last year, shortly after he presented his budget debate, when they were under the onslaught from pirates and this was what he said. Sir, I thought I was actually incorrect here, but Sir, I engaged a young man who helps me in the yard and when he read it, I was not sure how good he could read, but he read it, and then, I read it for him. You know what he said? He said, *Miss, that man head could good?* He was talking, Sir, about a no lesser person than Minister Rohee. And this is what the Minister said; he, Honourable Minister Rohee said:

He had been advised by the police...

This is what he is telling fisherman.

He had been advised by the police that the pirates were really thief men, who had taken their attacks to the seas, because of the strong police presence on land.

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[Laughter] [Interruption – Ohhhh]

Sir, this is true. I will read it again, Sir, because I see that you are not... you are having problems believing this. It says, Sir:

He had been advised by the police that, the pirates were really thief men, who had taken their attacks to the sea, [Laughter] because of the strong police presence on land.

And Sir, not satisfied, he continued. And I quote:

These are not pirates; they are thief men [Laughter] who do that (meaning piracy) as a profession. [Interruption – Ohhhh]

So they are doing piracy, but they are not pirates. They are thief men, who have been run off the land, because of the presence of the Guyana Police Force. Sir, but he does not stop there. The Honourable Minister does not stop there. Responding now, Sir, to the Simons' Report, this is what he said, in February of this year. And this is according now to the Stabroek News, again, 25th of February, and is these are their words:

The Honourable Minister had the gumption to say that the Crime Plans to the Government was working on, encompass the Simons' Report, so he could not understand all the fuss being made by the

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political parties.

The fuss, Inspector Rohee... I mean Honourable Member Rohee, is that, if your government had taken the very workable and relatively low-cost recommendations of the Simons' Report onboard, since 2000; then according to the Simons' Report, by 2005, that is three years ago, at the latest, we would have had a largely remodeled Guyana Police Force, better able to offer service and protection to our citizens. So that, Sir, is why we are making the fuss about the Simons' Report. *[Applause]*

Before I leave Minister Rohee, Sir, in the past, and go to the future with our own recommendations; Sir, let me quote from a letter written to the Stabroek News, and printed on the 28nd of February, 2008. In speaking of Minister Rohee, the author of the letter, namely, the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Mr. Robert Corbin said, and I quote:

Instead of casting blame and crying about statements made by me, you should do what any minister in every other democratic country (And you claimed that you have returned to that state, since 1992) you would do what any Minister would do, in the face of such miserable failure and incompetence, you would resign.
[Applause]

Not my words, Sir; but the words of the Leader of the

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Opposition, words that I willingly, and all of us, willingly embrace. *[Interruption – Speak to the budget]* I cannot speak to budget; the budget has nothing on Crime and Security. *[Applause]*

Sir, my recommendations are about forty. This is, in itself, Sir, a little report, if I may say so myself.

Recommendation 1

Use the windfall, the excessive windfall from VAT, to purchase boats and/or airplanes, to enhance our capacity to man our porous borders, or at least, to lift how little we can do, to some amount of acceptability.

And I know that the Minister of Trade will agree with me, because unless we have a secure Guyana... he, himself said; all those nice, flowery Articles and Ads he spoke about the birds, and people coming to see the birds; nobody will be coming to see anything, unless we improve our Crime and Security. So, the Honourable Member Persaud has a direct interest in this, so that the people can come to look at the birds. *[Laughter]*

Recommendation 2

Commence seminars using local expertise.

We have this thing *if it is not from outside, it is not good.*

Use expertise to commence seminars to begin the transformation of the Guyana Police Force, to a

community-friendly organization.

In other words, Sir, we are advocating *Operation Winning Hearts and Soul*, rather than *Operation Alienation*, which we are now on. [Applause]

Recommendation 3

Change the name of the *Guyana Police Force* to the *Guyana Police Service*. The Simons Report recommended that, since 2000.

It is not a force. It is a service to serve and protect. That is its mandate; not to force and to torture. Sir, let us again state, before we are misunderstood, and we have no problem... we support actively the establishment of a swat team, so do not let us get it wrong, and any such other teams that we will need. We will need such teams to confront gangs in the present and in the future.

Our position, Sir, is not to be inconsistent with that. Our position is that the entire Guyana Police Service, as renamed, needs to shift its standard mode of operation and become community-friendly. That is what modern community policing means. [Applause] It does not mean arming community policing groups. It means friendly interface with the community. Police-community; that is what community policing means.

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Recommendation 4

Encourage, Sir... and this is something that the PPP/C can go tonight and begin to doing.

Encourage, at the level of their supporters, the challenge to take up the task, to assist with securing our nation, by joining the Guyana Defense Force, the Guyana Prison Service and the Guyana Police Service, thereby, helping The Guyana Police Force and the other Discipline Forces, to attain their authorized strengths.

Recommendation 5

Enact legislation, Sir, to regularize the Community Policing Groups.

This was recommended by the 2000 Simons' Report, which in fact said, they are not too sure what these community policing groups are about. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, I think your time is up.

Mr. E Lance Carberry: Mr. Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member 15 minutes to conclude?

The Speaker: Is there a Seconder?

Member: I second

The Speaker: Honourable Member, in the question is that the Honourable Member be granted 15 minutes to ...

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continue or conclude, Mr. Carberry? I did not hear what you used.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: I just need five more minutes.

Mr. E Lance Carberry: I said *to continue*, Sir.

The Speaker: To continue.

Please continue, Honourable Member.

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: Thank you very much, Sir.

Sir, enact legislation to regularize community policing groups. This was recommended by the Simons' Report and reinforced, Sir, by our own Disciplined Forces Commission, which I am happy to say, the Honourable Member Nandlall was a member of, and I know that he did not give a descending report. So it follows that he agrees, Sir, with what I am about to say. And this is what it says:

The concept of policing communities by communities, has no statutory basis in Guyanese Law.

It then went on to say:

In view of the present numerical under-strength of the Guyana Police Force, coupled with inadequate means of communication, transportation and other

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equipment; the Commission recognizes the temptation to encourage communities to fill the vacuum and make efforts to safeguard their communities. However, policing by community groups is neither a proper nor reliable substitute, for policing by members of the Guyana Police Force.

And that is why, Sir, I urge our Members on the PPP/Civic, to encourage their supporters, not only to become members of the Community Policing Groups, which if properly legislated we have no problem with; but also, encourage them to join the authorized strengths of our Disciplined Forces. *[Applause]*

Sir, there were four recommendations made by the Report of the Disciplined Forces Commissioned, this is all on Page 106 going to Page 107 of the report, and it is Recommendations 46 to 48. I will read, Sir, one or two of them. The first one says:

Recommendation 46

The membership of these groups and other interested members of the communities, should be carefully screened for induction into the Rural Constabulary, and a proper system of training and instruction, relevant to community policing and other Rural

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Constabulary duties, should be implemented for those selected and appointed.

So basically, what they are saying is, let these people, encourage these people to become Rural Constables; rather than just remain at the community policing groups, which is an unincorporated body – no rules, no laws. It goes on to say that:

Those who are not fit...

Same Recommendation 46:

Those who are not fit to be inducted into the Rural Constabulary should be encouraged to act merely as the eyes and ears, and not the coercive arms of the in communities.

That is what the Disciplined Forces Commission, supported wholly by Honourable Member Nandlall, and I think, the Honourable Member Ramson at that time agreed to. Sir, we also endorsed those recommendations.

Sir, I continue with my recommendations.

Recommendation 6

Increased salaries of the police by 50 percent;

Recommendation 7

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Pay Disciplined Forces Members, who have been inline since January 2008, an allowance; *[Applause]*

Cannot the windfall from VAT be used, Sir, even for that, to show the Members of our Discipline Forces that we care about them? Can't we do that?

Recommendation 8

Implement, Sir... and this would be near to your heart, Mr. Speaker.

Implement the recommendations of the Border and National Security Committee, which was established by His Excellence President Jagdeo, and the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte.

Sir, my research tells me that, that committee was co-chaired by yourself, and Brigadier retired, David Granger, and Honourable Member Trotman, also served on that committee.

Recommendation 9

Engage and, or, deepen at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, talks with Brazil and Suriname, on joint border security.

Recommendation 10

Support the establishment of a Regional Law-Enforcement Unit, recently suggested by the Honorable Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Patrick Manning, and already supported by Suriname.

Recommendation 11

Appoint the Acting Commissioner, who has been acting since November 2006, or find a replacement.

You cannot have a Constitutional officer being at the wimps and fancies, of either the President, not only of Guyana, but the president of any democratic country, [*Applause*] or the Minister of Home Affairs or Minister of National Security, of any country.

Recommendation 12

Seek, under a new Minister of Home Affairs, to reengage the Business Community, in an effort to have them support the Crime Stoppers Programme that the Honourable Minister Rohee recently admitted had been stopped.

This is a good programme. And if we go back to the business community, in a positive way, with a positive Minister of Home Affairs, we think that they will come onboard.

Recommendation 13

Establish a broad-based national committee to craft, or re-craft, a national morality across our country.

Sir, this is an absolute prerequisite. It has been accepted that, many crimes has a large social component, for example, like domestic violence and sexual offences. And, Sir, this crafting of a national morality for all of us,

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must be supported by the Ministers of Home Affairs, Human Services, Education and Health. We know that Minister Ramsammy has a lot of energy and we would like to see him involved.

... because many of these offenses, domestic violence and violence against children, are now deemed Public Health issues. And in fact, Sir, how far we have descended into lawlessness, as a country, cannot be disputed. All of us, without exception, have been influenced in a negative way, by the level into which our country has dropped, in terms of morality, and the sense of right and wrong.

Recommendation 14

Sir, turning to traffic, not to speak on traffic; but just to reinforce recommendations that already made:

Ban music on all Public Transportation and do so now.
[Applause]

What is hard about that?

Recommendation 15

Install mechanical devices, which are called *governors*, to control the maximum speed that vehicles can use... that vehicles can go at; that is, vehicles that are involved in Public Transportation.

Remember the horrific accident in Amelia's Ward on the 21st? No, I think it was the 10th of October, where 10 people died, and then, a few days after 6 people and an

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unborn child died in the vicinity of Liliendaal.

So, Sir, we have serious problems and we need seriously people to solve these problems.

Sir, I do not want to spend time, the few minutes left to me, on prison. We know what is happening in the prisons. To Honourable Minister has accepted that the prisons are overcrowded. There are initiatives that can be used, for example:

- Increase the amount of prisoners that you send home on parole;
- Or do what other countries do, when they have overcrowding – they look at the prisoners and say okay, these 50 prisoners are about to go off within the next month and they simply bring forward, by a month, their time of release;

So if in that one month you have brought forward, they committed no crime; you have lost nothing and you would have saved \$19,000 per prisoner, because I think that is the figure Minister Rohee said it cost us to house a prisoner.

Sir, in conclusion, we are at the brink. We are at that brink where our Crime and Security are concerned. The Government, Sir, has to act and it has to act now, if we are to stop ourselves from going over the brink.

I see in today's papers... Again, Sir, the security situation

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is so fluid that every day for the last week, I had to rewrite my representation. But here is the Chief of Staff, the Executive President saying.

The Security Forces will have all they need...

Sir, I have not had time to actually read that; but I take him at his word, “*all that they need*”. So, we expect the Minister of Finance, as he has done in the past year, to come with a Supplementary Budget, in the not too distant future, telling us how he will move us away from this brink. Because the \$13.9 million, without more, and there is no plan about the social impact and how we are going to raise ourselves, as a people, to bring us back from the brink.

Sir, I strongly believe, I passionately believe that all of us, and I started with myself, can do well to begin a process of personal transformation. Sir, all of us here, when we come to this House, we come with glorious ideals, and then, we allow the politics to transform us. Sir, we must transform our politics; we must not allow it to transform us. *[Applause]*

What we need to do, Sir, is to replace it, for example, the budget. We need to replace the budget with a system, where everyone has an input; all major stakeholders have an input, before it is brought to the House. So even if you do not get everything you want, you may get some and you feel a sense of ownership. We do not just want every year to just come every year and a budget is read, and

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irrespective of what it says, whatever good I hear emanating from this side of the House, they are brushed aside. That Sir, will get us nowhere.

We want, Sir, a situation in Parliament, where members can sit together, put egos aside and adopt the best practices, irrespective of which side of the House these suggests emanate from; where Members of Parliament, Sir, may be allowed to regularly exercise of Vote of Conscience. I can see the cynics over on that side are beginning to smile and say *she must be dreaming*. Well, Sir, everything in live begins with a dream; all we have to do is to ask Mrs. Sen. Clinton and Sen. Obama, who are poised to make, one of them are poised to make their dream a reality.

Sir, we commit ourselves, the PNCR-1G commits itself, to playing a positive role, in helping our Defense Forces to reduce our crime and security situations, providing, Sir, that they do so within the confines of our Constitution and the General Law.

Sir, before I take my seat, may I ask God to continue to protect our nation and all of its people. I thank you.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank You, Honourable Member.

Hon. Member, Minister Harry Narine Nawbatt.

Hon Harry N Nawbatt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, like the colleagues before me on this side of

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the House, I wish to congratulate Dr Ashni Singh and his Staff, for the presentation of his Second Budget to this National Assembly. We recognize the enormous task, with which he is faced, with every sector lobbying for funds, and we know of the disappointment he experienced, by having to have the Budget reading postponed. We equally appreciate the final allocation made to all the Sectors, bearing in mind, the considerations that had to be taken.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to also thank the Staff of the Ministry of Housing and Water, including the Central House and Planning Authority and the Guyana Water, Inc, for the support given during 2007, for the achievements that we have had, and to urge, that those efforts be redoubled in 2008 to further achieve, for the benefit of the people of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Ministry of Housing and Water was allocated \$5.2 billion; \$4.7 billion being for Capital Works and \$.5 billion being for Current Expenditure, against the revised allocation in 2007 of \$5.6 billion.

In 2008, the Housing Capital Programme expects to spend \$1.26 billion and the Water Capital Programmes \$3.426 billion. We recognize the reduction, as pointed out by the Honourable Member Mr. Scott, and I wish to say at this point that, that reduction was due to difficulties experienced in the European Union Project, when we were expected to spend \$800 million and spent just above

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\$300 million, because of the delays experienced in having our projects expedited.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, the CH&PA introduced a number of initiatives to achieve improvements in the processing of applications; in 2008, those efforts will continue. We hope to reduce the waiting time for persons visiting the Central Housing and Planning Authority Office, to a maximum of 30 minutes, which we hope to be achieved by the end of July 2008. We have already taken steps to have a more user-friendly, visitor-friendly and comfortable atmosphere at the CH&PA, and we have already had efforts, to ensure the efficiencies continue in 2008.

It is a known fact, Mr. Speaker, that transparency in our processing of applications, has always been above reproach and those are continuing in 2008, and onwards. The CH&PA intends to stay the course started since 1992, and it continues in 2008 and for the foreseeable future, in order to advance the transformation process.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, \$1.762 billion have been spent on Housing Programmes on 43 projects; 12 in Region 3, 21 in Region 4, 7 in Region 6, 1 in Region 7 and 2 in Region 10. The total cost of those 43 projects, amounted to \$2.3 billion, between the periods of 2005 and 2007, and they were responsible for making available 12,789 house lots, 100 km of completed roads and 11 km of pipelines laid. *[Interruption – Does it have water inside?]* You have

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water in you? [*Laughter*] Because of the magnitude of expenditure on the land for the condition of occupancy with the completion of basic infrastructure necessary for persons to occupy the lots, it would be necessary during 2007, Mr. Speaker, to continue the efforts we have made in 2007, to continue in 2008, so that the allottees would be encouraged to construct houses.

In this process, a number of meetings have been held and will continue to be held in 2008, since we would actively, seriously consider the repossession policy. Failure to complete or construct houses, Mr. Speaker, I would say, has not only been due to their affordability or non-affordability, since a number of other factors have surfaced. For instance, about two weeks ago, I came across a person, who was earning in excess of \$300,000 a month, who failed to construct their house, because of factors associated with their family life. And these are some of the factors that we are meeting people to discuss with them; because the conditions of the agreement of sale stipulates the periods during which payments are to be made and construction is to be done.

What we have found, Mr. Speaker, is that, when we speak with persons, they explain to us what circumstances they have, and arrangements are worked out for payments and construction periods to be entered into.

We have carried out surveys in 2007 and will continue in 2008, to determine the number of lots that have been

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unoccupied. We are going to consult with those persons, call them in, so that we would discuss with them, before any action is taken, with respect to repossession.

The number of lots repossessed in 200, have been very, very minimal. I need to say that, as of recently, no lots were reprocessed in Region 7 and only a few in Region 10. It was brought to this House's attention, that we were reprocessing lots in those two regions. In Region 10, we reprocessed lots in batches of 5, and then, we move to 10. And those affected persons are persons, who have not paid for a long, long period of time and who have failed to come in to us, to discuss payments and construction plans.

What we have found, why people are not constructing also, is that, the areas where they have been allocated lots, are really at the back of the scheme, and nobody has gone there as yet; and they are there waiting until somebody start, and they will start too.

The other problem we have found, is that, people have an aversion to move from where they currently reside, to go into other areas where their house lots have been allocated. For example, people who applied for house lots and live on the East Coast, find reasons for not wanting to relocate to Region 3; and we are encouraging them to take up those lots that have been allocated to them, in other regions.

In the processing of Transports and Titles; we admit that

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we have not been as timely and efficient as either the allottees or we at the CH&PA would expect; but this is, again, for a number of reasons. We have problems with finalizing the blocks and the cadastral surveys in many areas. But these matters are now actively engaging the attention of the CH&PA, and to this end, we have had meaningful discussions with the Registrar at Deeds Registry, the Registrar of Lands and the Commissioner of Lands and Survey, and we hope to have these matters sorted out.

We hope to eliminate the backlog of Transport and Titles by September of this year, and after then, we hope to be able to issue Transport and Title to persons, who have paid their full, within a 4-6 month period. We also, are thinking about engaging another four land surveyors, to speed up the process. During 2007, Mr. Speaker, we have issued 2,681 titles and Transports; and in 2008, we estimate that in excess of 3000 Titles and Transports would be issued.

Another area of concern to us, for which we intend on alerting the public; is where persons attempt to sell lands that have been allocated to them to unsuspecting and careless individuals. Again, the Agreement of Sale and the conditions in the transport that:

*Persons are not permitted to sell those lots,
within ten years of being allocated.*

We would urge that those persons who are approached to

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buy land, from persons who have been allocated those lots, to read those conditions carefully.

There is another instance where, a number of these transactions are brought to us for transfer of lands through the process of gifts. Deeds of Gifts are being, more and more gone into and we have been investigating them. There are number of instances, we have been able to conclude, that they are not really gifts and people are really intending to send them for profiteering. Because Government spend millions and millions of dollars to develop those lands and sell them at rates, which people can afford, at highly subsidized rates, and persons who have those lands and intend to immigrate, or to make profits on them, attempt to sell them; but we have been watching it very carefully and we intend to deal severely with persons who we find attempting to do this. The penalties for such transfers, and such sales, would be extremely high.

In 2007, the CH&PA moved to processing applications that were made in 2002, and to interview persons who had applied in 2003. We intend to move in 2008, as we have already done, to interview persons who have applied in 2004 and to allocate lots to persons who have applied in 2003. By the end of 2008, we intend to move the process to 2005 and 2006 for allocations and for interviews.

In 2007, we have allocated 1,285 lots in Regular Housing

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Schemes and 758 lots in Regularized Squatter Settlements. In 2008, Mr. Speaker, we intend to move that figure for the Regular Housing Schemes, to 2000 allocations and Regularized Squatting Areas to 500. We would therefore allocate in excess of 2500 house lots, in 2008.

There are also, Mr. Speaker, special circumstances which we cater for. For instance, people with a number of children, and we try to limit it to people with five children or more, who are single parents, who are unemployed; not to deal with them in the chronological order, in which we deal with normal applications; but to deal with them on a 'as come' basis. Because, if we find that there is a need for those types of persons to be allocated house lots, we try to deal with them in an immediate way.

We have also been sending them and communicating with agencies like Food for the Poor, the CIOG (Central Islamic Organization of Guyana), and the Habitat for Humanity, to help those persons to build houses; because in a number of cases, they are unable to construct their own houses on their own.

The CH&PA would continue in 2008, those initiatives that we have started already, even before my time, with Banks and Financial Institutions, to discuss the rates of interest charged on mortgages, which now stands between 5.5 percent and 7 percent, for low income owners.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, the allocations included allocations

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made in two new housing areas.

- At Hope Estates where 86 lots were prepared and where 46 have already been allocated to persons, who have suffering from the floods in 2005, in the Mahaica area; and
- At Lusignan Areas B, which is popularly known as *Grassfield*, where 328 house lots have been prepared and where 131 squatters, who were squatting on the East Coast of Demerara at Mon Repos, Good Hope, , and those areas, have already been allocated.

During 2008, the Central Housing and Planning Authority, plans to complete infrastructural works including roads, water supply, *et cetera*, at Westminster on the West Bank of Demerara, which is a European Union - Government of Guyana Program, and at Parfait Harmony, also on the West Bank of Demerara, which is a IDB - Government of Guyana Programme and at Amelia's Ward, which is a Government of Guyana Programme. In the first two names, Westminster and Parfait Harmony; 1,863 house lots will be made available, and at Amelia's Ward 1,000 low income, already allocated house lots, houses can now be built on those lots. Those lots have already been allocated, but because of the lack of infrastructural works, persons have failed to

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go and take up those allocations and build.

The CH&PA is also in the process of identifying new areas for house lots developments, and in this regards, we have identified:

- 100 acres of land in Region 1 at Port Kaituma, where we expect to have 544 house lots;
- As well as in Region 3;
- In Region 7 at 5 Mile, Bartica, and
- In Region 10 to develop the Wisrock Phase 2 Project.

In 2007, Mr. Speaker, the *Zero Tolerance for Squatting* continued successfully, and we had only a few sporadic cases of squatting. This is to continue in 2008 with a PR Campaign to convince persons, not to engage in this exercise. The CH&PA is prepared to address squatters on the reserves for roads, drainage and irrigation, and sea defense; the reserves that are for those three instances.

We are prepared to accommodate persons who are squatting on those reserves, even up to one year, after the year in which we are dealing with normal applications with persons who have come in and applied, and are either not squatting or squatting on those reserves. We have provided those persons, who are prepared to pay and to build on the land allocated to them, almost immediately, because they would already have had some sort of structure on the lands on which they are squatting.

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We are not prepared to encourage the backdoor approach to squatting, and as a result, we are not prepared to accept persons who now squat and come to us for house lot allocation.

Mr. Speaker, I was not in the House, when the matter of *Plastic City* was raised by the Honourable Member, I understand, Mr. Mervyn Williams. *[Interruption – So it is hearsay]* I read it in the Stabroek News today and my colleague... *[Interruption – What! Stabroek New?]* Is it Stabroek News or Kaieture New? One of them... yes, I think it was Kaieture New - the Kaieture New of today. I had already finished reading the Chronicle, Mrs. Backer. *[Interruption – Ahhhh]* I read it in the Kaieture New today and I feel I have to comment, because I remember on February the 7th, a delegation of the PNCR-1G including Honourable Members Mr. Aubrey Norton, Mr. Mervyn Williams and Mr. Keith Scott came to my Ministry and we had a discussion with them concerning a number of matters, including Plastic City.

In Plastic City, 251 buildings were numbered by a survey that we carried out; 132 lots are to be made available after the completion of the Cadastral survey, for persons who live on those spaces, which are to be surveyed and which exist south of the sea defense reserve. The remaining 119 squatters, who squat on the reserve on the sea defence itself, cannot be regularized, because it would interfere with the sea defence. Those persons, were requested since 2004 when these surveys were carried out, to apply for

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house lots and those who have done so, and those who have not even done so and who have applied in 2005, can now approach the Central Housing and Planning Authority for house lots to be allocated to them, where they are now available.

I was under the impression, and my staff who was with me at that meeting, are also under the impression, that these matters were fully explained to the delegation that came to us, and I was surprised it was raised when I heard it was raised in this National Assembly. I would again urge those persons who had applied in 2004 and even in 2005 to come into the Ministry so that we would be able to allocate house lots to them. If you come improperly dressed; the guards would tell you that *you cannot come in.* [Interruption]

Memorandum of Understanding to Hand over Housing Schemes and Regularized Squatting Areas to NDCs:

During 2007, Mr. Speaker, the CH&PA and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development entered into a MOU to commence the handing over of housing schemes and regularized squatting areas that have complete infrastructure. This exercise resulted in 52 housing schemes and regularized squatting areas in five NDCs being handed over to those NDCs; the largest schemes being Mon Repos, Eccles, Grove and Diamond. This exercise will continue in Regions 2, 3, and 4, and the other Regions in 2008.

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At the moment the Deputy Mayor, the CH&PA, the Ministries of Local Government and Regional Development and Ministry of Housing and Water, are engaged in discussion to determine the modalities for the handing over of the Sophia, Cumming Lodge and Turkeyen Schemes by June 2008. The Ministry of Local Government has proposed flat annual rates pending the mechanism for rates and taxes to be implemented.

Also in 2005, Mr. Speaker, long-term development plans have been completed for Bartica, Charity, Lethem and Parika, and these are expected to engage Cabinet's attention in 2008. During 2007, Mr. Speaker, \$308 million were spent on infrastructural development works in Regions 4, 5 and 10. In 2008, \$420 million are to be spent on the completion of these works at Golden Grove, and to complete an all-weather road and 8 roads of a DBSC finish in Sophia as well as drains and drainage structures at Bath in Region 5. The latter works are expected to cost \$69 billion.

The remaining \$350 million, are to be spent on 4 km of DBSC roads and 4 drainage structures at Coldingen on the East Coast which is expected to cost \$51 million; 7.7 km of DBSC-finish roads at Enmore/Haslington, at the cost of \$80 million; 4.4 km of DBSC completed road at Golden Grove at the cost of \$50 million; 30 km of bauxite-finish roads at Amelia's Ward Phase 2 at the cost of \$120 million; and 3.1 km of DBSC roads at Ordinance Portland Phase 1, at the Cost of \$57 million.

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These projects have already been designed, advertised, tendered for, and are now at the tender evaluation stage. Contracts are expected to be awarded by mid-April and the awards to be completed by the end of 2008. Two other areas, Tuschen Phase 2 and Baltia, West Coast Berbice, will be addressed depending on the availability of funds and the completion of the cadastral surveys.

Under the Low Income Housing Project, Mr. Speaker, funded by the Government of Guyana and the European Union to the tune of \$850 million in 2008, four areas have been identified for attention. The contracts have already been signed for Westminster, on the West Bank of Demerara and funding involves the expenditure of \$270 million; 80 percent of the works on this project have been completed and the completion date has been extended to March 2008.

Cummings Lodge C, works are ongoing and the expenditure there is for \$178.482 million. In Cumming Lodge Y, the works will cost \$201 million, and both are expected to be completed in October of 2008. In Glasgow on the East Bank of Berbice the works there are expected to cost \$376 million and are expected to be completed in January 2009. In Westminster 841 lots would be prepared and made available, in Cumming Lodge C - 555 and in Cumming Lodge Y - 801. In Glasgow 975 lots have already been allocated bringing in the four areas a total of 3,172 lots made available. The works included 22.7 km of DBSC roads, 45 km of roadside drains and water for

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Westminster, as the other areas already have water.

Since 1993, Mr. Speaker, as is evident from the tens of hundreds of house lots allocated in new housing areas, as well as the thousands of lots regularized in the squatting areas and the tens of thousands of houses that have been constructed, the Government of Guyana, through CH&PA, has chartered the course for housing development, for especially the poor, as never before in the history of this country, and I guarantee, Mr. Speaker, that the Government of Guyana, Ministry of Housing and Water and CH&PA would be staying the course in housing the nation, and in this process, we are advancing the transformation agenda. *[Applause]*

With respect to water, Mr. Speaker, people's expectations have been raised since 1992 when Guyana returned to the democratic process ... *[Interruption – 'Oh, wow']* and elected the PPP/C Government *[Applause]* under the theme *Time for Change and Time to Rebuild. [Laughter]* This PPP/C's Government, Mr. Speaker, has achieved that, and all its other manifesto proposals.

There have been unprecedented improvements in every sector of social development, including health, education, housing and water. I remember, Mr. Speaker, the days before 1992 when there were massive blackouts *[Interruption – 'Now, you have blackouts everyday' [Laughter] ... "and on the return of electricity, people rejoice"]* That is what is happening today, Mr. Speaker.

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[Interruption – ‘We still have blackouts today’] It is when there are blackouts and when water shuts off for limited periods, people wonder why they happen; they do not rejoice when it comes on back, because they would have expected it to come on back. It is not that we do not get, we get far, far less, and if you have a conscience, you would admit that ... *[Interruption: ... ‘the majority of Guyanese’]*.

Mr. Speaker, under the sanitation section, the situation, we admit, is not as perfect as we would like it to be, even though tremendous improvements have been experienced in all areas. Staying the course to build on those achievements is what CH&PA and GWI intend to do to further improve the sectors.

In 2008, Mr. Speaker, with an allocation of \$3.427 billion we intend that 2008 would be the year of the commencement of the turnaround of GWI. Everybody would remember that in February 2007 the Government of Guyana and GWI had taken steps to terminate the contract with Severn Trent Water International because of performance indicators not being met.

I need to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that there were unacceptable Annual Audited Financial Statements between 2003 and 2006, the period when Severn Trent was in charge, as well as the non-achievement of a number of performance indicators or targets. Just to name a few ... non-revenue water which is the water lost

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through leakages, and some of us might know about that ... the target was to reduce the levels to 25 percent by the end of year five which was 2007.

At the end of 2006 ... [*Interruption: 'What are you talking about?' "If you stay quiet you will hear"*] ... the non-revenue water was at 62 percent; it was not being reduced. In 2006 ... [*Interruption: ... 'Who write that thing, man?'*] ... there was supposed to be a process to have a 24-hour day by 7- day week water supply, and we all know that that was not met.

In the collection efficiency, there was supposed to be a 90 percent collection rate by the end of 2007. In 2006, it had only reached 75 percent.

With respect to customer services, the number of days was supposed to be reduced, from 0.5 day to 3 days to rectify complaints. In 2006, it was still 21 days. By 2008, Mr. Speaker, we proposed to reduce the time taken to rectify complaints to 24 hours.

For hinterland coverage, 80 percent of the hinterland areas were supposed to receive safe water within five years. In 2006 it had only reached 50 percent. Those are some of the reasons why we had to terminate the contract with Severn Trent.

As a result of that termination, Mr. Speaker, protracted discussions took place between HIPIC, the IDB, the World Bank, the Management and Board of GWI, and

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those discussions finally engaged Cabinet's attention in 2008. A Turnaround Plan was approved for GWI, and it is expected that that Turnaround Plan would incur expenditures, totaling US \$22 million over a three-year period between 2008 and 2010.

To commence the Turnaround Plan there are several things involved:

The reduction of non-revenue water, that is the wastage and the leakages incurred in our system ...

Right now, it is estimated that 50 percent of the water GWI produces is lost through leakages. We intend to repair those leaks in the Turnaround Plan by doing extensive repairs to those leaks.

Individually metered customers

We intend to individually meter customers, both domestic and commercial. We intend to introduce District Meter System for areas involving approximately 1000 consumers.

Total Billing System

We intend to have a total billing system and to add to the total billing system we are going to have an aggressive Revenue Collection Campaign.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that there is a trend of increasing revenues being earned by GWI and I

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dare say that it is because of the improvement in the services as well. In 2005 GWI collected \$1.4 billion. In 2006, the collection increased to \$1.6 billion. In 2007, it was increased to \$2.1 billion and that does not include the \$200 million paid by the Government of Guyana to GWI for the 13,000 pensioners that were on their Payroll Account. *[Applause]* Nor does it include the subsidies provided by the Government to GWI for energy costs.

The Turnaround Plan, Mr. Speaker, also includes:

The rationalization of boreholes;

The rehabilitation of the Sewage Disposal System of Georgetown; and

Interventions in Hinterland Communities as well as Institutional Strengthening ...

In 2008, as a result of the Turnaround Plan, we intent to bill domestic customers on a quarterly basis, and large and commercial industrial customers on a monthly basis.

Also linked to the Turnaround Plan there is:

An aggressive disconnection of consumers who receive a reliable supply of water, or specially treated water ...

We are also going to be targeting those large numbers of carwash facilities that we see springing up throughout the country ... in Georgetown and in other areas. We have also been able to finalize the nominees for the Guyana

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Water Council and we hope to take those nominees to Cabinet very soon.

With respect to the Coastal Programme, Mr. Speaker, which is a fully Government of Guyana funded programme \$1.6 billion was spent in 2007 to improve the water supply to in excess of 200,000 persons in Region 2 to Region 6. Those interventions included extensive improvements in transmission and distribution lines, and the installation of 525 water meters as well as the upgrade of service connections which are all part of the Non-revenue Water Strategy and the Leakage Reduction Programme.

That amount of money, the \$1.6 million, also included the replacement of boreholes or wells, in the La Grange and the Meten-Meer-Zorg areas. I hope the Honourable Member Mr. Williams is listening. The La Grange and the Meten-Meer-Zorg areas are now completed and are fully functional. However, development works will continue to take place in those areas. And from time to time for short periods, very short periods, those wells are going to be taken out of operation, so that performance could improve and the range of water supply could be improved.

During 2008, a further \$350 million has been identified for the Coastal Programme, for the replacement of boreholes at Charity, where the well has been in existence for 33 years, and the No 47 Village on the Corentyne,

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Berbice, where the well has been in existence for 54 years. The cost for those two wells is expected to be \$70 million.

Also included is the installation of distribution and transmission lines in Regions 2, 3 and 6 as well as, leak repairs and service connection upgrades in Regions 2-6 and metering at Corriverton to enhance the Japanese project which I will talk about later. Areas to be targeted are also Regions 2 and 6... [*Interruption: ... 'When?' 'Maybe next year'*].

GWJ is to continue to focus on efforts to improve the level of service to reduce operational costs, including energy cost. We are currently in discussions with the World Bank to have an evaluation done by the Global Energy Fund to investigate possibilities of reducing energy cost. We intend also to devise a plan for each division, which will include specific targets to be monitored monthly. The provision of \$350 million is to benefit in excess of 50,000 persons in 2008. Also it includes provisions for emergency works.

The Hinterland and Linden Projects for 2008 have each been allocated \$45 million. In Linden, of the \$30 million allocated in 2007, \$24 million was spent to upgrade the distribution network to benefit 12,000 customers or approximately 5,000 persons. The remaining \$6 million was for the acquisition of 2 pumps for the Linden Power Company plant which has already been installed and

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functional, and for the Wisrock Power Plant which would be completed by the end of March, both to benefit 8,000 persons.

The 2008 allocation which is a 50 percent increase over 2007 is to be utilized for the replacement of 300 meters of aged cast iron pipes in Silvertown, 1.3 km of distribution lines upgrade, including service connections, to benefit in excess of 1,000 persons, as well as the procurement of 2 pumps for Amelia's Ward and West Watooka. For the Hinterland Areas, Mr. Speaker, the allocation has been increased from \$18 million in 2006 and \$20 million in 2007 to \$45 million 2008.

New Wells

In 2007 thirty three new wells were drilled. In Region 1 six communities benefited from 11 wells; in Region 2 one community from 1 well; in Region 7 three communities from 3 wells; in Region 9 four communities from 13 wells; and in Region 10 three communities from 5 wells.

During 2008, the \$45 million will be spent in Region 1 and Regions 6 to 10, to benefit in excess of 5,000 households on the rehabilitation of existing systems in addition to four new solar systems and upgrade of storage facilities in Region 1 at Whitewater and Region 7 at Jawalla, Kamarang and Waramadan. A new well at Imbaimadai and a hand pump are to be installed at the cost of \$7.5 million. *[Interruption]*

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When the Honourable Member Mr. Fernandes mentioned ... Hope in Region 1; I am sure he was aware that it was the high elevation of the land that ... *[Laughter]* He mentioned the high elevation in that community which was responsible for the water not being able to reach that area. However, Mr. Speaker, GWI already had plans to investigate the possibility of a storage reservoir and a booster pump to see if any works could be done to give those people water.

In 2008, the refurbishing of the storage tank at Port Kaituma, at the cost of \$8.5 million and repair to the distribution network will be done. At Mabaruma, Wrorina and Barabina the de-silting of the existing reservoirs to increase capacity at the 3 pumping stations for longer pumping hours and improved supplies will be investigated, and for approximately 3,000 house lots, to benefit those persons at the cost of \$3 million.

In Region 6, the rehabilitation of Distribution System at Orealla and for new pipelines to be laid at Siparupa at the cost of \$2.3 million would be done. In Region 8, rehabilitation work of the water supply infrastructure at Cato and Paramakatoi at the cost of \$4 million is expected. In Region 9 Ishalton is to have an additional well drilled. At Region 10 repairs to the pumping system at Ituni, in addition, the Linden Power Company is being contracted to supply electrical power to the pumping station, including the installation of power lines to the cost of \$12 million would be done. A new well is to be

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drilled at Imbaimadai and a hand pump is to be installed at the cost of \$7.5 million. Discussions are already ongoing, to secure funding for 50 additional pumps, for the Hinterland Communities.

Mr. Speaker, Mahdia system, completed in 2007, was completely destroyed by minors and is being rebuilt, with funds provided by GGFC, which is expected to be recovered from those persons, responsible for the destruction and those works are expected to be completed by March of this year.

The Georgetown Remedial Sewage Project, Mr. Speaker, Phase 2 of that project, is being undertaken at a cost in excess of \$3.5 billion. Up to 2006, \$761 million were spent on expenditure, including the rehabilitation of water distribution network in four wards, including North and East La Penitence, Prashad Nagar, Campbellville, Lamaha Gardens, East Ruimveldt, Roxanne Burnham Gardens, and South Ruimveldt. A further \$80 million is expected to complete these works by May 2008.

In addition, remedial work at three pump stations at Agricola, Sophia and Turkeyen were done to correct the difficulties experienced in the 2005 floods. In 2007 \$658 million were spent, which included the procurement of a new generator for the Shelter Belt and this would be operational by the end of March, 2008. In 2008, \$900 million, including \$96 million by the Government of Guyana and \$813 million by the IDB would be incurred,

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a total of \$2.5 billion.

For 2008, the IDB and Government of Guyana Programme intends to provide funding for the water supply in Georgetown, in the following areas –

\$482 million for two iron removal plants in Central Ruimveldt and Sophia Wells at a total of \$585 million; the estimated completion date is April 2009. This site is already equipped with well storage tank and booster pump. This will improve the quality and quantity of water supplied [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I beg that the Honourable Minister be given another 15 minutes to conclude his presentation... [*Interruption: ... 'To correct what he has said'*]

Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt: Mr. Speaker in 2008 as well

- \$83 million will be spent on the rehabilitation of the Shelter Belt Treatment Plant, which has already served the people of Georgetown for 70 years. This would maintain the quality of service and is expected to be completed by July 2008.
- \$80 million, as already been mentioned, is to be spent on the Northeast La Penitence

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and other areas.

- \$27 million, Mr. Speaker, would be spent to link the 14 inches Agricola water main to the Ruimveldt and Eccles System.

In the area of sewage, Mr. Speaker,

\$197 million is to be spent from the IDB - Government of Guyana Programme of which \$85 million is to be utilized for the rehabilitation of the Tucville Septic Receiving Station and is expected to be completed by June 2008. The contract has already been signed and works will start as soon as this month.

- The other project which is the rehabilitation of the Sewage Pump Stations in Georgetown has been identified for \$112 million. Mr. Speaker, just like the 70-year system that we talked about, the Sewage System in Georgetown was constructed in 1929 for a population much, much smaller than what currently exists in Georgetown and the only rehabilitation works done were done on a very minor scale in 1985-1989; 8 pumping stations are now working of the 24.

The \$112 million is intended to procure 12

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pumps to do the complete rehabilitation to these 12 pumping stations. The designs have already commenced and the completion date is cited for 2009, the first quarter. Additional funds would be provided by the IDB in 2009, to the tune of \$128 million to complete these 12 stations. The Government of Guyana had a contribution of \$240 million in the last Supplementary Provisions provided.

Works have already commenced on the design and the procurement of the additional 12 new storage pumps, to the tune of \$240 million, as I said, to do additional rehabilitation to the other 12 pumping stations. The completion date for the other 12 is expected to be in 2009, as well.

\$200 million from that supplementary provision has been allocated to rehabilitate the Street Sewage. The Street Sewage System is in a critical stage, having been built in 1929 as well. The areas to be identified as priority would be the commercial sectors, which are on the verge of collapse.

An additional \$200 million, Mr. Speaker,

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would be allocated for the repairs of leaks and to upgrade the service connections, and to bring GWI service up to the standards, which have been implemented by GWI.

To the Water Supply Technical Assistance Programme, a total of \$2.077 billion has been identified for 2008 and it includes four components of spending:

- HIPIC - \$327 million;
- World Bank - \$1 billion;
- The Japanese Grant - \$500 million; and
- Government of Guyana - \$250 million.

From the HIPIC spending, it is expected to spend \$32 million, on the cleansing and rectification of the database of GWI. It is intended that 100 percent inspection of customers' properties would be carried out. This exercise has started in Georgetown and 3,000 of the 160,000 customers have been completed. It is expected to be completed in six months. \$295 million has been allocated for procurement of water meters, pipe fittings, galvanized sheets and other materials, which is again intended to compliment the Non-revenue Water Strategy in the Turnaround Plan.

In the second component of this project, the allocation of \$1 billion by World Bank to the Government of Guyana includes the drilling of three wells at a cost of \$100

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million, which is due for completion in the third quarter of 2008. These wells are located at Lima in Region 2, Vergenoegen in Region 3 and Cotton Tree in Region 5. They are going to be supplemented by 3 Water Treatment Plants, at the cost of \$1.3 billion for which the contracts have already been signed and are expected to be completed in 2009.

In excess of 50,000 persons are going to benefit from improved water supply and the quality of water. The facilities are intended to provide water at a height of 5m on the first floor, 18 hours per day and 100 percent metering coverage. All three are to have backup generators and the project is to be completed and operational in August 2009... [*Interruption: 'In what way?' 'Not Backer's generator' "Oh, thanks!"*]

The Japanese Grant, Mr. Speaker, is in excess of GY \$2.25 billion and it is intended to construct a Water Treatment Plant at No. 66 Village on the Corentyne. It would include an elevated storage tank, flow tank filters, booster pumps and backup generators. Like the others, 100 percent of metering coverage designed to function 18 hours a day and to provide treated water at first floor level 5m high. They will serve between No. 51 Village and No. 73 Village on the Corentyne, approximately 10 miles and to benefit in excess of 1,300 persons.

This, Mr. Speaker, is intended to be the first of this type of project in Guyana. It is intended to provide treated

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water at low maintenance cost. Mr. Speaker, this project is intended to be a flagship of GWI operations, even if only for Berbice. It is scheduled for commissioning within a month from today. Mr. Speaker, we intend to have that fully commissioned by the end of April.

The Government of Guyana wishes to thank the people and Government of Japan for the funding of this project as well as the contractors and consultants, both Japanese Firms for the on-time completion and the quality of work provided as well as the staff of GWI for the role they played.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Second Phase, which is intended to be continued from No. 73 to Molson Creek, has been delayed, and would not now commence in March of 2008, as the only bid submitted is above the estimated costs. Discussions are currently ongoing, to determine how to proceed with this project. Mr. Speaker, these are some of the areas which the Ministry of Housing and Water intend to do works during 2008.

As is evident, the Ministry of Housing and Water is involved in advancing the Transformation Agenda during 2008. We probably would have been allocated more to do more had it not been for the massacres at Lusignan and Bartica ... [*Interruption: 'Nooo!'*]

I take this opportunity, on behalf of the Ministry of Housing and Water, to express sympathy to the relative and friends of those who were so brutally murdered.

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Mr. Speaker, I appeal to all Guyanese to join in the effort of relentlessly pursue the criminals so that events such as this these may never occur again, and so that sums now being diverted to combat these criminals can be spent to improve the lives of Guyanese, and ultimately, reduce poverty in our society. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Mrs. Clarissa Riehl ...

Mrs. Clarissa S Riehl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since no expressions of sympathy was forthcoming from this Assembly as a whole, Mr. Speaker, we are obliged to individually offer our sympathy and condolences firstly to the relatives, and then, to the wider communities of Lusignan and Bartica, for the wholesale and apparently senseless slaughter of their residents, by a mindless group or groups.

Maybe, it is trite to say, Sir that words cannot restore the innocent lives that were so swiftly and brutally taken; but words are all we have to sympathize and to condemn. And as the law enforcement seek out the culprits that have perpetrated these atrocities it is hoped that this Administration, too, is searching its innermost being for any deeper or more fundamental reasons for these vicious outburst of attacks by citizens upon other citizens of this land under their watch.

I wish to commend, Sir, the Hon Minister of Finance for

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all the effort he has put into compiling this Budget for 2008.

I point to the lack of interest; if we look around to the public there is a total lack of interest in this Budget, by the people of this country. We only have to look around ... all we have is the staff who are committed to be here.

No one is clapping, except, perhaps, the Members of the other side, while the Budget was being presented. There are no new taxes; no one is clapping to that, Sir, because the citizenry is already reeling, from the taxes they have to live with, and then, there is the VAT. *[Applause]*

I turn now, Mr. Speaker, to my remit, which is to look a little at the legal affairs of this country and I will look, firstly, at the Law Offices of the State and the shameful depletion of staff, found therein.

Firstly, Sir, let me start with the Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecution which comprise the State's Criminal Lawyers. This is a chamber with which I am very familiar, as many Members already know.

Let me do my own budget here in my presentation, not in the form of senior technical and all those fancy words that we have when we open these big books, but let me look at the authorized staff strengths and the legal personnel therein, and what actually pertains now.

The DPP Chambers' authorized strength is:

- The Director of Public Prosecution

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- 1 Deputy Director of Public Persecution
- 2 Assistant Directors of Public Persecution
- 3 Senior State Counsels; and
- 10 State Counsels

The actual staff strength, as of today, is:

- 1 Acting DPP, since January 2005
- No Deputy DPP, from the same date, January 2005
- 1 Assistant DPP
- 1 Senior State Counsels and
- 6 State Counsels, 4 of whom were just hired.

The DPP's Chambers, Sir, do not only prosecute criminal matters at the Criminal Sessions, but they perform important functions of giving legal advice to police stations all across this land. So, why are these Chambers chronically understaffed, since this Administration took office?

Sir, the Chambers of the Attorney General, which represent the State's Civil Lawyers, fares no better and those Chambers are, of course, the seat of the Hon Attorney General. Since 1994, Sir, there has been no Solicitor General, since the death of the incumbent at that time. Since 1998, there has been no Deputy Solicitor General, since the resignation of the incumbent at that

time.

Before I proceed to give the whole litany of unfilled vacancies let me quote a little from our Attorney General himself in last year's Budget. As you remember, Sir, because I think I was sitting in your place, deputizing for you last year; and I remember the Attorney General almost on the verge of tears... *[Interruption: 'Wow!']* Yes, I remember the AG was so saddened when he was giving his presentation last year. Let me quote and I can tell you and you will hear it; it will come out here. I quote from ... this is the HANSARD, Sir ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: He is coming up after you Honourable Member Mrs. Riehl ...

Mrs. Clarissa S Riehl: Yes, Sir ...

The Speaker: The Attorney General is going to speak after you ...

Mrs. Clarissa S Riehl: Yes, I know. I am quoting from ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Do you think we should send for some Kleenex? *[Laughter]*

Mrs. Clarissa S Riehl: Yes. And he would agree with me; I know he would.

The Speaker: I will instruct the Clerk to get some Kleenex. *[Laughter]*

Mrs. Clarissa S Riehl: Thank you, Sir.

He says, and I quote Sir:

In relation to the senior personnel of the chambers, Mde Speaker...

This is his Chambers, the Attorney General's Chambers ... and Minister of Legal Affairs:

Regrettably, for several years we have not had a Solicitor General, a Deputy Solicitor General and Senior Personnel. We have advertised and we have received three applications for the position of Solicitor General. As you are aware, Madam, the post is to be filled at the discretion of the President, and I have made certain recommendations and I am hopeful that the recommendations would bear fruit.

[Interruption: 'Perhaps...']

In addition, recommendations have been made, with respect to the position of Deputy Solicitor General and other senior positions.

Mde Speaker, I have heard my colleagues on the Opposition Benches refer to the inadequacy of salary structure for officers in the Public Service and other areas. With respect to the Chambers, as such, you will be aware of the fact that there is a

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tremendous discrepancy between the salary which is paid to State Lawyers and to the Members of the Director of Public Prosecution, as opposed to the Revenue Authority and other agencies. And representations have been made for an attempt to have a final solution to this inadequacy, because if that is not addressed, Madam within a short time the Chambers of the Attorney General would find itself in difficulty...

And it goes on with the statement, Sir.

But we are charged with the responsibility, Madam, under the State Liability Act, to defend all mitigations which have been instituted against the state, and unless we are in a position to be adequately staffed, we would find ourselves, in the Mitigation and Advice Section with difficulty.

I hope that the representation that has been made to address this situation would be dealt with by the Minister of Finance at the appropriate stage and I hope that when they learned Attorney General stands to address us he would tell us whether any fruits have been borne from what happened the last time.

National Assembly Debates

44th Sitting

14:12h

Monday 3 March 2008

Part II

Continued from Part I of IV... (Pg 80)

Mr Speaker, what has really happened between the Law Offices and, say, the Magistracy, and I am familiar, as I said, with both? There has been a delink where payments are concerned since this Administration came into office. There has been a delink between Law Officers and Magistrates who, at the time I served in both capacities, were on par. For instance, an ordinary Magistrate was equivalent to an ordinary State Counsel; a Senior Magistrate to a Senior State Counsel; a Principal Magistrate to Assistant DPP and the Chief Magistrate was in a separate category. But since this Administration came to office it has delinked the positions and so everybody wants to be a magistrate. What happens when the young counsels go to these chambers, both the DPP and the AG, is that they just go there to garner two or three years experience and then rush to the Judicial Service Commission and apply to sit on the bench. And do you know why, Sir? Because the current starting pay of the State Counsel right now is \$150,000 and that takes into consideration the nine percent increase which has just been given; but the starting pay of a magistrate \$389,270, not inclusive of allowances, which they have. Small

wonder that everybody wants to rush to the Magistracy, as soon as they go to these chambers; both the Attorney General Chamber and the DPP suffers from this.

You would recall, just a few weeks ago, perhaps by order, the Magistrates received \$100,000 increase on their pay, while State Counsels, who are functioning in these chambers, received 9 percent on their already poor pay. So there is your answer. There is your answer; it is not because there is a lack of lawyers. Every year, the Hugh Wooding Law School churns out lawyers, Guyanese lawyers, by the scores. Last year, I think the number was 26, and the previous year was something, not too far removed from that 26. But the sorry state of the Law Offices of the State has a direct connection to the salaries that are paid, and the same goes for the senior positions.

The senior positions ... I expect the Attorney General will tell us some more about why he cannot have an SG or a Deputy SG. As he said here, these are lawyers who have to prepare litigations. Whenever people file any case against the State or Ministries and so, they have to go to get advice from the Attorney General Chambers, and the Attorney General Chambers sends lawyers to represent them in court, and things like that. I really am sorry for Attorney General; but I cannot help him. *[Laughter]* He has to help himself with this Administration that he is working for. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I turn now to the matter of Law Revision. By Act No. 4 of 1972, a Law Revision Commission was set up *to prepare*, and these are the words of the Act:

To prepare, publish and maintain an edition of the Laws of Guyana.

The Act specifies that:

The Attorney General, the Chief Parliamentary Council and their successors in office shall be members of the commission, and the Attorney General and his successors in office, shall be the chairman of that commission.

The First Commission chaired by The Honourable Shridat Ramphal, did its work and converted all the old British Guiana Ordinances into these Green Volumes that we see before us here and updated the laws, I think up to 1973 or there about. But the process, Sir, was to be an ongoing one, and in-between the functioning of a Law Revision Commission there was to be a constant update so that, the laws would not lag too far behind.

The Second Law Revision Commission, Sir, was established under the ... I am sorry about that. The next Law Revision Commission was established under the First Justice Improvement Programme, which was funded by the USAID. The Guyana Government and, I think,

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UWI was also a part of it, and it was chaired by the first Attorney General of this Administration, Mr Bernard De Santos.

This second Law Revision Commission, Sir, updated our Laws according to the LROs, up to 31 December 1997 that work, I understand, was done; but, Mr Speaker, we never got any new volumes. Yes, since 1997, we never got any new volumes; and why, Sir? Well, enter the *Law Book Scandal* of which we are all so well informed. The *Law Book Sandal*, where monies were paid for a set of new volumes which was never forthcoming ... [Interruption: 'Yes'] sometimes referred to as the *Law Revision Scandal*.

The National Democratic Institute, Sir, which is an international NGO that functioned here in Guyana sometime back, stepped in to fill the void, after we got no new volumes. We are still operating from the old ones from 73. The NDI stepped in and presented us in the year 2002, or thereabout, with an electronic version of our updated law.

But there are several things wrong with this version - the CD ROM.

- (i.) First of all, the Laws are mis-numbered on that ...

Then,

- (ii.) It contains a body of Laws, which after the

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authorized date, the authorized date for the law revision was up to 31 December 1997, but they put into it ... and you have Constitutional Reform and all sorts of things, which were way beyond 1997;

And then,

- (iii.) It omits Subsidiary Legislation, which are things like Rules, Rules of Courts and Rules of the High Court, and so on, is not in that CD Ram;

But the most important omission is that:

- (iv.) It does not comply with the Law.

The Law, as I said, requires the Law Revision Commission *to prepare, publish and maintain*; those are the three words of the Act, and in-between, as I said, leaves have to be taken out and new leaves put in, and you cannot do that on a CD ROM.

So that that does not adequately represent the revision of our laws, for all practical purposes; that is why we only have these green volumes before us.

Mr Speaker, 10 years have passed since that last authorized revision of our laws took place and we have, in the meanwhile, passed in this Honourable House, many new bits of legislation, some of which have not even been assented to, as we all know. The need for a Third Law Revision Commission to be established, I think, is real

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and I think that will cure the *Law Book Scandal*. We must have, at this time, a new set of volumes before us.

We also need, Sir, Law Reform. My colleague, Mrs Backer, tabled a Motion in this Honourable House, calling for a *Law Reform Committee to be set up*, which I had cosigned.

We have many archaic laws, Sir. Our Divorce Laws still depend on fault and things like that which the Hon Minister of Human Service Ms Priya Manickchand has singled out one area – the area of sexual offences for reform, and like my colleague, Mrs Backer, I laud her for her famous *STAMP IT OUT*. But there are many other bits of our laws which are badly in need of reform.

I think we need, at this stage, not only Law Revision, but we need a Law Reform Commission to be put in place so that we can in fact bring all of these laws up-to-date. The piecemeal approach will not work, not in this 21st Century.

Another aspect of Law Reform that is crying out for change and attention, Sir, is the abolition of Preliminary Inquires in Indictable Matters and the move to what is referred to in legal circles as *paper committal*. I cannot understand why this particular aspect of reform has not yet been undertaken. I remember going to the British Judges who had come and the Chancellor invited a group of lawyers, somewhere in the mid-90s, at the Tower Hotel and I thought that this thing was so imminent that the next

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year we would have moved to change, and move to paper committal; but nothing has happened since that meeting.

The benefits are obvious from this Paper Committal System.

- First of all, it will result in speedier trials of criminal matters;

We would not have people charged with serious indictable matters, like Benschop, sitting there for all these years, waiting, having to go through first a preliminary inquiry, before the Magistrate, and then, to sit and wait.

It will also ease the burden on Magistrates, who already have been called the beast of burden of the profession in the judiciary;

- It will help with prison congestion;

My friend, Mrs Backer, alluded to that when she spoke about *the prison congestion*. It is horrendous, especially in the Remand Section, which tells you, that these matters need to be taken out speedily, from that section.

- Fourthly, it will eliminate a whole lot of paper work, having to type these depositions, *et cetera*.

Of course, it might necessitate even an increase in the number of judges and more legal advisors to the police, *et cetera*; but any new system will in fact, necessitate these

types of changes.

Mr Speaker, I turn now to matters of the judiciary. The Constitution of Guyana, Sir, guarantees our judges security of tenure but this Administration, by its action, over the last few years, has been maintaining a number of Acting Judges. In the recent past, there was as many as five out of a complement of twelve High Court Judges, who were on the acting rostrum – five out of twelve. Today, there are still two judges, one acting for as long as seven years, and the other, for six years.

Judges are important functionaries, Sir, who judicially, figuratively, if you want to say, who hold the citizens' rights, freedom, and sometimes their very lives, in their hands. The State of Guyana should therefore discontinue their insidious practice and make firm appointments of judges, under Article 128 (1) of the Constitution, instead of using 128 (2) and creating Acting Judges.

Article 128 (2) is meant to be used in a limited sense. It speaks of a vacancy; it speaks of judges who are acting; not of creating that vacancy and things like that. So it is not meant to be used in the wholesale manner, that it is being used by this Administration.

Further, Sir, under Article 128 (3):

An acting appointment to the judiciary...

And I quote,

...for the Constitution itself, shall have

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effect until it is revoked by the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Judicial Service Commission.

On the other hand, Sir:

A judge who enjoys tenure...

That is a judge who is not acting and has been fully appointed,

... can only be removed from service after a tribunal sits and he was heard, and all of that ... but for an acting judge ... by the stroke of a pen the Judicial Service Commission can terminate his position.

So, where are we going with this situation? I do not understand why we have to have this. This Administration seems to like acting appointments. Everywhere you turn there are actors, the Police Commissioner is acting; the DPP is acting. This person is acting. So it is really a ...

There also appears to be a very whimsical approach to promotions within the judiciary. We hear of very junior magistrates who are being made judges and we hear of judges being elevated, you know, without any rime or reason. I do not understand what is going on here.

All these factors, Sir, can lead to a lowering of morale and a heightening of timidity among the body of judges. And then, taken together, it might be tantamount to the

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interference with the independence of our judiciary. *[Applause]* The resultant effect of such interference is that judges are inhibited from rendering decisions, without fear or favour, in accordance with their oath of office.

These are also some of the signals that perhaps, contribute to that persistent impression, both internally in Guyana and externally, that Guyana possesses a weak and ineffective justice system, reference the US Drug Report just spoke of *archaic legal system, of inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the judicial system*. That is the most recent Drug Report; it was in the papers yesterday.

It is also pertinent to note here, Sir, that the very gentleman who was fingered in the *Law Book Scandal* which has caused us to be bereaved of the new set of volumes of the Laws of Guyana, now sits on the Judicial Service Commission ... *[Interruption: 'What!']* by dint of being Head of the Public Service Commission. *[Noisy Interruption]*

We must remind ourselves that the Judicial Service Commission is the body which recommends appointments, the discipline of judges and magistrates of this land. What does all of this have to say for this Government?

Mr Speaker, the fifth of the six broad areas, that the Hon Finance Minister outlined in Page 3 of his Budget Speech, and I will just quote:

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Fifthly, we will ensure that the Justice and Security Sectors continue to accelerate reforms to deal with the current and emerging challenges.

That is No. 5 of the Hon Finance Minister's pillars of broad areas in his Budget. And I wish to continue also on Page 38, where he did speak on what is going to happen in the Justice System. He said:

Mde Speaker, in the Justice Sector, an average of 7000 legal cases, civil cases and 300 criminal cases are filed each year in our legal system, and we will ensure an improvement in the efficiency in which these are addressed.

And this is the particular part I want,

Of the \$1.5 billion allocated to the Justice Sector this year \$303 million will be expended under the programme for the Modernization of the Justice Administration System. This is a US \$10.2 million programme aimed at improving the quality, efficiency and efficacy of service delivery in Justice Sector Institutions, promoting more efficient interactions among Justice Institutions and improving access to justice for our citizens.

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I am a little confused, Sir, I do not know what exactly is the amount? Whether it is \$1.5 billion or \$303 million, or US \$10.2 million, would be spent this year. [*Interruption: 'That nobody knows'*] But whatever it is, however, whichever one of those sums it is really, I hope that this would be well spent.

The first judicial ... these are monies that are essentially IDB Funds, to be ultimately repaid by the people of Guyana. The First USAID - Government of Guyana Justice Improvement Programme, to which I alluded, gave us a renovated Supreme Court building, a Law Library and Law Revision, without of course the volumes, [*Laughter*] among other things.

Whatever the Modernization of the Justice Administration System entails, I would wish to make the case, Sir, for the establishment of a Family Court, as a division of the High Court [*Applause*] in much the same manner, as the Commercial Court was created.

Mr Speaker, this is now a new idea. The creation of a Family Court was first mooted way back in 1983, when the Elimination of Discrimination of Children Born out of Wedlock Act was passed. In the mid-1990s, when the Adoption Act was amended, to permit Guyanese in the diaspora, to adopt Guyanese children at home; the Committee, headed then by Justice Desire Barnard made a firm recommendation for the establishment of a Family Court. This Administration had indicated a positive

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attitude to the idea. I think my learned colleague over there, Mrs Chandarpal, was the Head of Human Services at the time. They had indicated a positive attitude to the idea, but nothing came out of it.

At the time when the family is under severe stress from all the hardships in society and when domestic violence is on the increase, on the rise. A Family Court buttressed by an enhanced probation and counseling service can deliver justice in a much more caring environment.

Police stations are, by and large, not working for the Domestic Violence Act. I do not want to go into all that has happened there. But police stations are not what domestic violence is all about, because as somebody has said that *the policemen, many of them are guilty themselves of domestic violence*, so they treat it very scantily and very lightly.

I wish to state further that I feel that domestic violence should be handled in a manner, in much the same manner as in a Family Court, it might well take place, in that a woman ... and let us face it, although many of the legislation that we are passing are gender neutral, domestic violence is something that, first and foremost, affects women and children. [*Interruption: ' Deborah, you don't want that law at all'*] [*Laughter*] so you know ...

I feel that a sort of *Justice Bhagwatie*, with which you are familiar Mr Speaker ... type of justice can well do us

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under this umbrella. Where women just write a letter to the Family Court and state what is happening to their lives, and then, the court can take up that issue. That is what I understand is the *Justice Bagwatie Formula* to help poor people and we really need something of that nature to help women who are suffering from domestic violence in this country. But it has to be buttressed as I said by counseling and that sort of thing.

Any new court that comes into being, of course, would necessitate a lot of changes and that is what I hope that this modern ... what do they call it? ... This new programme that we are undertaking now would help to make some of these changes.

I wish also, Sir, to make a call, for the establishment of a Public Defenders Office. The Legal Aid Clinic does not satisfy this need as it deals only with civil cases. *[Applause]* Our prisons are filled to capacity, with many indigent defendants who, and you see them ... We as practicing lawyers ... You see them sitting in the Magistrate's Court; they do not have counsel, they cannot afford counsel and after several times and no bail, they throw in the towel and claim guilty. Whether or not they are really guilty is neither here nor there, at this stage; but they need the help of a lawyer and we do not have ... We have a whole lot of lawyers, but it is not about having lawyers. Every year, as I said, so many are turned out in this country that the State can provide some help to the indigent defendants of this land.

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Such developments, Sir, such developments, Mr Minister, are the trappings of a modern, caring society. *[Applause]* This could well form ... this could well fit within the ambit of the Modernization of the Justice System. You yourself said you *are having modernization*. Every modern society has a justice Defenders Programme.

These are systems, Sir that must run on parallel tracks, with the construction of buildings, and roads and bridges, if we are to truly develop this society. *[Applause]* You cannot just build roads and building, and leave your people wanting in every aspect of life which is what is happening here. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the incumbent Chief Magistrate was suspended from duty since October 2004. To date there is no Chief Magistrate; there is not even a Chief Magistrate (Agt). There was one in the interim, but that gentleman retired last year and since that time, there is no Chief Magistrate. There is a Principal Magistrate carrying out the functions; but of course, she would not see a cent for doing that, *[Laughter]* although she is doing the job.

I understand, there is a serious backlog of Coroner's Inquest to be held, which the Magistrates now have to cope with. I know we give them an extra \$100,000; but the Judges we have given \$100,000 and \$200,000 and they, Sir, are getting monies over and above their salaries, for the backlog that they have created, or perhaps, their predecessors created. *[Laughter]*

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Now, I wish, to ask the Hon Mr Attorney General if the Magistrates would be given any monies to help to work late hours [*Applause*] and to have these Inquests done. [*Applause*] I do not know whether they will be able to handle that backlog of inquests, that they have now, Sir.

Judges Salaries ... and I wonder, Sir, at this extra money that judges are given, because judges' salaries are supposed to come from the Consolidated Fund ... and I wonder what measure of accountability is taking place, for the money that they are given for this backlog ... I would say no more.

Mr Speaker, from what I have outlined here this afternoon, I hope the Honourable House gets a picture, of the plethora of problems that beset our Legal System; many of these were brought on by the tinkering of this Administration. For instance, there used to be, I think, an Annual Confidential Report on Magistrates and on Law Officers, and these helped the Judicial Service Commission and so forth, as to how people should be promoted and things like that. This Administration has done away with that, not only the delink between the salaries, but also they have done away with these annual reports.

So people are just handpicked here and there and put in positions. You can do that with your government; but the third arm of government, the Judiciary, must not be treated like that. [*Applause*] Many of these, as I said,

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were brought on, by the tinkering of this Administration and many more were made by the blatant omissions to fill the positions, *et cetera*.

I hope that the Modernization of the Justice Administration System may correct, at least, some of these problems. But I look at the Capital Budget for the Supreme Court and all I see is \$82 million for buildings, again, to complete the Berbice High Court, to paint the Judges' Quarters, and for vehicles, and the usual jargons that get there. And \$50 million for the Magistrate's Court at Charity, which I know is deserving ... because Charity is badly in need of a ... that building was so dilapidated for so long. So that at least I know is worthy. The DPP Chambers also, have a sum there for the extension of the DPP's Chambers.

This Administration, Sir, has a fixation with buildings and roads and things; but what happens within these buildings is infinitely more important in a country. *[Applause]* You must address the issues that are important to your people. It is your people, your human resource which give character to your country. *[Applause]*

It is not the building that you build; it is who the people are and that is why we are known here to be a very hospitable people. That is what Guyana is. That is what stands out and I do not understand how you on the other side miss these things. *[Interruption: 'How?'] [Laughter]*

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Yes, you missed it, in your quest to just build building and build roads; you have forgotten the most important resource of this land, your people. *[Applause]* I wish that the Modernization of this Justice Administration System will seek to remedy some of these things. Thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Mr Doodnauth Singh, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs ...

Hon Doodnauth Singh: May it please you, Mr Speaker ...

In speaking to this Budget, I wish to commend the Staff of the Ministry of Finance for the way in which they prepared and analyzed the various sectors, so that the Minister of Finance was able to deliver a scholarly presentation. *[Applause]*

In the same vain, Sir, I wish to congratulate my erstwhile colleague, Mr Murray, for his preparation, presentation, analysis and comments, which he has made during his remarks. *[Applause]* And I would expect that, the Minister of Finance would certainly take onboard, the matters that were raised by my colleague, Mr Murray *[Applause]* and that in his response, having addressed his mind to Mr Murray's own analysis of the Budget, he will be able to respond accordingly.

Mr Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs adumbrated

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the nuances and the Foreign Policy, of our Government in a most eloquent manner, which would have been expected of a Technocrat Minister.

Finally, Sir, it was a privilege and pride to hear young Minister Anthony speak. The preparation, the historical analysis was applauded, even by my colleagues Leader of the Opposition Mr Corbin, and Mr Murray. And perhaps, I should claim that because he sits to my right, some of the eloquence might have rubbed off. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, yesterday I attended a function, and perhaps, my young colleague Nandlall might speak out and say *relevant* as he normally does; but I attended a function yesterday, Sir, where religious leaders spoke with respect to the atrocity that had been perpetuated at Lusignan. It was the first occasion that I visited that area.

In the course of speaking, these religious leaders described death as *passing from one stage to another; that we have to console ourselves by the fact that we are preparing for the hereafter, and that, it is the will of God that people were sacrificed in the way, in which they were.* With the greatest respect to those religious leaders, I challenge the will of God, to destroy people in that way. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I do not attend religious functions, because I believe they try to rationalize the most abominable acts that take place on this earth. In the sacred books of the Hindus, they speak of the Law of Karma. It is described

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as Karma-Ke-Keel and they misuse that Law and apply it to situations that it has no relevance whatsoever to.

The most ghastly act that was committed was when one of those persons at Lusignan was at the alter praying to her Lord, and in answer to that prayer, an AK, whatever you call it, 47 - was discharged on her. That is not the act of God, Sir; that is the wickedness of mankind. That is sacrilege and it must be described as such.

Mr Speaker, if there is a god, and sometimes I wonder, and with the greatest respect to my learned colleague Backer, who invoked the name of God, if there is a god, I hope and pray that none of the activities that were described at Lusignan and Bartica could be ascribed to that sacred, and that final and ultimate being. As a result of those atrocities, we have an opportunity in this Budget, to ensure that every financial resource that is available to us ought to be afforded to the security service to ensure that the paralysis of fear which permeates and stalks us on this land, should be eradicated. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, much of what has been said by my colleague Mrs Riehl, as you know, I share some of those views. The Attorney General's Chambers, Sir, is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that legislation is enacted, advice is tendered and litigation is properly defended by those Chambers.

Insofar as the legislative functioning of those Chambers

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are concerned, Sir, we have been privileged to have three officers, one from Nigeria and two from India, and five of our own officers ... Despite the fact that on some occasions Ministers feel that what they have sent to us may not be adequately and properly, proportionally dealt with; but we try within the confines that are available to us to ensure that legislation is brought as expeditiously as possible to this August Assembly.

My colleague, Mrs Riehl, has spoken of the fact with respect to litigation and advice I pleaded on the last occasion I spoke and she cited the words that I used on that occasion to make a plea that the disparity that existed between the Magistracy, and the Chambers of the DPP and the Attorney General's Chambers ought to have been addressed. It is my prayer, Sir, and hope that that situation can be dealt with in the appropriate way.

Insofar as I am cognizant of the fact that young officers who are appointed to my Chambers, find it more lucrative to move themselves to the Magistracy and to the Legal Aid I regret, and I may tell you, Sir, that within the week, only recently, officers advised me that they were leaving my Chambers; it is with regret, because those officers looked upon the occasion, when they were at the AG's Chambers as an occasion for learning,

My learned friend and colleague had spoken of the fact, Sir *with respect to the appointment to the Magistracy and the Judiciary*. You are well aware, Sir, that those

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appointments are within the confines of the Judicial Service Commission. And despite the fact that I have the responsibility to speak as the Minister of Legal Affairs with respect to the judiciary there is no control or administrative function that is undertaken by the Attorney General insofar as the functioning of the Magistracy and the Judiciary are concerned.

With respect to Law Revision, Sir, I know that the question has been posed, and I have prepared a response, which I will give at the relevant time, and I hope will be accepted by my colleagues.

We had undertaken, Sir, with the assistance of the Foreign Donors, to produce a Disc. We did produce that disc. It is not in conformity with the Law; but it was intended to be a guide and an aid to lawyers and the judiciary as such. Regrettably, in the course of the production errors were committed despite the fact that both the Members of the Private Bar and ourselves were involved in that exercise.

I am hopeful however, Sir, because I am seeking assistance at the present time to have that situation remedied, Officers will be appointed to review the relevant discs and the laws that had been enacted since then with the expectation that, within the relevant time, we might be able to produce another more efficient and up-to-date disc, not within the confines of the law revision as such but to be of an aid and assistance to us

all.

Mr Speaker, with respect to the ... You will appreciate, Sir, that we had abolished the position of State Solicitor. That had come about because of the fact, with the merging of the two professions, the Solicitors and the Barrister as such; and the fact that the Chambers of the Attorney General takes instructions from the various ministries and corporations and we draft our own pleadings. However, the Public Trustees' Office functions and carries out those duties and responsibilities that are charged to us.

The same applies to the Registry. As you are aware, Sir, during the tenure of my learned colleague, Mr DeSantos, legislation had been enacted to institutionalize the Deeds Registry. That law has been enacted; but it has not been found necessary to implement it, up to this point in time.

Whatever is the rationale, Sir, the fact is that, the International Community is demanding of us that we should incorporate that institution, as such as quickly as possible. I wish, Sir, to make reference to what has been spoken of, or said, with respect to the loan agreement that exists between the Government of Guyana and the Inter-American Development Bank. For the benefit of my colleague, Mrs Riehl, it is a US\$25 million Loan Agreement and it has two components:

- (i.) A Policy Based Component, supporting a policy based loan of US \$15 million; and

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- (ii.) An Investment and Technical Support Component of US \$10 million.

I have spoken on previous occasions to what is required and what is expected under this project. But since many of my colleagues, and you yourself, Sir, are more familiar with the computers; and my colleagues you will see, Sir, as soon as they enter these Chambers they, what you call it, *plug-in* or something. I am not an Internet person [*Laughter*] but I am told ... I hope these computers are being used and not abused.

But what I understand, Sir, is that this project is - some phrase they use and tell me - *online*, or something like that, [*Interruption: 'Yes, online'*] online, so that they can all have access to it and be able to read in more detail, in greater detail, the components and the expectations, under the project.

I want to make two comments. I cannot leave out my friend, Basil Williams, as such. Mr Williams spoke to the fact that *the Public Service Appellate Tribunal, the officers to that tribunal, ought to be appointed*. I agree, Sir. And it is my hope and expectation that, as far as it is practical, that steps ought to be taken to ensure that the officials of that tribunal ... because I can appreciate and understand the several issues which are raised by Public Offices, which have to be litigated. Because on a daily basis I am faced with litigation arising out of the disciplinary actions moved against Public Officers.

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In fact, my learned colleague is reminding me that on a daily basis one of my colleagues, who I would prefer not to name, institutes proceedings and motions even for persons who had been disciplined 15 and 20 years ago. And what you would understand and appreciate, Sir, the difficulty that we will have to get instructions as such much less to be able to adequately present and defend those cases, so that the tribunal would serve a useful purpose to that extent.

However, I disagree with him with respect to the tribunal which he describes as the *arbitration tribunal* or which is under the Trade Union Act. I have practiced before that tribunal in Trinidad, and it is with the greatest respect to him ... I do not think that we have as such the facilities and the opportunities which will fully engage a tribunal in that to be effective. And it bothers me that some persons may very well say *in the same way as we have the Caribbean Court of Justice which has only been able over the several years to deal with three applications and probably one case, or two cases to be heard; you will have that situation where they will not be fully employed.* So Mr Williams, with the greatest respect, I do not share your view, with respect to that tribunal ... [*Interruption: 'on the contrary to you' "Yes, okay"*].

Mr Speaker, as I said Sir, I have agreed with several things which Mrs Riehl has spoken to, and as a result, I do not want to be repetitious. I will merely say to you, Sir, it is my expectation, that in the short-term, adequate

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steps will be taken, to address the several issues which has been... to which she has adverted and has been identified. I am hopeful that we would not *loose sight and only concentrate on the establishment of buildings; but deal with personnel*, as such. [Applause]

I thank you, Sir. [Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member. [Pause]

Honourable Members, I think this is a good time to suspend for one hour.

17:00H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

18:05H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I trust that the refreshments were sumptuous and in order, and you are now well prepared to continue right until the midnight hour [Laughter] when I believe we will finish.

Honourable Member Mr Khemraj Ramjattan ...

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, this ritual that we go through every year, has somewhat lost the passion I had come to know of it over the years, since I have been a Parliamentarian. I rather suspect, it is because of the depressing circumstances over the last couple of weeks. I rather suspect because of the fact, that we have had allocations put into those slots and categories, which we normally would have, in any event. But I rather suspect that the passion has been lost

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this time around, primarily, because of the underlining principles that one would have wanted to see in a budget that is going to ensure that there be growth in this country, was absolutely in deficit.

I say that because, when you have a belief in certain conceptual positions, it is going to be very difficult and hard for you to change those concepts and beliefs. And so, like we lawyers normally would say, unless you have '*mensrea*' that goes with '*actus reus*' you do not constitute the ingredients of that which you are supposed to perform.

We have here, in my opinion, Mr Speaker, people who simply do not want to walk the walk, although they love to talk the talk; and the Budget really encapsulate that kind of attitude, whereby; growth is what is required in this country, but that which is to promote growth is hardly there. We are going to talk plenty, about how we put so much for water; as a matter-of-fact, the Minister just mentioned almost all the pumping stations in the country. We are going to talk about how much we are going to do for hospitals and almost all the auxiliaries in hospitals, we are going to get mentioned. But the underlying philosophy that will create growth and those mechanisms and procedures that have to be put in place, to ensure that we get the growth promoted and molded, is in deficit, big deficit.

That is because, as I indicated, Mr Speaker, this nexus

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between the intention and action, has been largely missing. One of these intentions, if I may say, Mr Speaker, has to do largely with a feeling of the Administration, that greater spending in an area that is going to see, probably, certain public benefits, is the best thing out.

If we have come to the realization that development, and growth, and democracy, as an integrated ... that is going to carry us far, we must learn then, not simply to do the things that is just going to be political propaganda; we must start doing the things that are going to ensure that those three very large principles that govern and will make sure we progress through the good governance principles that we talk about is going to take us places. But no, rather, we have an Administration that seems not to like the idea that entrepreneurship, the fact that we can have growth through private enterprise, investment coming from foreign and investment domestic; is what is going to take us to places.

I want, first of all, to remind this Parliament, that last year when I mentioned a couple of the statistics of Guyana's performance in the International Investment Climate Rankings there was a tremendous amount of booing. This now has been the statistics that the Guyana Investment Climate Assessment from the World Bank utilized in Report No. 35951 GY as the basis for coming to their findings as to why, although so many millions have been pored into this country, the benefits of growth, as they

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would want to see it, is not there.

I remember last year, and of course, I think Minister Benn was one of them that said, *he just could not believe that, where did you get it from?* Well I wish now to state, like I did the last time, the sources and in quoting last year's figures that was 2004, and I have the updated figures for 2006, World Economic Forum... [*Interruption – I think there is one more recent than that*] There is a more recent one? [*Yes.*] Well, you will produce it for me. It deals with good governance issues and I understand that you are an expert now for that at Cabinet, on good governance issues. [*Laughter*]

I just want to quote them, because again I hear the slurs will start loudening... [*Interruption – Yes. That is what you have to do, press on. We will cover you*] I would like to quote just four of them. The last time, I quoted seventeen. [*Interruption – Quote the whole book and done.*] [*Laughter*] You want to deal with, and this is where I will come directly to the point, because that is how I am.

- (i.) The Pervasiveness of Money Laundering through our Banks; out of 117 countries, we are 117. [*Laughter*]
- (ii.) Out of the Brain Drain Rank; out of 117 countries, we are 117.

We even got worse than the last time.

- (iii.) Reliability of Police Services; we are 116

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out of 117 countries... [*Interruption – We are staying the course*]

And that is staying the course? [*Interruption – Of course*]

- (iv.) Centralization, rather than Decentralization of Economic Policymaking...

Decentralization is always something that ensures to the benefit of private investors.

Our rank Mr Speaker is 115 out of 117.

Mr Speaker... [*Interruption – Staying the course*]

- (v.) Irregular Payment in Public Contracts; 114 out of 117;

And what the President and all those over there love to talk about:

- (vi.) Macroeconomic Environment; the index rank 113 out of 117;

This is the Investment Climate Assessment, done by the World Bank, and they are talking about our state of affairs.

The other aspect of the matter has to do, with when they are conducting:

- (vii.) Business Surveys, and so on, on how we rank in getting credits...

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Something that is important for private small businessmen, getting credit.

Our index rank is out of 155 countries, it is 145.

This now is very important too, but as my good friend Donald and the rest would say, and this is from Transparency International now.

(viii.) Our Corruption Perception Index is 121 out of 163;

And that is the 2007 Report.

Now, these statistics form the background for this assessment that was conducted, as to what is happening here in Guyana and what should be the recommendations to get us out of this morass. And what we have, unlike what my friends over there is going to be talking about in rebuttal, I assume, is that these are people that came from afar and they just interjected these figures based on perceptions.

But I want to tell you that apart from those statistics that were done; this Investment Climate Assessment had over 164 Guyanese Manufacturing Firms being surveyed. The ICF was conducted with the participation of 164 Guyanese Manufacturing Firms, 32 Hotels and Tourism Sector Establishments; and then, utilizing the standard World Bank Questionnaire and Methodology of Data for collection; and then, they go on to talk about the criteria used.

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The purpose of the survey was the benchmark Guyana against other countries, and so, as to assess how level playing field there is in this country. This is what their main findings are, Mr Speaker, because I want to say that, the significance of what I am saying here has to do with, if we do not solve this problem of growth in Guyana at the economic level and largely, an expansion of the political space for other people; we are going to be a failed state.

We have to learn to teach our people, especially our entrepreneurs, what are the effective recommendations, that can get us out of the problem; but we must first know what the problem is. We must not just jump to conclusion, like our President recently did that *look, these are demented psychopaths and once we catch them, we solve the problem.* [Interruption – *But they are dement psychopaths*] They are demented psychopaths; but we will be demented, if we only applied that, as the exclusive reasoning that is causing the problem. [Applause][Interruption: I want you to do understand too... Oh yes, he is!]

One of the findings is that:

Guyana's Investment Climate lags behind that of all Caribbean countries.

All! And that,

It is only similar to some Central American

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countries. Guyana ranks especially low internationally in objective measures, because of infrastructural bottlenecks, relating to a whole host of burdens, related to taxations, business regulations, Customs regulations and contracts enforcement.

And of course, as the other Report said,

Low access to credit and shortage of labour skills suffered by private sector...

The survey also made a very important finding; all of them are negative, if I may say so. But I would not go through all of them; I will just go through some of them that I feel subjectivity must be stated, in an August Assembly as this. The Surveyed Guyanese Firms indicated that:

Macro-economic and political uncertainty are preventing investment and growth in this country. For example, 44 percent of the interviewed manufacturing companies perceived uncertainty at the macroeconomic level, to be a major, severe obstacle, to their operation and growth. Political uncertainty is also ranked among the top binding constraints, with close to one-third of the firms, saying that this is a major obstacle.

And of course,

*The playing field is not level, and again,
they talk about corruption.*

That Administration across the floor, Mr Speaker, indicates that, *you must bring the evidence*. I do not know, how you are going to get the evidence, when you do not want to pass the Freedom of Information Act. *[Applause]* How are you going to get the evidence, when you do not want your Police Force, sometimes, to do the investigation? How you are going to want it, when the Public Accounts Committee, after it makes its recommendations, you do not implement or enforce the implementation of any? *[Applause]*

And then, they say that *you must have the evidence*. Well that is an atrocity in argument... *[Interruption – You are a lawyer?]* Oh, yes! Because we will never get the evidence; we will never get the evidence, the way you want it. But just like how the very many things happens and people get to know about it; and especially, knowing how bullying this Administration can get, to those people who are critical of them; they run to their taxes, they run to get them back through their Custom's Clearances ... *[Interruption – 'How you know that?']* "Oh yes! Me, I suffered that at the hands of this Administration. They tumbled all my files in my chambers, just to look for my taxes. I did, I did; but you understand, it is such a vindictive thing. But that would not in any way bother

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those over there, Mr Speaker; those it bothers are the businessmen”]

This is what the businessmen told them about:

Bribes on government contracts...

[Interruption: ‘What!’] ... 15.3 percent.

For every government contract, literally there is, what is called *corruption going on*, to the extent of 15.3 percent. *[Interruption]*

Payments to get things done, 3.5 percent...

[Interruption – ‘Where you get that from?’ “I am going to give you the report.”]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, what are you reading from?

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: I am reading from, Sir, the *Guyana Investment Climate Assessment, Report No. 35951 GY* from the World Bank.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: From the World Bank, and it is at Page 7, Irfaan, about your government’s bribes on contracts *[Laughter]* and it is at Page 8, about all the 117 spaces. If it is not last space, it is second-to-last space. *[Interruption – Read Page 24]* Oh! So you saw that; but you want me to read Page 24? Well, you will read Page 24. *[Interruption: ‘I do not have the opportunity’]* Well, you had the opportunity, but you did not want to read

page 24. You did not want to refer to the document.
[Interruption]

What the businessmen had to say however, Mr Speaker, was that:

Even though corruption is so high, they somehow managed to surmount it and still continue to do business. Even though corruption is perceived as a major obstacle...

And this is Page 9,

...to doing business; by interviewing Guyanese Manufacturing Firms, reported brides to secure Public Contracts, though high, they still conduct business. That is 15 percent of the contract value, on average, across all contracts.

15 percent, this is a 15 percent government. *[Laughter]*
We have a 15 percent government. Other leakages ... I suppose 20 percent is not bad.

Mr Speaker, this Report however, the Government, I know, do not want the Opposition to see. They have made... *[Interruption: 'How?'* Of course, you do not want to share this with the Opposition. You do not want to share this with the public. *[Noisy Interruption]* You just do not want to bring it. Everything is online, yes; but you do not want to bring it here.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, please, please.

Mr Ramjattan.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: This was 21 June, 2007...
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Mr Ramjattan, is not that a World Bank Report?

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: Yes. Sir.

The Speaker: Is it not available on the Internet?

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: I did not get it from the Internet, Sir.

The Speaker: No.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: I do not know. I had to get it from an inside source of the Government. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: They say, Mr Ramjattan as you well know, lawyers should not ask questions for the answers which they do not know. *[Laughter]* But I just wanted to point out that if it is a World Bank Report, usually, they are on the Internet.

Proceed. Do not let me interrupt you.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: Very well, Sir.

I understand that, however, the Government asked these financial institutions to delay their report... *[Interruption: 'What! They do that to delay their report' "Alright, but*

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none of the 2008 Reports are out. I hope that you can bring it to me, Irfaan; I want to see it”] [Laughter]

So we come down to what we must know to be the existing situation. Unless we know what the existing situation is, Mr Speaker, because none of these things were said by the Honourable Minister of Finance. Since it is online we must know what we have existing, so that we can affect remedy. The remedy would depend largely on what the diagnosis is. The prescription and the medicines are going to depend on that existing reality.

The Minister does not say anything about that; but then he goes on to make his allocations and so on. I am saying that those kinds of allocations, oh yes, they are run-of-the-mill. Run-of-the-mill and will have to be done; but that is not going to nip this continual decline. It is not going to nip it; it is not going to cut it off; it is not going to, in any way, save us from the cancer we are getting.

Now, this failure to have growth rates is one of the big problems we have and that is the problem we have to crack. It is my opinion, and I want to share it here that what this assessment, a Climate Assessment Survey indicated is what basically we have to do.

But before I go that way, I got a little off-tangent, because I did not quote the Corruption Section:

A Summary of the Main Findings and Recommendations

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I see Irfaan smiling now:

While corruption is not perceived...

This is striking. *[Interruption: That is why I tell you to read Page 24]*

... as being a major problem bribes paid out at very high' ... must only be ...

No, no. Just listen me out.

- (i.) We have to learn to carry out Annual Audits Of Procurement Operations;*
- (ii.) We have to deepen the ongoing government efforts to increase transparency in Public Procurement;*
- (iii.) We have to establish a functional Procurement Monitoring and Evaluating System, to monitor the application of the new Procurement Laws and Regulations;*

And they even go on to advise that:

- (iv.) We develop an e-Procurement Strategy. [Interruption: 'That was done']*

Electronic, I think, in procurement, Sir ... Well you know, Mr Speaker, everything that is recommended apparently is being done, yet, we seem not to get ourselves out of this crisis. *[Laughter]* Everything is done. The strategy of doing the correct things is not one

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that is employed by this Administration; to a large extent, it has to be forced on them. They are half-hearted about these measures, to the extent that what happens is that they then go after some process of delay with a shopping list to the Donor Community and say *look, we do not have any money to help with our Judiciary; give us a \$25 million. We do not have any money for our Citizen Security, give us \$15 million. We do not have money for anything. You want a Presidential Summit on Competitiveness? Give us an \$800,000.* And that is how ... [Interruption]

Because they realize that it is Manzoor Nadir and a couple of others that need the help ... and then they produce it; but that is not strategic thinking to get us places. We are now going to be literally on this mendicancy and dependency syndrome ... going to, in a way, get us to the reality of what must be done. We go seeking Aid now, not to manufacture growth out of it; but for Aid sake and that is what is happening to this country. We seek Aid for aid sake.

And because of the fact too that Aid largely is used, in a very wicked, mischievous manner in this country, this Aid, quite frankly, and I will read from another text, has caused a lot of people, especially in government, to get rich. This Aid has made a few people rich from the corruption that has followed it. It has not been intelligently used, and as a result, it has hindered growth in the sense that there is no focus as to how we should be

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creators of wealth through our own efforts...
[*Interruption: 'You are right, it is not ...'*] "*The report is out; if it was not you could not have gotten it*" "*Do not worry with you. You are saying that it is official. It is out and it is online but it is not official yet...*" [Laughter] "*He is a little disoriented*"]

I want to indicate too, Mr Speaker, as part of the analysis that is going to get us a budget that meets the underlying principles and the underlying philosophy has to do with another important area that we have not been paying attention to, and that is good governance issues.

Good governance within Institutions of the Government, good governance within Commercial Companies, good governance within Trade Unions, good governance in all institutions; we have not been doing that; but especially, good governance where it is supposed to matter, and that is, in government circles.

And by the way, I am quoting from a person, who used to be part and parcel of the World Bank, in a book that is rated and set to become a classic by the Economist Magazine, *The Bottom Billion – Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done about It*. The author is Paul Colier and he was the Director of Research at the World Bank up until recently and is currently from Oxford University, Director of African Economies, Centre for the Studies of African Economies.

When I read this book, having been recently presented

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with it, a lot of what he is talking about, and there are three short passages I wish to quote; when he is talking about the African countries; it applies to Guyana here.

Why is bad governance so persistent in some environments?

I want to make the submission that Guyana is such an environment of bad governance. I will give the examples of ministerial conduct just now. But let us just take the paragraph:

One evident reason is that, not everybody loses from bad governance. The leaders of many of the poorest countries of the world are themselves among the global superrich. They like things the way they are, and so, it pays to keep their citizens uneducated and ill-informed. [Applause]

It pays to keep their citizens uneducated and ill-informed. So they are not going to put this to the people, the report and findings of the ICA; no, they will keep them ignorant.

Many of the politicians and senior public officials are villains [Laughter] but persistence is not due to self-interest. Among the politicians and officials, many are people of integrity.

So you do have people of integrity... but what you have:

Few citizens get the training needed and

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those who do not get it leave. All too often, the brave reformers are overwhelmed by the forces that love the status quo. [Laughter] Nobody likes being coerced to be cohorts, least of all the powerful local elites. They are hypersensitive about sovereignty and so they do not want scrutiny from overseas, because they see that as threatening their gravy-trains.

[Interruption: ‘Gravy-train?’ “Their gravy-train ... Is Guyana they are talking about”] It is Guyana they are talking about. They do not want the DEA to come to Guyana to have an office here and to catch narcotics criminals ... No, go back to America. They do not want experts to come here to do the things that will get us way forward ... *No, you are breaching our sovereignty.* But is not sovereignty that is top talk; the real motive is boiling underneath is that you are threatening their gravy-trains. *[Applause]* That is what they do not like and that is what we have here. So this corruption that I am talking about is all over the place.

My good friend, Mervyn Williams, in his presentation in rebuttal to somebody over there, was indicating, the instances of where corruption is found in the Auditor General’s Report. I just picked up the other day, as a result of what Mervyn Williams said, and he quoted a lot of the items, 1418 and 1419-1444 and so on. I have Mervyn Williams’ support here. But you pick up the

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Parliament Public Accounts Committee Report, 2002-2003, and as soon as you open the thing, *instances of overpayments to contractors*. Look, I just open the book [Laughter]

Instances of overpayments to contractors; Defective, poor quality and incomplete work ...

And then you turn another page, you get:

Guyana Defense Force, \$11 million not accounted for in an un-reconciled account.

You turn; anywhere you go in this big book, you can find it.

Region 2, the storekeeping and stores accounting continues to be in disarray.

You turn back to the Front Page; you will see something that is almost unbearable that:

The PAC has been advising that certain decisions be taken with Accounting Officers, and they have not been taken.

Ask Volda Lawrence. And then, you talk about:

The abuse of the Contingency Fund ...

That Mr Murray has talked about.

All of that we have and much more, Mr Speaker, and this Government would just want to be in that state of

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perennial denial – *no, we do not have corruption; you all are not bringing the evidence*; and the evidence is in the Auditor General's Report and the Report of the Public Accounts Committee. *[Applause]* The evidence of contracts and all of that, and the brides for contracts in the ICA Report, 21 June 2007 - World Bank Document, and so, we have it. We have it to the extent, Mr Speaker, whereby, it glares us in the eyes so clearly that it is probably blinding. That is why the Administration does not see it *[Laughter]* it blinds them.

I want to talk about what Mr Collier ... by the way, to a large extent, the systems of the World Bank, as the book ... in the section of the book that talks about the author: It says *he, in a sense, designed all these things like the ICA Assessment* that Guyana is now having surveys down on; he probably did the designs of them, as Director of Research in the World Bank. This is what he talks about corruption; and this is what makes me feel, you know, he is not only writing about Burundi, Cape Town and other African countries; but Guyana.

Corruption has its epicenters...

And this is Page 137,

I start by focusing on our Banks where much of the lout is deposited. Among the companies that pay the brides, two sectors seem to stand out, resource extraction and contraction. [Applause]

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It is a rule of ... he is saying, that: When governments like to give out contracts, there are small piece and big piece passing by. *[Laughter]*

Corruption in the construction sector...

This is Page 138, now,

... has been a dirty secret. Construction has all the ingredients conducive to corruption. Each project is a one-time-only thing and so cannot be readily priced. There are so many uncertainties in execution that it is not possible to draw up what economist refers to as a complete contract. As a result, it is easy to evade the discipline that would otherwise be espoused by competitive tendering. A crooked construction company colludes with the public officials, to win a contract with an artificially low bid.

But then, what do they do?

They readjust the contract price, in the middle of the contract.

And that has been happening here in Guyana. *[Applause]* Almost all of the contracts, whenever they have been tendered, go back someday for readjustments, and another \$24 million or \$40 million ... *[Interruption]*

There are now credible studies...

Mr Colier is saying,

... for some countries to estimate how much corruption in the construction sector is raising the cost of infrastructure, and thereby, reducing growth, and these effects are large.

And then, he refers us to the Global Corruption ... Transparency International. That is what he does. He as the Director of the World Bank Research Unit, the highest director in that research unit, he is saying that:

The countries now, all the countries under the World Bank ... there are credible studies for which there is tremendous corruption in construction.

Why is corruption in the construction sector particularly important now?

And he goes on to say because:

Largely, the World Bank, the IMF and the IDB, are granting large loans... for infrastructural work in the bottom billion, the poorer countries.

Guyana, by the way, is in *the bottom million*.
[Interruption: 'Go on to the Index Report']

I want you to understand this; big corruption is likely to undermine the

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political process, enabling the strategy of patronage to triumph over honest politics.

That happens here, I have seen it happening here. *It triumphs over honest politics.*

Patronage - \$2500 go and dig that drain, elections time, they do it all the time – this Government. [Applause] And so, what he is saying ... and by the way, that is exactly what the ICA's Recommendation is:

That for infrastructure to make sense is only if it is matched by a radical strategy for enforcement of the Anti-corruption Laws and Regulations in the construction sector.

When I read these things I forgot that it was Africa. It came straight back home; this stuff happens here largely and that is why, quite frankly, we are having the problems that we are having. [Laughter]

So reforming Guyana would not come because of those of us who feel that if it comes it will affect probably our gravy-trains.

The vested interest in the status quo will use all their powers, all their resources, all the ingenuity, and on the other extreme all their bullyism, to ensure that there is a redirection to new growth.

And of course I am quoting him, another person I am quoting here that says:

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They lie in ambush to change ...

The other person is, I think ... is it Private Sector Commission? I think this might have been quoted by a Member of the Private Sector Commission.

They are going to lay in ambush for you, whenever you start being brave enough to talk about these things. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, I want to indicate that this battle we must confront. This battle ... we have got to fight this battle of not feeling that all is right. We have to understand, that we have to rid this country of bad governance. We have to understand, that we have to rid this country of corruption. We have to understand that is what is going to bring back this patriotic zest; that is going to bring back that energy to engage in positive activities.

Our young people ... It was such an amazing thing to hear Irfaan make his presentation ... What did he say? I made a note somewhere. He said... Oh yes! *[Laughter]*

The skilled people that are going away are a reflection of our tremendous educational capacity to produce more of them. [Laughter and Applause]

You were not here, Mr Speaker, but that was the argument of that young man. All the *skilled people* ... it is a *good reflection* on this Government, because it shows its *tremendous educational capacity*. When you start

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getting from the sublime to the ludicrous like that, we will have nowhere to go. *[Laughter]* We will have nowhere to go. That is what his argument was. He was trying to rebut somebody making the point of our *skilled and educated crop every year leaving the country ...* and that was his argument! ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you please give the Honourable Member 15 minutes to complete his presentation.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: Thank you very much ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Just a moment. Is there a seconder, please?

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: I rise to second it, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the question is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude.

Honourable Member ...

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: This has to do ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Mr Ramjattan, I have not concluded the formality of presenting the question for approval.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: I am so sorry, Sir.

The Speaker: Just allow me please. Honourable

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Members, the question is that the Honourable Member be given 15 minutes to conclude or to continue?

Mr Raphael G C Trotman: To conclude ...

The Speaker: ... to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member.

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I just want to quickly state this too, that apart from the reports that I have quoted, which is actually the fact, the reality, we have also a very important thing that helps with the business climate, and that has to do with the example our officials ... If our officials are continuously going to be arrogant, and authoritarian, and immoral; they are going to chase people away.

I am speaking here, now, of what brings in people. When they see that, let us say, when a judge has made his ruling, the President is not going to cut him down. Remember Justice Jainarine Singh making a ruling and then the President coming down, slamming him down? There is a law-growth nexus that we must appreciate. The Rule of Law is important. Even if the judge is wrong; you must respect that judge's decision.

We have in our midst a minister, Minister Benn, breaching a Court Order and demolishing a building, although the same judge indicated to him *do not demolish*

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it. We have contempt proceedings right now...
[*Interruption: "Shame man!"*] We are saying that this law-growth nexus is being violated and that is why people are not going to come to this country to invest. Domestic investors are going to go away too.

A big thing that is happening is Capital Flight, especially after what happened at Bartica and Lusignan. And again, when I quote Colier, because he talks about this too; what happens to the poorest countries in the world, the bottom-billion, as it were?

The lack of capital inflows is not the only problem countries suffer from but the other half is that their own capital flow flows out from these countries.

What is called: *capital flight*? And that is due to the fact that they feel coerced in their own patrimony as it were ... They feel coerced. I do not want to quote the extensive thing; but I want to say that that is what he is talking about there, at Page 92. I will share this book with Irfaan.
[*Laughter*]

So these people are not only voting with their feet, that is, migrating; they are voting with their wallets, as he says. They are taking their money out of the region. And what is driving this massive Capital Flight? I will tell you:

Bad governance, corruption and a coercive political apparatus; that is what the man is saying and that is the

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person who designed these things that we have ... But we are not going to get that.

I just want to say, apart from these conducts that we have from high officials, we also have policies being passed in this Parliament, which become law and nothing happens thereafter. As a matter of fact we see an emasculation of these bodies... *[Interruption: 'What!']* ... by the President himself when we approve in this Parliament here Bills to go to him.

I am not going to talk about the 10 Bills of the Last Parliament, which were not assented by him; I am going to talk about the Bills in relation to Private Enterprise that he assented to. Take, for example, in December 2004 a Bill was assented to, now called the *Small-Business Act*. That is why I had made the point when I started out that this Administration does not like growth; they do not like entrepreneurship; they do not like these things.

They passed a Small-Business Act; its Council, its Bureau after 4 years have only met three times and all of its arms are nonfunctioning. No budgetary allocation to ... *['You have the ire of the AFC, so please behave yourself']* *[Laughter]* There are no budgetary allocations to support these arms. Such a strategic sector as small businesses, which create the most jobs, the greatest creators of employment in Guyana, and of course, by virtue of that, poverty elevation. It took one year to have its first meeting, and then, today it is in a state of relapse.

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The Investment Act was passed in 2000 and assented to in March 2004. This Investment Act provided for a Body that was going to sort out the regime of incentives, to make it attractive to investors to come, and the consultations to realize what are the problems of businesses? And so on, what will enhance the positive investment regime for growth of local entrepreneurs and to promote the image of business.

You know what, Mr Speaker? They took two years to have their first appointive meeting ... and who they appointed? Jeff DaSilva, Balgobin, Jerry Gouveia and a set of persons who, quite frankly, are in their midst already. So you are not going to get any fresh ideas from them. *[Applause]* It is what we call *incestuous*. Incestuous – that is what it is. *[Noisy Interruption]* They had one meeting, and nothing has happened after. *[Laughter]*

The National Competitiveness Secretariat and its Council, I understand, is under the Ministry of Tourism. We have somebody now coming in, I think his name is Kevin Hogan; he flies in once every two months, have a meeting with someone ... I know her, Marlyn Boodoo ... then flies out back. *[Interruption: 'Who is Marlyn Boodoo?'* 'Marlyn Boodoo, you do not know her? She is Mr Shri Chand's wife. And they have it setup ... the President sits in the council, Labour, Regional Chambers of Commerce and some businessmen.

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What has happened? Nothing has happened with this secretariat and this council, to ensure that, that which is to promote competitiveness, that which is to educate them as to which of the products we could sell to the European Union, how we could package them, what are the rules of origin? ... No! To make our country competitive, we have a big secretariat, a big council and nothing happening.

It was only when May 2006 came that I understand some monies were given for a Presidential Summit; then they got their act together. You know, like World Cup come now, and so, they got their act together, and then they did some Summit on Competitiveness. So it had no credibility after that Summit and no effectiveness. And now, I understand some more money is coming, another \$26 million, and so they are now getting their acts together. But once the money does not come, you will find a state of comotose. They will ... that is what they are. *[Laughter]*

So Mr Speaker, I am addressing these aspects in growth largely because I want it to be known, that there are problems in our country and that is, problems without the crime situation that we have. That is over and above, what I am talking about. Businessmen are having a hard day. That is why I really cannot, although the Minister is a good friend of mine, I cannot, in all honesty, commend this budget.

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It is in my conclusion that it is still to comprehensively articulate how we are going to energize our productive capacities: How are we going to organize to meet markets that are opening up in the European Union, through the EPA and all of that, and the CARICOM? How are we going to reform the business sector, so that there can be in it an element of patriotism? So they are going to die for the businesses rather than literally ask themselves, *should we stay in Guyana, or should we go to St. Lucia, or Trinidad?*

It has failed another way too, to address the taxation issues. The Private Sector circulated a Press Release, begging literally, that we need some space with the taxation of 35 and 45 percent Corporate Tax, and 33 1/3 percent Personal Tax. Nothing has been said in this budget in connection with that.

It has failed to address our energy expectation. All the time it has been said *tremendous potential Guyana has for energy*. Energy, oh yes, we are going to deal with it. Last year there was a promise *we are going to deal with it*; this year comes and we are not dealing with energy. The cost is skyrocketing – US \$100 per barrel of oil.

Just to say, finally, it fails to address largely, this question of growth, especially in our agricultural sector.

We in the Alliance for Change, feel that these are some of the underlying principles that ought to be tackled in a budget. This budget, largely, does nothing of the sort.

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And in that sense then, Mr Speaker, I must say that this is something that I, personally, and the Alliance for Change, as a political party, will not commend it. It lacks ... and has tremendous deficits.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Ms Pryia Manickchand, Minister of Human Services and Social Security

Ms Pryia D Manickchand: May it please you, Mr Speaker ...

That was a very interesting novel Mr Ramjattan spent most of his presentation reading from.

Mr Speaker, I wish to join my Honourable Colleagues, in this Honourable House, in congratulating the Honourable Minister of Finance, in presenting to us a budget that will see us staying the course of development. *[Applause]*

I congratulate the Honourable Minister, Mr Speaker, not only for the content of the budget; but for an excellent delivery of those contents. *[Applause]* It is always a pleasure listening to the Minister of Finance, Mr Speaker, and we have come to expect from him nothing but excellence and he did not disappoint us in this 2008 Budget.

Mr Speaker, in 2006, the PPP/C went to the people of Guyana in the election year and said to them *we have an*

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agenda for the development of Guyana and that agenda was laid out in our documents, the Manifesto of the People's Progressive Party Civic. That agenda contained our road map, so to speak, for development for the next five years. We intend to go with that agenda, Mr Speaker.

The people accepted that agenda, as one that would see us rising out of poverty; as one that would see us consolidating the gains we already made; and as one that would see us heading steadfastly toward development and a developed Guyana. It is that agenda, Mr Speaker that we intend to stay the course on. It is that agenda that we intend to promote and advance, that we think will cause ... we believe will cause the transformation of lives in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, 2007 marked a very successful year for this Government, and particularly because this is my sector I will, of course, focus only on the efforts in the Ministry of Human Services, its Staff and Management.

The year 2007 was capped, Mr Speaker, by Guyana exhibiting on the world stage, its potential and promise in having three very young Guyanese children represent us at the UN forum, *[Applause]* to discuss, Mr Speaker, *The Outcome of a World Sick with Children* – a document that was adopted by UN Member States, some years ago. We were represented by Vira Jackson, who is a primary school student from St. Margaret's; Woritania Boodoo, then twelve years old; Donavan Sullivan, a resident and

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son of Beirut, East Coast Demerara, who was the first student of that area to obtain the grade, to make it to President's Collage, which he presently attends. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, we were so very proudly represented at that forum. Vira Jackson was chosen to read a statement on behalf the other children, as it related to climate change, and Waritania Boodoo co-chaired a session with her Trinidadian counterpart. *[Applause]* We could not say how proud as the country, how proud as a person I was, to watch our children excel in this way. And that, Mr Speaker, is the true promise of Guyana. That is Guyana's potential. That is what we must work toward and ensure continuance. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, we have also seen remarkable improvements in our Pension System. In Guyana, every person over 65 years old, who has been resident in Guyana two years prior to application, is entitled to old-age pension.

In 2008, Mr Speaker, the Government of Guyana is going to spend in excess of \$2.5 billion on Old-Age Pension. These are for our senior citizens and this will see an increase of over \$1.3 billion from last year. The amount that each senior citizen is going to get this year, Mr Speaker, is \$6,000. *[Interruption: 'Wow!!']* Mr Speaker, irrespective of the gasping we have heard, and we understand that, senior citizens are very appreciate of this and they expressed that publicly, and otherwise.

[Applause]

We recognize, Mr Speaker, that there were some issues, with regard to pensioners receiving their pensions on time, and we have ironed out most of those, so that now, pensioners receive their pension books in the previous year. So in 2007, late 2007 pensioners began to receive their pension books for 2008, and by 24 January 2008 we had distributed in excess of 90 percent of the pension books.

Mr Speaker, we recognize that, this had become a problem and we now move to a position where, if we have applications for pension, those do not last longer, from the date of application to the date of receipt of pension books, or the day when it is ready to be distributed ... no longer than six weeks, and this applies all through. This is a policy put in place by the Ministry of Human Services and it is something that we police, to ensure it happens. This is not something that takes longer than six weeks.

The same thing happens for mistakes. We heard from the Honourable Member of the Opposition that *correction on pension books were taking too long*. We have to correct them, if there is a name incorrectly spelt on the person's pension book. For example, if Jaswantie is spelt with an *ie* and on her ID card, or whatever she is using as identification, it is spelt with an *ee*, she will not be able to encash that book at the post office, and that is a security

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measure. Those corrections ought not to take, again, longer than six weeks.

Mr Speaker, that is why I was very surprised when I heard the Honourable Member Ms Wade at a meeting in February, in fact the first week in February, in the hearing of staff members of the Ministry ... I had expressed to my staff that, *I hope they had distributed as close to 100 percent as was possible, and if they had not done that, then they should start doing it. I did not want excuses.* And it was Ms Wade, the Honorable Member of this House, not someone in Ms Wade's hearing, but Ms Wade who said that, *'we did not have those problems in Region 5. The books had been distributed.*

Having said that, if Ms Wade, or any other Member of this Honourable House or from any region, any citizen of Guyana, whether pensioner or not, finds that the system I just described, and we have described publicly, is not working, or has not been put in place in your respective region please let us know. We would be happy to correct that, because there is only ... We have put the policy in place and we have provided the resources to get that done, but we need to ensure that it is actually being done.

We also assisted significantly, Mr Speaker, with Public Assistance. Last year, in excess of 16,000 persons benefited from this relief given by the Government. Two-thirds of that amount, last year, was children. This year, the Budget caters for an increase by 83 percent in the

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amounts offered by Public Assistance. The Public Assistance sum is at its highest yet at \$4,500, and the budget proposes to allocate \$810 million, towards persons who will receive Public Assistance this year.

Mr Speaker, between Pension and Public Assistance, we are going to give Direct Financial Assistance to, in excess of 6 percent of our population. In excess of 6 percent of our population is going to get Direct Financial Contribution ... *[Applause]* That, Mrs Riehl, does not amount to *not caring for the population*. That indicates clearly, that we have not forgotten our people. These are the people that we are giving assistance to and these are the people, who are the most vulnerable in our midst. And I do not care which side of the House you are on, you have got to applaud the Government for that. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, Public Assistance is determined according to the Laws of Guyana, to be more specific, the Poor Law Relief Act. The persons who determine whether someone is eligible for Public Assistance or not, is not the Ministry of Human Services, it is not the Ministry of Finance. Accept for the broad policy of the Government that *our vulnerable must be assisted*; we have nothing to do with who is entitled to public assistance.

There is established under that Act several Local Boards of Guardians; those boards are made up of local persons in the community. For example, Ms Wade is on the Local Board of Guardians in Region 5. Because this is not

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an automatic grant, but it needs testing; every six-month books are distributed. That is why, Ms Wade, we cannot make the same arrangements for the distribution of Public Assistance Books that we make for Pension Books. We rely on the Local Boards to tell us who qualify. When you tell us who qualify, we can distribute. And that is how Public Assistance works, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

As I said, Mr Speaker, the Local Board of Guardians is governed by the Laws of Guyana, the Poor Law Relief Act. But I would be happy to explain that to any Member of this Honourable House, or to any other Board Member, who may not have known what his/ her duty was hitherto.

Mr Speaker, in the area of child protection, the Government has seen and recorded, many successes which have seen our children, especially our orphans and vulnerable children, getting help which would restore hope to their lives.

We launched in 2007, or more specifically in March 2007, *Mission Child Protection*, which was a mission that we hoped, would have addressed comprehensively the needs of children who found themselves misplaced, or who found themselves on the streets. That programme, Mr Speaker, saw the Ministry of Human Services picking up in excess of one hundred and twenty children, forty-two of whom remain in our care. So Mr Williams, five of those children are from Region 3.

We would be the first to tell you that we would like to

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expand this programme and we have been allocated some money to do that and so we will be doing that to ensure that we can deal with more children.

Street Children is not a new phenomenon, Mr Speaker. This is something that existed a while ago. The difference is now we have free press and we have a lot of people with free time on their hands and they go and show us that, which is their right, and it is your right, to watch it too. But it is not a new phenomenon.

Look at the HANSARD of 1993, you would see Mrs Chandrapal, Honourable Member of this House, then the Minister within the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, promising the people of Guyana and promising this Honourable House that a Drop-in Centre was going to be established and that Drop-in Centre was to cater for the children, who were on the streets in 1993. So this is not something that arose last night. The difference is, we are now dealing with it and we are happily dealing with it.

Mission Child Protection is also supported by that Drop-in Centre, which is now a misnomer, because the children are now resident there and they are not just dropping in there; as well as the Mahaica Children's Home. Those homes have in excess of 30 children each.

Mr Speaker, we intend this year that we will draft a Child Protection Agency or Child Protection Services Unit that will be an umbrella body that will deal with all issues

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relating to child care and child protection. That body is going to be informed by various pieces of legislation, five of which are presently at the AG's Chambers being finalized; the drafts are being finalized. Those pieces of legislation, Mr Speaker, are:

- The Custody of Children Bill;
- The Protection of Children Bill;
- The Status of Children Bill;
- Child Care and Development Services Bill;
and
- The Adoption Bill

Those are presently with the Chambers of the Attorney General. We hope that they will be finalized very soon by his staff and laid before this National Assembly, as early as possible.

We know though, Mr Speaker, that institutionalizing children is not the best for them. We have read all the reports around the world, which suggest that, *it does more harm than good to have children in an institution*, and so we intend to reintegrate as many children as we can with their natural families.

We know, though, that some children, irrespective of the best efforts and the greatest of intentions are not going to be capable of being reintegrated simply because they do not have families who are capable of taking them, even

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with Government's financial and other support. And so, for those children, we have to establish a Foster Care Programme; and it is reported in the 2008 Budget that we intend to start that Foster Care Programme.

Mr Speaker, we do know, though, that while some children are going to be ... while institutionalizing children is not the best thing for them, some of them are going to be housed in orphanages and institutions, even if only temporarily. In 2008, we intend to finalize the Regulations and Minimum Standards for Orphanages so that we can ensure that children who are in there are in a child-friendly environment and can grow up productive and healthy.

But I want to assure this Honourable House, Mr Speaker, as well as the Guyanese nation many of whom have become nervous since Mrs Lawrence spoke, I believe it was when the Honourable Member called for *a hostel to house HIV-infected and affected children*, and I wish to assure people who got nervous after that call that we are not going to be dumping any HIV-infected and affect children in any house. It is not going to happen. It is not going to happen now. It is never going to happen in the future. That would not be in the best interests of those children, or the society of our country. That is not going to happen under my watch, Mr Speaker.

We recognize, Mr Speaker, that we cannot develop fully as a country, without allowing our women to develop to

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their full potential. We cannot develop fully as a country without treating women equally and fairly. And that is going to be another matter that is high on our agenda.

Mr Speaker we recognize that many of the pieces of legislation, that have already been passed by this Honourable House, the Domestic Violence Act and other Acts, have not been implemented as fully and as effectively as they ought to have been, by the persons who have to implement them and by the Bodies that have to enforce them. We know we need to do a lot more work in that area. We call on all Members of this Honorable House to do that. I urge the Members to pay attention to their specific groups and areas where they can assist in spreading the word, as to what we need to do.

To Government, this year, is going to embark on a National Campaign to address domestic violence. But Government's action alone is not going to be enough, and I can tell you that from now. There has to be action by every sector of society, by every person, by every church, by every institution and everybody with the commitment to do as much as we can to clinch it, **'stamp it out.'**

I want to assure, for Mrs Riehl, that although not in our agenda that I laid out before, we are presently looking, someone has been contracted to do that and I do not believe she would mind – it is public record anyway, Marcella Thompson, a young attorney who has just returned with her Masters, to look at Acts like the

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Matrimonial Clauses Act. So that, we can look at whether we want to expand grounds to look at the Marriage Person's Property Amendment Act, to look at the Deceased Person Estate Act; to see how we can use those Acts with what we have and amend them to ensure that women are fairly treated.

We intend also to draft legislation that is informed by the consultations. And I have to tell you, we have had in excess of 50 public consultations on the *Stamp It Out* document, which is a document that proposes methods to strengthen protection against sexual violence, and it proposes reforms to the law. We intend to use those consultations and the recommendations and suggestions that came to us out of those, to inform the legislation that we are presently drafting, that I am hoping to bring to this National Assembly, very soon.

It is this year also, Mr Speaker, that we will be drafting the Domestic Violence Regulations that are going to become parts of the law; that is going to support the present Domestic Violence Act of 1996.

Mr Speaker, Legal Aid Services last year, in 2007, was expanded to Regions 5 and 10, in a very limited way. Legal Aid Services ... Prior to last year was run the only Legal Aid Service that existed in the country, which was run by the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic providing services to Georgetown and its immediate environs.

This year, the Government has supported Legal Aid and

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has offered a subvention. This year we will see Legal Aid services expanding to Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. Those are Regions that are in need of Legal Aid, Mr Speaker, and those are regions that are going to get Legal Aid.

And I heard Mrs Riehl's call for what can be referred to as *Criminal Legal Aid or Legal Aid in Criminal Matters*. It really only reiterates a call made in 1979, which is recorded in the Guyana Law Journal and written by one Dr D J Daude and Mr M H Parris who, I am told by Minister Nadir, is Mr Malcolm Parris. At Page 11, the name of that article is:

Representation in criminal cases in the Courts of Guyana, the need for Legal Aid...

So since then, 1979, there was a call for Legal Aid.

Mr Speaker, from 1993, the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic, which is a NGO, started up and started providing that service, and it was really the only formal Body that provided Legal Aid. They were funded from 1993 to 2007 by international funders, first the USAID, and then, I believe, the USAID-GDCCR. In 2007, they came to the Government, long after the Budget was read and passed and appropriations made, and they said: *We are going to shut. We have to shut our doors, because we have exhausted our funding and having exhausted our funding, and having checked for the last ten years to get funding; we know we are not going to get more money. So we are going to close, except of course, if Government wants to*

support this.

And the Government came, sometime late last year, with a Supplemental Paper, that used from the Contingencies Fund, Mr Ramjattan, \$32 million.

And this is the example that I am going to use, because I heard talks of it in this House and it caused me some worry. I know Mrs Backer said I should stick to domestic violence; I would be the first to tell you that I am not an economics czar and I have little interest in that area. But this caused me some worry, because I know it is being said I have seen headlines about it and persons got up and read prepared presentation ... that's not the Government and ... because it is a Supplemental Paper.

Mr Speaker, the Consolidated Fund houses or holds most of largely government income.

Out of Article 220 of the Constitution there is established, a Contingencies Fund. That Contingencies Fund, Mr Speaker, can be used by the government and really ought to be used by the government, if it is the government that is going to meet the needs of the people. You see, when I heard these things, I started to worry for two reasons:

- How could we function, if we could not go back to the Minister of Finance whenever we ran out or needed more money; and
- If the law was not in place; then we should seek to put it in place.

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So I looked at it, and the law is in place. This is what ... like I said the Contingency Fund is created by the highest law of our land, the Constitution, in Article 220. The Fiscal Management and Accountability Act provides for monies from the Contingencies Fund to be used, and this is what it says:

The Minister, when satisfied that an urgent...

And I am reading from Section 41 (3), Mr Speaker,

The Minister when satisfied that an urgent, unavoidable and unforeseen need for expenditure has arisen, may approve a Contingencies Fund Advance, as an Expenditure, out of the Consolidated Fund.

And these are the circumstances, under which he must do that:

- (a.) *For which no moneys have been appropriated, or for which the sum appropriated is insufficient;*
- (b.) *For which moneys cannot be reallocated, as provided for under this Act; or*
- (c.) *Which cannot be deferred without injury to the public interest*

Legal Aid came to us after the Budget was read in 2007, so it was *unforeseen and unavoidable* this expense that arose. In 2007 we gave them, through a subvention,

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\$300,000, so the money was *insufficient*. If we did not continue Legal Aid in 2007, if we had closed it until today's Budget; then what we would have had is a six-month closure of the clinic, a clinic that, up to June last year, had served 964 people. [*Applause*] How could we have closed them? What would we have told them? That is what a responsible government is supposed to do.

I could not work in an environment, where somebody tells me that I have to close a 13 year old clinic for six months, because I have to wait on a budget ... to come here and get money for it. [*Interruption*] In this same way it is the same thing with several other issues that came out of my Ministry, and that is why I am responding to it.

Water Rates Waiver for Pensioners

The other thing that came out of the Ministry was Water Rates for Pensioners. Our old people are being assisted by the Government. The Government is paying their Water Rates. Last year, in November, GWI came and said:

We are not going to be able to carry this expense anymore, unless you pay us. Here is your bill.

This is a new intervention, so we did not have all the paper work in place to know exactly what the bill was likely to be. We went to the Minister of Finance and we said *we want our pensioners to continue getting their water, these are old people.* [*Applause*] So we brought to

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this house the Supplemental Paper and that is what you got.

This year, you see in the Budget, an allocation of \$120 million, somewhere around there, for water waiver for pensioners. And that is because this year we sorted out largely the paper work, we can estimate. We can estimate this year, what the bill is going to be. So the pensioners and people who got served by Legal Aid, may not have gotten served, if we had taken that approach. *[Applause]*

National Register of Disabled Persons

Mr Speaker, we should not forget also our disabled people. In 2008, we embarked on a programme to register our disabled persons, because we intend to create a National Register of Disabled Persons.

We have come to realize that, persons are unable to access the many benefits that the Government offers and many services that will help them in their lives, simply because of their disability. What I mean by that, Mr Speaker, is that persons who cannot for example, hear or speak, and sometimes flowing from that read and write, may not be able to access something like Public Assistance.

If we have a register of disabled persons, well then, we will be able to take those services to them and would be able to better plan for them. So in collaboration with the National Commission on Disability, we have embarked

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on a campaign to register disabled persons, so that we can take services to them.

It is this year too, Mr Speaker that we intend to set aside money to create, the Single Parent Assistance Fund. We heard much have been said about this. We have single parents who are largely women, although it is not only women, who will be benefiting from this fund.

And we have heard Honourable Member, Mrs Lawrence, say that *we should not talk about this and we should not hold consultations meeting about it*. Well I believe, Mr Speaker, it is our duty... not I believe, it is our duty, our Constitutional duty to engage in inclusive governance, and that sometimes means, talking to the people that are going to benefit from this fund. And so, we are going to talk to those people, even at power lunches, to find out what it is they want and what it is that will serve them.

You cannot call for women to be helped sometimes in inclusive governance, and then, you come here and stand up and say, *give it to anybody who comes to you*. That is not how we deal with public funds and largess. So, we are going to be consulting, to determine how it is we can best help persons who find themselves in need of help, because of their status of, 'single parents.'

We should continue, Mr Speaker, to run, manage and operate facilities for persons who are homeless. The Palms have been allocated, this year, a sum in excess of \$100 million. The Palms is a facility or geriatric

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institution, which is free. At any given time it houses in excess of 230, old and infirmed persons. This is going to continue with Government's support through this Budget. We are going to stay that course and continued to transform those lives, who will be residents of the Palms.

We will also continue with the shelters for the homeless, which once used to be known as *the Night Shelter*; which houses, on any given night, in excess of 80 persons. Those would have been; prior to that shelter being opened, 80 persons who would have been without shelter, had it not been for the care of this Government.

So again, we have not forgotten our most important resource. We have not forgotten our people and this is how we give back to the people of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, Mrs Laurence had called for *a Family Code, a family quality* and she spent most of her presentation calling for *family policy*. Well, in April 2007, a family code was launched. If you call it *code* or you call it *policy*; it is the same thing. And I am happy to, not here, but I am happy to leave with her, a copy of that police, which was much advertised and of which she ought to have known.

The third thing the Honourable Member got wrong, the other thing she calls for was *a Commission on Women*; or me to establish that commission. That is a Parliamentary Commission that the PNCR-1G sits on. So I was not sure how Mrs Laurence was calling for me, as a Minister, to

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establish that commission. Perhaps, she should call on her members who sit on that commission, who sit on the Appointment Committee, to be more open to discussions and then we will get the commission appointed. *[Applause]*

I have indicated, and am on record as indicating, very early on in that commission that *I wanted and had an interest in seeing two commissions established, the Women's Commission and the Children's Commission.* We still cannot get around to that. Ms Gail Teixeira, Honourable Member of this House, is going to be able to better tell the Members of this House, why we could not get that done in the Eighth Parliament.

Mr Speaker, we will continue our Psycho-Social Interventions, which is quiet work towards restoring life. Those interventions, we saw ... last year, were hard working officers of the Ministry making interventions at places like Linden. And the victims of the Linden crash that we heard about earlier, and we all know about, where ten Guyanese lives were lost. Our staff went there and made the kind of interventions that were needed.

They also worked tirelessly with the victims of the Laing Avenue fire, the Lusignan massacre, and as of tomorrow, we begin work with the Bartica massacre... victims of the Bartica massacre. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, this is quite work not, perhaps, worthy of press attention. Quite work that... *[Interruption]* Yes, I

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went to Linden. I was actually there myself and so was my Permanent Secretary, and if persons from Linden do not know that, then perhaps, they are not paying attention. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, we intend to continue this quite work that will see us restoring lives, because we believe that is what we are there for, we believe that it is part of our mandate.

We intend to continue assistance through the Difficult Circumstances Unit, which assists persons who find themselves in difficult circumstances, as well as through our School Uniform Distribution Programme. In 2007, the Government of Guyana spent in excess of \$30 million on uniform for children. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, while we accept and believe that this is our duty; we also know that, if we were not a caring government that was responsive to the needs of the people, we may not have done this; because we did not see this done prior to two or three years ago. *[Applause] [Interruption – You are in government]*

Mr Speaker, I wish to assure Mrs Riehl that the Family Court of which she spoke, is in the National Agenda that I spoke of; but it may not be as simple a matter as establishing a Family Court.

I believe there are still some discussions among the Bar and the other persons, who are going to administer that court, as to what jurisdiction the court will have. Is it going to be a court with only High Court jurisdiction? Is

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it going to be a court that can house matters for the Magistracy? I believe that is the quarrel.

I do know, however, that our social partners and our friends have been very active in attempting to get funding for us, to help in establishing this court. We believe that it is something that we are going to see shortly.

Regarding NIS, Mr Speaker, which is the National Insurance Scheme, a report is posted online that is... so we do not need to go by anybody for the report. It is posted online and can be accessed by any of us [*Laughter*] and by all. [*Interruption – That sound like desperation in getting the information out*] But I can just imagine...

Mr Speaker, the National Insurance Scheme was established in excess of 30 years ago, in 1959, and since its foundation, it has been providing much-needed support and appreciate the social benefits to its members. But with the effluxion of time, its level of delivery and its impact on society, has somewhat declined. The Government understood this and saw that the time had come for the review and reform of the scheme.

The Government put together a committee, Mr Speaker, which comprised of Members of the Government of Guyana, Consultative Association of Guyanese Industries Ltd., Ministry of Finance, the Guyana Trade Union Congress, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana, the University of Guyana, the Private Sector

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Commission of Guyana, Guyana Consumers Association, Guyana Pensioners Association, the Bank of Guyana and the Political Opposition. Mr Speaker, that main committee divided itself into four subcommittees, to examine the areas that I am about to mention:

- The Investment, Financial Management and Pension Subcommittee, which was chaired by Mr Christopher Ram and Mr Rajendra Rampersaud.
- The Benefits and General Subcommittee, which was chaired by Mr Seepaul Narine;
- The Legislative Or Compliance Subcommittee, which was chaired by Mr Lloyd Joseph; and
- The ITT Organization - Human Resources and Communication Subcommittee which was chaired by Mr Earl John.

Mr Speaker, those Committees or that committee, had as its terms of reference, the Committee was required to:

- (1) Examine all aspects of the National Insurance Scheme, including policy formulation, statutory requirements, organizational structure, operational procedures and processes, and the overall financial viability of the scheme; and
- (2) Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the

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efficacy of the organization's delivery capacity and make recommendations for the general and specific improvement in quality, and timeliness of its services and products.

In November 2007, the Committee produced its Final Report of the National Insurance Reform Committee and made recommendations, some of which I will outline.

- (i.) The Committee examined how to remove restrictions, other than those related to contributions on accessing benefits, once earned through stipulated number of contributions;
- (ii.) Consideration of the payments of unemployment or any other benefit;

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The Committee also examined and considered:

- (a.) More stringent legislation to be applied to employers and self-employed persons, who default in their contributions to the Scheme and in other areas of compliance.
- (b.) Legislation mandating employers and NIS, to furnish employees or contributors regularly, with information concerning their deductions to the scheme.
- (c.) Legislation allowing employee contributors, individually and collectively, to take actions to recover misappropriated contributions from defaulting employers.

Another area that the Committee looked at was:

- (i) A comprehensive review of, and recommendations for the general restructuring of the National Insurance Scheme.

This is not exhaustive of what the Committee looked at, Mr. Speaker; but these are some of the things they looked at.

This report, as I said, is available online or can be had, I assume, from the National Insurance Scheme, or from .gina.gov.gy, or from my office. It is a public report. It is

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presently engaging the attention of Cabinet, where these recommendations that were examined and considered, are going to be looked at, with a view to making the scheme, as the Terms of Reference said, more financially viable and efficacious.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to indicate, as the Regional Geographical Representative from Region 5, that the Regional Authorities performed creditably well last year. The Region is a large agricultural region, as we heard from the Honourable Member, Mr. Seeraj, some of us for the first time, that *the region is actually the largest cattle rearing, cattle producing region in the country ... [Interruption] ...* and I am particularly pleased about that. I am very proud about that. I feel to myself that I am contributing to that largest cattle rearing community.

Mr. Speaker, the Region, because of the community, the agricultural community and the effects that climate change has clearly visited on our country, and specifically, on that Region which has many riverain communities and families, it has not been without challenges. But we have seen over the years, responses by this Government, and more than responsive, proactive behaviour by the Minister of Finance, by the Minister of Agriculture, both the present one and the slain Minister Satyadeo Shaw, we have seen them going into the region and addressing the needs of farmers.

This Region stretches from Mahaica to Rosignol and

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includes regions villages such as Maraikobai and the Mahaica- Mahaicony-Abary Rivers and the persons who live along those rivers. This kind of proactive behavior on the part of the Government, as it relates to addressing the issues of the residents of Region 5, is going to continue.

Region 5 Budgetary Allocation

This year Region 5 has much to look forward to in the areas of education, health, drainage and irrigation, bridges and land development. Mr. Speaker, \$40.3 million is going to be spent towards the upgrading and rehabilitation of roads throughout the region this year, and \$12 million will see the upgrading of streets in the region.

In health, a doctor's quarters will be constructed at Mahaicony and that is perhaps to go hand-in-hand with the new Diagnostic Center that is being built there. Phase 2 of the rehabilitation work to the Fort Wellington Hospital and the upgrading of the Rosignal Health Centre to house the poly-clinic will also be done. This is going to cost \$28 million. It is a benefit that the people of Region 5 will see, experience and enjoy.

The Maraikobai Nursing School is also expected to be extended and the No.8 Secondary School is going to be constructed right at the Blairmount branch road. This is expected to cost \$19 million and is also planned for this year.

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And so, Mr. Speaker, Region 5 is not only going to see the general services like pension, and public assistance, uniform distribution and access to education and health care but also these specific things that will make the residents of Region 5 more comfortable.

Vulnerable Communities

We intend to continue to work too this year, Mr. Speaker, with vulnerable communities. We have begun to work with Tiger Bay, a community that we deem to be vulnerable.

We noticed that many of the parents in Tiger Bay are in fact single parents, as a result of which, when they are working, Mr. Speaker, their children are on the streets or could find themselves in trouble. We have been working with those children. In 2007, the Ministry hosted a camp, a summer camp or August-vacation camp, for six weeks, which was an all-day camp and we provided meals, supervision and educational facilities, so that these children did not have to be on the streets.

We intend to continue working with this community. We have already had some parenting workshops with that community and we intend to continue those so that the children of Tiger Bay or the people of Tiger Bay can again be assisted.

We intend to continue to working with Beirut, and on behalf of the people of Beirut, I thank the Hon Prime

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Minister and GPL, and the Hon Minister of Housing and Water and the Guyana Water Authority, because Beirut, as of last week, got lights and water. *[Applause]* That is a community we intend to continue to work with. We visit the people there frequently, we meet the needs of the people there and we intend to continue doing that.

There are still things, Mr. Speaker, that need to be done on the part of the Government, from the Ministry of Human Services, and we will be the first to say that. Systems have to be perfected and areas strengthened and we are prepared to do that. We are committing every day to working to ensure those things happen. Many of these things cannot be done by government alone.

All of the things I spoke of, Mr. Speaker:

- A more efficient Pension Service, Assistance to vulnerable groups through Public Assistance and Uniform Distribution and Difficult Circumstances Unit;
- The drafting of Sexual Violence Legislation;
- Putting the Children's Bill before this Honourable House;
- Drafting Domestic Violence Regulation;
- Creating a National Register of Disabled Persons;

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- Creating a Child Protection Services Unit
- Creating and establishing a Foster Care Programme and
- Expanding Legal Aid Services

These are all things that we spoke about in our 2006 Manifesto. It is that agenda that we are pursuing. It is that agenda that the people have accepted [*Applause*] and an agenda that would take us as a country forward. These are all things spoken about in the 2008 Budget. It allows us to stay the developmental course that we have started, and it allows us to continue to champion and advance the transformation agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate the call I made last year, and I invite Members of the Opposition to join us. [*Interruption: 'In What?' "Join us in our struggles to make Guyana a better place"*] [*Applause*] scuffing at what we do will not take away from the fact that we are on the move. We are on the road to development and we will continue to develop. So you can come on board with us; if you do not, then we will do it alone. But we would love to have you onboard. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Ms Amna Ally ...

Ms Amna Ally: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, we have before us Budget 2008 under the

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theme *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda*. [Applause] Permit me to join with others in congratulating the Hon Minister of Finance on this his second presentation in this Honourable House. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker indeed, there is a transformation of agenda, because what our beautiful Guyana used to be, is no longer so. [Laughter] Ours was a country where peace prevailed, we had reached the stage where people knew how to live with each other, and Guyana, on the brink of 1992, was poised for a grandiose economic development. [Applause] At minimum, Mr. Speaker, there was respect for people, respect for authority and we felt secure in our homes.

But what do we find in these last few years? Uncontrollable killings, the feeling of insecurity, the disrespect from citizens outpouring their anger, by verbally and physically abusing our Ministers of Government [Applause] and the inability of the Government to execute a plan to safeguard the citizens of this country. I trust that Government can really have a Transformation Agenda so that once again Guyana can be a safe place where we all can look forward to live in. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker, the Budget speaks to *an investment of \$19 billion in the Education Sector*. This is commendable and it gives birth once again to the Promised Land.

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[Applause] But let us now examine the various areas of investment in the people, for this sector.

I wish to begin with literacy and numeracy. *[Noisy Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, in the 2007 Budget Debate, the Honourable Minister of Education in his presentation said, and I quote:

The Government will be working to ensure that there is 100 percent literacy in Guyana [Applause] and so we intend to do.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure it would be appropriate to ask the Hon Minister to tell this Assembly, this third month of the year 2008, what percentage thus far has been achieved and what mechanism was used for this assessment and/or conclusion. *[Applause]* You see, Mr. Speaker, the Hon Minister also said in his 2007 Budget Presentation that:

\$850 million will be spent under the BEAMS Project and that this project is geared toward ensuring that the 100 percent literacy is achieved. [Laughter]

This is why it is necessary, for this Hon Minister to tell this National Assembly what we achieved as against what we spent. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, I am an educator and I must admit that the BEAMS Programme is a good one. *[Laughter]* But conceptualizing is one thing; executing is another. *[Applause]* Mr. Speaker, the execution of the BEAMS

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Programme, in its present state is unacceptable. Please permit me to give some details.

- The programme begins, equipment is distributed to the schools, but nobody cares whether or not they are functional;
- There is no maintenance of equipment;

So if a radio goes bad, the programme stops, because there is no programme to maintain or replace it.

- The organization and utilization of master and cluster advisors and trainers have fallen to pieces.

Each of these trainers has to service approximately twenty schools. How effective can this be? But more than that, these trainers have not been paid since November 2007. Where are the millions going for these trainers? Where is your plan? Mr. Speaker, money is voted in this project for the trainers; but the unit uses teachers, taking them away from their classrooms, during instructional hours. So here you suffer some, pretending to help others. *[Applause]*

In addition, Mr. Speaker, at the commencement of the project assessment officers were employed. The *modus operandi* was agreed on. Now, this part of the programme is *gone with the wind*. *[Laughter]*

I know, Mr. Speaker that the Minister would want to point us to the Human Development Index...

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[*Interruption: 'That is right'*] But it makes good sense for him to use a School-Based Assessment. You must know what the practical situation is, existing in the schools. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker, the success of the BEAMS Project can only be achieved, if the plan is fully executed, hence, a steppingstone to achieving the objective of 100 percent of literacy. [*Applause*] I wish to urge the Government, to work the plan: identify the shortfalls and then, make the modifications. There is too much hopping around on this programme. Everyday there are changes ... [*Laughter*] thus, there can be no proper assessment.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister stated, at Page 29 that, and I quote:

An additional \$115 million for the implementation of a Nationwide Literacy Programme through a Fast Tract Initiative

...

This is a clear acknowledgement that, the Government's Education Policy is failing. The PPP/C inherited a country in which there was no need for a Nationwide Literacy Programme ... [*Interruption: 'What!'*] The story does not end there. The Minister said, on Page 30 that, and I quote:

Numeracy is also being addressed by a similar model of Cascade Training.

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I am glad the Minister recognizes the need to deal with the issue of teaching children literacy and numeracy. It is also a clear acceptance by the Government that education is not only about physical structure but also about the content of the education programme. Too often, the Government speaks about how many schools they built and how much they would have spent, without addressing the crucial objective of ensuring a literate and functioning society. *[Applause]*

Let me hasten to say that we are aware of the various dimensions of the Fast-Track Programme ... the target groups at the primary levels of the schools, youths and adults; the literacy and numeracy of BEAMS, and the involvement of the levels 4, 5 and 6 in our primary schools. Mr. Speaker, we are conscious of the huge sums that will be invested. While we have no qualms about that we need to see a detailed plan and I hope the Minister would be able to provide us with details as to how this programme will be executed to achieve the desired outcome.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, on the question of literacy I wish to say that the trend world-wide is for everyone to be literate. Hence, I wish to offer this piece of advice:

- For any Literacy Programme to be effective, you must have adequate materials, functional equipment, resource personnel, guides,

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workshops and relevant support materials.

- There is need to recruit competent staff, enhancing library access and remediation. Proper assessment can be done and concepts must be revisited, for appropriate application.
- Effective management is needed.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2007 Budget Debate the Hon Minister boasted that over one million textbooks were distributed across the Ten Administrative Regions. Sir, it is not how much and at what cost. The fact of the matter is that, there are not enough textbooks in the system, and Sir, I am speaking from a point of knowledge. So you cannot trick me. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, you can speak of establishing libraries to enhance literacy, and if you do not provide librarians and other relevant support services, it makes no sense. *[Applause]*

You cannot establish IT Labs with 2 computers, no staff, no programme or personnel, and expect success from that programme. So just from these examples, I can only conclude that talk is cheap, and this Government is good at that. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to turn my attention to the New Education Strategic Plan of 2008-2012, as referred to on

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Page 29, in the Budget Speech. Let me say from the onset, Mr. Speaker that this Government does not have a comprehensive and workable plan that one could say with surety will result in a marked improvement in the Education Sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister Dr Desrey Fox was at pains trying to outline the Education Plan. But what she failed to tell you was that she was bluffing. *[Applause]* Let me tell you why I say this; this Education Plan is incomplete. The status quo is that, as we debate this budget, this plan is incomplete, and I am sure the Minister will not deny this.

Presently, only the Introductory Chapters have been received from the international consultants, *[Interruption: 'What!']* and these include a brief review of the 2003-2007 Plan with some relevant data supplied by the Planning Unit of the Ministry of Education. It also contains some main strategic issues discussed with the Minister. Mr. Speaker, everything in this plan is in draft. *[Laughter]* the proposal for Universal Secondary Education, School Health Nutrition and HIV-AIDS ... *[Interruption]* Special Education ... *[Interruption: 'In draft']* and Fast-Track Programme, among others *[Laughter]*

We are aware that in order to complete this plan, some clear policy guidelines and commitments are needed. Come on, Mr. Minister! Where is your vision? Budget

preparation was not yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, my concern is how is it, large sums of money are voted, when the Minister and his ministry do not have, and have not yet completed, this vital plan? How is it, you have a five-year plan and you are yet to settle budgetary guidelines and commitment? Imagine, we have two Ministers in the Ministry of Education ... *[Laughter]* ...and they cannot settle policy guidelines in a timely fashion, in order to aid the completion of this five-year Strategic Plan? I would like the Minister to tell us, how is it he can cost a plan when it is incomplete?

In the field of Special Education, for example, Sir, could the Minister tell us whether there was any consideration given to addressing the issue of career paths for special education? Tell us, Mr. Minister.

On the question of Health, Nutrition and HIV-AIDS, as referred to by Minister Fox we welcome this aspect and we believe that, good health and nutrition are, not only the essential inputs but also the important outputs of a basic education. No doubt, Mr. Speaker, the Education Sector must make an input in a holistic way in response to the deadly epidemic.

I now wish to turn my attention to Technical and Vocational Education. Mr. Speaker, the PNCR-1G welcomes the recognition and importance of Technical and Vocational Skills. You would recall that in the tenure of the PNC we did not miss the opportunity to place

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emphasis on Industrial Arts Centers ... [*Applause*] ... Practical Instruction Centers, [*Applause*] and more than that, the Post Secondary Technical Institutions ... [*Applause*]... which in a large way provides requisite skills for our people, providing the establishment of business and creating jobs for many.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, there is a demand for skills training in our sister CARICOM countries and that will necessitate consolidation and expansion of technical education. Mr. Speaker, the consideration to have 10 Pilot Schools with an additional one to come in a phased way is indeed magnanimous. What is equally of concern is how pertinent are those existing centers. Is there any consideration to strengthen the existing ones? Or is there a concerted effort to defuse what was there and what you inherited?

I now turn to *Classroom Education*. Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to Page 30 of the Budget Presentation, Bullet 4.35 on *the Delivery of Education in the Classrooms*. Mr. Speaker, rhetoric and more rhetoric ... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, classrooms are starved of resources, yet you have demand for child-friendly classrooms among other things. All the schools get are instructions and directives from the Ministry. Mr. Speaker, with the \$728 million in the Budget proposal I hope that our teachers in the classrooms, can look forward to support for delivery of education. The meager grant offered cannot suffice.

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Mr. Speaker, the delivery of education lacks organization and management. Let me cite one example here, and I have to do it here because the Minister refuses to consult the Opposition for any view in education ... [Interruption: 'Say it again'] Mr. Speaker, our schools cannot do well and our teachers cannot do well when our policy framework lacks vision and cohesiveness, when it is not done in a timely fashion and when adhocism is the order of the day.

Minister Fox spoke of *Curriculum and Curriculum Guides*. Well that was like the Digicel Advertisement: *Blab, Blab, Blab*. [Laughter] These guides, Mr. Speaker, have to be used in all schools and at all levels.

The National Center for Education and Research Development (NCERD), an entity which was established under the People's National Congress, and which was introduced by our dear, departed Derrick Bernard, is the entity responsible for the production, and by extension, the distribution of these guides to schools.

This Government has been in office for 15, going to 16 years and has not produced up-to-date Curriculum Guides for the four subjects: English, Math's, Science and Social Studies. But more than that, even the old ones that were produced in the 90s are not available. I can tell you what is available at NCERD: in the Primary schools you have six levels. Let me tell you what they have: That is Basic

- Level 1 Social Studies since 1999; Literacy

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Hour, 2005, because that was the recent thing coming under BEAMS;

- Level 2, Social Studies 2005;
- Level 3, Mathematics 1991 and 1999, Social Studies 2001 and Science 2003;
- Level 4, Mathematics 1999 - a Level where continual assessment is done, the same assessment where the Minister is to decide whether or not it should continue.
- Level 5, Mathematics 1997, Science 1994, and Social Studies 2005 ... the only one that is very recent.
- Level 6, Mathematics 1999; and
- The new SSCE Syllabus, Social Studies 2005.

Mr. Speaker, how do you expect development in education, improved delivery of education and a gateway to achieve 100 percent literacy, when at the very basic level the tools for this development are absent? I want to say to the Minister, *do the basics then look for the results.* [Applause] You, Mr. Minister, must ensure the combination of getting production, distribution and utilization of Curriculum Guides at primary levels, to give effect to improved education. [Applause]

It was no lesser person than Dr Kenrick Hunt who, at a

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recent lecture to head teachers, dealing with issues in education indicated that of 20,000 pupils leaving primary schools to enter secondary schools only 8,000 write the CXC exams and about 2,000 pass those exams. It is clear, that something is definitely wrong and must be addressed. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, Government has embarked on a road where everything done, prior to 1992, was bad and must be defused in the air. Let me say this to the Government, *there are ants in your own shoes and bugs in your own beds.* *[Applause]* Again, Minister Desrey Fox alluded to organizational changes. There was ineffective monitoring of the school systems. Hence, a new team was put together and this team is called, as Minister Fox said, *MURD*. I wondered if she forgot the *er* and it was really *murder*. *[Laughter]* And this team is to do inspection.

Mr. Speaker, for 15 years, the Ministry of Education did not inspect or monitor anything done in education? I want to ask the Minister, do you know, Minister, of an Inspectorate Unit which existed in the Ministry of Education? What do you think were their functions, may I ask? But you are so bent on criticizing the past that you do not recognize your own failures and you continue to live like ostriches. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, much has been said about Critchlow Labour Collage. Minister Manzoor mindfully painted the present status quo at the Critchlow Labour Collage; but I was

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very pleased when Honourable Member, Mr. Basil Williams, set the record straight.

The establishment and the institutionalization of the Critchlow Labour Collage were not by accident, or mistake, or for political gains. The PNC, in its tenure in government and in its wisdom, and under the egis of Mr. Forbes Samson Burnham, established the Critchlow Labour Collage. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, the PNC always had a clear policy position that our education system must have a mechanism to give our youths a second chance. It is to this end that subventions were granted to the Critchlow Labour Collage. There were numerous programmes, including the Guyana National Service, that were clearly aimed at giving our young people that second chance. Many students, who did not do well at the GCE and later CXC, were able to attend the Critchlow Labour Collage, and then proceeded to the university. Many were saved and given that second chance. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the PPP/C is now depriving the youths of that second chance. Unfortunate for them, if I may say so ... *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, I have to underscore that any government worth their salt will not engage in political maneuvers and play Chinese checkers with the future and lives of our young people. So, Dr Anthony, when you speak of *giving youths a second chance* do not exempt an institutionalized institution like the Critchlow Labour

Collage.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few other areas, which I wish to touch on briefly. Mr. Speaker, the Education Sector ...
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, your time is up. Before you go on to a next subject ...

Mr. E Lance Carberry: Mr. Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member 15 minutes to conclude her presentation. *[Pause]*

Mrs. Clarissa S Riehl: Mr. Speaker, 15 minutes to conclude.

The Speaker: Yes. Proceed, Honourable Member.

Ms Amna Ally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, there are a few other areas, which I wish to touch on briefly.

Mr. Speaker, the Education Sector has always been the recipient of huge sums of funding from International Organizations. Just to name a few, we have:

- (i.) Guyana In-Service Distance Education (GIDE), funded by Britain;
- (ii.) Guyana Basic Education Programme (GBED), funded by Canada;
- (iii.) Primary Education Improvement Programme (PEIP), funded by IDB;

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- (iv.) Secondary School Reform Programme (SSRP), funded by the World Bank;
- (v.) Basic Education Access and Management Support Programme (BEAMS), funded by IDB; and
- (vi.) EFA Fast Tract Initiative (EFAFTI), funded by the World Bank.

The problem, Mr. Speaker is the sustainability of the programmes. *[Applause]* GIDE, PEIP and SSRP no longer exist. GBED's Canadian funding ended; but there is talk of the extension to take in the Secondary Academic Programme, to be done by distance. GBED needs more allocation to produce the modules for the current distance programme. Will they get it? If the current one has problems; what will happen when the funding from Canada ends?

The Government of Guyana has not sustained these projects. What a shame, Mr. Speaker. Are we to think that those programmes were not useful; hence, the Government's decision to abandon the sustainability of those programmes, wholly or partly? What then is government's contribution to education in this country?

Mr. Speaker, in recent times, the functioning of Boards of Schools has been in sharp focus. Quite a few months ago, the Hon Shaik Baksh appeared before the Social Services Committee to discuss elements of Boards of Schools.

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Despite promises and set timelines, until now, we are not in receipt of this document on the managing of School Boards.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, there is great haste to establish lots of Board schools to match, or downplay President's Collage. It would be opportune, though, if the Hon Minister can tell us, whether these Board Schools are independent, their level of independence and whether these board schools, apart from President's Collage, are given any subventions for their administration.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to call on the Government to stop the discrimination in the Education Sector. Honourable Minister Fox, in her presentation, continuously referred to *the Chief Education Officer*. But what she did not tell this Assembly is that discrimination is at its peak, and since the departure of one Mr. Ed Ceaser some year ago, until now, Mrs. Genevieve Whitehead-Nedd is only acting in that position. She has not been appointed.

Mr. Speaker, let me say unapologetically that she is qualified, she is a professional [Applause] and one with abundant experience ... [Interruption: 'All the more reasons to appoint her'] But obviously, because she does not have the right look, she cannot occupy that top position ... [Interruption: 'Shame! Shame! Shame!'] [Applause] In addition, Sir, there is no anxiety for that appointment because the Minister himself usurps the

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function of the Chief Education Officer.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, if we want development in the Education Sector, we must resolve to manage well, and not to undermine the potential for growth. We must develop innovative approaches, for the insurmountable problems in the Education Sector.

And finally, we must recognize the foundation set in education and build on it. Let not this Budget be anchored on promises only; but rather, deliver to this nation what is due to them. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, we can take the 15 minutes suspension now, please.

20:21H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

20:50H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the Members that will be speaking this evening: Dr Bheri Ramsaran, Ms Africo Selman, Ms Bibi Shadick, Ms Vanessa Kissoon, Mr. Neendkumar, Mr. Anil Nandlall, Mr. Parmanand Persaud and Mr. Albert Atkinson. Now that is eight persons.

I am asking persons, please, not to ask me when we will finish. Members come up to me regularly, as the hour gets on every 15 minutes, to ask me *when we will finish*. That is not within my hands. It is within your hands, so

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you ask yourselves the question. There are eight people to speak and I understand all are desirous of speaking and concluding this evening.

So I will call, firstly, the Minister within the Ministry of Health.

Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to join these discussions today. Moreso, to thank the eloquent Minister of Finance for a presentation well done; I also thank his Team for the hard work they have put in.

Although I was going to constrain myself strictly to the area of health and allow the Hon Minister of Health, Dr Ramsammy to explore in wider topics, I think because of one of the last presentations, I will venture a little beyond the realm of health.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Khemraj Ramjattan quoted some from a World Bank Report; then he quoted extensively, as-a-matter-of-fact, one person commented that he padded his speech extensively with readings from a book dedicated to exploring the topic of *Corruption in Africa*. Because of this, Mr. Speaker, I too decided to peruse the materials at our disposal regarding the impression of International Agencies on the status of Guyana, and all of this material I will refer to very briefly.

There will be no padding of this presentation, which I

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have taken some time to do. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I note that had Mr. Ramjattan attempted to write an article and attempted to quote so extensively from somebody's book, he might be legitimately accused of plagiarizing. *[Applause]* There must be some rules, Mr. Speaker, that in these quotations presented, there should be some limitations ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: You cannot plagiarize if quoting.

Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Oh, no, I understand ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Plagiarize is if you adopt it as your own.

Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am very choosy with my words. I said if he was writing ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: So, you are not very fair to the Honourable Member.

Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Okay. Well what I would like to point out to the press, Mr. Speaker, is that because Mr. Ramjattan preceded his lengthy padding of the speech with quotation with referrals to *the World Bank Report*; I hope that there is no mistaking the fact that that final quotation does not accurately reflect the situation in Guyana. That is the point I want to get over. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, after listening to that well padded up presentation, I looked at the PIN (Public Information Notice) by the IMF, a very public document that you can

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even get it down right here, and I am going to quote a small bit of it from the IMF Executive Board, *Concludes Article 4 – Consultations with Guyana*. This is what they said, very quickly:

Structural Reforms are broadly on track. After some initial delays progress was made in Tax Reform, Public Enterprise Restructuring, Improving Public Sector Governance, Strengthening the Financial System and Improving the Private Investment Framework [Applause]

Let me conclude, Comrades; then you can give the congratulatory knocks on the desks. I will continue quoting, and this is from PIN (Public Information Notification or Notice). I continue:

Tax Reform Measures, such as eliminating discriminatory power of the Minister of Finance in granting exemptions and annual publications of exemption, improve the efficiency, equity and transparency of the Tax System. [Applause]

[Interruption: ‘Very good man’] Note, if you were taught the tools of essay writing you would see that in this paragraph every single sentence is a principal position pointed out. *[Applause]* But let us go on, Mr. Ramjattan, and this is not padding, this is not reading from a book on Africa. We continue saying:

A new...

Further, I am quoting the said document, Mr. Speaker.

A new Procurement Law, regardless of the year...

This is where Mr. Ramjattan needs to be coached in governance and government. The IMF and the World Bank are tuff institutions to deal with and when you start a document, they fix the course for several years. You have to learn it. *[Applause]* I have dealt with such people. They come to you with much suave, but they are firm.

Let me continue quoting,

A new Procurement Law and Organic Budget Law were enacted and became operational to strengthen fiscal management and accountability.
[Applause]

Let me just finish this off quickly. It further continues:

The Financial Institutions Act and the Bank of Guyana Act were amended to bring them further inline with the best international practice.

[Interruption: 'You hear that?'] Hear that? Hear this; let me repeat some key words, finally.

Reforms are broadly on track.

I will move on colleagues, friends, Mr. Speaker, by

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quoting Dave Martin, *Guyana is back on tract.* [Interruption: 'Yes man'] [Applause] Now, let us move on a bit further. I have put the setting so the press understands that that lengthy padding was not a quotation describing the situation in Guyana... [Interruption: 'It was a novel']

Massacre at Lugisnan

Now Mr. Speaker, we noted and many other Speakers noted here that this presentation, the Budget Presentation and this debate, are happening in trying times for Guyana.

The massacres were mentioned many times. I would like to point out a certain positive development I have noted and this was reflected in some of the public pronouncements by stakeholder, from the recent Stakeholder's Meeting. Yes, efforts were made to terrorize. Some people may be surprised at this, but I am not, because I believe in the Guyanese people. They have responded in a positive manner. They have shown elements of unification.

Look at the wakes at Lusignan; I attended them regularly, practically definitely every night and there was that feeling of revulsion at what had happened. But they were understanding, interacting with their ministers and their leaders of government. Look at it, you look at their faces; people of all walks of live from Wakapau coming down to mix with people at Lusignan.

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Massacre at Bartica

Look at the reaction at Bartica, a heartening effort at giving each other solidarity. And note too, another positive development that supporters of the Government and the more positive thinkers of the country must analyze; in Bartica, there was not the outburst of misguided protest that we had witnessed before. This, my friends, tells me that Guyanese understand that we are in for the long haul. They understand whose side this Administration is on. It has been proven by our action that we are on the side of the regular citizen. This is a war between criminals, as Mr. Ben is regularly heard saying, against the good citizens. *[Applause]* And we stand firmly with the ordinary citizens, the law-abiding citizens of this country.

I would like to note the unity that evolved, and probably, it comes out of the crucibles of the Guyanese experience. Here it is we are presenting a positive budget at a time when there are efforts at creating turmoil and there were definitely efforts that would intimidate. But, as one of the stakeholders, I think it was Joslyn Dow who said in a television interview *threateningly, the Guyanese are not turning inwards, they are not crumbling; they are standing up and showing a united position.* That is one of the things I want to note. *[Applause]*

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, and I think this is very relevant to this Budget Debate. I looked at the Guyanese

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resilience ... We have had episodes in the past, when while we were under siege, while we were being attacked, while we were being mauled sometimes positive thoughts were being developed; positive programmes were being developed. This budget is yet another indication that despite the trials and tribulation, this Government is continuing to stay a good course. *[Applause]*

Strong History

Mr. Speaker, we have a strong history in this regard. Recently I was looking at the conceptualization of the University of Guyana. This is good for the media and good for the younger citizens of this country to know that at the time of the conceptualization of the University of Guyana, this country was also experiencing trying times. As a matter of fact, in the Inauguration Speech for that University, I think it was on 1 October 1963, the then Deputy Premier noted *this event is occurring at trying times for Guyana.*

But still, look at the product we have now. The university, which initially in those days was denigrated by the Opposition as being *Jagan's Night School*, has evolved and boomed. I thought I should mention this, Mr. Speaker, to say that Guyana has had a strong history of resilience, and still has, in progressive ideas and progressive moves, despite existing trials and tribulations.

I am prompted to mention this too, Mr. Speaker, because I did this bit of research while preparing to celebrate the

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60th Anniversary of Dr Jagan becoming a Member of the Legislative Council. While his Government was under siege, while there were preparations for strikes against his government, he was creating a university. This budget reminds me of our strong history. While we suffered two onslaughts against the symbol of power and against peaceful citizens, we have been able to craft a very progressive budget to consolidate what we have already achieved. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate, once again, Dr Ashni Kumar Singh for this effort. He continues in very good footsteps. What I would like to point out ... No, Mr. Speaker, I am not going back to the past, I am going back to the future ... because we could very well argue, from some of the discussions that we have had here, that had we not had an intervention, as we did over several decades, we would have been achieving more progress now.

Loss of Brain Power

Mr. Speaker, when I look at some of the criticisms, I decided to check what happens in other countries. If we were very alert, especially our Member on the other side of the aisle, we would see that even in today's publication there are, or there is, information which shows that Guyana is not alone in some of the difficulties it faces.

I noticed, for example, there was a snide approach, snide remarks about our loss of brain power. The Government

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does not deny that. This budget, as you will see as time goes on and if you peruse, the figures, the facts and the data there, it will show that we are trying to counter that by creating training opportunities.

GPL Power at Leonora Hospital

But, Mr. Speaker, the article I want to refer to and bring to the attention of the Members, or my good friend across the aisle, is from the Kaieteur News, Monday, 3rd March that is today.

Around the Caribbean and South America...

And I am certain they did not read it. From the level of preparations I am seeing, I am certain they did not make themselves aware of this. For example, Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago, I heard the Honourable Mr. Williams telling this House that *GPL had not even been able to connect the electricity to the hospital at Leonora, telling this House that the hospital was not even functional*; whereas, papers of the said day and the day before were indicating things to the contrary.

Misinterpretation and Misrepresentation

This is the level of preparation this House is being entertained with by its Members, or should I say *certain Members*. These Members are shortchanging the constituents who voted for them. *[Applause]* This is the point, they are collecting monies as representatives, and I

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hope I am not being unparliamentarily here, Mr. Speaker, please guide me; they are collecting those monies under false pretence. I will come again to the misinterpretation and misrepresentation by the Honourable Member concerning a major facility in a region, he claims to represent.

Brain Drain

Mr. Speaker, I was referring to this article BARBADOS LOSSES MAJORITY OF NURSES TO RICH NATIONS, and they ask me *what this has to do with us?* How laughable, how pathetic! *Barbados Nation* that is the newspaper:

While Barbados has been able to keep its highly trained doctors at home, it has lost the overwhelming majority of its nurses to the world's richest nations.

I would not give you the whole article. Let me read a little more of the more cogent points.

This is according to the results of a study which the organization for economic corporation (OACD) in Paris has just released.

This information is on today's news print, today's newspaper. Now it further says:

That report said Barbados retains more than half of its doctors, 53.3 percent; but

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saw the flight of almost 80 percent of its trained nurses, most of them to Latin America.

It goes on to explore the brain drain and how it affects other countries, and it cites the name of Jean Christopher, the specialist preparing this report. It says:

Guyana also suffers a severe loss, as many as 2,131 nurses or 81 percent.

Barbados suffers 80 percent losses, Mr. Ramjattan, whereas Guyana suffers 81 percent, approximately the same. Remember, Mr. Speaker, Guyana is a country now getting back on track, after years of losses. Remember the days, Mr. Speaker, when Guyanese going to Barbados, we were so impoverished we could not be entertained on the taxis. Why? They could have only taken GY \$15 out of this country, which could not even buy a *buns and swank* at that time. *[Applause]*

This now, to compare the two, *Guyana 81 percent, to be exact, 81.1 percent and Barbados 80 percent*, a richer economy like the Bajan economy. That is the point I want to bring about. I know it would be lost on my colleagues over there; but I know the public will understand what I am saying, yes, we are all in a bad position. In this year's budget, the government is taking aggressive steps to right the situation, enhancing the training facilities and maintaining the amount of nurses to be trained, for example. But that is one article, for example, I came

across while preparing for today's activity.

Justice and Security Sector

I did incidentally, while we on the very day, I think ... the very day we started the activity, I noted that, for example, Dr Ashni Kumar Singh had identified certain key areas that he would be addressing, and one of them was his promise that the government, as one of its focal points:

Government will ensure that the Justice and Security Sector continue to accelerate reform and deal with the current emerging challenges.

He also indicated that:

Institutional Reform aimed at further transforming the business environment to stimulate greater investment, job creation and sustained economic growth will be advanced.

While preparing for this debate, Mr. Speaker, I was perusing the articles in the newspaper and I came across one which did catch my attention, again in the Kaieteur news, and it said for example, this is what it was saying ... and why it caught my attention is because I have firm support for Dr Ashni Kumar Singh's commitment to improving how we do business in this country to protect the investor. And in this case, Mr. Speaker, it caught my attention, an article which says:

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New Administrator identified for Globe Trust.

At Page 3 [Interruption: 'Tell me about it. Is it new?' "No. This is something coming out of Mr. Conrade Plummer, a respected person, yes"] And what impresses me here is that it falls neatly into the commitments contained in the budget:

This Government, in 2008, will continue Institutional Reform aimed at further transforming the business environment...

And I suppose it means the banking environment and trust, and so on ...

... to stimulate greater investment, job creation and sustained economic growth

What I saw my friends in this article that the GTICL was forced to close its doors in 2001, because of liquidity problems ... The article continued to relate the woes that were experienced by something like 5,000 small depositors, as against the apparent ease with which larger borrowers were able to get off the hook. It said:

As of December, loans owed to Globe Trust totaled \$721 million of which \$650 million may be collectable.

Easy as that, and why I mentioned this, friends, is because people from New Amsterdam, for example, are having apprehensions that, probably, a similar thing might happen there with a certain entrepreneur there. Details are

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coming out with that. But here again, the reform will make a more healthy investment environment for these small people, who stand the chance of losing their lives' savings. But because this thing is before the court I am advised I should speak no more on it.

Bridges

Now, Mr. Speaker, as we peruse the newspapers of the recent times, recent vintage, looking at some of the responses to things being done by the Government I noticed that this Government is building bridges, uniting the nation, promoting social cohesion. I noticed for example, there is a loud shout, Guyana and Brazil within kissing distance! That is the Kaieteur News. Mr. Speaker, this again is an indication that the gloom and doom we heard emanating from across the aisle cannot have such a resounding appeal to the International Partners.

No country would be investing in this activity had they not been confident and certain of what Guyana has to offer. Of course, the Brazilians did this. No government, that is the lesson I am bringing, would invest in this venture if they did not see the potential of doing business with Guyana. Guyana is back on track. *[Applause]* This, Mr. Speaker, indicates further, yes, Guyana is on the move. This, Mr. Speaker, indicates that this Government is building on firm foundations. Remember that in the Budget Speech, Dr Ashni Kumar Singh underlined that *one of last year's significant achievements was the*

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hosting of the Rio Summit, the 20th Rio Summit.

Construction of Bridges

Now friends, colleagues, comrades, cricket and calypso are not strong enough to keep us fully united with CARICOM. Guyana has to play the role of big brother... [Interruption: 'What!'] [Laughter] The link between the Caribbean, CARICOM and the continent, this is continental destiny in construction. [Applause] Some years ago I wrote an article with that title *Continental Destiny*, published in the Mirror Newspaper where we explored that theme. Here it is a sister country, a fraternal country with good relations, building stronger relations – bridges into the future.

This budget, our present budget, builds on what we have been doing in regard to the construction of bridges. The bridge to Berbice, between Berbice over the river and the rest of the country is already progressing apace. Mr. Speaker, colleagues, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for having, or finding the wherewithal to continue that project and I would like to bring it to the attention of this Honourable House.

Infrastructure of the Health Sector

Mr. Speaker, we are building the bridges, but not only bridges. As Dr Ashni Kumar Singh pointed out, in the area of health, significant investment this year will be made to complete certain structure, and as he put it in his

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speech, this will go a long way towards achieving the Government's goal in a capital way, in a major way, overhauling practically in total the infrastructure of the Health Sector. Let us look at that a bit, Mr. Speaker. What did we achieved last year that we can boast about and which we are building on this year; 10 hospitals are being constructed, the Linden Hospital is one of them.

Achievements at Lethem

But before we come down to Linden, let me remind you, since I spoke about the Takutu Bridge, about the achievements at Lethem. That hospital is built new in a plot close by to the existing facility. The civil works, a new hospital is being built there, is practically completed. Procurement of the new equipment is on stream and the old equipment that we might have saved from the previous, or existing hospital, is also in store for reuse.

This is a link between the road to Brazil and Guyana to provide the facilities for the expected burden, due to increase cross-border traffic and the demands on the Health Sector. Yes, as we said, a corridor of investments stretching from Brazil to Guyana, and of course, passing through Linden.

Linden

With the upsurge in interest by foreign companies in bauxite, Chinese companies and Russian companies, the

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interest in the Bauxite Mining Town has heightened and investment is in the offering. Because of that, and because of the need for expanded services in the township, there is a significant, practically a total overhaul of that facility. Monies will be allocated, as you can see in your Schedules, for the completion of that facility. That facility is, of course, on the hob from Lethem straight into Guyana, which will be seeing more road traffic and more need for facilities. That is another gem in the collection of the Ministry of Health. It is something we should be proud about.

Region 10

What I want to point out to our comrades, friends and colleagues from Region 10, there were comments, some of them not very strong this year *that Region 10 might be suffering from some neglect*. This is continuing efforts to dismantle those comments. Region 10 will get its hospital. The monies being invested this year are coming on the back of monies already invested last year. *[Applause]*

Region 10, like the rest of Guyana, Mr. Speaker, is also on the move. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention, for those of us especially who as coastlanders do not travel around much and for the wider public, that in Mabaruma the civil works are practically completed for the new hospital there. We are suffering a bit there because of difficulties with the contractor, who has had to

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be replaced, and for those of you who know; in that eventuality there is some delay, while the necessary paperwork is done for a replacement. The civil works and the correction of civil works will be finished shortly and the equipping of the building will commence.

What I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, is that while the construction projects are going on, the Ministry has taken pains to create as little as possible disruptions. The services in Mabaruma continue, unfortunately, in temporary, cramped conditions. Because of this, the Ministry of Health will work diligently with the new contractor to swiftly complete the civil works. But services at the previous level are still being offered, the same can be said for Lethem, and this is to put to rest any apprehensions that while the buildings are being constructed, services are suffering.

This is a difficulty we usually have when you are using existing buildings, or when you have limited facilities and you are trying to expand them. The contractor will tell you that if they attempt to repair the back step, they discommode it because activities have to be done only through the front steps. Or if they are repairing the roof, temporarily a room or two will be decommissioned, because the roof has to be covered with only canvas or tarpaulins. We are experiencing that; but this Ministry, with the help of the contractors and our partners, is making every effort to make sure that services are minimally disturbed.

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Diagnostic and Treatment Centers

The expanded cooperation with Cuba has yielded us four Diagnostic and Treatment Centers. The Guyana side is responsible totally for the funding of the physical construction and of the purchasing of the equipment, and of course, the Cubans will provide us the manpower for the next five year: the doctors, the nurses, the technicians, and so on. The Guyana side will pay them a modest stipend and will provide them with accommodations and basic sustenance.

Diamond Facility

I would like to point out that the Diamond facility is already up. This is a source of pride for the Ministry of Health. This is a source of comfort for the residents on the East Bank, and I think I should spend some time telling you about this achievement.

We already expect to build further on it, add more services to it this year. It started out without, for example, HIV-AIDS counseling and testing. We have started integrating it at practically no additional cost. We already notice, for example, that because of overwhelming, positive response that we have to expand the waiting area. In the first few months of its existence that hospital has excelled. It was commissioned by the President on 12 October, and by 4 January of this year, it had already seen, diagnosed and treated 13,900 patients, and already performed 100 operations and procedures. *[Applause]*

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Those are solid achievements.

Allocation for Health

And this, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Media, this is why when you look at this year's budget and you see a relatively modest increase in the allocation for health, you will understand why we are satisfied with this. Because, the massive investments last year are now going to be fine-tuned, with smaller modest sums this year. You would note that last year we had just over \$10 billion invested in health and this year it is just over \$12 billion. That modest increase will consolidate the massive investments in 2006 and 2007.

Region 3 Diagnostic and Treatment Centre

Leonora Cottage Hospital – Mr. Speaker, the massive investments in Region 3 is represented by the new Diagnostic and Treatment Centre now being created on the premises of the famous, well-known Leonora Cottage Hospital. This facility is a success [Applause] Despite the misleading comments that my colleague across the aisle made, despite those misleading bits of information, for example that *the facility had not been commissioned and that the facility had not been powered up*, this is not so.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, a very heartening thing happened, and I think it happened, if I remembered correctly, on the 27th of this month and it was reported on the 28th of this month that is when this budget debate

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started... [*Interruption – Today is the 3rd*] Sorry, I stand corrected. On the 27th of February, at 7:25 am, Madonna gave birth to a baby and the med-wife was Jesus... [*Laughter – Praise the lord*] and this all happened at the Leonora Cottage Hospital. That is progress for you. [*Applause*]

Dr Eucus Fernandes is the Cuban Director at the Leonora, and Madonna Britton is a 28-year-old Guyanese woman, who delivered on that day, at that time, a bouncing bundle of joy at 3 kg 100g. This, Mr. Speaker, puts to rest the misinformation that the facility was not commissioned.

I would like to bring this to the attention of the wider public; we had persons standing here, from time to time, bring us information that was not necessarily the purest or the correct information. So, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that that facility is up and running. Today, as of ten o'clock, we had already seen 122 patients at that facility. That is progress [*Applause*] in the country, in the Health Sector. Region 3, like Region 10, is on the move. Now to emphasize why I mentioned this that was the first birth there.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to point out that even during construction, the Administration was very careful not to disturb the services. Services continue to be delivered there. Presently, we have a team of 22 persons resident at the facility, which was provided by the Administration, with new dormitories for the doctors,

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nurses and technicians from Cuba. The surgical team of that facility is resident at the West Demerara Hospital, which has a fairly new modern operating theater.

Yes, friends, there are very comfortable, revamped dorms for the Cuban doctors, very comfortable and they are very happy. As-a-matter-of-fact, the Cubans, many of whom have served in other countries, have indicated that *their comfort zone in Guyana is far better than anywhere else they served, including in the Caribbean.* [Applause] That is a fact, which means that we will be having a satisfactory and successful engagement with this team.

Suddie and Mahaicony

Mr. Speaker, to put it quickly in a nutshell, the similar facility at Suddie should be commissioned in a months' time, and a similar facility at Mahaicony will shortly afterwards follow.

Maintenance and Repair of Equipment

I would like you to know that the investment is secured, because the teams are equipped with a biomedical engineering component. This is planning, this is visionary planning. Usually, we have a difficulty in Guyana, because we have a paucity of skills necessary to maintain and repair expensive equipment. The Cubans will be having here, on small stipend paid by the Guyana Government, a team for the next five years to install, maintain and service these equipments. Our investment is

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secured. The Guyana side, in the meantime, has embarked on discussion to have its local personnel trained as replacement staff, so that when this team departs, there will be sustainability.

Mahaicony and Suddie Facilities

I would like to point out to you that the medical brigade, or the medical team, to staff these two facilities, that is Mahaicony and Suddie, will be in the country within a month.

Suddie

However, because we have already made significant strides at Suddie, I have already invited the Cubans to send and they have already for about a month sent part of the team, a portion of the medical team that would be naming Suddie. That comprises the surgeon, the orthopedic surgeon and support staff. This is a boom for the system in Essequibo. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, while the construction was being done, we did not withdraw services. In those cases when services had to be disrupted, we made every effort to ensure that the disruption was very minimal. Surgery, for example, was transferred to the Achar Joseph District Hospital at Charity, and what we have done, we have up-scaled that facility to accommodate surgical activities.

Charity

It would mean that when we would have fully functional,

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fully commissioned the new hospital at Suddie, we will not remove the improved facility or services at Charity. The hospital has been up-scaled; we have done a little work on the lab, and so on. Mr. Speaker, we have two doctors and a medex stationed at Charity. *[Applause]* at Charity is a small hospital at the head of a river with a strong and significant indigenous population.

This, again, put to lies to the claims made, for example, by my good colleague across the corridor, across the aisles, Mr. Fernandes, when he speaking about Region 2 he made some remarks... *[Interruption – Region 1]* Region 1, sorry. He made remarks, which would suggest that *this Administration was not favourable disposed to the indigenous population*. I want to say this; the facility at the head of the river at Charity will remain. It will be a boom for the indigenous population there.

And I want to make this further observation; the PPP/C is the largest Amerindian party in this country. *[Applause]* That would be difficult for you to swallow, but let it sink in. We will not withdraw the facilities from Charity. We have two doctors there and a medex – never before in the history of that small hospital. Up to recently, we had a Nigerian and a Cuban doctor, along with a local medex. The doctor from Cuba has been withdrawn and reposted and we now have a Guyanese doctor there. So, we have a Guyanese-Nigerian combination at Charity and that is working satisfactorily.

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Mr. Speaker, while we were making this intervention to improve the Suddie facility, certain construction activities created discomfort for the patients and the staff. That is why some facilities, or services, were transferred to Charity. And we are not mindful of the concerns that there might have been difficulties regarding surgical patients.

Surgery Backlog

Unfortunately, my learned friend, Mr. Keith Scott, is not well informed when he says that *there is a massive backlog*. What did happen, Mr. Speaker, is that during the visit of the US Ship, Comfort, there was a big hullabaloo that everybody needing surgery would be entertained by public television announcement inviting persons from Essequibo to come forward for possible surgery. We got every Tom, Dick and Beharry, who thought they needed surgery to come forward. A list of even the simplest things was constructed. US Comfort left; the burden or the workload that we expected was not fulfilled and the Guyanese doctors were left with this list.

We invited several people to surgery, this was towards the end of last year; some persons said, and of course I was deploying to Charity Hospital, and this is where the Leader of the Opposition should listen and be informed. I was deploying not only the Guyanese team, but also a surgical team from China, which now does very good work at the Georgetown Hospital. The Chinese teams at

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the Georgetown Hospital are a good addition to our services and we must congratulate them. So we made ... they should be congratulated.

We were taking, and did take, the Chinese Surgical Team to Charity and we started the mop-up. Within one weekend we were able to get 10 surgeries done. The persons in Charity who benefited from the outreach of this Chinese medical team are extremely grateful. We must congratulate our Chinese colleagues. *[Applause]* But friends, that did not get rid of the legitimate backlog; it only went several steps in a positive direction. Therefore, the Administration took other caring steps and other initiatives.

We are working closely with an organization, which comes to Guyana from time to time and which has surgical capacity. The organization is called *the Guyana - North America Association for Social and Health Services*. The Secretary is Ms Juliet Stanford and the President is Ms Deborah Bristol. The point person in Guyana is Ms Beaton, who now heads the YWCA.

We did good work with that team two weeks in a stretch. One week, a surgeon from the US and the Guyanese surgeon in Essequibo, working along with a Cuban anesthetic technician, did several surgeries. That exercise, in elevating the pressures while we improved Suddie, continued the next week.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, we have a very happy

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population, which now understands that, despite the adverse propaganda, their surgeries are being adequately addressed. In some cases, Mr. Speaker, as any practitioner will tell you, services could not be delivered, because of the concomitant illnesses of the patients. One particular case stands out whereby these surgeons brought in the special mesh needed to help a particular patient with his abdominal hernia; but we could not do the operation, because his condition did not allow. We will look at that case and get it done, when he improves.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to point out is to underline, to put a lie to the claim to the criticism that *services were disrupted*; they were not, at any of the facilities. They might have been relocated to temporary locations.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I have a very short letter from the Guyana - North America Association for Social and Health Services, a team that we have been working with and which we have bonded well with over the past few months. It says ...

The Speaker: Accede to the letter ... Honourable Member, your time is up.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I beg that the Hon Minister be given another 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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The letter which shows how we are doing our work, quietly achieving and undermining some of the criticism; this is what the letter says from that association. It is addressed to me:

Dr Ramsaran

Minister within the Ministry of Health

Brickdam

Dear Dr Ramsaran,

On behalf of the Members of the Guyana - North America Association for Social and Health Services, and the people we were privileged to serve, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks for your services and the services of your staff and of State House...

They are referring to the State House Guest House in Anna Regina.

... and the Charity Hospital; their assistance enabled us to put a little dent in the surgical needs of our beloved country, Guyana.

That is the type of cooperation that we did and will continue to do in this year. That is the way forward.

Through your kindness and cooperation, we performed surgeries on 23 persons, who will be able to enjoy healthier and more

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comfortable lifestyles. We are looking forward to a continued working relationship with your Ministry, for the sole purpose of breaking down the backlog of surgical needs in Guyana. [Applause]

We complement you on your aggressiveness to serve the people of Guyana and your willingness to work with our organization. We can assure you, that we will continue to work diligently towards a healthier Guyana.

This organization has planned to come already in the first quarter of this year. Unfortunately, because of the advisory, a legitimate advisory by the American Embassy they have been forced to postpone their visit. This is the way we have quietly been crafting our work. It is being consolidated in this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out too, our achievement in the area of malaria control. If one was to look at a similar period last year, a similar epidemiological week last year and compared it to this ...

Incidentally, the letter I referred to comes from that association and the secretary is Juliet Stanford. Deborah Bristol is the president and the focal person in Guyana is Ms Beaton of the YWCA ... *[Interruption: 'Again! We heard that already less you think it is not an authentic product']*

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Mr. Speaker, in the area of Malaria Control, this Government has achieved significantly. We have dropped below 50 percent, the burden of the disease. Mosquitoes, treated mosquito nets, the introduction of new, more effective drugs, training and expansion of the microscopic programme, and so on; that is an achievement for Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9... [*Interruption: 'Everybody getting nets?' "No, my friend, you are misinformed. We do not give nets willy-nilly. We do give them regularly to targeted groups. That is the science behind it. That is why we have achieved these results"*]

Mr. Speaker, as I was on Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 and as we were not so long ago in Mabaruma, let us take a walk down to another place, not far from Mabaruma, a place called *Wanina*, and this is because I am addressing some of the misinformation. You could walk there, my friend, you could.

Now, addressing some of the misinformation and misrepresentation, from my Honourable Member across the aisle, Mr. Desmond Fernandes; I would not have spoken on this, because this event occurred, I think, on 25 April last year. And although I do have the article here we did not publish it. But Mr. Fernandes misleadingly gave the impression that *this Administration does not care for the Indigenous people of Region 1 ...* he particularly mentioned *water*. I would not mention or I would not deal now with the water system in the settlement itself. That is being improved and I will not steal the thunder of my

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friend, Mr. Whittaker. He will deal with that.

Wanina Water Supply System upgrade ... I, on 25th April last year, received on behalf of the Government of Guyana this facility from the contractor and I think I have given some copies of this to an assistant. He can probably give them to the press, to Mr. Scott, to Mr. Fernandes, and probably to you, Mr. Speaker. This is authentic.

Wanina Water Supply System, is located at a little place called Wanina, not so far ... and when persons like myself, Ms Carolyn Rodrigues and Mr. Fernandes tell you *not too far*, it could be misleading; you might have to go over a hill and a dill. In this case, we had to go down the laterite slopes of a little ravine and we found the Wanina Water Supply System Upgrade Project.

Let me tell you about this before I close, I want to underline the misleading information that we are getting from representatives on the PNCR-1G benches. They are shortchanging their constituents. They are not doing the necessary research. Here we were told, in a very flippant manner, although practically in the form of a short joke – no pun meant on the words, Mr. Fernandes, we were told that *the Government was doing nothing for the Indigenous persons in that area.*

The Funding Agency is the Caribbean Development Bank;

The Executing Agency is the Basic Needs Trust

Fund;

The Consultant is the Caribbean Engineering Management Consultant (CEMCO);

The Purpose of the Project is to improve the level of service, that is, longer pumping hours, higher flow and pressure to the existing communities, between Wauna and Kumaka, and also, to provide new services to approximately 150 households.

The Key Project Features:

- (i) Replacing the pumping-plant facilities; this is a new pump and pump house, with an approximate capacity of 200 gallons per minute, pump and engine;
- (ii) Upgrading the spring box and fencing it, for security from contamination;
- (iii) Installation of 4.2 km of PVC transmission pipe from Wanina to Hososroro;
- (iv) Installation of 100 km of PVC pipes for distribution and a stand pipe to Tobago Housing Scheme, which will give approximately 40 new households service;
- (v) Installation of 3.5 km of PVC distribution pipe between Hososroro and Kumaka.
- (vi) Installation of 1 km of PVC distribution pipes between Kumaka and Mabaruma

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Secondary School, approximately 15 new households, the key part of this information sheet, Mr. Speaker,

- (vii) Approximate cost of the project is GY \$63 million, to provide additional services of potable water to a predominantly Amerindian community.

That is why the PPP/C, will forever remain the major Amerindian party in this country. *[Applause]*

What I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that this is only Phase 1.

Phase 2 will include:

- (i) The installation of storage facilities on Hososroro Hill.

But my friend, the Honourable Whittaker, will tell you more about that legend, I know, but he will tell you in the corridors. That is his project. That is Phase 2 which will give storage so that you will have more capacity.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will allow in the informal sessions that Mr. Whittaker interacts with the other speakers.

Let me move on, Mr. Speaker. I need to tell you that in the area of training, the Ministry of Health has a robust program.

I would like to particularly thank those quiet persons who do not hit the press, who do their work quietly, but

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achieve. Ms Croft at the University of Guyana has successfully piloted the BSC and Nursing Programme. [Applause] At a recent graduation, she was hailed as the *Nightingale of Guyana*. I would rather interpret it to say that, *she is the Mary C Cole of Guyana*. [Applause]

With that programme, which is fully supported by the University of Guyana and the Ministry of Health, we are providing senior personnel for the Nursing Sector. What is more interesting, this time around, friends, is that we are preparing teachers. One of the concentrations of the programme, will produce this year, six tutors for us. That means that our efforts at expanding the intake of nurses, will be fully supported by the requisite trained staff and I have instructed Ms Croft that she should continue this concentration in the year coming. Training of nurses is on a firm footing under the PPP/C.

Mr. Speaker, we have in training approximately 650 nurses. The Ministry of Health will continue its investment in this vital sector. For example, presently at the Georgetown School of Nursing we have 349 souls; at the New Amsterdam School, 121; at the Charles Roses School, 154. Just under 650 souls are being prepared as nurses for Guyana, and of course, we are hoping to have the continued intake of 250 per year.

There are innovations to look at their comfort. We have known and we follow the criticisms. For example, from the Honourable Dr Norton, that *their accommodation*

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leaves something to be desired. This year, we will be looking at innovative ways of addressing that. Dr Norton, thank you for your criticism in that regard. We concur with you, and we will try to make our nursing students, more comfortable.

Mr. Speaker, I have tried to touch wide across certain areas of health. I have mentioned that, health does not exist in a vacuum. It exists, in our Guyana, a Guyana where bridges are being built; in a Guyana where things are being put back on tract. I would like, in that vain to say, that this budget, indeed, stays the course. It indeed advances the transformation agenda generally, and more particularly, of the Health Sector. I am certain, that my preceding Ministers and colleagues on this side have proven to you that, it has also advanced the cause of the transformation agenda of their relevant sectors.
[Applause]

With that, Mr. Speaker, Colleagues, I would like to encourage you, to welcome you and to urge you to fully support this budget. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you.

Honourable Member, Ms Africo Selman ...

Ms Africo Selman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the statistics cited by the Hon Minister Beri Ramsaran, regarding Barbados migration rates; I wish to direct his attention to the website

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.nationsencyclopedia.com and I wish to quote what it says.

The net migration rate for Barbados in 2000 was 0.9 migrant per 1000 population.

To me, the problem of overpopulation, the government encourages immigration, [Applause] Whereas, Mr. Speaker:

The net migration of Guyana is 8 migrants per 1000 population.

Hence, to compare Guyana with Barbados is contextually illogical, irrational, whatever ... [Interruption: 'He got that from the Chronicle Papers']

I now turn to make my contribution on the 2008 Budget, presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, under the theme – *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda*.

The title of the budget seems to suggest that, the government is on a correct course, in keeping with its 2007 Budget Theme, a theme entitled, and I quote:

If that were so, that would have been commendable. Regrettably, a careful examination of the realities of Guyana today, and in the context of other presentations made by my colleagues on this side of the House, that is far from the truth.

Staying on Course would therefore mean, continued

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unemployment, high cost of living, an education system that is nonresponsive to the needs of the society, a frightening security system, young people in a state of despair, and the distribution of resources would remain inequitable across the country.

Certainly, that cannot be what the people of Guyana expect. And therefore, one must wonder, whether this Government has the capacity, to bring about the transformation agenda they boast about. As a youth, therefore, I am frightened by the thought that the Minister of Finance is telling us that *we must stay on this reckless course.* [Laughter]

A PNCR-1G Press Conference, on 10 January 2008, describes the situation most accurately, and I quote:

2007 was a challenging year for the Guyanese people. In economic terms, the rising cost of living has played havoc, on the lives of the Guyanese people. The primary reason for the spiraling cost of living was the imposition of the excessive 16 percent VAT.

The party, once more, calls on the Jagdeo's Administration, to immediately reduce the VAT Rate, to no more than 8 percent, so that, the New Year sees some measure of relief for the Guyanese people.

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Regrettably, this Budget has offered no relief.

Staying on course, in keeping with the Government's agenda, would mean that, the Government has no intention of offering any relief to the Guyanese people, by reviewing its policies and making adjustments, where appropriate. Therefore, we can expect continued rising cost of living and continued hardship, in 2008.

Mr. Speaker, the woes befalling the population were compounded by the alarming developments, in the area of public security, as have been highlighted by the incidence of 26 January 2008 and 17 February, respectively.

I wish to refer to a statement, by the Honourable Dr Ashni Singh, on Page 2 of the 2008 Budget Presentation, when he says, and I quote:

Mde Speaker, twelve months ago, I presented the First Budget of our Governments' current term of office, under the theme 'Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana.' That budget reiterated our vision of a better Guyana for all Guyanese. It articulated an ambitious policy agenda for the medium terms, and it presented programmes and projects for last year, aimed at consolidating the impressive gains already made in transforming our economy and improving the lives of our people.

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Mr. Speaker, improved standard of living presupposes, increases in real income, which in turn, can ensure a better quality of life. For example, higher income can improve a person's ability, to engage in greater leisure and other cultural activities; but currently, this is not happening. The Guyanese spending power have been eroded and they are struggling to afford basic necessities, from day to day.

To speak of improved standard of living, the Hon Minister of Finance should be telling us that the unemployment rates, in Guyana fell by 0.5 percent, or 1 percent, or 2 percent; but we have heard nothing. In comparing the Minister's remarks, with the reality of the Guyana situation, it is evident, that the Government's perception and vision are not in keeping with the expectation of the Guyanese people who, at least, wish to live at a higher quality of live than their fore parents, instead of being marginalized and insecure.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the Budget Presentation, it appears that the Government's definition of development is the construction of roads, schools, bridges, et cetera. While these are all integral to development, economic development requires much more. The International Economic Development Council describes economic development as, and I quote:

The creation of jobs and wealth and the improvement of quality of life ...

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This budget falls very short, since it has nothing in it that suggests that employment will be created in Guyana through government's ability to create the conditions that attract Foreign Direct Investment in large doses.

Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence, that any single country in Latin America, Africa or Asia has been able to transform its economy and sustain development on the basis of dependence on Foreign Aid. The current Administration needs to look at the countries that are doing well not one of them has relied on the combination of plantation, tropical agriculture and development aid. They have done so, by heavy reliance on Private Investment in large quantities and on developing new areas such as manufacturing and production of value-added products.

Guyana has not been able to attract Private Investment in large quantities; and the internal climate does not appear to be conducive to attracting Private Investors. So, how are we *transforming the economy and building a modern and prosperous Guyana*, when the current Administration appears to have no developmental policies in this direction?

Mr. Speaker, let us now examine the Education Sector. I am of the view that education is directly linked to development. The Hon Minister within the Ministry of Education would appreciate that education is the cornerstone of development, being herself a beneficiary

of education.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon Minister Dr Fox, insinuated in her budget presentation that *the methods that were used in schools in the past were ineffective*. The Hon Minister could not be speaking of the period under the PNC Administration, as her own achievement during that period is testimony that the PNC Government crafted sound education policies of which she has been a beneficiary. *[Applause]*

It cannot be disputed, that the 1970s marked the most extensive revolution in the overall socio-cultural sphere of activities in Guyana. This is so in relation to education policies and programmes, as well as in the area of infrastructure for development. The picture that emerges is one of unquestionable achievements and advances.

The current Administration had an opportunity to build on the solid foundation that it inherited from the PNC Government. Regrettably, the Minister had the courage to admit that the methods they were pursuing over the past 15 years were ineffective and she is now scrambling to put things in order. We are left to wonder what the previous Ministers were doing.

The Government has an obligation to conduct a proper evaluation at the end of each Basic Education Programme to ascertain its effectiveness, if it will continue to spend large sums of money and still will not be able to effectively correct any shortcomings in this sector.

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Fortunately, the new Minister has now recognized this responsibility and we wait to see what progress will be made.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to highlight that in her 1970 Education Policy Statement, the then Minister of Education, Minister Field-Ridley, revealed that:

The fundamental objective of education for the new Corporative Republic was the provision of the extensive range of new skills that were needed for national developmental purposes. In this regard, moreover, what was critically urgent was to transition from the academic, or grammar-type education that the country had inherited from its colonial past and that was essentially elitist in nature. The need for education change from this vantage point, derived from the fact that, the output of that type of education system did not meet the vital requirements of education for development.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to Page 30 of the Budget Presentation, and I quote:

Mde Speaker, we recognize the need for an alternative pathway to secondary education given our goal of Universal Secondary Education.

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Mr. Speaker, in light of the Minister's statement, I wish to state that, with regard to the secondary level education, the introduction of the Multilateral System during the first half of the 1970s was conceived as the core for the restructuring of the Secondary School System. It was intended to serve several purposes:

- First, it was expected to be the breathing ground for a more technical based type of education, hence the development of the Multilateral and Community High School Programmes, with a clear orientation towards productive work within the needs of the communities and the nation.

So, there were always mechanisms in place to equip the nation's youth with appropriate skills. Further, Mr. Speaker:

- The introduction of the Community High Schools under the PNC Administration was geared to present a curriculum that was devoted to both academic and vocational pursuits.

May I remind this August Body, that the basic purpose of this new type of secondary school was to provide for the children who would normally have been retained in secondary departments of all-age schools a more functional education which would have prepared them to earn a living in any of the sectors of the economy.

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Mr. Speaker, this approach to secondary education filled a crucial gap in the existing education system regarding those students whose life chances were severely circumscribed, once they were unable to make the grade in a purely academic stream. The Community High Schools, therefore, sought to capture this category of students, and by providing them with vocational skills, afforded them the opportunity to function meaningfully in society when they left school. During the Colonial Period these students would have found it virtually impossible to find any gainful employment.

I noted with concern that the budgetary allocation this year failed to take into account the Community High Schools, notwithstanding, the significant role these schools have played in contributing to molding the nation's young. Whether in the present circumstance the various Technical Institutes and other programmes by the Government can fill this void is yet to be seen. It is hoped, that this concern will be addressed by the Hon Minister.

We, in the PNCR-1G, welcome and would be in support of any programme that will bring development to our educational system. But, Mr. Speaker, I beg to submit that the woes befalling our education system cannot be solved by the Fast-Track Plan which is still to be implemented. This is what the Minister of Finance had to say, on Page 29 of the Budget Presentation 2008, and I quote:

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Mde Speaker, we recognize that innovative approaches are needed to tackle the issue of literacy. In order to increase literacy, a more aggressive programme has been conceptualized, that will see an additional \$115 million for the implementation of a Nationwide Literacy Programme through a Fact-Track Initiative. This programme will specifically target low-performing children, out-of-school youths and adults, and it is expected to benefit 9,000 children and 4,500 adults.

This is commendable, though it is not a purely governmental innovation. Large sums of money are being invested into this initiative. But has the Government analytically examined to what extent these programmes cater for the needs of our children? Is the Government of the view that only 9,000 children need this programme? What survey was conducted to ascertain the number? If no survey was done, how does the Government know that an expenditure of \$115 million will really address the problem of literacy in Guyana? In this regard this aspect of the budget appears like guesswork and very much unscientific.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that education is a process, which if not properly delivered or implemented systematically, will do more harm than good. Yes, there is a need for better fundamental Literacy and Numeracy

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Programmes in the school system, and sure, there is a need for teachers to be trained to meet the needs of these planned programmes. What is clearly needed side-by-side with this is also a comprehensive programme to improve the quality of delivery of the education process.

Teachers, who are seeking training at the Cyril Potter Collage of Education and the University of Guyana should be adequately equipped through their training to meet the needs of the complex problems that are a part of the school system today. These problems, Mr. Speaker, are problems of the larger society where people have to grapple with continuous poverty and struggle for survival, that children are often neglected.

While the government boasts of the increased remuneration for teacher, we all know, Mr. Speaker that what the teachers earn is grossly inadequate and really cannot compensate for the task they have been assigned and to live at a reasonable standard. How then does the Government hope to improve the quality of education when the personnel responsible for the delivery are disillusioned and dissatisfied?

If the Government wants to implement and ensure the success of education ventures then salaries of teachers must be significantly increased and funds must be allocated for research. *[Applause]* There are many problems that need to be researched and proper recommendations made. For example, climate change

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will create many challenges that demand research in agriculture.

The University of Guyana needs to become part of the process of development. It should be the institution that is structured and supported to be an independent research institution that contributes to the development of Guyana. This budget gives no indication that any serious attention has been paid to these matters. Despite the large allocations in education, there is no assurance that Guyana will be boasting of a successful story in the fiscal year 2008.

Let us examine the areas of youth and culture. Mr. Speaker, difficult decisions and adjustments face young people in all societies.

Perhaps, the most fundamental problem faced by the young people today is unemployment. Everywhere, and almost in every community, scores of our nation's young people are hopeless, frustrated and in a state of despair, since they are unable to find jobs. To date, large numbers of youths are either unemployed or underemployed, irrespective of the many programmes announced by the government.

What is even more alarming is that many of them are qualified. We must acknowledge that young people have certain needs and aspirations. Consequently the existence of unemployment or underemployment means financial worries, frustration and discouragement. That is one of

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the reasons, why the majority of our young graduates from the University of Guyana are migrating to developing as well as developed countries where better opportunities exist. Where then will we find the skills to implement this ambitious development programme outlined by the Minister of Finance?

Mr. Speaker, having regard to the fact that many youths may not be sufficiently matured to cope with such problems they go in the undesirable direction of delinquency: drugs, vandalism, stealing, *et cetera*, and sadly, some even vent their feelings by striking out against the society. These problems are invariably compounded by peer pressure, whereby young people are influenced either consciously or subconsciously to become involved in those antisocial activities that we complain about.

Macro Policy and Micro Practices – Mr. Speaker, we in the PNCR-1G recognize that youth unemployment is not unique to Guyana; but we believe that, as the unemployment rate soars the government and nongovernmental organizations have to find effective measures to tackle the problem, through macro policy and micro practices in the areas of education, training and retraining, and the creation of jobs.

Provision of relieve – One policy that can be adopted to reduce the problems that arise out of unemployment among youths, is providing relief, or protection, from the

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financial hardships of unemployment; for example, unemployment relief – could this not be financed from the windfall received through the Value-Added Tax?

There could also be a compulsory unemployment insurance scheme to which workers and their employers contribute, and from which payments are made to those young people, who are eligible for work and those workers who cannot find jobs. This is what is done in modern societies, and this is what all caring governments that speak of building a modern society would do, as is done in the United States of America, Britain, and other countries.

Retraining – Another measure to reduce the level of unemployment is the acceleration of programmes for retraining, in order to give would-be employed young people new skills that are in demand.

I must commend the Government for recognizing the importance of Youth Training Centers and making budgetary allocations. But the question is whether the government has come to the recognition that training young people and not creating jobs is also a waste of money, and aids in fueling further frustration among youths who are unable to find jobs at the end of their training.

It is therefore insufficient for the Hon Minister of Labour to tell us how many young people benefited from youth skills training programmes without, at the same time,

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telling the National Assembly how many of those young persons are in gainful employment. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, I noted that the Hon Minister Dr Singh did not make budgetary provision for youth entrepreneurship. Mr. Speaker, in some countries young people are encouraged and supported to start their own businesses. The governments provide both finance and training, to enable young participants to be successful entrepreneurs thus enabling them to run their own businesses.

Mr. Speaker, in the name of *Building a Modern Guyana*, I propose that the current Administration, urgently addresses youth entrepreneurship. Mr. Speaker, we the People's National Congress Reform – One Guyana hold the view that social policy and the implementation of employment-related programmes to enhance youth employment would also help young people grow, change, and perhaps overcome the feelings of social exclusion and enable them to use their energies and talents, positively. The policy must not only satisfy short-term goals, but must be concerned with long-term development of the society and the full integration of youths in the process.

It is being noted that, budgetary allocations are being placed into corrective institutions, such as the New Opportunity Core. The Government does this every year. The question is, does the Government have any mechanism in place to monitor the behaviour of the

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inmates after they leave those institutions, to ensure that the money indeed was well spent? One would hope that they do.

Mr. Speaker, one of the hallmarks of a truly democratic society is full freedom for the citizens to pursue their different religious beliefs and cultural practices, while being treated as equals, irrespective of their beliefs or values.

The Hon Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Dr Frank Anthony alluded to the fact that *Guyana will be witnessing the emergence of a cultural renaissance, a cultural rebirth*. Guyana needs more than a cultural renaissance, Mr. Speaker, and I could not agree with the Minister more. May I remind the Hon Minister, that the immediate post-independence years, were characterized by continuous cultural explosions. *[Applause]* Prominent in this regard was the decision that was officially announced a few months after Independence, in relation to the observance of religious and other national holidays.

Guyana will be hosting *Carifesta X* this year; but so far, sufficient has not yet been done to unearth the available talent, consistent with the tremendous potential of Guyana. This was the hallmark of the First Carifesta, held in 1972. Thirty-six years after, this premier Caribbean Cultural extravaganza returns to the land of its birth. *[Applause]*

In celebrating such a mega-event, recognition must be

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given to the contribution of Mr. Forbes Burnham for this initiative. *[Applause]* Perhaps, I should remind this House what Mr. Forbes Burnham stated in his opening address in 1967, at a Conference of Caribbean creative artists:

... Guyana will be the venue of a Caribbean Art Festival, featuring Guyanese and Caribbean young artistes whose work in poetry, painting and sculpture projects and our dreams and visions, help to foster and develop a Caribbean personality.
[Applause]

As early as 1966, there was the consensual recognition within the Caribbean Creative Community, that the Guyana Government was exceptional in terms of its strong encouragement and nurturing of Indigenous culture.

We welcome *CARIFESTA X* and look forward to it exceeding the standard set in 1972 when it was initiated in Guyana. *[Applause]*

One of the key elements, to ensuring the success of *Carifesta* in 2008 is the Government's capacity for guaranteeing the safety and security of participants and guests. Mr. Speaker, there is even a fear among Caribbean governments as to whether Guyana can successfully and effectively host this mega-event, because of the uncertainty regarding the security of the personnel that will be put on show during that period. If we are to

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succeed, therefore, the present initiatives on crime and security must be seriously addressed.

Transformation

Finally, Mr. Speaker, it is the underlining belief that if the systems of proper education and the employment of the youths ... [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: Before you move on to Education and Youths, Honourable Member, your time is up ...

Mrs. Deborah J Backer: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable Member be given 5 minutes to conclude her presentation.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Proceed, Honourable Member ...

Ms Africo Selman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is the underlining belief that, if the systems of proper education and the employment of the youths, adequate remuneration, a secure and safe environment for all, creation of industries and the conditions that attract Foreign Direct Investment substantially are in place Guyana would be well on its way to transforming its economy into a modern and prosperous one.

Mr. Speaker, my vision of a modern and prosperous Guyana, as a young Parliamentarian, is one where the government is responsive to public opinion, where all lawmakers and enforcers subscribe to the principles that

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are enshrined in the Constitution, where the notion of the separation of power, ceases to be illusive, but indeed, places checks and creates a system of balance and accountability in all governmental affairs; a Guyana in which liberty ceases to be a state-of-mind, but a set of legal rules, which safeguard and guarantee civil liberty, and a Guyana where resources are allocated equitably.

I believe that these aspirations are truly indicative of real democracy and a modern Guyana which can be achieved if policy makers subscribe to them and take into account the views of all stakeholders. The Budget 2008 gives no assurance that my vision would be realized.

And so, I hope the Minister and those in Government will take seriously onboard, the contributions made by Members on this side, if indeed we all wish that Guyana should progress to be really classified as *a modern and prosperous Guyana*. Thank you. [Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Ms Bibi Shadick ...

Ms Bibi S Shadick: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to this debate, on the Estimates for the year 2008; I wish to crave your indulgence; it is a late hour, and to give me permission to read most of my presentation. Sir, if you have no objection.

First of all, I wish to add my voice to that of all those who spoke before me in congratulating the Hon Minister of

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Finance Dr Ashni Singh and his Team for a well crafted and very eloquently delivered Budget Speech, which is aimed at staying the course and advancing the transformation agenda; an agenda which this Government set itself, when it was first elected to office in 1992 and which agenda we have been relentlessly pursuing since that time.

Mr. Speaker, all Guyanese know that after nearly three decades a transformation was sorely needed and the Guyanese electorate, by continuing to ensure that the PPP/C continues as the Government, have evidenced by their conviction that they trust us to carry out this transformation.

Mr. Speaker, although the transformation is far from complete, there is evidence of it all around for those who wish to see, but since change is a continuous process, the transformation can never be fully complete. Because, just like any progressive home owner who is continually making improvements, because he is never satisfied that his living conditions are up to standard, the people will always ask for more, in order to keep up with a fast changing world environment.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, before I go into the content of my presentation, I would like to address one little point, lest I forget what Ms Selman raised in her presentation. Very vocally and very eloquently delivered, she made a speech which asked for a reduction of the VAT from 16

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percent to 8 percent. I would like to bring to her attention one case in point, because she says that, *VAT reduction will reduce the cost of living.*

I am minded to remember that the National Milling Company which is responsible for production of flour and selling flour in this country, on the day that Hon Minister of Finance announced that flour would be zero-rated, the Company issued a statement that, *fine, it is zero-rated but the prices will remain the same, Guyanese, because we will now increase our prices by the same 16 percent, which we used to collect as VAT.* What guarantee do we have that, reducing the percentage of VAT will result in reduction of the cost of living? [*Interruption: 'That is very elementary'*]

Region No. 3

Mr. Speaker, I make my contribution today, in the context of my responsibilities as the Regional Geographic Member of this Assembly with responsibility for Region 3, for which the Honourable Member Mr. Mervin Williams, also holds responsibility.

As I listened to the Honourable Member speaking on Friday, it accord to me, Mr. Speaker, that he may not be fully aware of the limits of Region 3... [*Interruption: 'Just like you are aware of nothing'*] So, just to put this Budget into context, as it relates to my constituency I wish to say that Region 3 stretches from the Arobaru Creek on the Demerara River to Makouria on the

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Essequibo River and includes all that area in-between, including the West Bank and West Coast of Demerara, as well as all the Essequibo Islands and riverain communities of the Essequibo Region, and has to cater for facilities and services for all those communities...
[Interruption: 'And you are living in Georgetown']

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member, Mr. Williams, during his presentation questioned the need for dormitory facilities at the Parika-Salem Secondary School and he suggested that the money allocated for this could be better used for laboratory and kiln, among other things...
[Interruption: 'I did not suggest that; the people are asking for that'] I wish to point out that, the Parika-Salem Secondary School caters for the students of the riverain communities of Essequibo, and as such, the dormitory facilities are absolutely essential, if we are to realize our goal of universal secondary education. *[Applause]* That is not to say, that a laboratory is not essential in a secondary school; but we first need to house the students who attend the school, before expanding the curriculum.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member questioned *the Government's decision to build a new school in Santa Mission and not to rebuild the Bagotville Primary School.* First of all, I am sure that Mr. Williams does not wish to deprive the children of Santa Mission of a modern, new school building in place of an old, dilapidated building, which Government inherited from the church.

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Secondly, while it is true that the Bagotville Primary School building is in a bad state of disrepair, the Nismes Primary School is less than 100 rods away and if our goal of universal secondary education is to be realized, it makes sense to locate a secondary school between the Patentia and West Demerara Secondary Schools. So instead of rushing to build a new primary school so near to another existing one, the region is looking into the possibility of establishing a secondary school there and accommodating all the primary students from the whole catchment area at the Nismes Primary. *[Applause]* *[Interruption: ‘You do not plan ahead’ “Yes, Mr. Williams, we do plan ahead and you should listen, not interrupt”]*

Mr. Speaker, speaking of planning ahead ... and I wish Mr. Williams would listen ... I listened to him carefully and that is why I heard all of these things. Contrary to Mr. Williams’ assertion that *Government wasted money in building this school*; pre-planning is exactly why a new, state-of-the-art primary school was constructed at Greenwich Park, so as to accommodate the projected expansion of the primary school population with the establishment and occupation of the Tuschen Housing Scheme.

Mr. Williams has led this House to believe that *he is very concerned about the incidence of child labour in the Region 3 Communities*, and for this he must be commended. This is why I was perplexed when I heard

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this same Honourable Member advocate that *contracts for the manufacturing of school furniture should be awarded to the Den Amstel Practical Instruction Center so that*, and I quote his words:

Students can earn money while they are at school.

[Interruption: 'is child labour...'] Is Mr. Williams suggesting that during the time allocated on their timetable, for students to attend classes at the center, and in the limited space afforded to them they can complete contracts for building school furniture? Or is he really suggesting that the instructors take the contracts and use the children as ready, cheap labour? *[Interruption: 'Shame, shame, shame']* And while we are on the subject of child labour, Mr. Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Mervyn Williams: Mr. Speaker.

Ms Bibi S Shadick: The truth always hurts.

Mr. Mervyn Williams: Mr. Speaker, on a point of elucidation, Sir ... *[Noisy Interruption]*

Ms Bibi S Shadick: It hurts... *[Interruption]* The truth always hurts, you know.

The Speaker: Alright. Yes, Honourable Member ...

Mr. Mervyn Williams: Sir ... *[Interruption]*

Ms Bibi S Shadick: I listen ... I do not disturb anybody; I listen ...

Mr. Mervyn Williams: I never suggested ...
[Interruption]

The Speaker: We do not usually allow any interruptions in the National Assembly; but what is it?

Mr. Mervyn Williams: I never suggested anything about cheap labour and I resent that.

Sir, I would wish to ask the Honourable Member, to reconsider what she just said. I never insinuated, for one moment, the whole question of encouragement of children in an exploitative labour arrangement. I just simply sought to demonstrate how a practical instruction center can benefit the school system and the students during regular school hours. That is all I sought to do, Sir.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member, your explanation is taken.

Yes, Honourable Member ...

Ms Bibi S Shadick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I asked a question; I think the Member was trying to answer.

While we are on the subject of child labour, Mr. Speaker, may I point out that the Honourable Member Mr. Williams, by his statement that *the Minister of Labour is making an about-face*, seems to be accusing the Honourable Minister of Labour of saying that *there is no incidence of child labour in Guyana*. In fact, what the

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Minister has always said is that *Guyana is not a country known to have the worst forms of child labour, as defined under the ILO Convention 182*. There is a big difference between child labor and the worst forms of child labour, and the Honourable Member Mr. Williams does not seem to understand the difference.

This Government is, however, committed to tackling and eliminating all forms of child labour in Guyana; not only the worst forms. To this end, the Government has already passed laws since 1999 to raise the working age of children to 15 years and the age of consent to 16 years in the Last Parliament. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, this year the Region 3 Budget has allocations for improvement works to be done at more nursery and primary schools and these are located, for this year, in Eastern Hog Islands, Morashi, Endeavor, Clemwood, La Harmony, Alik, Marionville, Great Truli Island, Northern Hog Islands, Karia Karia, Belle Plaine, Endeavour, Bagotville, Vive La-Force, Eastern Leguan, Saxakalli, Meten-Meer-Zorg, Independence, Louisiana and Kingston. The works identified include the construction of sanitary blocks, trestles for water tanks, incinerators, ramps and other things.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to address some matters concerning health services in the Region. Again, the Honourable Member Mr. Williams seems to have been misinformed of the state of readiness of the Leonora

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Diagnostics Centre, with respect to the provision of the electricity supply, and I am very happy that the Hon Minister, Dr Bheri Ramsaran spoke at length about this. In fact when Mr. Williams was speaking, as pointed out by the Minister, the centre had already been providing services to the residents since earlier in the week and, in fact, by Friday the first baby had already been delivered to a resident of Tuschen New Scheme. *[Applause]* And this is the part I would like to bring over, which baby I am sure, will become a student of the new Greenwich Park Primary School, in another 5 years, 9 months. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, I wish to assure the Honourable Member that the official commissioning of this centre was not delayed due to the non-availability of electricity supply but because a conscious decision was taken to commission a fully operational centre, and this will happen as soon as we are convinced that most of the initial start-up hiccups are taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, this year, in order to improve health services in the region, the Budget caters for expenditure for the construction of Health Posts at Louisiana, Leguan and Zeelugt, as well as a Health Centre at Parfeit Harmony and an overhead reservoir at the West Demerara Regional Hospital which at present has some administrative problems, which are receiving the active attention of the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Administration.

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Mr. Speaker, I now wish to turn to the area of drainage and irrigation and agriculture. Sir, Region 3 is an agricultural region, and it is because of this the Poor Rural Community Support Services Project was established and headquartered in the Region, with a mandate to do projects, which are designed to improve the facilities available to farmers in order to improve access and production. This project which came to an end in December 2007, completed, or is in the process of completing, projects such as:

- Fencing and development of pasture land at Wales, Vive La Force, Windsor Forest, Den Amstel, Hague Back, Leonora, and De Kinderen/Zeelugt at the instances of Cattle Farmers Associations in those areas;
- Rehabilitation of channels and construction of related structures at the instance of Water Users' Associations of Ruby/Parika, Vergenogen, Parika Back, Hubu, Maripa, Morashi, Lower Bonasika – Left and Right Banks, Alik, Beribisiballi, Lannaballi, Hog Island, Free and Easy, and Salem;
- Drying floors were constructed at Vergenogen Rice Mills and for the Small Farmers Association at Leguan;
- A Multipurpose Center was built at La Harmony for the Orange Bosom Women's

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Development Association and a Day-Care Centre at Den Amstel, for the Women's Development Association there;

- All-weather farm-to-market roads have been constructed at Ruby Back, Salem and Namerick;
- In addition, a packaging facility, has been built at Parika near the Ferry Stelling.

And the Government plans to build a wharf leading to that facility in order to provide space for farmers to add value to their produce, and also, for direct exports, from the same facility.

Mr Speaker, in the area of land development, this year's budget makes provision for construction, or reconstructions, of koker at Louisiana, Hog Island, A-Line in the Channel Polder, a koker door at Stanleytown and check panels at Vreed-En-Hoop first and second decks. HDPE Tubes will also be purchased for installation at La Jalousie, Hidrony, Cannel Nos. 1 and 2, Hog Island, Ruby and Parika.

Sir, roads will also be constructed this year at Nismes, Doc Town, Haig Housing Scheme, Patentia Housing Scheme, Last Street Vergenogen and Uitvlugt Forth Street. Also, Mr Speaker, the rollover projects at Tuschen, Goed-Intent, Sisters Village and the main access road at Parika and the last street in Zeelugt Housing

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Scheme, will continue to completion. There is also provision, for construction of bridges at Vriesland, Vive La-Force, Crane Housing Scheme and Friendship, Wakeanaam.

In order to be better able to maintain school and community playgrounds about which the Honourable Member is very, very concerned, as well as for other reasons the Region, this year, will acquire a tractor and trailer and a slasher, principally for use in the Essequibo Islands to supplement the equipment it presently has for use on the West Bank and West Coast.

Last year, we acquired a new speedboat and outboard engine which facilitates visits by regional officials and the transportation of small pieces of equipment for the benefit of the riverain communities of the Essequibo; while the previous boat will be refurbished and assigned to the Demerara riverain communities. And I would like to assure the Honourable Member that the tractor was not stolen; it is probably parked in the yard of the multipurpose centre at Leonora, where you spend most of your time. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, while I speak about the above improvements which are planned for this year, I must address the comments made by the Honourable Member Mr Mervyn Williams in relation to alleged corruption and in relation to the award and execution of contracts. To illustrate his arguments, Mr Williams quoted extensively from the

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Auditor General's Reports... [*Interruption: 'And what is wrong with that?'*] I would like to point out to the Honourable Member that it is this Government which ensures that there are Auditor General's Reports. [*Applause*] These reports are public records in order to better address any and all intransigencies by public officers, who are annually, since 1993, called before the Public Accounts Committee of this Parliament to defend or explain their actions.

I have the dubious honour of sitting on this Parliament's PAC, and I can assure Mr Williams, that both Government and Opposition Members of the Committee address every revelation of the Auditor General condignly. Sir, if there was no Auditor General's Report, as obtained before 1993, I rather suspect that Mr Williams would have had a very short contribution to make this year.

Finally, while I am on the subject of corruption, Mr Speaker, please permit me to bring to the attention of this House, and by extension the people of Guyana, an instance of what I like to call *institutionalized corruption* ... [*Interruption: 'Tell ...'*] Sir, very recently, and you would love to hear this, the Region 3 Administration discovered that through the Health Development Government has been paying the electricity charges for the PNCR-1G Headquarters at Vreed-en-Hoop for the past 15 years. [*Noisy Interruption*] There is more ... and perhaps since its establishment ... [*Interruption: 'Bring*

the evidence’]

This discovery, Mr Speaker, led to an investigation of the status of the property, on which the said PNCR-1G Headquarters stands. It was discovered that in 1936 Mr Abdul Ramon donated to the Government of Guyana, then British Guiana, a piece of land at Vreed-en-Hoop for the establishment of the Vreed-en-Hoop Health Centre by Transport No. 1281 of 1946. This property is listed in the inventory of the Government properties in the Health Department of Region 3. A perusal of the books of the Bestkline NDC shows the property initially listed as belonging to the Ministry of Health, but in 1999 the record shows that the sum of \$11,435 was paid for Rates and Taxes and a receipt was issued to the PNC for the Ministry of Health ... [*Noisy Interruption*]. In 2003, a further sum of \$10,000 was paid, but this time the receipt was written in name of the PNC and an examination of the register reveals that the name *Ministry of Health* was crossed out and the name *PNC* written in ... [*Noisy Interruption*]

Mr Speaker, up to this morning, because I knew I was coming here to speak today, I checked the books in the Deeds Registry and I can assure this House that the transport, a copy of which I have here, is still in the name of the Government of Guyana. [*Noisy Interruption: ‘That is corruption’*] I can only assume, Sir, that the PNCR-1G is setting up the conditions for an Application for Declaration of Title, by Prescription, to the said

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property which belongs to the Government and, therefore, the people of this country. [*Interruption: 'That is thieving' "The PNC does"*]

Sir, ownership of property in the register of any NDC can only be changed when the new owner provides a valid title to the property. But in this case there is no such supporting document. [*Interruption: 'PNC is a thieving party, man'*] Sir, we all know that during its nearly three decades in government the PNC made no bones about its policy of paramountcy of the Party, and I do not question their use of state property for Party purposes during that period; but for that practice to extend up to today tells me, and should be instructive to the people of Guyana about ... I know you do not want to hear this ... tells me and should tell the people of Guyana where corruption began and how institutionalized it is.

Mr Speaker [*Noisy Interruption*] I would like to be heard!
Mr Speaker!

The Speaker: Honourable Members, allow the Honourable Member to speak, please.

Ms Bibi S Shadick: I can say with certainty that after 15 years in government the PPP/C does not advocate party paramountcy and has never used state property for their party purposes. [*Applause*] [*Interruption: 'And will never thief state property'*]

Mr Speaker, having raised so much ire on the other side,

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at this time I would like to commend the Hon Minister of Finance's Budget to this Honourable House. Thank you.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

[Noisy Interruption] I pray silence for Honourable Member, Ms Vanessa Kisson ...

Ms Vanessa Kisson: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, I rise to give my contribution to this 2008 Budget Debate on behalf of my constituency, Region No. 10.

Mr Speaker, I honestly believe that the theme for the 2008 Budget should be titled *Value for Money – Quality and not Quantity*, because we all know that our teachers, doctors and nurses are leaving and not *Staying the Course*.

Mr Speaker, this Government makes us believe, that the youths, our children of this nation, are their No. 1 priority, yet still, thousand of students are left school-less, all due to one Minister's decision.

The Minister of Education, after stating in one of the prominent newspapers that, students *desirous of entering the 6th Form Level, need to pass English in order to be qualified for entrance to the desired institution*. It seems, however, the Honourable Minister somewhat had a dream, whether a bad one or nightmare; he woke up one morning and decided that these students needed both

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Mathematics and English, not even one of the subjects as before, so as to enter the 6th Form. Note, Mr Speaker, some schools do elimination examinations.

Let it be remembered that we have an obligation and responsibility to be investing in our students and our schools. We thank the Minister for wanting the desire for higher grade passes in schools. But do we hinder a child, whose desire to pursue a 6th Form education that right, because of his, or her, failure to apply the required knowledge at their examination of one subject? The leaders of this nation somewhat failed, by applying the knowledge of their everyday examination for the betterment of Guyana; but do the people of this nation hinder them from perusing what they think is a dream, from turning it into a reality? I do not think so.

Mr Speaker, at least 20-25 students are school-less and clueless in Linden, despite parents plea for reconsideration, since within the batch were 15- and 16-year olds. This action was still implemented casting a dark cloud over the hopes of their future. When someone has the desire to go to school and has the ability but cannot get into our school ... that is wrong. Education drives the economy and the quality of life.

Mr Speaker, a few of these students, along with others, decided that instead of staying at home they would attend the Linden Technical Institute, thinking that their silver lining would remain shining. Low and behold, a few

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months later, students from this institution staged a protest, because they were not being taught. But that's not the shocking part of this scenario, Mr Speaker ... this occurred because the lecturers, after working at this prestigious institution since 1996, were told that they would not be appointed from that time, but from 2006 when the board was constituted thus refusing them the normal benefits of a teacher.

Mr Speaker, there is an old adage that still sounds an alarm *-education is the key to success*. But after some amount of investigation we were reliably informed that the Cyril Potter Collage of Education, Linden Branch, will be dismantled after 2008 Graduation. All persons desirous of attending this institution will have to attend the Turkeyen Campus. Parents, students and residents are calling on the Minister of Education to tell them about the plan for the education system in Region 10.

Mr Speaker, it is normally hard for a person from Linden to travel on a day-to-day basis to and from the University of Guyana. Imagine a teacher traveling to Campus and back, and having to teach the next morning. If you think education is expensive, try ignorance ... *[Laughter]* Because, people who are now desirous of attending this Tertiary Institution and cannot afford to travel, on a daily basis, or afford to pay rent for accommodation are left to ponder whether they would be another figure to the unemployment data.

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Mr Speaker, the Regional Democratic Council – Region 10, requested \$99.6 million, in order to promote a comfortable environment for the schooling population within the Region. For instance, this money would have allowed:

- Extensions to Great Falls Primary School which would have provided access to school-age children, who are at inconvenient distances and due poor economic circumstances.
- Extension of the Linden Foundation Secondary School ... Despite its size, it is now currently overpopulated, while children on the eastern side of the Demerara River are still waiting to be housed.
- Extension of the Kwakwani Student Hostel in order for secondary school age children of Berbice riverain areas to access secondary education.

Mr Speaker, with the \$31 million that was allocated to the region works would only be done to 3 schools, namely, Kwakwani Secondary, Amelia's Ward and the McKenzie High.

Region 10 Young People's Concerns

Our task is to provide an education for the kind of kids we have, not the kind of kids we used to have or want to

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have, or the kids that exist in our dreams. Mr Speaker, after recently meeting with a group of young people one of their major concerns, apart from job opportunities, is education reform in Region 10. As one of the youngsters stated, and I quote:

From housing to education – how smart a choice! What next would the Government do to us?

Distribution of Chessboards to Schools – I would like to congratulate the Honourable Minister for doing a good job in trying to promote sports in this country. Let us take, for example, the distribution of chessboards to schools. What a wonderful idea! But, I must say it saddens my heart, that since after speaking to the Honourable Minister, to date, as I speak, no chessboards were given to any of the schools in Region 10 and a few other regions. I recently learnt by the television that we will be receiving ... but the question is, how soon? We are still awaiting our fair share.

Physical Education Equipment – Mr Speaker, over a year ago a letter was written to the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, requesting physical education equipment and pieces for schools in Region 10. To date, a year after and after several follow-ups by calls, one-on-one conversations and reminders by letter, and after being told by the Honourable Member, Neendkumar, that *the money is not here*, then *I got the money*. Mr Speaker, he also

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said that *the things were bought*; but we have not received any such pieces of equipment. There is an old adage that rings out, *all work and no play makes 'Neil' a dull boy*.

Female Referee Fired – Mr Speaker, I personally know that the Minister is trying ... I have attended the opening ceremony of UDFA with the Hon Minister, and I vividly recall both of our comments when we saw a few female referees. Low and behold, Mr Speaker, about a week later, it was brought to the attention of the Hon Minister, by way of words and letter that one of the female referees was released; or let me put it straightforward, was fired after she was forced to take a medical to attend a referees' training in Trinidad. To date, nothing was done, after being promised by the Minister, that the matter would have been raised with the Hon Minister, Minister Nadir.

It is such a shame, Mr Speaker that this young lady is still out of a job. I would like to bring to this House's attention that her last job was with the GEA. Mr Speaker, it was also noted by the Minister, that the person who fired this young lady was fired by the Government shortly after – Mr O'Lall ... *[Laughter]* Yet, the young lady is still out of a job and we all know how difficult it is, especially since it is a young woman and there is still a high rate of unemployment in Region 10.

Mr Speaker, it was observed that money allocated for Sports, Youth and Culture within the Region is not submitted to the RDC. We are suggesting, Mr Speaker,

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that these funds be given to the RDC and when this is done the Region would be able to facilitate maintenance work to the many rundown facilities, for example, the West Watooka Ground, the McKenzie Basketball Court, the Ameila's Ward Ground and Basketball Court, the McKenzie High School Ground, Christiansburg, McKenzie Sports Club Grounds, and I can go on. It would also be greatly appreciated if special attention could be paid to the McKenzie Sports Club Swimming Pool since it is known that this Region also produces great swimmers and athletes. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, we must view culture, as much more than a marketable community... *[Interruption: 'Commodity' 'Commodity, sorry. It has value in its own right ...' 'Who taught you in school?' 'At least not you; you are not qualified']* It is the base on which we build national character, national unity and a greater sense of national pride. It is believed that the nation is the sum total of its culture, or its people's expressions in the areas of religion, music, dance, visual arts and similar activities. Guyana is blessed with its diverse groups of people since each brings to the national pool its own way of doing things *[Applause]* which when put together constitute the uniqueness of this great nation.

Mr Speaker, culture in Guyana should be promoted as *the means of understanding national development*. Not just using our holidays and national events to showcase our Amerindians on Heritage Day, East Indians at Phagwa or

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Diwali and our African on Freedom Day, thus, leaving out the other three, or to quickly put together some of these to entertain our dignitaries when we need to impress them, Mr Speaker, or to speak about steel-bands for Mashramani or Carifesta; but rather, for there to be a programme to develop our rich culture at all levels in every community. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, there has to be a commitment from the government who is the custodian of the financial purse and an important ingredient for the support and development of our culture.

Develop Culture in Every Region and Community – Mr Minister, the youths of Regions 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 3, 2 and 1 also would like to learn to play steel band too. Therefore, I call on the Hon Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport to think of Guyana, and not only national events and Region 4; but to rather have a vision for Guyana and to implement programmes to develop our rich culture, in every region and community. *[Applause]*

Bodybuilding – I would also like to ask the Minister if the Ministry can focus a little more on bodybuilding in this country. Because, Mr Speaker, there is a young man who has represented Guyana and brought 2 Gold Medals, a young man by the name of Sylvan Garner, and he was only given a handshake by the Minister.

Mr Speaker, it is well known, that there is need for much development in Region 10. And so, if works are to be done, they should be done properly and the RDC should

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be given some amount of respect. When the RDC requests monies for projects in the region, it should be granted because they are the representatives of the Region.

Take for instance, Mr Speaker, the RDC requested \$83.1 million for roads but they only received \$30 million. If they were given the required amount, then lots more roads would be rehabilitated and upgraded, especially those roads which give access to schools, government facilities, and also aid in the enhancement of commuter comfort from the residential areas into commercial areas such as, the St. Aden's Primary School road, the access road along One-Mile School, construction of access road to the new One-Mile Nursery School, grading and shaping of access road in Canvas City Housing Scheme, and Mr Speaker, I can go on.

Bridges – Mr Speaker, I bring your attention to infrastructural development. The RDC, again, was not given the \$73 million they requested, which would have done works such as upgrading the Sport Club Ground at Ituni, rehabilitation of drains at Industrial Areas and South Amelia's Ward, construction of concrete drains at Wisroc, Lovers' Lane, One- Mile Access Road and the construction of an abattoir at Linden.

Instead, Mr Speaker, a \$5 million was granted to do rehabilitation works to a section of road at Katapuli Creek. Mr Speaker, I would like this Honourable House

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to note and know that only \$5 million was granted for this rehabilitation, which is approximately 100 meters or less. But we all know the money really is to do corrective works to the Katapuli Bridge, which was not properly done about 2 years ago, when the sum of \$9 million was spent on that bridge, which was moved from its original position. We all know that story, and as I speak, the bridge is being threatened – we will have a floating bridge.

I am talking about bridges, Mr Speaker... [*Interruption: 'At Charity'*] Again, the RDC was not granted the \$28 million they asked for; but a mere \$13 million was allocated, which means, the rehabilitation of the bridge at 1st Street, Rainbow City, which provides linkage between the community and main access road, would have to remain, until this Government sees it fit to release the money. The residents will continue to suffer.

Mr Speaker, after perusing the Region's submission; I note with great concern that, of the \$15 million requested by the RDC for health, only a meagre \$6 million was allocated; and it is known that the health of a village and town is the health of a nation.

Nurses' Hostel and Charles Rosa School of Nursing – It is good to know that works will be done to the annex building at the nurses' hostel; however, completion of the Charles Rosa School of Nursing, is equally important as our nurses need to operate in an environment conducive

to learning.

Health Post – Mr Speaker, there is great need for a Health Post at 58 Miles, since that community is a growing one. I would like this Honourable House to know that the residents of 58 Miles have to walk to 47 Miles to receive medical attention.

Motorcycles for the Health Sector – Mr Speaker, a further \$2 million was requested by the RDC to purchase 8 motorcycles for the Health Sector, which would aid in the efficient delivery of health services by the Medexes and Health Officers. But again, this Government did not see it fit to grant this extra \$2 million.

Ultrasound and ECG Machines – I would like to engage the Hon Minister of Health's attention and to let him know that there is need for an ultrasound machine and an ECG machine at the McKenzie Hospital.

Vehicles – Mr Speaker, [*the Minister in the Health Ministry will report.*] Mr Speaker, let it be known that a vehicle is earmarked for the Education Ministry even though it was not requested by the RDC, but nevertheless, we will welcome this venture.

However, let it be noted that the RDC requested 2 vehicles, and they did not receive any. It is important that the Regional Chairman and Vice-Chairman have vehicles in good working condition. At present, the Regional Chairman's vehicle is in a sorry state and a sore to the

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eye. Mr Speaker, I am wondering if there was a mix-up with the allocation of the vehicle. Regional 10 needs a proper overall system of communication and as a result, is being starved and stifled of information via the media - the television especially. Mr Speaker, do you know how frustrating it is to have to watch Nonstop Comedy Network (NCN) all day, all night?

The residents are calling on the Jagdeo Government to deal with this problem, which will create and generate job opportunities, when channels such as 28, 6, 9, *et cetera*, are given the opportunity to operate in Region 10. *[Applause]* The big question is; why are you so afraid to allow Freedom of the Press in Region 10?... *[Interruption: 'Yes man!'] [Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I conclude by saying that we, the residents of Region No. 10, would like to see proper works done in the Region and no more substandard works. We want value for our money, quality and not quantity. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Neendkumar ...

Mr Neendkumar: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, fellow Members of this Honourable House; Members, I would have liked to go into detail about some of these aspects, but I will cut my speech.

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I rise to support the Budget 2008, as presented by the Hon Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Kumar Singh and to compliment him and his reliable and competent staff, for their timely preparation and presentation of this year's Budget. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the theme of this year's (2008) Budget is most appropriate – *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda.*

Mr Speaker, as an elected Geographical Member of Parliament, representing the constituency in Region No. 4, I am pleased to report to this Honourable House, that the people in Region 4 were well treated by the PPP/C Government, during the year 2007. *[Applause]* In keeping with the PPP/C's 2006 Manifesto, *a Brighter Future for All Guyanese*, the 2008 Budget will certainly keep this country Guyana on course and the PPP/C Government will continue to advance the transformation for further development and success. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, all of us here in this Honourable House, are indeed proud of the spanking new CARICOM Secretariat Head Office and the beautiful new Convention Centre. *[Applause]* Now, at the same Pattensen-Turkeyen Area, this responsible and reliable PPP/C Government has already started the construction of a state-of-the-art Olympic-size swimming pool. *[Applause]* The completion of the construction of this swimming pool, will add to the further development of sports facilities, for

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our sportsmen and sportswomen.

Guyana National Stadium – Mr Speaker, the year under review was indeed, highly successful for sports in this country. It cannot be denied that the PPP/C Government, with the support of the entire nation, was able to complete the construction of the Guyana National Stadium, at Providence. With the support of all Guyanese, Guyana hosted the Super 8 Matches successfully.

Mr Speaker, later this month on the 22nd of March, the National Stadium at Providence, will become the newest test venue in the world – West Indies will be playing Shri Lanka... [*Interruption – Test Venue*] And I am confident that all of us ... [*‘Listen, Mr Murray’*] in this House are eagerly waiting to see the first ball bowled at the newest test venue. [*Applause*]

Inter-Guyana Games 2007 – Mr Speaker, to add to what our Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Dr Frank Anthony, has said in his speech I would like to report that Guyana hosted the Second Leg of the Inter-Guyana Games 2007 with great success, with our organization and hospitality arrangements being described by our guests as *excellent*. In the actual events our Guyanese youths won at Male Basketball and Male Volleyball after many years and our Cyclists dominated the cycling events.

Sporting Structures and Sports Committees – Mr Speaker, the PPP/C Government will be strengthening the sport

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structures in the country, in the year 2008. We will be making strong efforts to establish functioning sports committees, in all Ten Administrative Regions of the country.

Youth Interest in Sports Programmes – Mr Speaker, during the year 2007, we saw that our students, our youths in particular, showed great interest in our sports programmes. To this effect, we will be working more systematically, in schools and the committies, to ensure that we involve more of our youth population in sports. Already, the Ministry of Education, the Local Government Ministry and the Ministry of Health, are working along with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, to develop a stronger sports programmes.

Use of Sports – Mr Speaker, sports can, and must, be used as a vehicle to foster harmony, peace and unity among our people. Sports must enable our people to socialize and live a disciplined life. Sports must keep our people away from crime, drugs and other negative activities. A disciplined nation is a nation that has high moral standards; the moral must be high, and then, we will achieve greater success.

Mr Speaker, the construction of the New Diamond Secondary School is a manifestation of this Government's genuine interest in educating our students. *[Applause]* In 1992, the education system had crumbled... *[Interruption: 'Hi, hi, do not make your eye and pass us']*

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This caring and responsible Government, with the establishment of the successful New Diamond Housing Scheme, can now be proud of the fact that, the New Diamond Secondary School is open and more than 1000 secondary school places are available to our students. This is indeed a welcomed achievement. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I must also mention that the new Wisburg Secondary School was commissioned in November, last year. This will improve access to higher education for our children in the mining town of Linden. The Wisburg Secondary School will accommodate approximately 1000 students, along with 46 teachers. *[Applause]* The school is equipped with resources for Information Technology (IT), Industrial Arts, Home Economic and Science. Its motto is; *Education, Investment for Life*. This is not ... This is truth.

Sports Gears for Region 4 – Mr Speaker, I would like to report to this Honourable House, that the Honourable Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Dr Frank Anthony, gave to the Regional Chairman, Mr Mingo, a substantial amount of sports gears, including cricket gears in 2007 ... *[Inaudable]*

Sylvan Garner Received Assistance – Secondly, I would like to report that Sylvan Garner received assistance from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to attend the same event that she is talking about, where he medaled... *[Interruption: ‘Who is she you are talking about?’ ‘The*

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Honourable Member, right ...”]

Chess Sets in Region 10 – In respect to chess sets, we have a system in place to distribute chess sets in Region 10, where we will be also having training, right. So, I would like you to know very clear.

Mr Speaker, I listened to some of the Speakers from the Opposition Benches, and it is regrettable, that some of them made us feel that things are so bad in this country... *[Interruption: ‘You do not know that?]* However, I would like to remind them, that the political calendar is not counted by the days, but by the events that take place. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, as we take a drive from Parliament to the East Coast, or we take a drive to the East Bank of Demerara; I am sure that we will be extremely proud and happy to know, that the roads are better now than any time before ... *[Interruption: ‘That is so?’ “Further... And they are well lit”]*. How many of us ever thought that we would have been able to put in place the beautiful streetlights that we now have? *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I am sure that when Mr Murray leaves Parliament later this evening he would be laughing, as he will be driving in bright, beautiful streetlights straight to his home. *[Applause] [“Debbi too”]*

Mr Speaker, can anyone deny the fact that the new Regional Hospital at Diamond is a remarkable

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achievement for the PPP/C Government and the people in Region 4, in particular? *[Applause]*

Today, I am proud of the achievements in the Housing, Education and Health Sectors in Region 4. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the people in Region No. 4 are benefiting from improved Drainage and Irrigation Programmes in the Region. We are fully cognizant of the fact that, our coastline is below sea level, and today, with the rising sea levels, we have to be very prompt, efficient and vigilant, with our Drainage and Irrigation Programme. Approximately \$265 million were spent on Drainage and Irrigation works in the Region. We must recognize that, although we experience heavy rainfall periodically, yet, our people did not experience any major flooding. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, I would like to commend this Government's Electrification Programme.

Today, we must accept that the housing drive was done in an organized and planned system, and the necessities, water, roads and light, were also included.

Mr Speaker, the Bauxite Industry was destroyed by the People's National Congress Government, when they were in government. The workers were teargassed and imprisoned. The PNC caused the industry to be merely limping. However, today, with the astute leadership of the PPP/C Government, we are proud to let this nation know,

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that both the Linden and Berbice Bauxite Corporations are profitable [*Applause*] and the people's jobs are guaranteed for the next 10 years; [*Applause*] when you were planning to dismiss them ... [*Interruption: 'Tell them Neil'*]

In 2007, BCJI Inc. invested approximately US \$4 million in equipment. During 2007, BCJI Inc. produced 1,000,775 tonnes of metal grade bauxite and 114,120 tonnes of chemical grade bauxite. The improvement at Linmine is also most encouraging.

Mr Speaker, the Honorable Minister of Finance has pointed to the positive growth expected in the key sectors of the economy in 2008. The economy is targeted to grow by approximately 5 percent, during 2008.

- Sugar production is expected to achieve 290,000 tonnes, an increase of 5.8 percent.
- Rice output is targeted at 321,000 tonnes, representing a 7.6 percent growth.
- Bauxite production is expected to increase by approximately 17 percent or 2,000,624 tonnes.

You cannot take it, Debbi. You cannot take the result. You cannot take it. [*Applause*] Buxton cannot stop this. Mr Speaker, certainly this country is developing and the quality of our people's living standard, is improving.

Mr Speaker, I would like to once more express my

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support for the Budget presented by the Honourable Minister of Finance.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, Mr Nandlall ... He is not here?

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall: Sir, I rise to support the Budget presented to this National Assembly by the Hon Minister of Finance.

I wish, like the Speakers before me, to extend my sentiments of congratulation to him and his competent team for presenting a comprehensive and very progressive 2008 Budget.

Sir, we have heard a lot; a number of attempts have been made to place an interpretation to the title of this Budget – *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda*. I would like to begin my presentation, by situating this Budget in its proper context.

Mr Speaker, the People's Progressive Party/Civic, went to the people of this country in 2006, during the elections campaign and presented to the people of this country a plan and a programme for development of Guyana over a five-year period, commencing from 2006 to 2010. We told the people of this country, after explaining in great detail about this plan; we asked the people of this country to partner us and to support us, as we set about to implement our vision - the People's Progressive

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Party/Civic's vision for the development of this country.

Mr Speaker, the people of this country responded resoundingly and we were given the mandate of the people of this country, to implement the policies and programmes contained in this document. *[Applause]* And therefore, Mr Speaker, we have a constitutional responsibility to implement the policies contained in this document.

At this juncture, it may be appropriate, Mr Speaker, to recall, that the PNCR-1G went to this people of this country with their developmental plan; the Alliance for Change went to the people of this country with their developmental plan; GAP-ROAR went to the people of this country with their vision for development. Unfortunately, the people of this country rejected those programmes and those plans, and supported the People's... *[Applause]* Fortunately, I said *unfortunately*. Fortunately, they rejected those programmes and they endorsed the plans of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in a nutshell, this was our vision:

- A vision in which no Guyanese will be imprisoned by poverty and every Guyanese child will have the opportunity to develop into a productive and proud citizen, pursuing his, or her, dreams in a free land;

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- A vision, where every Guyanese has access to the best quality education, and health care; where people owned their own homes, and live in communities with proper streets, roads, drainages, electricity, water, sanitation and modern amenities comparable to that of a developed country;
- A vision where our people can enjoy healthy lives, where our elders can enjoy their golden years in dignity;
- A vision where a resilient and competitive economy is created, an economy that can function effectively in a global environment, withstand domestic and external shocks, and provide opportunities for our entrepreneurs to create wealth and generate well-paying jobs for all of our people;
- A vision where our development is based on equitable allocations of resources, for all of our people and where good governance and the rule of law will prevail.

Mr Speaker, it is in that context, and this document, Mr Speaker, was called from the National Development Strategy, which the government has been using as its model for development.

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It is well-known, Mr Speaker, that, that National Development Strategy, was a document that was formulated and prepared by a number of very highly qualified, talented Guyanese; including people like Prof. Clive Ulandi Thomas and Dr Kenneth King, who served as a Minister under the PNC Government.

Mr Speaker, so that last year, the Budget presented by the Honourable Minister, Dr Ashni Singh, was the first year of a five-year phase for development. That is why, Mr Speaker, it was entitled *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*, and this year, Mr Speaker, the Budget is entitled, *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda*, meaning, Mr Speaker, that it is continuing the development, which started last year. So I just thought, Mr Speaker, I would say that, to put the budget in a proper context.

Mr Speaker, I say that, also to say that, one would have expected the Opposition Members in Parliament, would have looked at this document in that context, so that, when they criticize it, they would understand, that this is only one year of a five-year plan and their criticisms could have been a little more constructive and objective; rather than so jaundiced and biased.

Mr Speaker, take for example the presentation made by the Honourable Member, Mr Mervyn Williams, who unfortunately is not here. I used his presentation as an example, because he largely epitomized, the presentations

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made by several Members of the Opposition. He spoke, Mr Speaker - I do not think Your Honour was here; but he created, he spoke and he purportedly was speaking for Region No. 3, and he painted a most dismal picture of Region 3. After listening to him, you would think that Region 3 was a virtual hellhole.

He forgot to mention, Mr Speaker, about the large housing scheme established at Parfait Harmony. He omitted to mention the large housing scheme established at Cornelia Ida. He omitted to mention the large housing schemes at Tuschen, both north and south. He omitted to mention the brand new diagnostic centre, which was constructed at Leonora. He forgot to mention, Mr Speaker, that the transportation service between Supernaam and Parika, would be boosted with the provision of two brand new Ferries, which are intended to augment the present transportation service there. He forgot to mention the government's plans, to convert Parika into a township. He also did not mention, that the government is presently pursuing, a complete redesigning of the Stelling at Parika.

He did not mention, Mr Speaker, that it is in this Budget two brand new airstrips are going to be constructed on the Islands of Leguan and Wakenaam. He did not mention anything like that. Mr Speaker, and there are many... for example, he did not speak about the new well, the water well, which was installed quite recently at LaGrange. He did not mention any of these things.

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Mr Speaker, there is nothing wrong with, in your presentation, to give credit where credit is due and criticize where criticism is deserving. But it is my observation of what is transpiring here; Members of the Opposition are looking at this, as an opportunity just to attack the Government and the government's policy. Mr Speaker, that type of approach cannot take us anywhere, because it is not... the people of this country, whom we are elected here to represent, deserve better, more objective and more intelligent representation. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, I quoted from the Manifesto, where:

Our vision was to create a resilient competitive economy and an economy that can function effectively in a global environment and withstand domestic and external shocks.

Mr Speaker, 2007 presented an opportunity to this Government, to demonstrate that commitment to the people of this country; because 2007 we witness an unprecedented rise in fuel prices internationally. From February to December 2007, fuel prices rise from about US \$35 per barrel to US \$99 - \$100 per barrel in December. Then we also saw in the international arena, a decline in food production, which led to an increase in food prices, due mainly to adverse weather conditions and a movement away from food production, toward the production of bio-diesel type of products.

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Electricity Cost – Mr Speaker, what was the consequence of that on the Guyana economy? It is known that we spend approximately 40 percent of our GDP on the acquisition of fuel. What that means, Mr Speaker, is that such an international development, would have had a devastating effect on the Guyana economy. For example, Mr Speaker, the operating cost of GPL: GPL spends about 80 percent of its budget only to purchase oil. So you can imagine, when price, of oil rise on the international market, the devastating consequences that will have on the Guyana economy.

But what we have seen in the Guyana economy? As a result of prudent fiscal management, although the price for oil has increased so dramatically, only 6 percent of that increase was actually borne by the consumer, at the pump, Mr Speaker. That is an outstanding testimony of good governance and prudent economic management.
[Applause]

We have seen no substantial increase in the price for electricity in this country. If the increase in fuel price, Mr Speaker, was allowed to be passed down, without the government intervening and cushioning the effects of those prices, Mr Speaker, electricity would have become absolutely prohibitive to the ordinary man in this country.
[Applause]

VAT Windfall – Mr Speaker, the question has been asked regularly, *where is the windfall?; where is the money*

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going from the windfall government has gotten from VAT? Well, there is where it is going, Mr Speaker. The President said on various occasions that the government had to intervene and subsidies, for example, the running of GPL, Mr Speaker, so that the ordinary Guyanese consumer, would not have borne the brunt of the increase in price, internationally. [Applause]

*Response to Rise in Oil Price – Mr Speaker, I can give the parallel of what transpired in the 1970s, when there was an increase in fuel. Mr Speaker, you would recall that the increase was nowhere near the magnitude, of what we had witnessed in 2007; but in the 70s there was an increase in fuel prices. At that time, Mr Speaker, our major exports, bauxite and sugar were booming. They were booming, Mr Speaker, but because of the increase in the price of fuel in the international market; what we saw the government of the day did? Immediately, Mr Speaker, there was a devaluation of the Guyana dollar. Immediately, there were banning of food items. Immediately, there was a shortage of electricity, institutionalized blackouts; *Load-shedding* it used to be called. That was how the PNC Government responded to the rise in oil prices then. We do not see that now, Mr Speaker.*

What have we seen now? We have seen an economy that is growing. We are seeing an economy that is scheduled to grow by 4.9 percent. Amidst all the international turbulence on the world market, with prices of oil, *et*

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cetera, et cetera, Guyana's economy continues to remain stable. We have not had any major devaluation of the dollar, over the past 10 to 15 years, Mr Speaker. That is the prudent management of the economy that I am speaking about.

Sugar Estates – Mr Speaker, I will not go through the various sectors; but we have seen that this Budget projects transformation of the Agriculture Sector, for example, Mr Speaker, with the new factory at Skeldon being scheduled to be completed this year. We also see in the Budget, Mr Speaker, that the Enmore factory is scheduled for upgrade and a brand new packaging plant will be constructed at that factory, which is supposed to be a state-of-the-art facility, comparable to any one existing of its type, in the Caribbean.

Bauxite Industry – Mr Speaker, my friend, Honourable Member Mr Neil Kumar, spoke of the fact that, unlike a few years ago, we now have a vibrant bauxite industry, where productions are expected to continue to grow, both at the Berbice location and at the Linden location. In addition to that, Mr Speaker, the government plans, and it is in the Budget, to build a refinery plant that will refine the alumina.

Hydro-Plant - In addition to that, Mr Speaker, a hydro-project is scheduled to be constructed, which will supply power to that plant.

Offshore Banking – Mr Speaker, the Budget also informs

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us that shortly, an Offshore Banking Bill will be presented to this House and that will transform, that will usher us into a new age of offshore banking.

Maritime Exploration – Mr Speaker, we are aware of the maritime, the United Nations ruling, in respect of the dispute that we had with Suriname. This year, Mr Speaker, we are expected to see that sector taking off, with exploration activities scheduled to commence.

Judiciary – Mr Speaker, before I conclude, I would like to speak a little on the Justice Sector. Mr Speaker, US \$25 million is earmarked to be injected in that sector. This is the first time in the history of this country that that volume of capital investment, is ever being made in the Judiciary. *[Applause]* And Mr Speaker, this is in addition to the Financial Capital Investment which the Judiciary will benefit from, under the Security Sector Plan, which Hon Member, Minister Clement Rohee, will speak about later.

Crime Fighting and Administration of Criminal Justice System – Mr Speaker, of course, Crime Fighting and the Administration of the Criminal Justice System, go hand-in-hand. The Administration of Justice, the Criminal Section of it is scheduled to receive a substantial sum of money, under the Security Sector Reform Development Plan. In addition to that, Mr Speaker, US \$25 million will be spent in modernizing the Administration of Justice in Guyana. *[Applause]*

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Justice Reform Strategy – The main objective of the programme, Mr Speaker, is to enlarge the investment climate and Rights Enforcement in Guyana, through improved public sector governance. In order to achieve this higher order objective, the reform is reflective of the identified three main pillars in the Justice Reform Strategy, namely:

- (i.) Strengthening the accountability and administrative efficiency of service delivery in the Justice Sector;
- (ii.) Enhancing linkages and co-ordination within justice institutions; and
- (iii.) Improving access to justice.

Mr Speaker, these are the three broad heads under which this programme will be implemented.

Policy Reforms in the Justice Sector

Mr Speaker, the aim of this component is to assist in improving the accountability and efficiency, and accessing of Guyana's Justice Sector. Activities will focus on a number of Policy Reforms, including legislative and administrative elements. A number of benchmarks have been identified as these would constitute the basis for the release of two tranches of financial support, under this component.

Under the Investment and Technical Support Component, Mr Speaker; this will finance the activities that will

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support the achievement of the reform benchmarks. These activities will be directed to the operational improvement of the leading justice institutions. The key activities will include training, requisition of computer hardware and software and the refurbishment of physical facilities.

The activities of this component are organized into three sub-components, namely:

- (i) Enhancing institutional capacity;
- (ii) Strengthening linkages among justice institutions; and
- (iii) Improving access to justice.

While the High Court has certain responsibilities under the first sub-component; the Ministry of Legal Affairs has sole responsibility for components (ii.) and (iii.). Under sub-component (i.), Mr Speaker, Enhancing Institutional Capacity in the Justice Sector, the purpose of this sub-component is to:

- Improve the quality, efficiency and efficacy of service delivery in the justice institutions in Guyana, by strengthening governance and accountability;
- Building institutional capacity, streamlining legal procedure; and
- Modernizing administrative systems.

Activities relevant to the High Court are to:

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- Improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery in the High Court and in the Magistrate Court;
- Strengthening the Judicial Service Commission, by drafting rules and code of conduct;
- Eliminate and reduce the backlog of cases;
- Strengthening Court Administration;
- Support to Registry in the development of job description, performance standards, training, *et cetera*;
- Support to improve the Court Financial Management;
- Enhancing skills and productivity of judges and magistrates; and
- Rehabilitation of physical improvements in the courtrooms and courthouses.

Activities relevant to the Ministry of Legal Affairs are:

- Improving Criminal Justice; the focus here is the reorganization of the Department of Public Prosecutions.

Specific tasks have been identified, Mr Speaker, for the DPP because Mde Deputy Speaker Riehl spoke at

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length about *the DPP's Office*. Well, these are the developmental plans that are in store for that office:

- Design and implement a functional and operational reorganization of the DPP Chambers;
- Develop and implement a plan for the phasing out of police prosecution of narcotics and indictable cases - that is in the short-term; and the phasing out of police prosecution for all criminal matter - that is the long-term plan;
- Training of Prosecutors police, including specialized areas, such as cyber crimes and money laundering, and the DPP staff themselves;
- Design and installation of a management information software;
- Procurement of goods, equipment; and
- Minor works for expansion of the DPP Office outside of Georgetown.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member also spoke, about *a need for review of legislation to be done*. Well, Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Legal Affairs is schedule to review the legislative making process, and include a system of assignment of legislation to Ministries, and development and implementation of a reform plan.

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Mr Speaker, under Sub-component (ii) - Strengthening Linkages among Justice Institutions, among the specific activities in relation to crime fighting are:

- The preparation of a functional and operational plan for the DPP, with particular focus on coordination with the police;

Sub-component (iii), Mr Speaker, deals with the question of improving access to justice. The purpose here, Mr Speaker, is to:

- Improve access to justice in Guyana, by enhancing citizen awareness of their rights and responsibilities; and
- Providing services to court users, to facilitate legal advice and presentation, as well as, access to information and alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

Mr Speaker, specific activities that are scheduled to be undertaken under this component are as follows:

- Expansion of legal services throughout Guyana;

Mr Speaker, right now, it is centered only in Georgetown. Well under this component, it is expected to go countrywide.

- Development of a legal awareness;

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- Support of informal justice; and
- Law revision and legislative framework.

Mr Speaker, that in a nutshell; the document is a very thick document; but that in essence, is what the Justice Sector Reform Plan is about.

Investment in our People

Mr Speaker, there is another issue that I would like to reply to. Honourable Member Mrs Riehl spoke about *this Government not paying attention and not investing in the people of this country*. She spoke at length about that. But, Mr Speaker, I wish to point out to this Honourable Assembly, that there is a part of the Budget that carries that exact name, Page 29 - *Investment in our People*. There is a whole section of the Budget that deals specifically with that issue.

Under that section, Mr Speaker, it covers health and those types of social services. There, \$19 billion will be spent on Education; \$12.1 billion will be spent on Health; \$1.5 billion is going to be spent on Housing and Water, and \$359 million is scheduled to be spent on Youth and Sports. So, Mr Speaker, it is not correct, when the Member said that, *we are not investing in people*. The Budget has a specific title dealing with that issue and billions of dollars are earmarked to be spent in those areas. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, with those few sentiments I would like to

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commend the 2008 Budget to this House, and I ask this entire Assembly to support it. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Mr Permanand Persaud ...

Mr Permanand Persaud: Mr Speaker, I stand to represent my geographical constituency, Region No. 2.

Before I speak on my geographical constituency, I want to commend the presentation by the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, for a well-done presentation of the 2008 Budget, in this National Assembly.
[Applause]

Mr Speaker, the year 2007 was a good year for Guyana and the long presentation with the \$119.3 billion Budget, reflects the PPP/C commitment to *staying the course*. Mr Speaker, by using the resources available, the 2008 Budget will definitely be *advancing the transformation agenda*. Mr Speaker, this will enhance all improvements, the improvement of the physical infrastructure and our economy.

Region No. 2

Mr Speaker, for my region, I want to say that my colleague Mr Faruke Khan, Honourable Member, spoke on the very many sectors of our region and I just have a short presentation.

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Education – First, I want to deal with education. Contrary to what we listened from the Honourable Member, Amna Ally, criticizing every aspect of the education system, which that Member is also a part of; I think is a gross insult.

The objective – Our Region’s Education System, is to provide equal access for all children and young people, to equal education.

The scope – This programme caters for the management and the coordination of the education programme in the 29 Nursery Schools, 38 Primary Schools and ... Secondary Schools.

Support is also given to the In-Service Training Centre, of the Cyril Potter College of Education and the Essequibo Technical Institute. [*Applause*]

Mr Speaker, with the few staff at the Education Department, and I want to call the figure – 4, 1 Regional Education Officer and 3 District Education Officers; we have managed to supervise and monitor the entire education system of our Region.

I can tell you, especially for the Minister of Finance, I know when you budget and allocate money to my Region, you are looking forward for results. This year, like last year, I will definitely tell you about results in my Region. [*Pause*] In our Region, Mr Speaker, we strongly believe in community relations with our schools, which

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are assisting in enhancing the education programmes at all schools. With the Parent-Teacher Association, the Officers of the Education Department also have faced public meetings at periodical times, in different areas. Some of the constraints they are facing is, the Department of Education needs to be more staffed.

Mr Speaker, I just want to move directly into results from the last CSEC Exams, which I think is on par, or championing the cause of education across Guyana. I want to give you results. Mr Speaker, to make it short because of this late hour, the results of the CXC Level:

- At the Anna Regina Multilateral School, Shafaz Shareef

I want to give you subject for subject, because there was a big criticism pertaining to who was the top student in Guyana and we in Region 2 had a different believe in this situation.

Agriculture Science, Grade1; Biology, Grade 1; Chemistry, Grade 1; English A, Grade 1; English B, Grade 1; Integrated Science, Grade 1; Mathematics, Grade 1; Physics, Grade 1; Social Studies, Grade 1; *[Applause]* Spanish, Grade1; Technical Drawing, Grade 1; Human Biology, Grade 1; Electricity and Electronics, Grade 1; Information Technology, Grade 1.

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Fourteen subjects, Grade 1, at one sitting, Comrades. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, this is the kind of result I wish that the people of the Opposition can give us, because definitely we are getting results in the other areas.

2nd Placed in Region 2, Mr Speaker, Avinash Persaud.

Agriculture Science, Grade1; Biology, Grade 1; Chemistry, Grade 1; English A, Grade 1; English B, Grade 1; Geography, Grade 2; Integrated Science, Grade 1; Mathematics, Grade 1; Office Administration, Grade 1; Social Studies, Grade 1; Physics, Grade1; Principles of Business, Grade 1; Human and Social Biology, Grade 1.

Mr Speaker, Fourteen subjects, 13 Grade 1 and 1 Grade 2. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, this result comes from the equal allocation of resources from the Government.

Shoba Seegobin – 11 Grades 1; 1 Grade 2

I can call the 10 top students in Region 2, Mr Speaker. And when people criticizing the education system, I know across the board of Guyana, the Ministry of Education has the same programmes and policies. *[Interruption: 'Now tell us about the average']* Our education system believes, Mr Speaker, success is not happening in its result. There is nothing mysterious about success. It is doing instead of doubting, and working hard instead of

wishing. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the Essequibo Technical Institute, is also working and giving us great results, as the mission statement:

Essequibo Technical Institute will be a premier institution. It will meet the needs of the trainees. It will provide a high quality of training and services that would foster growth and development in commerce and industry.

And this was asked about *why the government was not concentrating on prevocational training and further training after secondary*. Mr Speaker, I can tell you that in Region 2, we have the Essequibo Technical Institute. Like in many other areas, we do have that and we are contemplating to establish a branch of the Guyana School of Agriculture. *[Applause]*

Also, Mr Speaker, there is a call by the Board of the Anna Regina Multilateral School, because of the good results and the teachers and students that are going there; we are asking that if very soon, we can establish the first 6th Form School in Region 2. *[Interruption: ‘Where is Amna man...’ ‘All for the PPP/C in Essequibo – a clean sweep’ ‘You have to go to Canje’]*

Community D&I Project – Mr Speaker, I want to move on now, to the part of Local Government. Mr Speaker, the

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residents of Region 2 welcome the establishment of the Community D&I Project, which has been doing well for our region, in every community. *[Applause]* One, it creates employment and the second thing is that, we have a very, very clean environment in Region 2. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the subvention given from the Ministry of Local Government to our Region and the various NDCs; as I want to mention, we have 5 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and 1 Township, and I want to tell you it is a record, that from 1994 Local Government Elections to date, we did not establish one Interim Body Cell. All our councils are functioning. *[Applause]*

Our Region and our NDCs and Local Authority, have been using the \$3 million grant that we are getting from the Ministry of Local Government and we have been doing well with this, to maintain streets, culverts, drains, *et cetera*. I can tell you, it is well kept in our Region. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, with the same funding and the rates and taxes collected in Region 2 we are intending very soon to establish two new townships, that is, at Charity which is a fast growing area and the Supenaam-Good Hope Romona area. *[Applause]*

Hinterland Communities

Mr Speaker, I just want to touch on some areas of the Hinterland Communities and some people may question

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what we are doing, as a people, for the people in the Hinterland Communities. In fact, recently I addressed the people in one of the Hinterland areas and I told them that we have to stop using the words *Afro-Guyanese, Indo-Guyanese and Amerindians*; but we are all Guyanese. *[Applause]*

Development – Mr Speaker, our Regional Administration and Sub-Committees make regular visits to all these communities. I can tell you, the developmental works that are taking place across Guyana, all nine of our Hinterland Communities have been receiving similar benefits, that is, Health Centers, schools, transportation, *et cetera*. *[Applause]*

President's Village Grant – The Regional Administration and the nine Amerindian Communities welcome the President's Village Grant which they can use to enhance economic activities in their given communities.

They have submitted the programmes and finances have already started to pour into the villages, like Capoey, Bethany, Kabakaburi. I can tell you that Kabakaburi is going for a massive craft-centre, from which they can establish a Craft Centre to export craft from Guyana. *[Applause]* I can tell you Niebi-craft are now exported from Pomeroon straight into Barbados, St Lucia and Grenada. Karowake, for the first time, they received \$500,000 and they will establish a boat service from Karowake, which is about 32 miles from Charity.

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[Applause] Mr Speaker, Wakapow is the largest Hinterland Community in Region No. 2 and very soon, as someone may tell us if it is accurate, that a Secondary School is already gazetted for Wakapow Community.
[Applause]

Mr Speaker, I just want to indicate to this House, that Mainstay Lake, Whyakia Mainstay Lake - Community has been doing well in business

We established a huge pine project where we have a pine factory and we are exporting pine chunks to France, Canada and other countries in Europe. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, finally on Hinterland Community, I just want to tell you about the Tapakuma Area. We are now working hard and have established a cassava project, with the grant that is given from the President's Village Grant; and this will enable us to export cassava cake, this is the garlic-flavoured cassava cake, cassareep and cassava bread. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker... *[Interruption: 'You pay VAT on that?' "No VAT on cassava bread"]*

Drainage and Irrigation

Mr Speaker, December last saw us at the closing stage of the Poor Rural Community Support Services in Region 2. I want to tell you, Mr Speaker, to give you a little report on this; that in Region 2, we spent approximately \$811, 209,000, and this enabled us to do drainage and irrigation works within the Rice area of Region 2; rehabilitate and

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construct structures in the Drainage and Irrigation System. We constructed a storage bond and ramp for the Fisherman's Coop Association in Lima.

Region 2 Seed Paddy Growers Association received and constructed a brand new Laboratory Seed Testing Programme. The Anna Regina Fish Station was reconstructed. The Capoey access road was constructed and the Mashabo access road was constructed.

School Drop-out Multipurpose Structures – Mr Speaker, on this programme also where we had youths dropping out of school we set up various drop-out structures, where we have drop-out multipurpose structures like resource materials, and so forth.

Day Care Centre – In Columbia, Capoey, Johanna Cecelia, Collin and in Suddie, Maria's Lodge, we have Day Care Centres.

Mr Speaker, with these I think myself and my colleague Honourable Member Faruk Khan did give you a good breakdown as to what is going on in Region 2.

I want to thank you, very much, Mr Speaker, and I close.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Members. Thank you very much, the Honourable Member made a very great speech.

Honourable Members, Comrade Albert Atkinson please.

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Mr Albert Atkinson: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members of this Assembly, we all meet once again to give our support, I am sure, to the Annual Budget of our country. Budget 2008 is a well rounded budget that has catered for every sector of our economy. As the geographical representative of Region No. 8, Potaro-Siparuni I am happy to contribute and to support this 2008 Budget.

This budget is imbued with the vision of the PPP/C Administration, of continuing to improve and to enhance, and to secure the lives of our people in the Interior. What does this mean for Region 8 Mr Speaker? It means better roads, better Health Centers, potable water for our people, better security, building of police stations, prompt payments of Old Age Pension and Public Assistance [Applause], better communication and transportation. [Applause] With this, it is evident, Mr Speaker, because quite recently, up to the latter part of last year, one would have been communicating from the Interior, that is Region 8, by virtue of a radio transmitting set or by virtue of mail. Now, one can get a cell phone and can communicate to any part of the world, via Degicel or GT&T. [Applause]

Physical Infrastructural Base – Mr Speaker, the 2007 Budget with the theme, *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana* this year with the continuity and smooth flow of *Staying the Course, Advancing the*

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Transformation Agenda; the Pataro-Siparuni Region, despite all its challenges with respect to its topography and peculiar distribution of our population, we continue to build the physical infrastructural base of the Region. This, Mr Speaker, is very critical for the Region.

Professional Human Resource – We continue to improve its professional human resource, for the areas of health, education, public works and agriculture.

Mr Speaker, I listened keenly, to Honourable Members Williams, Dr Norton, and Mr Fernandes who all attempted to paint a very gloomy picture of what transpires in our Interior Villages and Settlements. Indeed, Mr Speaker, we do not have utopias or any ‘shangrilas’ in our yet untapped Interior, although we aspire for that.

What I do know, Mr Speaker, is that, we on this side of the House, have been collectively supporting the building of better roads, health posts, centers, hospitals, schools; providing tractors, chainsaws and agri-tools; training of nurses, teachers, clerical workers; encouraging small business enterprises; and empowering our women [*Applause*] through leadership programmes, wherever we have villages and communities, and have always agitated for more resources to be expended in the Region.

Mr Speaker, I solicit the attention of our Honourable Colleagues on the opposite side of this House to recognize, and admit, and appreciate, that Region 8 is no

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longer isolated. Isolation, Mr Speaker, is not good for development and it has left our Region with a lot of catching-up to do; but we are making headway ... We are making headway.

We would have very much appreciated it, if the allocations for the Region were in sync with what we had proposed. *[Laughter]* But, we respect the reality based on our priorities and have to work with what is available. Mr Speaker, with the 2007 Capital Allocation of \$93.7 million, our Region was able to complete 2 heavy-duty bridges at \$14.5 million, 2 teachers' quarters and the purchase of solar equipment for health and education.

Mr Speaker, the will of the people is to have vehicular roads and with \$10 million and the peoples' support, approximately 40 miles of roadway from Kato to Maikwak was constructed through dense jungle and rugged mountains by manpower *[Applause]* and another 80 miles from Karisparu to Kato and 25 miles from Kato to Cheong Mouth. The construction of these roadways and bridges will bring considerable relief to the residents of the Pakarimas, since trucks will be able to travel with more ease.

Now that the communities are accessing ATVs, through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, five have so far been allocated and delivered, actually. The drudgery of moving books and medical supplies from point to point will soon become a trend of the past. *[Applause]*

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This year, 2008, Mr Speaker, we have been allocated in excess of \$100 million. This will be utilized to purchase a tractor and improve the drainage at Mahdia, by continuing the construction of concrete drainage in preparation for the design of having Mahdia transformed into a township, at some stage or another... *[Interruption: 'So that is very definite']* Also, we are going to be purchasing a small dragline and a dump truck ... *[Interruption: 'That is available?']*

Mde Speaker we continue to build and upgrade our airfields. Whereas in the recent past there were only three major landing strips: one at Monkey Mountain, one at Kato and one at Orinduik *[Interruption: 'What about Orealla?']* with a once a month Guyana Airways Service, we now have airfields in 13 of the 16 Amerindian villages with a twice, and sometimes thrice, a week domestic service by Air Services Ltd to seven of these communities. *[Applause]* Feasibility studies are now being undertaken to have a strip built at Kaibarupou. Monies have been voted for the completion of minor works at Chenapau.

Mr Speaker, Region 8 continues to focus its attention on the improved delivery of education and have \$34.1 million towards Teachers' Quarters at Maikwak, the students' dormitory at Paramakatoi, the education Office at Mahdia, the school at Micoby, a new school at Muruwa and a fence for the nursery school at Mahdia. *[Applause]*

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Qualified Teaching Staff – These schools are not just being built, Mr Speaker, they are being equipped with solar equipment for lighting. [Applause] We recognize our deficiency in qualified staff. However, 11 of our 25 schools have qualified Heads, and excepting for one, are fully staffed by members, indigenous to their communities, with the ongoing upgrading programme. [Applause]

Teacher's Training – Our untrained teachers are undergoing intensive preparation for college. The Region has begun to reap the benefits of this programme as is evidenced by the thirteen teachers undergoing training at the Cyril Potter Collage of Education; nine of these are in their final year and will be graduating in July of this year, of course, to return to our region.

Remote Nutritional Programme – The Remote Nutritional Programme has already been introduced to 7 schools, and this year 8 more are going to be benefiting. Mr Speaker, this innovative venture by the Ministry has also benefitted the Agricultural Sector as residents find a readily available market for their produce and are producing more nutritional crops for the programme. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, we continue to improve on our many successes in the Health Sector of the Region. We continue to build and maintain our facilities and to train and upgrade our staff. In 2008, Mr Speaker, with a capital allocation of \$9.5 million, we are building a

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Health Hut at Micoby complete the x-ray facility at the Mahdia hospital, constructing a drug storage facility to cater for the prompt distribution of drugs and supplies to satellite areas and purchasing solar panels and fittings, transmitting sets and solar refrigerators.

One million dollars are being allocated for training and upgrading our staff. Mr Speaker, we do not say that there are not deficiencies. We have to be honest, Mr Speaker, so that when we compare resource expended to results achieved there is no denial that we have come a long way, a very long way, [*Applause*] from the Medical Ranger who visited comminutes once a year to the District Commissioner who was the lone administrator of the Region.

Our reform in administration has seen an extension to the inclusion of Community Development Officers attached to the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. Their constant contacts and intensive training programmes for village leaders have begun to bear fruit, as the self determination of the communities become established with the building of village offices [*Applause*] through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, so that communities have some degree of autonomy now.

The construction patterns are changing in the villages, with thatched roofing giving way to galvanized roofing. Live stock, mainly cattle and sheep, have begun to increase in Monkey Mountain, Kato, Mahdia, Kurukabaru

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and Chiung Mount. Overall, Mr Speaker, the standard of life has increased tremendously. *[Applause]*

The benefits derived from the YEST Programme, the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training Programme, is clearly obvious as the building of furniture and repairs to small machines, generate an income for youths who have attained such skills. Sewing clubs for women help to generate an earning, as they sew uniforms and other small ventures of this nature, initiated to build up self determination.

Mr Speaker, bringing our talents to the forefront continues to be one of the Region's top priorities, as we won the Amerindian Heritage Queen Pageant for the second time, consecutively in 2007 and have begun preparation to take the crown again in 2008.

Mr Speaker, I would wish to continue with our achievements; but at this time it is our projections that are really relevant. As a result, the Region will continue pursuing our infrastructural programme as this, ultimately, will be the foundation for investment and the creation of jobs. Most importantly, Mr Speaker, access to the Region is our priority. It is with this vision, Mr Speaker that the Region intends to pursue its programme. *[Applause]*

In concluding, I wish to commend the Hon Dr Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, and his staff for the prowess in the compilation of the Budget. I thank you, Mr

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Speaker. *[Applause]*

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned until 14:00H.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Honourable Members, we adjourn until later today at 14:00H

Adjourned Accordingly At 12:30 H