

77TH SITTING - 1ST SESSION - 9TH PARLIAMENT

WEDNESDAY - 18 FEBRUARY 2009

14:04

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the prayer

PUBLIC BUSINESS

(i) GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

**(1) BUDGET SPEECH 2009 - MOTION FOR
THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF
EXPENDITURE FOR 2009**

3RD DAY BUDGET DEBATE 18 FEBRUARY 2009
**Assembly resumes the Debate (3rd Day) on the Motion
for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for
the Financial Year 2009**

The Speaker: Honourable Members, we will now resume the Debate on the Budget for the year 2009. I have not received my list as yet so I do not know who the first speaker is.

Mr Murray, are you starting today?

Mr Winston S Murray: I believe I am, Sir.

The Speaker: Welcome back ... [*Applause*]

Mr Winston S Murray: Thank you very much.

The Speaker: You might be aware that there were certain speculations, none of which I believed.

14:05H

Mr Winston S Murray: I do not know what they were, so they cannot solicit a comment from me.

Sir, on behalf of the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana, I extend congratulations to the Hon Minister

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of Finance on the presentation of this his third Budget to the National Assembly and to the Nation.

Sir, I apologise in advance, for any repetition there may be in anything I say, but hope that even if I repeat, share another if not different perspective.

Sir, the Theme of the Budget according to its cover is, *WORKING TOGETHER - REINFORCING RESILIENCE*. There is a common saying that a book should not be judged by its cover and clearly, in this case, we need to take heed.

Working together must involve a process of meaningful consultation for openness and of participation in decision making and would be, in our view, a necessary condition of reinforcing resilience within the population as a whole.

To the extent that that was what the Hon Minister meant, when he spoke of working together, then that part of his overarching theme for the Budget is fully consistent with Article 13 of the Guyana Constitution, which speaks of an inclusionary democracy providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens with particular emphasis on those areas of decision-making that directly affect their well-being.

The President in his inaugural address to the Ninth Parliament also stressed cooperation and working together. Through you, Sir, I would like to say to the Hon

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Minister that working together cannot and must not be a tool of convenience invoked in times of difficulty or crisis, as a rallying call to cope with the situation. Rather it must be a practice that is embedded in our way of life to get things done and to move our country forward. In that context it cannot escape notice that, as far as we are aware, there were no pre-budget consultations with key stakeholders, namely, private sector organizations and trade unions. Perhaps Sir, the Government knows it all and has the recipe for solutions to our problems. I wish them luck in that regard.

Generally speaking though, the evidence is that the Government's approach to this idea of working together is, at best, ambivalent.

In the 2007 Annual Report of the Private Sector Commission (PSC), the then Chairman in his Report dated 14 April 2008 said at Page13 thereof:

The establishment of a National Stakeholder Group, involving the Parliamentary Opposition and Civil Society to discuss security, was recommended by the Private Sector Commission and agreed to in principle by President Jagdeo in the first half of 2006, but was never implemented.

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Of course, the Lusignan and Bartica massacres made the summoning of a National Stakeholder Forum imperative. The nation cried out for a collective voice at that time.

There was optimism generally at the end of the two meetings on that occasion that the National Stakeholder Forum would be institutionalised.

In fact, the Chairman of the Private Sector Commission put it this way at Pages 13 and 14 of the Report I just referred to:

We have been able to get an agreement at that forum for a meaningful and effective partnership with Civil Society, and for full involvement in what appears to be a more inclusive approach by the Government of Guyana in dealing with Security and Governance matters.

In fact, Sir, at that time, a Press Release was issued by the Stakeholders' Forum saying that, the Government was going to examine ways and means of institutionalising that Forum. Perhaps Sir, up to this point in time they have not found such ways and means; for what we do know there has been no institutionalisation of that most important Forum for consultation.

Sir, so through you, we of the PNCR-1G say to the Hon Minister of Finance, we shall follow keenly, how he

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interprets and executes his call to work together as he implements the 2009 Budget.

Now for the substance of the Budget - Right at the beginning the Minister casts it in the framework of the thirty months since the last elections. This is a convenience that has allowed him to interpret performance over this period, as though it was a trend.

I note his words at Page 1 of the Budget Speech and I quote:

Since then ...

Since the beginning of this period, since the elections ...

... the economy has grown steadily and substantially, with sectors that were previously considered non-traditional, demonstrating increasing strength and buoyancy.

Mr Speaker, we cannot allow the Hon Minister of Finance to create an erroneous public impression of the performance of the economy under the stewardship of the PPP/C Government in Office. The PPP/C has had the reins of Government for sixteen continuous years and it would be wholly misleading to handpick the last three or so through the signpost of an election, to determine the Government's performance

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Objective observers of the economic performance of Guyana since 1993 would agree, I have no doubt, that the relatively healthy performance of the economy between 1993 and 1997 was due, in the main, to the continued momentum created by the Hoyte administration's ERP, and in spite of the PPP/C Government, in fact, it followed them into office, and try as they might, they could not have gotten rid of it. If those years are to be discounted, then what do we find? For the eleven years 1998 to 2008, the economy grew at an average of 1.8 per cent per annum. For three of those eleven years, namely 1998, 2000 and 2003, the economy contracted. Therefore, when one looks at the period as a whole a reasonable conclusion is that the economy has been really stagnant.

To get an even better understanding of where we are as against where we ought to be, we should use the National Development Strategy as a point of reference in this regard. At Page 13 thereof it is stated, and I quote:

If all our strategies are followed, it is forecast that the average annual growth of the country's Gross Domestic Product between 2001 and 2010 would be nine percent. We are convinced that even if the strategies are not followed optimally, at the very worst, barring a series of cataclysms, the average GDP growth would be of the order of six percent.

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Sir, in so far as cataclysms are concerned, I hear the Prime Minister's utterings; I am willing to admit that the floods of 2005 was one such, but they said a series of cataclysms and one could hardly constitute a series.

It went on to say that, even if we performed well by 2010, we could not be described as an affluent society; that we would still be far from the forefront of even the developing countries, though our standard of living and quality of life would have been much improved.

But during the period 2001 to 2008 with only 2009 and 2010 to go, the GDP grew at an annual rate of just under 2.5 percent, which was less than half of the six percent per annum which we should have grown by, barring cataclysmic events. The logical inference is that, there has been really no significant improvement in our standard of living and quality of life.

The functional framework within which the Honourable Minister has cast the 2009 Budget is the international environment, and that is as it should be. We are an open economy. We rely on international trade (exports and imports) and foreign direct investment also, to fuel economic growth. At Page 2 of the Budget Speech, the Minister acknowledges that over the past two and a half years the global background was characterised and I quote:

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... for the greater part by uncertainty and volatility.

And at Page 3 he said and I quote:

... by the end of 2008, the economy had slipped into deeply embedded recessionary conditions.

Against that background, some questions have been raised about how reliable is the growth rate figure of 3.1 percent for 2008.

It may be worth mentioning that according to the Minister, sugar declined by 15.1 percent in 2008 compared with 2007; when in 2005 sugar declined by 24.1 percent real GDP fell by 1.9 percent. Such is the dominating effect of sugar performance on the economy. Of course, all things being equal, a decline of 15.1 percent would have caused a GDP reduction of 1.2 percent; but the Minister tells us that non-sugar GDP grew by 5.9 percent in 2008. But this figure must itself come under scrutiny given the fact that, other important sub-sectors declined, compared with 2007:

Forestry by	1.5 percent
Bauxite by	7.0 percent and
Manufacturing by	2 percent.

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Of course, one important sub-sector, namely rice, is reported to have increased by 10.5 percent in 2008 over 2007.

But let me say this, that there is a great scepticism in relying on the growth rate of 3.1 percent announced for 2008. But even if this was a believable figure, it should be noted that it is 3.5 percent, that is, more than one-third less than the projection of 4.8 percent for 2008.

Writing in the Stabroek News of 8 February 2009 on the issue of *Dubious Economic Data* this is what Professor Clive Thomas has to say and I would like to quote him:

Despite the obvious magnitude of these economic reverses, the official data do not fully portray their impacts on ordinary citizens. Indeed, the Bureau of Statistics had declared an inflation rate of only 5.8 percent for the period January to June 2008. Over this same period, it reported a dubious growth of real GDP of 3.8 percent. Remarkably, these data indicate that the Guyana economy was insulated from the global shocks during the first half of 2008. Personally, however, I remained sceptical of this. I cannot prove though that the economic data are being massaged to support predictions of the authorities as some critics argued, and indeed, I cannot so

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prove either. Nonetheless, I shared the widespread agreement that the bases of our national statistical collections need to be revised and improved.

Mr Speaker, in this regard, I see the Minister taking out his Budget Speech; let me note that the Hon Minister did speak at Pages 26 and 27 of his Budget Speech of *updating national statistics; of rebasing the national accounts and of the introduction of a new 2006-based set of national accounts* later this year. We certainly look forward to that Mr Minister. I just want to remind him, through you Sir, that in the 2008 Budget Speech he had promised full implementation of this set of new national statistics by the start of 2009. So Mr Minister, you are now behind that schedule.

Mr Speaker, I would now like to make some comments on the Hon Minister's review of activities in 2008. What I have found is that the Hon Minister, in his 2007 and 2008 budget speeches, outlined some specific activities as part of the agenda for those years; but either gave no report to the nation or gave a report without any reference to what he had told the nation in the earlier budget speeches of 2007 and 2008. I see those items as representing commitments to the people of Guyana, and since they were introduced by the Hon Minister in this House, it is to him that the nation looks for an accurate and proper contextual update on these matters. Of course,

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I will cite only examples since exhaustive time would be required to run the gamut of issues.

For example, at Page 41 of the 2008 Budget speech, under the caption and I quote:

Tax Reform and Tax Administration

the Hon Minister promised, and I quote:

In 2008, we will conduct a study of our tax system to determine how we can implement further tax reform, to ensure that it adheres to all of these principles.

These are principles which the Minister had identified to underpin the tax reform study. In this case, Mr Speaker, not only did the Minister not inform the National Assembly and the nation of the status of implementation during 2008, but in outlining the agenda for 2009, the Hon Minister made no mention whatsoever of the furtherance of the tax reform study.

What are we as representatives of the people, and what is the nation to make of this is anybody's guess. Is it that the project has been dropped altogether or has it been put on the backburner, never to see the light of day?

The PNCR-1G feels compelled to say, that such a project must be of the highest priority if Guyana is to be an attractive investment destination; if workers are to be

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relieved of a 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ percent tax burden, once the threshold of \$35,000 per month is reached, and if all who earn taxable income are to pay their fair share of taxes. We hope that before this Debate ends, the Hon Minister will find it convenient to update the nation on this most important project. And let me say in this regard that all of us here would recall that at the opening of an EXPO Exhibition, the Chairman of the Private Sector Commission, at the time, made bold to suggest that should VAT turn out to yield revenue in excess of what would make it revenue neutral, that such additional revenue should be considered for being expended on a changed tax structure. Sir, he was roundly abused by the President then; and I wonder if that is an unspoken policy that stalls the implementation of the tax reform study

Mr Speaker, at Page 25 of the 2008 Budget speech, the Honourable Minister informed the nation that:

Government is currently considering the possibility of establishing an offshore financial sector in Guyana.

We were told then, that such a sector, proper regulated had the potential to contribute to growth in Guyana. We were also told and I quote:

... the technical work has commenced and will advance during this year.

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That was the year 2008.

Surely, the Honourable Minister owes the nation an update on this potential contributor to growth, but alas he told us nothing. Is it that offshore financial sector is no longer seen as an attractive proposition; if so tell it to the nation, since this is something you promised that you would investigate and pursue and that in fact, technical work has been advanced in that regard.

Also, Sir, at Page 25 of the said 2008 Budget speech the Honourable Minister said, and I quote:

The Government is pursuing vigorously private sector investment in the alternative energy sector, specifically hydropower and biofuels.

In respect of hydropower, we were told in 2008, and I quote:

Government continues to work with a strategic private partner to finance the construction of the hydropower project at Amalia Falls. Engineering, procurement and construction bids are expected to be solicited in the second quarter of the year with financial closure expected to follow later in the year.

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That is the year 2008 and that is what he told this nation. Sir, the Hon Minister omitted to tell us that there was no closure of this project in 2008; before going on to tell us, and I quote:

Progress is expected to be made later this year towards concluding the financing of the project.

That is what he tells us in 2009. But let us be frank about this. I want to say now that, given what the Minister himself said, which I shall refer to later, about the condition of the international economy; given what he himself said about the difficulties that would arise for countries to finance projects either at the level of government or even in the private sector; that private direct investments, there will be great difficulty in obtaining such investments; it is our prognosis that the financing for this project will not materialise in the year 2009. So we have strong reservations, about the realism of the Minister's expectation.

On the same Page 25 of the 2008 Budget speech, the Honourable Minister went on to say, and I quote:

With respect to biofuels, we are currently in receipt of eleven private sector proposals for investment. These will continue to receive our vigorous and positive attention.

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I ask the Hon Minister, through you Sir, to tell this nation, what his vigorous and positive attention has yielded by way of results. I suspect it is zilch - zero, but no mention is made of these matters either in the review of the 2008 Budget speech or as part of the Agenda for 2009.

Instead we are told at Page 33 of the Budget Speech of 2009, and I quote:

In the area of biofuels Government has allocated \$60 million towards the identification and evaluation of viable investments projects.

So now it seems that the Government is embarking upon a process of identification and evaluation of viable investment opportunities in the area of biofuels. But he has not told us anything about these eleven private sector proposals for investments. Are we to understand that this is part of the investigation into those eleven with Government spending some money on doing preliminary works to examine their viability? Surely Sir, at the minimum, there should have been a clear link, if that was the case, between what the Minister is telling us in 2009 and what he told us in 2008.

And back in 2007 in his budget speech, at Page 27 thereof, the Honourable Minister said, and I quote:

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As a net exporter of food, Guyana is well positioned to take a larger share of the US \$3billion food import bill of CARICOM.

It would have been good to learn, Mr Speaker, what has been or is being done to further that objective. We believe that Guyana is entitled indeed, not merely that we have an opportunity, but that we are entitled to a much larger share within CARICOM, but of course we must put ourselves in a position to demand the entitlement.

What we do know, Sir, from sources other than the Government, is that in August 2007, Guyana made proposals to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for cooperation in agriculture, that would have seen that nation that is Trinidad and Tobago providing funding for farms in this country. The Trinidad and Tobago/Guyana Partnership was expected to see the cultivation of some 120 acres of land in Guyana, with the Trinidad and Tobago Government providing initial funding. However, as at the end of 2008, nothing further had been done, in respect of that project. Contradict me if I am wrong, but at least update the House on such an important thing. What I can say, Sir, silence and non-information are what prevailed on the part of the Government.

In the introduction to his 2009 Budget Speech, at Page 3, all the Honourable Minister was prepared to say is that, and I quote:

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The imperatives of energy and food security are of particular relevance to those of us in the Caribbean, given the magnitude of our Region's food import bill and Guyana's fuel import bill.

And at Page 8 of the *REVIEW OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY* he went on to say, and I quote him again:

The Region should sharpen focus on the need for accelerated progress in implementing the CSME.

The PNCR-1G shares that view Sir, and further we believe that, the sloth of progress in that regard is already hurting the movement; and given the dynamic movement and pace of global events, we may well find that the institution of a CSME may be inconsistent with those developments taking place. The window is closing on the CSME; or is it that some CARICOM Members are looking predominantly outside of the Region to further their particular interest.

And beyond that Sir, I believe we need a more dynamic and functionally relevant framework for the furtherance of the goals of CARICOM. For example, I believe that the Secretariat should have a strong project development arm that seeks to use available data, and make and support project proposals to strengthen regional capacity. It could also be involved, if only as an observer, in

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relevant discussions between and among Member States, in the formulation or execution of projects. The institution cries out for being streamlined and possibly being restructured. It is no accident, I wish to observe, Sir that the Heads of important international agencies are generally not permitted to serve more than two terms, normally a period of ten years.

Mr Speaker, what we have in the 2009 Budget is another list of programmes and projects intended to excite the expectancy of citizens, while we have a number of earlier promises made and not kept, or the people are kept in the dark about them.

Now, Mr Speaker, I wish to delve further into the substance of the 2009 Budget.

To begin with, Sir, we note again the misrepresentation of the budgetary deficit as set out in Table 3 of Volume 1 of the Estimates. This is achieved by improperly describing Capital Inflows as Capital Revenues. These inflows are essentially made up of external grants and loans; the result of our begging and borrowing efforts.
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member

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Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member 15 minutes to continue his presentation?

Put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed Honourable Member ...

Mr Winston S Murray: Thank you Sir. If the monies are properly categorised, the true deficit would be derived as follows:

- Current Expenditure -
\$82.4 billion
- Current Revenue -
\$90.3 billion
- Current Account surplus -
\$7.9 billion
- Capital Expenditure -
\$46.5 billion
- Less Current Account Surplus -
\$38.6 billion

So Sir, that is the real deficit in the Budget for 2009 - \$38.6 billion

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Thus approximately thirty percent of the Government's proposed expenditure is dependent on our ability to achieve the targets set for soliciting, to obtain grants or borrowing to finance Capital Works.

Sir, I have heard the Minister on the last occasion when this matter was raised, referred to the fact that the PNC since I do not know when - in its earliest days - have been using this same categorization of figures. You know this is a tool of convenience for the People's Progressive Party/Civic. When it suits them they refer to the practice of the PNC *raison d'être* for continuing the practice now and to the future, and in this case that is what they would want to do. However, when it suits them they contrast what the PNC did during its day and what they currently do. Take your pick; you cannot have it both ways.

Sir, it is our contention that the 2008 Budget presentation, whatever may be the length of time over which the PNC did it differently, which they have copied is wrong and it needs to be changed, and the earlier the Government does that the sooner it will give to the public, the true impression of what the real deficit is in the Budget that we present.

Sir, it is important that we know what this real deficit is, because in addition to what has been said earlier, the Hon Minister on Pages 3 and 4 of his Budget Speech said as follows, and I quote:

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We in Guyana should make no mistake about it: Recovery from the current global recession will be long in coming and no country will be spared the accompany trauma ...

Our development partners now face harsh budgetary choices of their own that could adversely affect the availability of developing financing for countries like ours.

This prognosis has been reinforced by news out of the G-7 Finance Ministers' meeting in Rome last Saturday where they stated that:

Grim new economic data on Friday showed Europe's recession is deepening.

The news item also said that British Chancellor of the Exchequer was more blunt in calling the current troubles the *severest downturn in generations.*

In fact, we know that there is a strong lobby in many of these developed countries that are advocating protectionism; and we know that in the case of the USA stimulus package, they have actually inserted a clause, speaking of explicitly buying American goods.

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Also Sir, the Headline of the Stabroek News, Page 8 of 12 February 2009 proclaimed CDB SEES BLEAK REGIONAL PERFORMANCE.

These projections have to be juxtaposed to expected global growth deceleration of 0.5 percent and expected US economy contraction of 1.6 percent in 2009

Mr Speaker, quite frankly, it is anybody's guess as to how severely Guyana's economic condition will be impacted on in 2009 in view of the foregoing. The problem is that, the recession is deepening all around. While I would like to remain hopeful for growth in the Guyana economy in 2009, I cannot honestly say I share the Minister's optimism for a 4.7 percent growth in GDP in 2009.

Here, Sir, I want to make reference and advocate again the PNC/R-1G's position that a group of experts should be put together to assess, what truly is going to be or likely to be the impact of this global recession on economies such as ours and perhaps on the economies of CARICOM as a whole; and to make recommendations to either the Guyana Government if it is set in a Guyana context or to the Regional Government if it is set in a CARICOM context, as to what should be done to take us out of the difficulties we are likely to face. On this Sir, I hasten to say should resonate more positively with the Government.

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For I recall seeing President Jagdeo participate in a forum at the DAVOS Conference not so long ago, and this summarises more or less what he said. He said, [Interruption] it was indeed and I admit, but I am now calling upon him to practice at home what he has preached abroad and that is the knob of the matter. [Applause] Because what the President advocated in that forum was that we should not leave to politicians the responsibility for assessing the true impact of what was happening in the global arena and in the global world of finance and economics; that we should have independent thinkers and agencies to do so. Why Sir, and I agree with him, because he said that politicians see the electoral cycle as the framework of their operations, and so their eyes are set, in this case in Guyana, on the year 2011, when elections will come; and the measures that they will take will not necessarily address the longer term economic problems that the country faces, but are likely to be guided by the imperatives of an election victory come 2011. I say therefore to the Hon Minister of Finance and to the Government more generally that they should heed their own advice and agree to the setting up of a group of experts, who can independently analyse where we are, where we are likely to go and propose measures for dealing with what is likely to be a most difficult situation. [Applause]

I understand the Hon Member Mr Rohee, who may now be in foreign climes threw cold water on this proposal

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from us. I wish that you would communicate to him that he seems to be out of step with the President of his party and his country.

Sir, in addition to the tumultuous situation that we face internationally, the Minister looks to sugar really to be the backbone of the achievement of the target of 4.7 percent growth in the year 2009; and seems to suggest that the weather, in the non-achievement of the target of 2008, has been the major contributory factor. I want to make bold to say that we on this side of the House accept that weather was a factor in the non-fulfilment of the target. But we want to say to you quite candidly and frankly that there are deeper and more serious problems with the Sugar Industry, which you must not try to sweep under the carpet and we must face up to, if not we will again be deceiving ourselves and ultimately the nation, when we fail to achieve the target that we now set of 290,000 tonnes for the year 2009.

We were told by the Hon Minister in the 2007 Budget speech at Pages 23 and 24:

- that the sugar cluster had been completely re-engineered;
- that a Strategic Action Plan had been devised;
- that the Plan included actions to enhance the agricultural productivity diversification as well as

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to increase investment in research and development and new processing facilities.

These proposed actions without any reference to a Strategic Action Plan were, at Page 21 of the 2008 Budget Speech again highlighted on that occasion as, *being among the key areas targeted to achieve the goals of the sector.* End of quote. It would appear that by the end of 2008 this Strategic Action Plan along with the key areas targeted to achieve the Sector's goals had not yielded the expected results. So the Board of Directors was sacked and an Interim Board was appointed in early 2009 to prepare a turnaround plan for the industry within a month of its appointment. All of these moves in my respectful opinion are no more than a diversion to the real problems of the industry.

And I would make bold to say that there are at least two fundamental problems plaguing this industry:

- (i) *The first is the regular loss for some time now for whatever reason of managers at the senior and middle levels without adequate replacement. They used to give these figures in their Annual Reports some time ago, but have precipitately ceased giving them. But I want to tell you that from as far back as 2001,*

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they admitted in that year that, twenty-seven managers left; in 2002, thirty-three senior staff left and fifteen middle level staff resigned; and they abruptly stopped publishing the figures after then. But informed sources within the industry said that this brain-drain continues and continues to the detriment of a stronger sugar industry.

- (i) The second problem is that of micro-managing the industry. We believe that the Minister, through the Board of Directors sets policies and objectives for the industry. Thereafter it is for the management to perform under the monitoring and evaluation eyes of the Board. In such a situation, management would rightly be held fully accountable for failure to meet set objectives. In other words, Mr Speaker, political interference in the industry must cease. We have learnt this as to our bitter

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experience and so we warn you,
do not go down that road.

Mr Speaker, it has become fashionable in recent years for the Hon Minister of Finance to boast in each successive year that the budget is the largest ever. This year was no exception and the expenditure involved is \$128.9 billion.

Mr Speaker, the expenditure of the largest sum ever in any one year, surely cannot be an end in itself. That is what I want to tell the Hon Mr Ramson. It has to be scrutinized and examined to see whether the citizens of the country whose money would largely have financed it, have received and are receiving value for money, whether the priorities set out in the budget accord with those of the people and whether there is adequate transparency and full accountability for the monies spent.

Mr Speaker, It did not escape my attention, for example, that in 2008, the sum of \$108 million was earmarked for airstrips at Leguan and Wakenaam along with rehabilitation of the airstrip at Barimita. Obviously, the projects for the airstrips at Leguan and Wakenaam did not materialize, as they are therefore repeated for 2009. It would be real interesting, to find out who is pushing these two projects. I think it is a sick joke to propose such a project when the citizens of Leguan are more concerned about proper and adequate number of beds at the cottage hospital; when they are more concerned about the availability of drugs and other medicines at the facility;

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when they are more concerned about the reliability and timeliness of the ferry service and about better drainage and irrigation facilities. *[Applause]*

Then Mr Speaker, we are told that the Government has budgeted to spend over \$2.5 billion on drugs and medical supplies in 2009. A substantial proportion of this sum, approximately \$2 billion or US \$10 million, will be for the importation of drugs. But you know what Mr Speaker, the Cabinet has decreed by a 2003 decision, contrary to existing law namely, the Procurement Act of 2003 that all drug purchases must be made through the new GPC. Notwithstanding the comments in this regard by the Public Accounts Committee, there has been no change in this policy. This is not only a brazen illegality, but it robs the country of an opportunity to ensure that it is getting value for the money spent. So to talk about the largest Budget ever, when there may be cream-offs in there that go illegality into private people's pockets, really is robbery of the Guyanese people.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honourable Member ...

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed Honourable Member ...

Mr Winston S Murray: Thank you, Sir. Mr Speaker, this brings me to the vexed question of corruption in the public sector. Not once in his almost 2¾-hour long presentation, did the Hon Minister mention the word *corruption* at all. Perhaps the use of that word in Budget Speeches is taboo but I will tell you what Mr Speaker, whether we speak of it or not, the people of Guyana see corruption as endemic in our system and as a major factor in denying them better projects and a better quality of service and therefore a better quality of life.

The President has always been saying, and I quote: *bring me the evidence*.

Well lately he seems to have found some evidence of his own; hence we had a recent customs investigation.

It seems also that the Hon Minister of Agriculture seems to have been coming awake and aware, for he has also suggested that we should hear what the people on the ground are saying about theft and corruption in the Sugar Industry; even though he was later countered by the General Secretary, Hon Donald Ramotar, who wanted to keep the issue a hush-hush and not to give the impression that the Minister wanted to so openly admit.

Sir, even more recently, the Minister of Local Government has found it necessary to admonish the

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Regional Officials to operate within the law. We, at the Public Accounts Committee know how ripe is impropriety in the regions, and so it is good and heartening. That is what I am saying Honourable Member Mrs Chandarpal. It is good to hear the Minister reinforce the position taken by the Public Accounts Committee. It is an indirect admission that there is corruption which needs to be addressed, even though you do not want to use the word in the presentation.

Sir, but perchance they want more evidence, I advise them go to the project site where projects are being implemented; and go to the villages across Guyana and talk to the people, and you will get all the evidence you need, to know that corruption is endemic in this country.

Mr Speaker, in the Transparency International 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index, Guyana is given a score of 2.6 out of 10 ... 10 being the highest you can score for lack of corruption. You are a clean country if you can score 10. Do you know what we scored? We scored 2.6. Do you want to know the score for America? Sir, I can give it to you, because I have done that quality and level of research. The United States of America has 7.3 out of 10, a vast difference from the 2.6 of Guyana. *[Noisy Interruption]* You asked a question and I give you an answer. Like you do not like the answer and I cannot help it if you do not like the answer. *[Applause]*

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But Sir, let me say this to my colleagues over there, who are taking about perception. Transparency International Index includes getting opinions from the World Bank. It is stated in the Report - IDA and IBRD - and from the Economist Intelligence Unit. If you think that these are light players in giving assessments of corruption, then you can have it your way and believe what you want.

The position of Guyana on this issue of corruption is even more starkly portrayed when we are ranked among the thirty-two countries of the Region. For what do we find there? In that company we are ranked 26th out of 32 with only Nicaragua, Paraguay, Ecuador, Venezuela and Haiti below us. Of further significance, is the fact that according to the Report, scoring less than 5 points out of 10 indicated a serious corruption problem and scoring less than 3 points out of 10 indicated rampant corruption. Sadly Mr Speaker, Guyana with its score of 2.6 score falls squarely into the category of rampant corruption.

Mr Speaker, the representative of GOPAC - the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption - came to Guyana a few short years ago and spoke to representatives of the Government and the Opposition, including the PNC/R-1G, encouraging Guyana to join this Body To date, no action has been taken to do so. This, I believe, speaks volumes about our confidence in the absence of corruption in our system.

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Mr Speaker, there are other serious governance issues, which the Government completely ignores. The Constitution makes provision for the establishment of a Public Procurement Commission to oversee the procurement system. The award of contracts in the public sector is a serious bone of contention across this country. Yet the Government persists in administering the system through the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board - a Board wholly appointed by the Minister of Finance. This hardly engenders confidence in the system, except of course, for PPP/C supporters.

And Sir, as if to rub salt in the wounds, the Head of the Presidential Secretariat when he announces the no objection to the award of contracts, discloses the name of the project, its location and the sum of money involved, but he adamantly refuses to name the contractor awarded the contract. We have been advised by Honourable Members in this House, including my friend Mr Irfaan Ali that such information could be obtained on a website.

I want to say this, that we had the Chairman of the National Procurement and Tender Administration before us in the Public Accounts Committee and he admitted that the website is woefully behind and needs to be updated. It does not have up-to-date information.

But further Sir, I want to say this; even if it was updated, we cannot have a Government selectively determining what it announces out of a Cabinet decision. The

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Government must either say nothing and advise all and sundry to go to the website and get all the information, or, if it decides to give information to the public, such information must include the name of the contractor who has been awarded the contract.

In the face of all I have outlined Mr Speaker, the Government barefacedly calls for further individual and corporate commitment in these troubled and tumultuous times to augment Guyana's efforts. In both the developed and the developing world, leaders are implementing stimulus packages. These include *inter alia*, tax cuts, extended unemployment benefits and increased food stamps to help the poor. While some of those measures may not be feasible for us, given our level of development, surely there is something that can be done.

In concluding his Budget Presentation, the Hon Minister unabashedly mounted the political horse, when he sought to remind Guyanese how much the Government had done for them since the elections of 2006. So with great pomposity, he reminded us of the increase in the income tax threshold, in the minimum wage and in the old age pension ... *[Interruption]* I said, yes, you pompously reminded us. That is what I said ... you reminded us, so I am not denying the fact. Don't you understand me? I am not denying the fact. He even used percentages Sir, to make the absolute increases sound large. So, over the

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period, he told us that old age pension rose by eighty percent to the grand figure of \$6,300 per month

Mr Speaker, I will be bold enough to say through you, Sir, to the Hon Minister of Finance, that the Guyanese people are appreciative of what has been done, but the bottom line for them is that there is no increase budgeted for them in 2009:

- no increase for wages of public sector employees;
- no increase in the income threshold;
- no increase in the minimum wage; and
- no increase in the old age pension for 2009

That is the reality of the Budget for the people of Guyana. *[Applause]*

What we do know, Sir, is that there is contemplation on behalf of the Government, to raise the pensionable age for qualification for NIS pension from 60 to 65 years, when the average life expectancy life span for a Guyana is 62.5 years. So they are planning for many would-be pensioners to die before they become eligible for their NIS pension. We know that it is a recommendation you silently accept Sir. That is what we know and I will tell you that this attempt must be stoutly resisted in all sections of this population. *[Noisy Interruption]*

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Mr Speaker, we also know that despite the steep reduction in the acquisition cost of fuel, the GPL rates have not come down. Again, Guyanese appreciate the subsidies given when the price of fuel was high and rising; but we say to you that some relief could be given on rates given the drastic plummeting of the price of fuel, and if you are really interested in doing something for the Guyanese people.

We also know that the Government is deaf to the call for a reduction of VAT, that will make the measure truly revenue neutral. While the Government does not bestir itself in any of these areas, the beleaguered taxpayer and VAT victim must continue to suffer, to hold strain.

Yet the Government has the temerity to tell us at Page 5 of the Budget Speech that, times such as those being experienced globally require greater individual and corporate effort and discipline, and we must ensure that we maximize the productive use of every man hour.

We were told that we must be preoccupied with the elimination of waste and losses and with maximizing the effectiveness of spending and soundness of investment decisions.

Sir, I think it is only fair that we call upon the Government to do likewise:

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Will the Hon Minister and the Government work assiduously to sort out the cancer of corruption that threatens to engulf us?

Will the Hon Minister and the Government bring into being the Public Procurement Commission before the end of June 2009?

Will the Hon Minister and the Government severely limit expenditure on Presidential and other Ministerial travel with immediate effect?

Mr Speaker, we were told that it is hard work by all of us as individuals and as a country that will see us through the current economic storm that keeps us on the path to prosperity. There are two points I wish to make here.
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Before you make the point, Mr Murray, your time is up.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you grant the Honourable Member ten minutes to continue?

Put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed Honourable Member ...

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Mr Winston S Murray: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. *[Interruption: “Gail you seem to have problems with us on this side. We want to be your friend; we want to work together according to the theme of the Budget”] [Laughter]*

Sir, There are two points I want to make here in respect of this call for hard work by all of us as individuals, that will see us through the current economic storm and keep us on the path to prosperity, as said by the Minister.

The first is that many Guyanese may be working very hard, but hardly working effectively since mind and body are not together.

Second, I think it is less than honest to speak of keeping on the path to prosperity, when under the PPP/C we have never ever been on such a path. How could we have been Sir, when over the last eleven years our annual rate of growth averaged less than two percent, Mr Prime Minister?

I know, Mr Speaker, that what I have said here today ... (and I am coming to an end to stop your woe and worry) ... is hardly the ringing endorsement judged from the reaction from the Government benches that they have been hoping for from this Budget. But I believe that we, in the PNCR-1G owe it to the Guyanese people to have tempered the Hon Minister’s optimism with a strong dose of realism. *[Laughter]*

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I therefore apologise for any inconvenience that may have been caused in the course of this presentation. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Members.

Hon Member Mr Robert Persaud ...

Hon Robert M Persaud: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the budget presented by our colleague, the Hon Dr Ashni Kumar Singh, Minister of Finance, under the theme, *Working Together - Reinforcing Resilience*. Mr Speaker, as we all recognize, this year's Budget takes place amidst a continuing and uncertain global economic turmoil, compounded by a multiplicity of factors. The global financial crisis poses strains in almost every country and sector. In fact, according to the World Bank, the spreading global economic crisis is set to trap up to 53 million people in poverty in developing countries; countries of economic and social status such as ours.

This, Mr Speaker, takes place on top of the 130 to 155 million people that were plunged into poverty, as a result of the surge in food and fuel prices we witnessed towards the ends of 2007, and throughout 2008. Added to these challenges, we are also; and the world community, is also

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grappling with the emerging threat of climate change. Here in Guyana, we have felt its profound negative impact, as we saw in 2005, and more recently, the December/January rains. Against this background, Mr Speaker, the theme of the budget is both timely and relevant, for only by working together across sectors, interests, political affiliation, regions and countries, can we build on our resilience to all these shocks.

Mr Speaker, I am happy that we have benefited from the usual spirited, and at times informed, or uninformed intervention by the Honorable Member Mr Winston Murray. And Mr Speaker, he has raised a number of issues, some of them we have heard before; and he did apologize that he might be covering grounds that others would have, but certainly he has raised those issues this afternoon.

The first issue which we have heard repetitively has been the one of lack of consultation. But Mr Speaker, for some of us, it seems as if consultation is an event. It is not an event. Consultation is a process. It is a process that is nurtured; it is a process that is ongoing, and when we talk about consultation, it is not to invite a group in, smile for the camera, and say, here it is we have budget consultation. It is what we have been doing day in, day out, since the last budget; in and out of those events, Mr Speaker.

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Mr Speaker, this Government has made it quite clear that it operates, and conducts its affairs, on the widest of consultations. But not only consultation in its fair sense ... We believe in meaningful consultation, consultation where we are able to explore views, explore positions, and then even develop common positions. And we have seen that throughout our work, Mr Speaker. If you look at what happens in the different sectors be it in the Natural Resources sector ... if you see what is happening in terms of the Manufacturing sector, the Services sector, we have developed a very engaging and sustained process of consultation. So the Minister of Finance does not have to wait one week before he concludes his budget speech, invite individuals in, and say here it is we have consultation; because doing that alone would be defeating the whole essence, the spirit and purpose of consultation. I wish to repeat that we have been engaging, and will continue to engage in a meaningful form of consultation. It is not the format sometimes, Mr Speaker that is important, it is the content, and we put a lot of premium on the content.

Regarding the issue, Mr Speaker, in terms of working together in this country, we are too vulnerable to be divisive. We are too vulnerable to be pulling apart. Our survival as a nation and our survival as a people, depend on us working together: working across political divides, working across ethnic divides, working across religious divides, and other social divides, real or unreal, that may

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exist. And that is what we require in this country, Mr Speaker. So to suggest that we have been unfaithful to the whole issue of working together, and it is just something that we are glibly posing, I think is a misrepresentation of reality. This government has articulated conceptually, and in a practical way, what it means by working together. And if we go back to 2002, 2003, the PPP Civic Administration issued a Policy Paper on ... *Inclusive Governance - Building Trust*, in which we articulated meaningful, practical steps on how political parties and other groups, civil society and the Guyanese population at large, can work together to build a society. So while we may see it reflected in this theme, Mr Speaker, it is something that we firmly believe. It is something that we have been advocating since the formation of the People's Progressive Party; and even when there was a split in the People's Progressive Party, it is something that our founder, the father of our nation, firmly held on to; the need for all our people, all groups to work together. And we will hold firm to that thrust, Mr Speaker.

I just wish to correct an inaccuracy made by Mr Murray, because it is a recent event, and it is something that is being worked on, when he said at the National Stakeholders Forum, in a press statement issued on 12 March calling on the government to establish a mechanism for the institutionalization of the National Stakeholders Forum. But Mr Murray would know, if you

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reflect and look at the statement, it did not say that. What the statement said was that the National Stakeholders Forum agreed to explore ... to explore an agreed mechanism for, as it were, some sort of mechanism for the National Stakeholders Forum. There is a substantial difference in that, Mr Murray; and I think in the interest of a very healthy debate, in the interest of this healthy debate, we must take that on board.

Mr Speaker, the Honorable Member then proceeded to suggest that the expected growth rate that all of us would want to see in this country that is not being met was the fault of bad policy, or an act of the PPP/Civic Government. But it seems as if Mr Murray, in his analysis, has totally ignored world realities, the global economic trauma that took place within the 2001 to the current period. And secondly, but he did admit, the 2005 flood, the setback that we suffered, where ECLAC projected that 65% of our GDP was totally eroded. He has also forgotten the political instability orchestrated on that side of the House, too. He forgot that period, too, whereby, the Hon Member Mr Nadir, yesterday in his presentation alluded to the pronouncement made, not by Guyanese, not by our experts, but by international observers, how important political stability is for economic growth; but also pointed out that what happened after 1997, 1998, and what took place after 2001- the impact that had on economic growth and the development of our country. But Mr Murray has

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completely ignored those factors. But he wish, he must understand too; he must understand too, that the performance of the Guyanese economy was relatively sound and good, compared to others, given some objective realities.

Mr Murray, Mr Speaker, then proceeded in a very skillful way, and you must give him credit, in manipulating the data; and then took us down a journey of superficial analysis of sub-sector performance, to create the impression, first of all, that we could have grown more; and then on the other hand, contradicted himself immediately, that he didn't believe that we grew so much. I am not sure what it is, I am not sure what it is, I am not sure what it is he was trying to make; but he would know, he would know, that our performance, our performance last year was on par with the global economic output, with the global economic output. And also, his misrepresentation about the deficit too: I am quite sure the Hon Minister of Finance, in his presentation, will elucidate more on the misrepresentation we heard from Mr Murray; and there were also several speakers before him who talked, and attempted to talk about the deficit, and the size of the deficit, and so forth.

Mr Speaker, listening to the tone and the thrust of Mr Murray's presentation, and even several others, including Mr Ramjattan who spoke earlier, they all sounded like prophets of doom. They are all showing off ... as if they

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have no confidence in the Guyanese people. They are all skeptical of anything that is being said, and it is very sad, Mr Speaker, very sad. In an age where we are confronted with challenges; in a position, in a context within which this government is presenting realistic options and realistic solutions, we see this undue explosion of pessimism, Mr Speaker. And that is not the right spirit. It is not the right spirit for the time. What we need in this country, Mr Speaker is greater confidence and greater optimism ... greater optimism, because the people who put us in this National Assembly expect that we would be realists, and not use opportunities such as this to score cheap political points, but to be very honest in our analyses as we move forward.

Mr Speaker, the other issue that Mr Murray raised, and there are several others which I will deal with subsequently; and which I want to touch on, is the issue of corruption. And this government, this government has confronted corruption head-on. If you look at the amount of investigations, all those investigations ... [*Interruption*] I am glad you are calling them, I am glad you are calling them, you know why? Those became a reality because this government suspected wrongdoing, called in the Auditor General's Department, and was able to tell you that there was indeed difficulty. I am glad you called them, I am glad you called them because it was us, it was this government that unearthed it; we didn't hide it, we didn't wish it away, we unearthed it. All of those that

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you called, we unearthed them. And we are committed, and we are committed, Mr Speaker; we are committed to ensuring that steps are taken to combat corruption.

Mr Speaker ... Remember, Mr Murray, when you were in government ... you were a serving minister at that time ... When we came in, there was no Auditor General Report. Isn't that true? Isn't that true? But we have ensured that every single year, since this administration came into office that the Auditor General's Report was presented. We went further than that: We delinked the Auditor General's Department from the Ministry of Finance. So the Auditor General does not report to the Minister of Finance. When the Auditor General's Report is completed, he brings it to the National Assembly and hands it over to Hon Speaker.

Mr Speaker, the other issue in terms of corruption: Mr Murray creates the impression that the awarding of contracts is done secretly, and that people are handpicked and selected. Well, Mr Murray, as you would know, you were in that government at that time, too, whereby there was no competitive tendering process; where contracts were handed out by ministers and others. There was nothing like this big Tender Board, and we have this National Procurement Administration, which we reformed with international help. And you ... and Mr Murray, you may also wish to know ... *[Interruption: ...*

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“No, we are correcting it, and we have corrected it; we are on a path of correction, we started that”]

The Speaker: Honorable Members, please ...!

Hon Robert M Persaud: Sorry for that, Mr Speaker ... my apologies, Sir. Mr Speaker, I wish to point out, too, that the Honorable Member created the impression that the names of persons who were awarded were kept secret for some wrong or deceitful motive. But Mr Murray would know that every Tuesday morning there is a public opening being conducted by the National Procurement and Tender Administration. And if he wants to know who are the contractors, he does not have to go on the Internet, turn up there every Tuesday morning,- the media, John Public, anyone else could go there and see. We believe, Mr Speaker, in transparency. We practice accountability. And no one here can stand and tell you that corruption does not exist. Look at what took place in GRA. It was the President who had to call in, and make sure that a special investigation was done and unearthed corruption. And that report was brought before the National Assembly. So don't create the impression that we have ignored that there are acts of corruption, and there are persons who want to engage in malfeasance. We know that. But the point is, you should give us credit. Mr Speaker, the Honorable Members should give us credit for taking steps, and support us. I know he has been doing some good work as Chairman of the Public

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Accounts Committee; when he was Chairman; and I am quite sure, I am quite sure, that he will continue to lend support in this regard.

Agriculture: Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, agriculture has a key role to play in strengthening and solidifying our economy to withstand some of the shocks and global turmoil that we have all spoken about. But at the same time, agriculture presents us with an opportunity to maximize on those chances, or those possibilities, which may exist arising from those difficulties that I have referred to. And we see agriculture as a sector, combined with others, as supporting the developmental process of our government, and fulfilling the desire of our people to enhance economic growth, and to alleviate poverty in our society.

Mr Speaker, we all know that the global economic slowdown; for instance, its impact on the United States or North America, will slow remittances. We also know that the global economic slowdown will also have an impact on our export earnings, and that is why, Mr Speaker, we have to ensure that we gear the agricultural sector to take up some of those slacks; to increase exports, so that the country as a whole can earn more and be able to fill some of those shortfalls.

Mr Speaker, many of the international projections, the FAO, ...House; and even yesterday, the United Nations Environmental Program, in its report, entitled

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“Environmental Food Prices”, projected that food prices would increase between 30% to 50% in the near future, and further to that; that many developing countries, especially poor countries, would have to spend as much as 90% of their income on food. And, Mr Speaker, while this may present tremendous difficulties for some countries, it is imperative that countries such as ours, which possess a rich natural base for food production, that we the look at the opportunities. And that is where I want us to focus, Mr Speaker. The Government’s strategy, Mr Speaker, is to expand and diversify agriculture, not only in the traditional sectors, Mr speaker, but also expanding the range of exports, improving value added, and quality; and much more importantly, to break into new markets, whereby, we don’t have, as it were, a concentration on one markets, and when there are difficulties, we get a heavy blow.

Mr Speaker, while we cannot avoid the emergence of climate change by ourselves, this Government has taken steps to avert further climatic damage being done. His Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, has spearheaded an initiative that values our standing forests, and lobbied internationally for the creation of incentives to avoid deforestation. Mr Speaker, all of us must be proud of the fact that today, Guyana has earned itself global recognition for its position, advocacy, and efforts to combat climate change.

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Mr Speaker, one of the novelties of this budget is that; it is preparing and adapting our country for the uncertain global socioeconomic and climatic conditions. And in fact, it has been part of our Government's strategy; and 2009 has given effect; this budget has given effect, to a continuation of that focus. If you look at the initiatives, Mr speaker, that were taken as recent as 2008, you will see that we were prepared, and were preparing our economy for some of the difficulties that we see experiencing globally, and its concomitant impact on the national economy. But Mr Speaker, the 2009 Budget builds on these and expands additional interventions to make our economy more robust, and take advantage of the opportunities which are presented.

Mr Speaker, in the Agricultural Sector, we would have seen, and as was represented by the Minister in his presentation; there has been tremendous investments in research and technical services, better market information and support, improved drainage and irrigation, and more incentives of ensuring that advances are made within the sector; but not only advances, but ensuring that the Sector is made much more competitive. Production and productivity have increased significantly, particularly since the launching of the Grow More Food campaign in March of last year. There have also been increased support services and market opportunities for cash crop farmers and exporters, through an enhanced focus on market information and export facilitation. Mr Speaker,

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we are expanding our base, and also injecting new life in this Sector as a result of the Grow More Food campaign. And this campaign, Mr Speaker, I must say, has won the applause of IICA, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture, and UNFAO, the United Nation Organization of Food and Agriculture; not to mention the number of countries that have been interacting and discussing with us, how it is that they can tap into the programs that we have launched.

Mr Speaker, when global food output dropped, in Guyana we saw the opposite. We saw an overall increase. Last year, when globally, 900 million people were threatened with hunger, our people had access to affordable food in abundant supply. Mr Speaker, today, Guyana remains the only country within the CARICOM community which enjoys food security.

Mr Speaker, the promise of the sector is strong. Last year alone, we saw sixty new investments within the agribusiness sector; and as we speak, forty-nine new investments within the agribusiness sector are about to be approved. Mr Speaker, we can see, if you travel along the East Bank or you go on the highway, you will see the proliferation of new shaded ... and greenhouse farming. Our farmers and investors are adapting. Mr Speaker, within the Intermediate Savannas, we are currently conducting trials for commercial scale soybean and corn by the Private Sector. Mr Speaker, we see that there is

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tremendous interest in these projects and Mr Murray is absolutely right; the Honorable Member is absolutely correct when he represented that there were eleven projects. And I wish to say that we have reached the point where we have concluded Memoranda Of Understanding with these potential investors, who range from the United States, the Caribbean, and even as further afield as India. And as I speak to you, Mr Speaker, an IDB project which will develop institutional and other support for the development of a biofuel sector ... that is about to take off.

So from the Agricultural Sector, Mr Speaker, in 2008, we have seen job creation opportunities; we have seen wealth creation for investors and for our farmers; and we have also seen an increased support and additional incentives for small farmers to grow, to expand, and to become much more competitive. We will continue to support our local farmers by working with them to build their capacity and enhance their competitiveness. Mr Speaker, we are also trying to tap into the Guyanese diaspora. We are working in engaging with them in attracting investments in the diaspora within the sector; and at the same time, we are engaging our CARICOM partners, within the context of the Jagdeo Initiative; but more so within the context of ensuring that Guyana attracts as much investments within the Agricultural Sector.

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And the Honorable Member ... Mr Speaker, he is not here, but clearly, what is the status regarding our engagement with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago? I wish to advise him, that with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago we have set up a mechanism, and just five days ago, five, six persons from the Trinidad Government were here, whereby we were finalizing a protocol, a protocol whereby we can clear all the impediments, all the hurdles, phyto-sanitary requirements, looking at standards, looking in terms of farm certification; all the possible hurdles that will affect Guyana, or limit Guyana's exports to Trinidad and Tobago. Because if we want investors from Trinidad and Tobago to come and invest, working with local farmers, we want to ensure that the necessary arrangements are in place for them to have smooth and uninterrupted arrangements, so that they can export their produce.

And added to that, Mr Speaker, we already have three serious investors from Trinidad and Tobago working with our farmer's. There is one investor working in the Intermediate Savannahs. There is another investor working with small cash crop farmers. There is also another investor working in the Pomeroon, who export directly, on a weekly basis, to Trinidad and Tobago. So the discussions that we have had with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, those discussions have proceeded well, they have realized tangible results. And I am also happy to report that, in 2007, we could have only

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exported seven agricultural produce to Trinidad and Tobago, and because of the discussions that we have had, we have been able to clear a list of up to thirty agricultural produce which we can export to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. So I am quite sure, someone will convey the update to the Honorable Member Mr Winston Murray.

Mr Speaker, there is talk, a lot of talk, about the need for a stimulus package, but to Mr Murray's credit, the Honourable Member Mr Murray's credit, he had much more understanding of the complexities and the realities of our situation, to have made those, what I would say superficial, or not fully thought out positions. Mr Speaker, anyone with a clear eye will see that there is a very common; and, and if you check the budget presentation, there is a very pervasive presence of activities and interventions, to ensure that we create more opportunities, and we provide better services for people. Because when you talk about a stimulation package, you are basically talking about keeping people employed, you are basically talking about job creation, wealth creation, and you are also talking about government and others who provide services, being in a position to maintain and even to improve those services. And that is what the general thrust of this Budget is, Mr Speaker.

If we look at the Agricultural Sector, because the Agricultural Sector accounts for about 30 percent of our

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Gross Domestic Product, in 2008, Mr Speaker \$4.2 billion were appropriated for this sector. This year, Mr Speaker, some \$8.7 billion has been allocated, an increase of 106%. Isn't that a stimulus to our economy? Isn't that a stimulus to our farmers? Isn't that a stimulus to the Agribusiness Sector? Mr Speaker, we will see more jobs created. We will see, as it were, greater income and wealth activities for farmers, and the whole chain. Because when you produce something from the farm, it does not end there. There is a whole value chain; there is a whole support network that depends, and there are various add-on effects, positive add-on effects, from the agricultural activities. So when a farmer who employs 20 or 30 persons, he produces, Mr Speaker, and hands it over the farm gate; when he hands that produce over to the buyer, immediately another 60 persons gain some form of employment, through distribution, through transportation, through marketing, through the various logistics, through packaging and processing. So there is a whole range of spin offs, positive spin off activities from the Agriculture Sector. When we build more access roads, we are giving our jobs; when we conduct more D&I projects, we are giving our people more employment opportunities. When we carry out various activities, we are also providing jobs and wealth creation activities for all our people, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, we are not only keeping our people employed, but we are ensuring, we are ensuring that they

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earn more, and that their increased earnings will result in enhanced living conditions. Mr Speaker, as alluded to by the Honorable Minister of Finance in his presentation, our Government has been on target in delivering on its promises that we made in the PPP/C. Manifesto, and we will continue with this thrust, Mr Speaker. We will ensure that our efforts exceed even what we stated in our Manifesto, that is, *to deliver a bright and secure future for all Guyanese.*

The Speaker: Your time is up ...

Hon Samuel Hinds: Mr Speaker, I

move that the Hon Member be given another fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed, Honorable Member ...

Hon Robert M Persaud: *Sugar:* Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I wish now to turn to the various sub-sectors within the Agricultural Sector, and I wish to turn to the topic that has sweetened us in this National Assembly over the past three days: *Sugar.*

Mr Speaker, the performance of the Sugar Sector in 2008 was mixed, and it was this Government, it was this

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Government which very early on expressed its disappointment and its concern about the performance of the Sugar Sector. We do not have to wait until someone come and tell us, well there were some difficulties, there were some problems. So Mr Speaker, we very early on detected that there were some difficulties. But this production, a drop in production as the Minister of Finance pointed out, was due to a number of factors, many of which were natural, and there were some elements which were man-made. And Mr Speaker, we have ensured, we have ensured that these problems were carefully and comprehensively diagnosed. We have seen for instance Mr Speaker, the impact of the weather: In 2008, across the Sugar Industry, we saw rainfall exceeding 3000mm, and in fact it was the highest rainfall we have seen in 53 years; and that surpassed what was recorded in 2005. I know the Honorable Member Mr Vieira, who is following me, keeps a lot of rain data, and he will be able to confirm some of that.

Mr Speaker, the non commissioning of the new Skeldon Factory also meant that some 60,000 tons of sugarcane could not be harvested, which accounted for over 5,000 tons of sugar not being produced. And I wish to apprise the National Assembly, Mr Speaker, that the Guyana Sugar Corporation has filed for delayed damages amounting to, in excess of US\$5 million, which we are seeking to compensate for those shortfalls, with the company which is tasked with building the sugar factory.

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Mr Speaker, GUYSUCO's production has been in decline since 2005. However, last year, and even some work started in 2007, we saw a bold and forward-looking decision to reverse the decline, and ensure that the modernization and restructuring program conceptualized in early 2000 is not derailed. Some of the highlights, Mr Speaker, is that, we were able, after a year and a half negotiations with five prospective buyers for bulk sugar into Europe, were able to finalize the contract for the sale of a minimum quantity of 185,000 tons of sugar per year, with new terms and conditions, which were consistent with the Partnership Agreement.

Also, Guysuco has been able to advance its trademark and brand protection for its retail sugar, and move closer to having the name "Demerara" protected internationally. Also, Mr Speaker, we saw in 2008, an increase in the sale of packaged Demerara Gold, Demerara Brown, and bagged Demerara Gold; and we saw this increase moving from 6,083 tons in 2007, to over 7,000 tons in 2008, all production being sold.

Mr Speaker, the Government of Guyana and the European Union continue to work closely in 2008 in delivering the Guyana Sugar Action Plan. Indeed, the Sugar Industry met over 90% of indicators for the delivery of the sugar variable tranche before the deadline date of March 21st this year, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, I am going forward. We are taking a number of measures.

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On January 14th, I announced that the Cabinet and the President had appointed an interim board, and this Interim Board was tasked with the first assignment, that is to develop a blueprint for success. Mr Speaker, a new management structure took effect from 1 January 2009, which is aimed at improving operational efficiency; and as I speak to you today, Mr Speaker, the management has been fully Guyanized. Mr Errol Hanoman, the new CEO, assumed duties from last Monday. The Booker Tate corporate management agreement, Mr Speaker, will come to end at the end of next month, and we will see an accelerated program to develop local capacity, local skills, with also having the resort to import and seek external support in moving the industry forward.

Mr Speaker, the new Skeldon factory is currently being prepared for sugar production for the current sugar crop. Some of the reasons for the delay, Mr Speaker; and those of us who have an appreciation of projects of this magnitude will recognize that some of the delays do occur, not only here, but elsewhere. It is a turnkey project, Mr Speaker, and will only be accepted when the testing and the commissioning have been fully completed. The Honorable Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker, in his presentation asked, “what about the power generation aspect of the Skeldon factory;” and I wish to say, Mr speaker, that since the end of last year, mid last year, the Guyana Sugar Corporation, Skeldon Factory has been supplying to the national grade on a daily basis, 4.5 MW

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of power, and we have, and we have, Mr Speaker ... Mr Speaker, and we also have the capacity to supply 8 megawatts of power at this point in time, but because of line restrictions, that cannot be done, Mr Speaker.

And the question about power from bagasse, you can only produce power from bagasse when you have the bagasse. But we are currently testing the project, and when we pass the cane through, Mr Speaker, the bagasse will be used to generate power. But if you understand, Mr Speaker, if you understand the full, if you understand the full dimension of this project, an integral part of it is also diesel power; diesel power to be produced when bagasse is not available. So the production of power from the diesel plant is consistent with the plan; and when I appeared before, when I appeared before the Economic Services Committee, Mr Speaker, members there were exposed to the total plan, and they are fully aware that the diesel project is part and parcel of that plan.

Mr speaker, I also wish to say that the private cane farmers, after some delay in securing financing, which the government had to intervene in ensuring that they had access to finance, the private cane farmers are enthusiastically moving forward in increasing the acreage. At the same time, Guyana Sugar Corporation, the areas that we have identified, we are also moving apace to ensure that the 1.2 million tons of sugar cane required to put in the factor; so that we can get out

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annually close to 110, 000 tons of sugar by 2012, that we have full utilization of that factory, and the plan, while they are delayed in terms of the land area of cultivation- and we all know, that is a fact-those plans are now proceeding.

Mr Speaker, during this year, because we have seen some of the difficulties which were identified with GuySuCo, and we had a commission of inquiry done on the East Coast, and some other areas, one of the weaknesses has been identified as being a bad agricultural practice, and the emphasis this year will be on correcting that. Also, the contract for the construction of the state- of -the -art packaging plant at Enmore, which will produce and package high-value sugar; that investment is close to US\$12 million is soon to be signed, and the plan is to have construction commence sometime in the second half of 2009.

Mr Speaker, the road ahead for sugar will not be smooth sailing. Starting in the last quarter of 2009, we have, we all, our country, all of us will have to face a stark reality; that is when the final EU price -cut takes effect. And starting from 2010, Mr Speaker, the Sugar Industry will earn as much as, will lose as much as \$8 billion less revenue. We will have \$8 billion less revenue per annum as a result of the EU price cut. But Mr Speaker, I'm confident; I am confident that in the spirit of working together, in the spirit of honest understanding, in the spirit

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of having a true and realistic appreciation of the fact, we can overcome these challenges in the future. But this will not happen this year, this will not happen next year, and if you check the GUYSUICO business plan, Mr Speaker, it clearly states, it clearly states the road map. It clearly outlines the various targets, and it clearly points us to what we need to do, to get there, and the targets we need to reach at various points.

Mr Speaker, this will require a lot of hard work; as I said, it will require sacrifice, it will require dedication, and it will require a high level of professionalism to overcome the present and future challenges. Our blueprint for success, Mr Speaker, is being finalized, and I will not elaborate at this point in time its content. But sugar is too important to fail, and that is why this year the Sugar Industry will be spending close to \$37 million, \$15.1 million of which is dedicated in terms of wages and salaries for the industry's most important asset; the industry's most important asset is its workers; is those people who toil the fields, those people who work in factories, those people who get the plans and the programs going.

But Mr Speaker, all of us, all of us, have a piece of sugar history running through us. In fact, it is because of sugar we are all here in Guyana. And this Government, Mr Speaker, this Government, for strong and compelling economic reasons, and other factors, Mr Speaker, will

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stay the course. My apologies, yes, Mr Murray has corrected me, the Honorable Member, that our indigenous people were here before; I must recognize that too, but those who came, those who were brought here, we came because of sugar. And I want to, Mr Speaker, I wish, Mr Speaker, to invite all Stakeholders to support the efforts of the new Board and Management; and I wish to extend an invitation, that the new Board and Management, and the Government, are open to suggestions. We want all to be involved, and we look forward to some productive interaction at the Economic Services Committee, on the issue of Sugar.

Mr Speaker, I have heard the Honorable Member Mr Murray saying that “we are invited.” Mr Vieira will tell you, that two days after he wrote requesting GUYSUCO’s presence, we responded and said we were available; but Mr Vieira said that due to other pressing matters, we could not have been accommodated. So don’t say we were dodging from the Economic Services Committee. If you are ready for the Guysuco Management to appear before the Economic Services Committee, they will come here tonight if you want them to come!

Rice: Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, I wish to turn to rice. Rice, in 2008, we saw, was a golden year for the Rice Industry. It also marked the 100th year since Guyana ...

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The Speaker: Before you go further into rice, Honorable Member, you would need some more time.

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

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed, Hon Member ...

Hon Robert M Persaud: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As I said, 2008 was a golden year for rice, for a number of reasons, the most important being that we celebrated our 100th anniversary as a rice exporting nation. We also saw, we also saw ... [*Applause*] ... that the output was the highest in the last five years, and our export earnings; our export earnings in 2008 was in fact the highest we ever brought into our country, Mr Speaker. And I wish, I wish to urge the National Assembly, for us to compliment, for us to commend our hard-working rice farmers; for us to commend our millers, and all those who made this successful accomplishment possible, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, our targets for 2009, are realistic. They are realistic because they are based on existing conditions, one of which, Mr Speaker, we saw: there was a setback at the start of the year for the first crop, due to the impact of

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the heavy rainfall; and as someone pointed out, even our Honorable Minister of Finance might have been conservative, because the projected area of damage that we had supplied originally, when there was a final evaluation, we found that even that was, as it were, inflated. But we are still optimistic, Mr Speaker, that our production will not only exceed 306,000 metric tons, but certainly will be able to surpass that.

Mr speaker, we also anticipates that the earnings, the export earnings of the Rice Sector, will be stable; but recognizing the fact that globally we have seen a slump in the world market price for rice by as much as 20%, Mr Speaker, we anticipate, we anticipate that earnings will be, will as it were, dip. But at the same time, we are taking mitigating measures. And what are those mitigating measures that we are taking? One, that we are putting a lot of emphasis on increasing production and productivity. We are looking at bringing down the costs. We want to enhance our extension services. We will invest in procurement and upgrading of the laboratory equipment at Burma, and be able to test and make available new varieties. We are looking at additional seed processing facility. We are also looking at improving and enhancing regulations for the rice industry. We don't want a situation where we have, as in some other areas, that farmers have to wait months and months to be paid, notwithstanding the legislation that we have passed. And we are looking at other means, other

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mechanisms, at other arrangements to ensure that the trade of the Rice Sector is conducted in a very complete fashion, Mr Speaker.

Agricultural Diversification: Mr Speaker, once we have spoken about rice and sugar, the traditional areas within the agricultural sector, I wish to turn to another important area that we are putting a lot of emphasis on: that is agricultural diversification. And the Honorable Member, Mr Speaker, queried how is it that the Minister of Finance intends to develop the capacity and the ability of the sector to make full use of the vast export possibilities within Caricom and elsewhere; and I want to advise the Honorable Member, through you, Mr Speaker, that the Agriculture Exports and Diversification Project is one such mechanism. Last year we were able to conclude that project; and as we speak, Mr Speaker, we are already seeing deliverables. We are seeing results from that project, being in the field, and our farmers are commencing to benefit from those deliverables.

Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker ... *[Interruption]* I can quantify for you, Mr Speaker, but Mr Speaker, in terms of some of the projections that we had on that, that is, to look at the establishment of institutions and services to increase production in the non-traditional areas, in terms of aquaculture, fruit, vegetables and livestock.

We also want to ensure that we develop a proper plant and animal health system, and;

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we also have a facility in which we will provide investment support to the private sector, so they can be part of the agricultural export thrust.

We also have a number of arrangements provided for in the project, for public private partnerships.

As my colleague, the Honorable Member Dr Anthony pointed out, we believe strongly in PPP- public private partnerships. And we can also talk, we can also talk about the four Ps. One more P is always good Mr Speaker, Ps are always good.

Mr Speaker, I wish to point out that Agricultural Export and Diversification Project is a five-year project, it is not a one-year project, it is a five-year project. And this project, Mr Speaker, is complemented by another program that we have called the Rural Enterprise and Agriculture Development Program, and we saw that was alluded to by Honorable colleague, Minister Sukhai, when she talked of the impact in the hinterland communities, but this project amounted to US \$6.9 million. This project is intended to benefit our small producers. We don't want anyone to be left out. We don't want anyone to be left behind in this regard. And the project, and the interventions that we are making; these interventions are intended to develop small, medium, large, but all at the end of the day, to make Guyana an agriculture export giant; and also to develop eventually, as part of our vision, rice and other sugar-

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meaning that, Guyana will be known for its vegetables, its fruits, its aquaculture, and for its livestock exports, as we are known for our sugar and rice.

That is the vision, Mr Speaker, that is the vision, and it begins with a step, because this, Mr Speaker is the first time in our country that we have a comprehensive program that focuses on agricultural diversification; a comprehensive program that has international support; a comprehensive program for which feasibility and other studies have been conducted. And the Grow More Food campaign, Mr Speaker is to propel those initiatives, Mr Speaker, and the Honorable Members should be so advised.

Mr Speaker, the non-traditional sectors, too, in 2008, that is the non-traditional crops; we also saw its growth, not only in production, but also its growth in exports. And that is, Mr Speaker, a very positive sign. And to allow these types of growth and development, Mr Speaker, we have already alluded to the Grow More Food campaign, but we have also been conducting and putting a lot of emphasis on farmers' training and farmers' education. We have also worked with a number of international organizations and Governments; The Government of China, the Government of India. We have worked with the Government of Brazil; we are working also with the Government of Cuba; we are working with the FAO; we are working with IICA- a number of agencies, Mr

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Speaker, so that we can develop those capacities and support our farmers, Mr Speaker, so much so, that last year alone, we conducted close to 13,000 farm visits in all ten Administrative Regions.

Mr Speaker, institutional capacity is important. We want to develop our farmers' groups. We want to give them the capacity so they can grow and benefit from the opportunities that are presented. We also want, Mr Speaker, to expose our farmers to the new technology, to new research, and to make that available at no cost to them, and we have been doing that, Mr Speaker. We are working again with another PPP, the model farm with Neal & Massy Company, a model farm whereby we will bring to our farmers. We are also collaborating with farmers across the industry in creating model farms ... *[Interruption]* ... much more than pumpkin.

Mr Speaker, we also are looking at the infrastructure to support this. Last year, we commissioned an \$89 million packaging plant. We expanded our packaging facility at Sophia. We are working with the U.S. government, USAID, in developing cold storage facilities at Timehri. We are engaging with the people involved in air transportation, such as Laparkan, such as Caribbean Airlines; and looking at them putting on additional capacity. And that is what my honorable colleague, the Minister of Finance reminded me; it is all about working together.

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Mr Speaker, our farmers don't have the ideal conditions. Our farmers don't have all the best of situations they would have. We have to combat the weather, Mr Speaker; we have to combat other threats, plant diseases, risks, Mr Speaker. We have to combat in terms of a very volatile market situation. So our farmers are very exposed; they don't have all the conditions, they probably need more extension services, they need more visits; and I would agree with that, Mr Speaker. But I wish to state, though, Mr Speaker, we are committed to working with them in overcoming their difficulties. The December/January rains, Mr Speaker, affected a number of farming areas, particularly along the coast, but also several hinterland river-rain areas, in particular, Mr Speaker. But we were not unresponsive. Mr Speaker, we are a caring government, we love our farmers, we love all the people of Guyana, and we will do what it takes, and what we can do, to help improve their moments of difficulty. And that is what we are about.

And some of us, if we look, reflect on our history, and when we look at another era, when there were similar difficulties and similar hardships, what did the authorities do? They did nothing. We are doing something. We may not be doing all that we should, but we are doing something.

And Mr Speaker, I wish to allude to the Farmer's Assistance Program- the \$100 million that was allocated

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by his Excellency the President, as part of his caring thrust, as part of his outlook to help in the return to production by our farmers. And the Honorable Leader of the Opposition, I must agree, that he was out there, and I am happy he was out there, because, I always ... As a former Minister of Agriculture, Mr Speaker, I am quite sure he would be in a position to offer advice, and guidelines. I do not disrespect that, I don't disrespect his experience. So I am always willing to benefit from his advice, and from his, as it were, suggestions. And he was out there, and we have had some interactions with him or with his representatives, and we tried to develop a very collaborative arrangement in ensuring that, at the end of the day, notwithstanding where the farmers are, no one goes and asks the farmers who they are voting for; no one goes to say what group you belong to. But at the end of the day, Mr Speaker, we are out there working with all farmers.

And the Honorable Member was suggesting; and it is very difficult in this time in our country's history, when we thought that we were developing a very mature politics, when the politics of division and destruction were behind us; we saw the Honorable Member, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker, seeking to suggest that in the implementation of the Farmers' Assistance Program, we were discriminating. Mr Speaker, I am ashamed, I am ashamed that we can have in this day and age, the Honorable Leader of the Opposition making

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those claims. And that is why, whatever we do, we do it with full openness.

But I am much more, Mr Speaker, hurt by his statement, because he is disrespecting the hard-working technical staff of the Ministry of Agriculture. He is disrespecting officers such as Michael Welch; he is disrespecting officers such as John Woolford; he is disrespecting officers such as Nigel Dharamlall; he is disrespecting officers such as Mr McAllister, and I will come back to Mr McAllister just now- Mr Joseph McAllister; he is disrespecting a number of officers who work day in, day out to ensure that the best programs ... Even Mr Rudolph Gajraj, sitting here from the MMA, he is disrespecting those, Mr Speaker.

But Mr Speaker, there was a comprehensive methodology that was developed, and this methodology and the system were published in the daily papers ... it was not a secret. There were whole page advertisements running in the daily papers. Because I knew, there are three things that the PNC, Mr Speaker, they talk about, no matter what you do. Three things they talk about: discrimination and marginalization, they start about that; then they also talk about corruption and all sorts of other things, and then they talk about poor governance. They have been saying that from 1992, Mr Speaker, so you can predict the storyline, and I knew that would be the storyline. And that is why, we ensured that whatever we did was made in

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the public, and that the farmers who matter, the farmers who matter, they led and guided on the implementation of that program.

And Mr Speaker, I can list the communities which have benefitted. And if we start in

Region 4: Victoria, Nabacalis, Buxton, Vigilance, Friendship, Ann's Grove, Golden Grove, Haslington, Enmore, Foulis, Cove and John, Nootenzuil, Douchfour, Two Friends, Beehive, Unity, Lancaster, Supply.

Region 5: We have the **Mahaica Creek**, we started in the Mahaica Creek, and will continue in the Mahaicony/Abary/West Berbice.

Region 6; Black Bush Polder, Crabwood Creek, Lancaster, Manchester, Kendall, Union, Liverpool, Canal, Le Retraite.

Region 1, which we will soon be implementing on: Barima/Waini, Moruca.

Region 2 : the Pomeroon River.

Region 3: Canal Polder, Hague, Salem, and La Jalousie. And the list goes on, Mr Speaker. We have been providing a range of assistance, Mr Speaker, and I want to assure the House, Mr Speaker, that the methodology that was developed is a fair methodology,

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and it is based, Mr Speaker, on the estimation and the actual loss incurred by farmers, and that is they support.

And I want to, Mr Speaker, the Honorable Leader of the Opposition suggested that in some communities we were giving plant material, we were giving livestock supplies, and in other communities, suggesting that we were giving cash vouchers. I wish to ensure that whatever one community is getting, the other is benefiting from. There is no discrimination. There is no different standard, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, the Honorable Member Ms Wade suggested that the farmers in Region 5, in the Mahaicony/Mahaica/Abary area, were not receiving help; and she said that Region 5 never benefited from new cattle breed. Well, the Honorable Member, Mr Speaker, through you, I wish to advise here that last year alone, Region 5 benefited from 459 AI services, and new breeds were introduced, such as the Brahman, the Brown... and the Jersey, Mr speaker. Mr Speaker, in the Abary Area and part of West Berbice, I can take you, I can show you.

Mr Speaker, also, we can also look in terms of the support that we had given to the farmers who were affected. In the MMA area, Mr Speaker, shortly, we have already, we will be waiving the rent for last year for those farmers, Mr Speaker; and the waiving of those rents will cost the MMA and the government close to \$53 million, Mr Speaker. So if the Honorable Member would like to

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know what types of interventions and support we are giving those farmers, those are just two, Mr Speaker.

Projections for the Sector: Mr Speaker, I also want to turn to the area, in terms of what are some of our projections for next year in this sector, and we will, we will still be talking about crops. Mr Speaker, in 2009, we also want to continue to supply the introduction of new planting materials. Mr Speaker, we want to intensify spice cultivation in the hinterland region; we want to proceed with a program looking at the development of soya and corn. We also want to work with the farmers in terms of promoting good agricultural practices, and Mr Speaker, this year we will be expanding our training program for farmers. We started a new program at the end of last year, whereby, during the break at the Guyana School of Agriculture, we are bringing in the farmers for two weeks, and training the farmers themselves, giving them the means, giving them the knowledge so they themselves can be better farmers in this regard.

We are also using or we will be expanding the use of information communication technology. We would also be providing much more manuals, we will be providing them in CDs, not only for crops, and also. Those are specificities, Mr Murray, Honorable Member, Mr Speaker.

Livestock Development: Mr Speaker, I wish to turn to livestock development. As you know, last year there was

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a lot of emphasis on new areas, in terms of livestock development. One of which is that we looked at introducing Textel Sheep. And Mr Speaker, all of us in this House should be proud of something we did last year. For the first time in the Caribbean, Guyana has been the place where we have been able to successfully carry out embryo transfer as a means of introducing new breed stock, and we brought in the animals, the breeding stock from out of England, the Textel Sheep, Mr Speaker. And whilst I was leaving the office, Mr Speaker; this program is getting support from the British High Commission; I received a letter from the British High Commission saying that they have evaluated our program, and they are committed to expanding the program, so much so that they will be providing much more materials and technical assistance in it. You might be correct, Mr Speaker, the Honorable Member might be correct. In fact, the result they saw that we got, surpassed what it is they had projected for, and they want to utilize Guyana, in fact, as an area for breed development.

Mr Speaker, we have also looked at new breeds in terms of ducklings. We have had a very aggressive program, working with the Guyana Defense Force in terms of pigs; and a number of farmers on the East Coast, a number of farmers who are involved in pig rearing, have benefited from that, Mr Speaker, and we will continue to do that. Mr speaker, we have also put a lot of emphasis on the area of animal health, and we have been able to develop,

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to bring back in our system, close to 12 veterinarians; and these veterinarians are deployed across the country to be in a position to service our farmers; and they have been trained; because of the program of our government, we invest in our people to develop capacity, and they returned from Cuba, and they are today serving our farmers.

They worked day in, day out, in the rain, in the flood conditions, going after the cattle, going after the sheep, going after the goats, in terms of working with our farmers. We must recognize their efforts. You don't need to recognize the efforts of those of us who sit, but recognize those who are in the fields, those who get up in the morning and are dedicated to their task. We must give recognition to their efforts, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Time is up, Honorable Member ...

Hon Samuel Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that Honorable Member be given another fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed Hon Member ...

Hon Robert M Persaud: *Fisheries and Aquaculture:* Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, Fisheries and Aquaculture, I

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wish to turn to. We saw, Mr Speaker, thank you very much, Mr Speaker, I wish to thank the Honorable Member for his generosity. Mr Speaker, we saw fisheries and aquaculture contributing close to 3% to GDP; and last year, we saw that aquaculture and fisheries brought in close to US\$53 million. And we want this growth to continue, Mr Speaker. We have heard in Region 2, from the Honorable Member Mr Khan, as to what is taking place, our emphasis on aquaculture in Region 2. We have new farms going up in Region 3. In Region 4, we have dedicated close to 15,000 acres of land within the MMA area- an area called Herstelling, for aquaculture development. We have developed at Onverwagt, a small aquaculture farm where we want to encourage businesses to get involved. In Region 6, we are seeing, Mr Speaker, more investors and more farms in development; so much so, Mr Speaker, we don't only export marine products, we are today an exporter of aquaculture products, and we want to build on that in this year, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, some of the issues that we will continue to give a lot of attention to, Mr Speaker, are issues that involve the activities of our fisherfolk, issues such as piracy. Last year we have been able to develop a very strong mechanism with the law enforcement authorities, Mr Speaker, and we will be working in terms of dealing with piracy.

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We will be looking in terms of expanding our implementation of our fisheries management plan. Mr Speaker, we will also be continuing to ensure that a successful arapaima management plan in Region 9; that the arapaima management plan is a success, Mr Speaker. As we speak, we have young people from the Hinterland Regions, including Region 9, being trained at the Guyana School of Agriculture in fishery, Mr Speaker; because we believe, not only the potential of our marine fishing and deep-sea fishing; we also strongly believe as part of our strategic economic focus, that aquaculture can be a strong growth sector, a strong export sector, to deliver us, to deliver us in the future, as a very strong and vibrant economic nation, Mr Speaker.

Hinterland Agriculture: Mr Speaker, hinterland agriculture is very important. Why is it very important, Mr Speaker? We have, we have, we talk more about peanuts, Mr Speaker. Hinterland development is much more than peanuts. In fact, we don't talk about peanuts. We talk about bigger things, including peanuts. Mr Speaker, we have a hinterland agricultural strategy, Mr Speaker, and this hinterland agricultural strategy, Mr Speaker, speaks to the issue of new technology. It speaks about the issue of acoushi ant control. Recently, Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, there is a parliamentary, there is a parliamentary committee that is set up to look at food prices; and you know what, Mr Speaker?: When the motion was brought to this National Assembly, the

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PNC/R refused to participate in that committee. But I wish to advise members of the PNC, Mr Speaker, and the Honorable Member from the AFC, Mrs. Holder was there; and at a discussion at that committee, Mr Speaker, we were speaking about some of the same impediments that were affecting hinterland agriculture.

And if you looked and if you participated ... You would see, Mr Speaker the difficulty we have in Guyana. We complain that we are not consulted; we complain that we don't have opportunities to work together, and when there are opportunities to work together, we don't want to work together. And at that level, Mr Speaker, you would have had the opportunity to benefit from the discussions we started, on what we are doing, and what else we are proposing to do, to deal with this issue, Mr Speaker.

But Mr Speaker, the Honorable Minister of Amerindian Affairs would elaborate in her presentation on what we are doing for hinterland agriculture. I just want to say that, in 2009 we will be expanding on that support, Mr Speaker. So much so, Mr Speaker, one of the areas of emphasis will be extension services. The Honorable Member would like to know, that as part of our development of capacity for extension services in the hinterland, we have deliberately been selecting scholars from the Hinterland Region, and having them trained in various disciplines of agricultural science; so much so that I can report to you that starting last year, we had a

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young agronomist returning from Cuba, and he is serving in the entire Region 7. His name is Lawrence Louis. You can go and look for him. And in Region 1, and I will come to Mr Corbin's excursions to Region 1 shortly; and in Region 1, we have another vet by the name of Dr Filene Narine. Mr Speaker, he came back from Cuba, and is also serving the people of Region 1 in veterinary services. And coming this year, Mr Speaker, there will be others who will be coming. But I wish to address some issues that were raised about Region 1, because it seems as if Region 1, this excursion to Region 1, Mr Speaker, was a very exciting one for Mr Corbin. I wish to tell him, the Honorable Member, Mr Speaker; I wish to say that last year alone, Mr Speaker, in Region 1, the extension staffers there were able to make close to, 70 farm visits alone in the Mabaruma Area. Mr Speaker, they also conducted close to half a dozen farm field schools during that period, Mr Speaker. They were also able to provide support in terms of crop production, acoushi ant control, Mr Speaker. And during this period, Mr Speaker, we have seen that the complement of staffers within the region, the extension staffers, that complement has been growing. Today we have four persons, four full-time staff, Mr Speaker, and we also have two extension agents; and it is our plan in Moruca, Mr Speaker, in the coming weeks, to appoint three more staffers within that area.

But Mr Speaker, I wish to talk about peanuts, Mr Corbin likes peanuts, so let me talk about peanuts. Mr Speaker,

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the project that Mr Corbin referred to, Mr Speaker, the project that he referred to, is a project that the Ministry supported, and was based on an intervention made by the Honorable Prime Minister, the Honorable Samuel Hinds. This project will work closely with the UNDP, and this project was to ensure that we have a resuscitation of the peanut industry. But not only the peanut industry in terms of production, but the grant that was provided, Mr Speaker; the grant that was provided saw also, there was a solar processing facility, and that there was a developed system put in place, to, as it were, to process and to acquire. But Mr Speaker, I agree with Mr Corbin that the project which was developed, the Honorable Member, the project that was developed, did not stick to the timeline that it should have, I agree with him, because the person who was identified as the purchaser, was not able to deliver as he should, and their engagement with the Prime Minister's Office and UNDP, Mr Speaker, to correct and accelerate.

But, Mr Speaker, there is a bigger, and I suspect, there is another motive why it is that Mr Corbin has honed in on this peanut project. And I will tell you why, Mr Speaker. The technical manager for this project was a gentleman by the name of Joseph McAllister, and it seems as if the Honourable Member might be having some bone to pick with the name "McAllister", Mr Speaker. And it is, Mr Speaker, the brother of the former member of the PNC.
[Noisy Interruption]

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The Speaker: Can we have some order, please, Honorable Members? Please!

Mr Robert HO Corbin: On a point of order, Sir, I believe that ...

The Speaker: Honorable Member, you can't make that allegation against him.

Mr Robert H O Corbin: They are imputing improper motives to my explanation...

The Speaker: I understand this.

Mr Robert H O Corbin: ... when I clearly pointed out that these are problems which the farmers have there, and I established as a fact, that they have 10,000 pounds of peanuts there; what they wanted was marketing. I asked that the GMC be sent in there to purchase it. I don't know what that has to do with anything about the project, which I never mentioned. And I thought that the Minister would tell us when he is sending to purchase the 10,000 pounds from the farmers. That is what I asked, Sir.

Hon Robert M Persaud: Mr Speaker, it was an oversight on my part, and I wish to withdraw the motives and suggestions that were cast on Mr Corbin's intervention. But Mr Speaker, last year, the new GMC ...
[Interruption]

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The Speaker: Honorable Members, settle down, please. Let us settle down and get on. We are only on our second speaker. I have a list of eighteen speakers. Could we please get on with the business at hand - Debating business?

Hon Robert M Persaud: Mr Speaker, I wish to point out that the new GMC has had a presence last year, and they would be visiting some of the communities that Mr Corbin had pointed out, and they will be continuing, as part of their program of going forward.

Drainage and Irrigation: Mr Speaker, I wish now to turn to Drainage and Irrigation. As was pointed out Mr Speaker, drainage and irrigation is very vital for the agricultural development of our country. And the Honorable Member, Mr Speaker, of the AFC, has suggested that, when we carry out interventions, we do not get a proper evaluation and a proper assessment of those evaluations. And I wish, Mr Speaker, to quote from a World Bank Rapid Assessment on flood related damages to the coastland of Guyana during the period January 25th to 31st, 2009; and Mr Speaker, I wish to quote what the World Bank said:

The response to the flooding on the part of the NDIA was swift and continuous. As flood waters accumulated, the NDIA provided rapid response to local situations as needed, cleaning obstructed structures,

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excavating canal, and deploying pumps. Whilst operating in a reactive mode, the effects of the ongoing rehabilitative programs were noticeable and positive.

And the World Bank report went on to state, Mr Speaker;

Work has continued with the change in government, and significant progress has been made in improving the discharge capacity of the system in populated areas. This has been accomplished largely through the implementation of a concerted maintenance and rehabilitation program. While much remains to be done, the impact of this program demonstrated its effectiveness with the reduction in areas affected by flooding during the current heavy rainfall, and the increased speed with which accumulated water was removed.

Mr Speaker, I make this observation, because very often we hear two accusations, that; one, the government has not done anything much since the 2005 floods, and; secondly, that the investments that are been made are not effective. Well, what I am providing you here with, Mr Speaker; a lot of us like to quote the World Bank. This is what the World Bank had to say about the response in

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December/January, but more so, about the investments that we have made.

Mr Speaker, the investment in D&I in 2009 will continue to be very strong, and we will continue to focus an reallocation of primary and secondary drains, earthen embankments, installation of new pumps, also purchase of new pumps, and also purchase of new pontoons, pumps and excavators; and also continue to invest in terms of a conservancy. Mr Speaker, we would be looking at expenditure of close to \$7.9 billion in terms of drainage and irrigation, including the MMA area, Mr Speaker. Also, the implementation of the \$3.8 million World Bank Conservancy Adaption Project will be expedited. This project focuses on the East Demerara Water Conservancy, and a specific emphasis of this project is to improve and expand the drainage of the conservancy through the Demerara River, using the Cunha outlet. And since 2005, Members would know, because the Economic Services team, of the National Assembly, conducted a visit to the conservancy, and from my report, they were generally impressed with what they saw in the conservancy that team consisted of Members of the Opposition. But we will continue to put a lot of emphasis on that, Mr Speaker.

But Mr Speaker, one of the highlights in our investment in D&I would be the \$2 billion Hope Project, which we are calling the East Demerara Water Conservancy

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Northern Relief Channel at Hope/Douche Four. Mr Speaker, there have been some observations made in the National Assembly during debates by previous speakers, and also outside the National Assembly, regarding the technical soundness and wisdom of this project. And I wish to advise the National Assembly, Mr Speaker, that technical assessments of the E. D. W. C. and its flow system, by both local and international experts, indicate that the E. D. W. C. requires an additional outlet, in order to improve its safety standards, in responding to extremes storm events.

Hydraulic modeling, Mr Speaker, of the E. D. W. C. was carried out in 2004 under the Hydrology and Water Resource Study for the Guyana D& I Rehabilitation Project, and this was further updated in 2005 by the Task Force that came after the 2005 floods; which provided analytical output, from which recommendations were derived in improving the flow and discharge systems of the conservancy. Mr Speaker, the final report of the Task Force of 2005, prepared by experts, ...Mc Donald, local engineers, with input from, and also engineers out of Holland, recommended that the new outlet be constructed, probably the size of Land of Canaan sluice, and this they say is to evacuate a 10,000 year plus storm, and outside of this presentation, I can explain what a 10,000 year plus storm is.

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Also Mr Speaker, the assessment of the Guyana floods; Geotechnical and Hydraulic Assessment of the East Demerara Water Conservancy pointed in the same direction. From all the rainfall patterns, Mr Speaker, we see that there is accumulation in the north-east section of the Conservancy, and that takes a much longer period to discharge through the eastern relief structures; that is, into the Demerara River, thus causing the need for relief outlets to the Atlantic, Mr Speaker.

Works in this regard were recommended. The Task Force of international experts, Mr Speaker, importantly, recommended Shell Canal on the East Coast, and also another possible site was Nabacalis. However, when the assessments were done, physical assessments were carried out, it was recognized that due to agricultural and housing settlement in the path of those two identified sites, it will require a large investment with major socioeconomic dislocation, for either of these two locations to be proceeded with. In those circumstances, Mr Speaker, a decision was taken to construct a new outlet at Hope/ Douchfour area. And Mr Speaker, those of us who know the geography of the East Coast, would know that the Hope/Douchfour area is located 0.4 miles away from shanks, which is on the East, and also 0.745 miles on the west, which is Nabacalis, meaning that the Hope area is nearly in the center of the two extremes which were recommended by the experts, Mr speaker.

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In this regard, Mr Speaker, the consultancy services have been solicited through a national competitive bidding system. Implementation of this project, Mr Speaker, will not be done off of any one guessing, it will be done based on technical studies and assessments, in developing the most suitable structural design and operating procedures for the outlet. And the scope of services to be undertaken, Mr Speaker, will include hydrological and reserve studies, hydraulic engineering and flooding receding studies, hydrographic surveys, engineering and topographic surveys, geotechnical investigations. And the design, Mr Speaker, would include structures such as; an intake structure on the conservancy; a control structure on the crown dam; an access bridge, because you have to cut the highway, the East Coast highway; a discharge structure at the seawall interface; and also, the construction of the discharge canal, as well as an outfall channel, because we also know about the dislocation that takes place within the Hope area, the construction of a outfall channel, as well as a retaining wall and groynes.

Mr Speaker, there will also be assessments of the environmental impact of this project, and also recommendations and mitigating measures. There will also be provision of detailed designs, and a number of options will be looked at in terms of design. And the NDIA, Mr Speaker, will be engaging external supervision of this project; and already we have started a process of engagement with McGill University, and the International

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Commission on Drainage and Irrigation to support our technical efforts in developing this project, Mr Speaker. It is an important project, and it matters a lot to our economy, and to those persons in the Mahaica/Mahaicony area, who have to endure hardship whenever we have to undertake the emergency relief.

Forestry: Mr Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to speak briefly on the Forestry Sector, because the forestry sector is very important, Mr Speaker. 2008 was an important year for our forests, as Guyana pioneered a study, which assessed the true value of forests, to provide for provisions locally and globally, in terms of determining its ecological worth. Mr Speaker, because of the lobbying efforts, and the international acclaim that Guyana has earned in terms of its management of our forestry resources, Guyana was one of 14 countries to be formally approved as a participant in the World Bank Carbon Partnership, which is looking at ways to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, commonly referred to as 'red'. Because of these innovative initiatives Mr Speaker, Guyana is now considered a world leader in the current global debate on the crucial role of avoiding deforestation, which is being led by our President.

Mr Speaker, these initiatives have led to an increased awareness, that forest products originating from Guyana, come from sustainably managed forests, and this was an

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important factor that allowed Guyana to retain its market access, even in the face of the current financial meltdown. Mr Speaker, it has also resulted in numerous applications from credible investors, requesting access to state forest concessions, and land for the establishment of multipurpose processing and value added facilities. These are currently being considered in accordance with the well established, transparent procedures of the Guyana Forestry Commission, and other relevant agencies.

Mr Speaker, in 2008, we articulated and finalized the national law on export policy, and this took effect on 1, January 2009; but also, it includes Barama too, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, we have also put a lot of impetus on the value added sector, and starting on the January, 1, we have removed the 2% export commission that value added forest products would normally have to pay; and this will not only give us an incentive for the value added sector, but also to make our exports much more competitive, especially in a very difficult market environment.

Mr Speaker, we also continued our work on the Government Community Forestry Program, and we saw eight new community forest organizations formed, dealing with community forestry organizations. We have also enhanced our interaction and consultation with the FPA, the DMFSA sub-committees, looking at the forestry

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sector. And just recently Mr Speaker, this National Assembly unanimously, after a lengthy process of consultation, and working together; unanimously, passed the Forest Bill; a modern comprehensive Forest Bill, which is intended to take our sector forward. And I think sometimes we need to remember these efforts that we are making, rather than hearing the damning statements, and the harmful statements we sometimes hear emanating from some members of the other side. I understand also, Mr Speaker, to see that the Honorable Leader of the Opposition would have been referring to a letter in the newspaper by an individual; because we are a professional body, and we conduct our work professionally, in terms of how we manage the natural resources of our country. We have not commented on the personal issues that that individual has with the GFC, matters that are under consideration.

We need to bear that in mind; but it was a bit disturbing that he sought to involve a personal issue into this debate, Mr Speaker, and tried to make a general, a carte blanche, across the board; a sweeping condemnation of the staff of the Guyana Forestry Commission, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, in the coming period, we will continue our work in the international community, and if it wasn't for the excellent stewardship of our forest resources, and the management and the regulation functions that are being carried out by the GFC, we would not be winning

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support; not only verbal support, not only platitudes, but also tangible support from international Bodies such as the World Wildlife Fund which is working with the GFC; Conservation international; the British Government, Mr Speaker; the Dutch Government, and a number of other governments and other agencies, the ITTO, the FAO, a number of bodies working with the Forestry Commission giving us support in terms of implementing our work programs. So if the GFC is so bad, and so ineffective, and lacks transparency, why is it attracting such international support and all this collaboration that is taking place, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker, monitoring will be emphasized this year, Mr Speaker, and we plan to employ another 50 Forest Rangers, and to ensure that all concessions are fully monitored. Mr Speaker, we have just finalized an agreement with the Brazilian Government, in terms of conducting satellite monitoring of our forest resources, especially to reduce illegal timber harvesting. We have also introduced computerized log tracking systems and remote sensing, and this project will be completed shortly, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, also to support value added in our small operations, we will be introducing three kiln drying facilities, especially in helping our hinterland communities. And Mr Speaker, there are a range of other interventions that we intend to do.

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But Mr Speaker, as you can ascertain, our government's strategy in fostering agricultural development is both broad and deep; and I must say that I am overwhelmed by the keen interest shown by many members of the Opposition, in terms of development, and progress, and even issues that need to be addressed within the sector; and I think that is a healthy sign, it bodes well, in terms of collaboration and working as a team in overcoming the challenges that we face within our Agricultural Sector.

Mr Speaker, our strategy aims at expanding our agriculture base, increasing the sources of our export earnings, and increasing value added of our products, thus delivering on our promise to improve the livelihood and quality of our people. At the same time, Mr Speaker, it deepens our already existing productive base for an integrated support system, which we will realize through modernizing and reforming our institutions, so that they can deliver a better quality of service to our farmers and others who dependent on the sector.

Mr Speaker, to return to the Theme of this Budget, *Working Together, Reinforcing Resilienc*, we will, and we must continue to aim to involve and collaborate with all stakeholders, including farmers, unions, the private sector, the civil society, international organizations, donor communities, and yes, members of the Opposition; for only together will we be successful in delivering our ambitious vision. Only such a strategy will ensure that

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the significant funds we have committed to agriculture will deliver economic development and alleviate poverty. Today, more than ever, we can all say that we are on the way of making Guyana a stronger nation, and a leading provider of our basic sustenance, which is food, not only to Guyana but to the Caribbean region.

Mr Speaker, I conclude by pointing out; my concluding remarks. I conclude by pointing out or referring to a very important statement. I am very disturbed, because for the first time in a long time, a president of the United States, at his inauguration ceremony, made reference to small farmers in developing countries. I wish to quote President Barack Obama, in his inauguration speech, and this is what he had to say:

To the people of poor nations, we pledged to work alongside you to make your farms flourish, and let clean water flow; to nourish starved bodies, and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty we say that we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside of our borders, nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to the effects.

Mr Speaker, in concluding that paragraph, I pointed out that the world has changed, and we must change with it. I thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

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The Speaker: Honorable Member Mr Anthony Vieira, I will take the break after you conclude, and so give you an opportunity to capture the cameras while they are here, including your own.

[Inaudible]

Mr Anthony Vieira: I love to hear the Hon Robert Persaud tell us about his plans and activities. They are very long on words and promises, but short on facts and I, myself am a lover of facts. I would have preferred when he was referring to some of the projects he had embarked on, that he provided us with hard facts as to what exactly he had produced, and where they were located. This lack of... these promises were also pointed out by Mr Corbin in the 2007, 2008 and now in the 2009 Budget speeches. There were promises which have never actually been kept; so it is becoming a hallmark of these presentations.

Secondly, I want to say something about the “embryo project.” I happen to be personally involved, because the British were kind enough to invite me to the Royal Show in the United Kingdom; I believe Prince Charles was waiting to greet the Honorable Robert, who never turned up. Mrs. Wheeler has to be congratulated: This is the wife of the local British High Commissioner, and I would like to laud her actions so far, because she has pushed the Ministry of Agriculture, with the staff; and the last time I visited the project; because I am interested, I went twice to see it myself at NARI; she was complaining because

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the was waiting 3 ½ weeks for a plough, because the Textel sheep was being fed in the same field with the other type of sheep.

As far as the Grow More Food campaign is concerned, until we seen the facts from the Bank of Guyana statistics, I am going to put it down as the usual Robert, the Honorable Robert rhetoric; because frankly, I have this impression that our other crops, the small crops, the lettuce, tomato, onions, have been on the decline for many years; but because of the numerous drainage problems and other problems, the farmers have actually moved away from the land, and I believe... I don't know, we'll have to wait for the Bank of Guyana. You say they export more, but we don't have any evidence of that.

I don't shout, I have a very small voice. What you want, a big voice? As far as the increasing of the agricultural budget by over 100%, I have to say that it is true that the Budget is going to be increased by 100% this year, but my question is that; it is being increased by 100% to take care of the neglected and abandoned structures that have to be replaced, so that the drainage system can be put back in an effective situation. It really is not a new thing, it is fixing neglected and abandoned structures. As far as the Land of Canaan sluice the Minister referred to, I have to tell the Minister that there is no sluice at Land of Canaan, it's a relief weir.

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As far as diesel gen sets at Skeldon is concerned, I have to tell the Minister that there are Wartsila heavy-fuel generators at Skeldon and not diesel gen sets. Now despite the rhetoric to the contrary, perception are the most important thing people have. And it is the perception of the trade unions, the perceptions of the Chamber of Commerce, the Guyana Manufacturers Association, these political opposition parties, the Economic Services of the Parliament, that no real consultation was done; and therefore, the criticism that working together is a misnomer, is a fair comment. I don't know who the Minister is working together with, but it certainly was not with this Opposition. In the Minister's speech, it became clear that this was the usual 'bigger than last year' budget; and I did not see anything positive in it, for hydropower, or for the road to Brazil, both of which I consider vital to our economy. After all, our President declared last year that the Brazilian connection was so important to us, that he was putting the then Minister of Housing permanently in Brazil to facilitate the process of development; but perhaps the Honorable Member, the former Minister was sent there for some other reason.

In general, our local debt has grown from less than \$20 billion to nearly \$80 billion, and our foreign debt is again climbing, making our total debt nearly US\$1.3 billion. And what do we have to show for all of this? Do we have hydropower fuelling our industries? Do we have a road to

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Brazil, and all the developments that that can bring? Do we have a thriving sugar industry as promised by this administration after spending nearly US\$102 million so far? What we do seem to have is one of the biggest drug-fuelled economies in the Caribbean. We certainly have the biggest white elephant stadium in the Caribbean; and apparently everyone, except this Minister, understands that Carifesta yielded this nation nothing; and the World Cup fiasco left numerous bankrupted people in its wake, more than any other national enterprise in the history of this nation. So I don't really want to hear about how successful Carifesta was. With all due respect, it was a total disaster, and we all know it.

Sir, I will not deal with it any further, because, frankly, it has been covered by the media, but this sir, is a very poor budget, according to all sources, and it has diminished you in the eyes of those in our society who understand these matters, and who have some respect for you. I am not going to make any further general statements about this budget; it has already received enough condemnation in the media and here in this House, and so I will concentrate on the agriculture area which is my brief.

Drainage: To establish the dire ongoing consequences of one bad action in Government, I will give an example of an action which has caused untold misery in this country for over 5 ½ years. After coming to power in 1992, the PPP experienced very low rain fall, since in the period

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1992-2003, we were in the El Nino cycle of years, which yielded low levels of rainfall, but in 2004, we entered the La Nina years, which typically yield high levels of rainfall. Now, I have been aware of this cycle of 8 to 10 to 12 years of high rainfall alternating with 8-12 years of low rainfall, since I joined the sugar industry in 1965, and could look at the historical rainfall records that we have displayed on the walls of our offices, dating back almost 100 years.

We of course did not know about the El Nino, and the La Nina phenomenon. We knew that there were wet cycles of years, alternating with very dry cycles, and that we had to be prepared for the wet cycles throughout the entire period of the dry cycles, which meant de-silting outfall channels, keeping all trenches clear and not creating encumbrances. For example, as recorded at Houston Estate, in the 11-year period 1966 -1976, the average rainfall was 132.45 inches per year, with the years 1967, 1970, 1971 and 1976 producing annual rainfall higher than 140 inches. So, this phenomenon of having high rainfall is nothing new; has nothing to do with climate change; this is the normal rainfall pattern for this country.

From 1992-2003, the average rainfall being El Nino years, was around 75 inches average per year, in those years, and some genius took that to be our traditional historical rainfall; and not only did they neglect the entire national drainage system, they ill-advisedly allowed

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settlement and crop cultivation along the banks of the Mahaica, since in the El Nino years, the rainfall was so low that it was never necessary to relieve the high Lama conservancy level through the sluices provided for that purpose at Maduni and the two sluices at the back of the Lama, the south-east corner of the Lama conservancy. Since they allowed settlement along the Mahaica, which disallowed excess water to the Atlantic ocean; and since they allowed the mouth of the Mahaica river to become so silted up that it virtually became dysfunctional; not only did they cause untold misery, and even death, along the lower East Coast in 2005, 2006 and 2008, but to rectify this problem caused by not understanding the consequences of their actions, in this very budget there is a \$2.8 billion provision to build a new relief trench to discharge the Lama high level to the Atlantic through the Hope Village

Mr Speaker, Mr Minister, before we pass that provision, I would advise a bipartisan committee to be formed to discuss the repercussions of doing this relief trench through Hope Village; since I believe that these Maduni and Lama relief structures in the conservancy worked in the past, and should be allowed to work again, rather than building something entirely new; and this same lack of foresight and investigation to what our traditional rainfall is, also is what will ultimately make the Skeldon project a problem, if not a failure.

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Mr Speaker, we were born in a country, and found our homes, our fore-parents' homes, were built on stilts, off the ground, since our ancestors decided that it was impossible to build and maintain a drainage system capable of draining the intensity of rain fall we can get occasionally in this country. But the government keeps peddling these nancy stories that we are faced with climate changes, which is causing these problems. As far as drainage is concerned, and since our ancestors designed a system to take off... As far as the drainage is concerned, and since our ancestors designed a system to take off 1.5 inches of rainfall every 24 hours, if the rain falls in a well-distributed manner, we are capable of draining off 45 inches a month in non-housing areas, and 60 inches in housing areas.

Mr Speaker, in the year 2005, we recorded at Houston Estate 131.65 inches of rain. In 2006, we recorded 113.20 inches. In 2007, we recorded 109.33 inches; and in 2008, we recorded 129.34 inches. Now Mr Speaker, remember that in 1967, 1970, 1971, 1976, more than 140 inches of rain fell in each of those years; so what happened to the system of drainage? What happened to the system of drainage we had then? You abandoned it, you abandoned it and you broke it up. The only time since 1992, Mr Speaker, when the rain fell with an intensity which had the potential to cause massive flooding was on January 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18, 2005, when in those five days, 26 inches of rain fell. At no other time in my analysis, Mr

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Speaker, did we have a storm which was capable of causing the kind of flooding we saw on the East Coast.

The supporters of this Opposition, the supporters of this Opposition have had to pay for these lapses, with their taxes. In addition, the supporters of this Opposition must now pay to bail out the Sugar Industry from the ill-advised actions and disastrous investment by this administration, at Skeldon. The supporters of this Opposition have had to pay their taxes, when, in the year 2007, according to Mr Ram and McRae; in that one year alone, tax concessions to the value of \$180 billion was given to the; the concessions was given, and this amount was greater than the actual tax collected from the poor working people and struggling businesses in this nation. Their leaders- the leaders of these people who had to pay the taxes, because the government forgive the taxes, had no say in who were getting these tax concessions and why. They had no say in who was getting it or why. And this has been a hallmark of the PPP stewardship in this nation: look after the people who voted for them, and forget everybody else.

For example, they refused to support bauxite from the Consolidated Fund; but this budget and last year's budget are allocating funds to support the sugar industry from the Consolidated Fund to the tune of several billion dollars. But the people who vote for the PPP; the people who voted for the PPP died on the East Coast of this country

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in 2005, 2006 and again in 2008, victims of their own shortsightedness and prejudice in how they voted, which served them not at all. Mr Speaker, bad governance has consequences for everyone. It does not discriminate along racial or political lines. We must keep remembering that at all times.

Sugar: Mr Speaker, as far as sugar is concerned, last year we produced 226,267 tons of sugar. It was the lowest production recorded in the industry since 1991; and Skeldon was not the sole reason why this was so. Despite what the Minister says, all estates performed badly. This is the Minister of Finance, the Skeldon Estate. The accumulated results, all estates, all estates performed badly. The accumulated result of a systematic starvation of funds, to the rest of the estates, to finance this white elephant at Skeldon, is taking its toll on the industry now. Along with shortage of labour, late application of fertilizers, poor husbandry and bad drainage; and contrary to what the Minister said in his presentation, Skeldon has not co-produced 1KW of electricity as yet. I think you should listen. They have in fact, not even burnt one pound of bagasse in the four commissioning trials so far. Yes, Mr Speaker, four times they tried to commission this new factory without success, and in those four trials so far to commission the new factory, they are using heavy fuel generators to power the equipment for grinding, and not the bagasse.

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For the information of the Minister, the process of burning bagasse from the cane they are grinding to generate power for the running of the factory; the entity is expected to produce a surplus of electrical power, which will be fed into the national grid, and which is what is identified as co-generation. Any power produced by heavy fuel alone cannot be identified as co-generation. I hope this was an honest mistake, and not an attempt at ...

I see the failure of the Skeldon project as a five-part saga identified as follows:

1. In the very beginning, the Guysuco Strategic Plan, 1998-2008, the Board of the company wrongly assumed that the sugar protocols and the preferential price for sugar could not be removed by the European Union. It is in the review of the strategic plan in 2001, I happen to have it here. This was the first mistake in the Skeldon modernization project, since it was based almost completely on this false assumption. So while Trinidad, Jamaica and other ACP countries who read the situation correctly were diversifying, and minimizing their sugar industries, we were expanding ours with money which we did not have
2. The second major problem in our sugar industry today were the huge wage increases which were given to the sugar workers between

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1999 and 2007; increases which Guysuco could not afford to pay and be competitive in international markets. [Interruption] If you want to pay, and be ineffective as a competitor, it's your business, but you are not running your business, you are running this nation's business. Even with a preferential price, even with the preferential price, they were not capable of paying those increased wages; and so they were forced to reduce the workforce by 10,000 workers by 2008; but in reducing the workforce so drastically and so rapidly, they in fact, created a large scale shortage of labor in the industry which is plaguing them today. What is remarkable, is that even though they reduced the workforce from 28,000 in 1992 to around 14,000 today, with an estimated 4,000 casual workers, the wage bill still keeps rising drastically, whilst the price of sugar is falling.

There has just been too much political interference in the industry for it to survive economically. As a result of this political interference in the sugar industry, the industry's wage bill now amounts to 63% of its total costs. In the period 1994-1999, when the labour cost of the industry was hovering around 42%-45% of total costs, the industry made some profits; but when the labour costs began

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to approach 65% of total costs, around the year 2001, and onwards, the corporation ran into major problems. I noticed with some amusement that the GAWU union has been saying, that this 63% of total costs was applicable in the 1970s, and this is true. At the same time, it must be clearly understood that in the 1970s, the comparison is invalid, since at that time mechanization of sugar was not as widespread as it is now. Everything had to be done by hand, but not now. You are competing. Your competitors are people who are very highly mechanized and are hardly using manual labour. We have to do better if we are to stay competitive.

3. The third major problem is the changing weather patterns into the wet cycle of the years in Berbice, which is now a huge hindrance to the expansion, especially the mechanization aspect of the expansion of the cane cultivation, necessary to supply the new 350 tons per hour factory with cane. I am not sure, Mr Speaker, that many people understand what exactly this 350 tons an hour means as a consequence to what is applicable now. So I would like to put it into perspective. At Skeldon today, according to the Minister's own evidence, to the Economic Services Committee, Skeldon

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Estate loads 310 tons; that is over 2,000 tons per day; that is what they are loading now. The current Skeldon factory grinds at around 93 tons per hour, and therefore requires 2,232 tons every day, every 24 hour cycle period. The new factory, which is a 350 tons factory, if you were to fuel, that to run that factory at its capacity; and you have to do that if you are going to co-generate; you have to put the cane into the factory, or there will be no surplus bagasse to run anything; it will require 8,400 tons per day. In other words, four times more. Now, Mr Speaker, that is a huge amount of cane, and no one, not even Guysuco knows where this cane will come from at this moment in time.

4. The fourth problem in conception, was in expecting that the farmers in Berbice, at Skeldon, were capable of planning, planting, sorry, an area of about 10,000 acres, which was the size of Skeldon before the expansion. It just cannot be done, and especially since these farmers are not only going to have to plant 10,000 acres, they are going to have to have the equipment to harvest this.
5. Now, the fifth and final reason, there are numerous other things, but I just mention five

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main things. The fifth, there is also evidence that the other Guysuco estates, despite denials by the corporation, are being deprived of money to keep their operations economical and competitive; and this is due to a starvation of capital funds as a result of diversion of funds to complete this expansion at Skeldon. For example, at the beginning of 2008, the estates advanced their capital budget requirements to the Head Office of Guysuco, for an amount totaling \$5.569 billion. It was slashed by 129% to \$2.425 billion. The previous years also discloses irresponsible slashing of the capital requirement to the rest of the industry to fuel this expansion at Skeldon. In 2007, for example, Albion Estate asked for G\$528.6 million, to do its capital works, and was only given \$182.3 million. Rose Hall asked for \$413.6 million, and was only given \$193.4 million. The Skeldon project is a disaster for this nation, and to build this, they have butchered the rest of the industry. For example, in 2008 when the world market price for sugar was hovering around 14 cents a pound, our estates performed as follows:

Skeldon	–	39 cents per pound
Albion	–	20 cents per pound

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Rose Hall	–	22 cents per pound
Blairmont	–	23 cents per pound
Enmore	–	22 cents per pound
LBI	–	36 cents per pound
Wales	–	25 cents per pound
Hydra	–	37 cents per pound.

Mr Speaker, these are ridiculously high figures, totally uncompetitive in the world market. At the end of September this year, when the final 21% subsidy is removed from our sugar at the European Union, the consequences will become clearer. Guysuco's annual losses can become tens of billions of dollars per year, instead of the billions of dollars loss being experienced at this time. Because in the recent group of documents that were given to us, we calculated that the losses between 2001 and 2006 were \$6.577 billion to Guysuco. We have not, in fact, seen the 2007, and of course you won't see 2008 for some time; but we expect it will be three or four more billion dollars.

As a result of the removal of the subsidy by the European Union, the EU has begun to pay those countries they have been subsidizing a compensation for the loss of the subsidies, and Guyana has begun to receive its share. Incredibly, Mr Speaker, this Government has not found it

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necessary to pay the local cane farmers their share of this compensation. They have not even released it to Guysuco. It is being held in the Central Bank for beefing up the National Drainage System and other central Government projects. This compensation is not for the Government of Guyana to disburse in this fashion. It is for Guysuco and all cane farmers, who will lose income as a result of the withdrawal of the subsidy by the European Union ... *[Interruption]* Trinidad has already paid its farmers, so one can legitimately ask why the Guyana cane farmers have not been paid their share of the compensation. We have already received, Guyana has already received, G\$8 billion as the compensation from the European Union; and I understand that the total compensation for Guyana will be around 120 million Euros, Mr Speaker- G\$33 billion. If my calculations are correct, and the cane farmers of Guyana are entitled to 10% of that, I think the Government of Guyana will have to pay the cane farmers G\$3.36 billion in compensation, because they have suffered a loss in their price as well. I think that they deserve it, Mr Speaker, and I truly believe that it is the intention of the compensation velocity of the European Union that they get.

Rice: Mr Speaker, rice fared a little better; on paper, rice fared a little better than sugar in 2008. But evidence, increasing evidence is surfacing, that of the 329,574 tons of rice produced, only 193,000 tons were actually exported. World market price, during 2008, was very

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unsure, for example in 2008, at the beginning of the second crop, the world market price for rice was around US\$900 per tone; but after buying the paddy from the farmers at the inflated price of nearly G\$8,000 per bag, the world market price fell to about US\$510 per ton. As a result, many farmers have not been paid, and some estimates tell me that several hundred thousand bags of paddy are stockpiled all across the nation, unmilled, as there are no realistic markets for it, given the price at which the paddy was bought. This has left the millers in a very embarrassing financial situation, across the nation, and the Minister is well aware of that. You have already met with them.

This government, which has left the farmers high and dry, are now boasting about increased production, without telling us how badly the farmers have lost economically, as a result of the lack of proper marketing mechanisms for the Guyana rice, in 2008. There is no doubt that, given the small world market price of US\$510, even up to this time, that in the coming crop in 2009, there will be a very low price for rice in this country. I estimate that this year, the production of rice will be lower than last year.

Our Minister of Agriculture told the farmers in May and June of 2008, that his prognosis was that grains will be in short supply in the world; and his advice was that the farmers plant large acreages, for the second crop of 2008. But after reaping commenced in September 2008, the

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high price only lasted for around six weeks, and began to drop from US\$900 to \$510 per tonne, which is what the price is now. As a result, any paddy reaped this year will probably be bought for only G\$2,500 to G\$3,500 per bag. This will certainly affect the annual production of rice for 2009. We have to wait and see.

It is a very sad story, Mr Speaker; a story of the blind leading the blind; of people who don't understand the international dynamics of markets, prognosticating and misleading people into investing in bankrupt ... Through the year, Mr Speaker, a lack of support to the rice farmers hampered progress; fertilizers, especially triple super phosphate and urea in particular, were in short supply, or were delivered late, after the optimum time for the application, which would be best agricultural practice. So even in the area of supplying fertilizers, insecticide, weed killers and especially transportation, there was a delegation of farmers at my home, in the middle of October telling me that the whole island was full of paddy and couldn't come off, because the ferry wasn't working, they needed the big ferry to carry the trucks.

The Speaker: Time is up, Honorable Member ...

Mrs Deborah Backer: Mr Speaker, I rise to move that the Honorable member be given fifteen minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

Mrs Deborah Backer: Thank you.

Mr Anthony Vieira: *Fisheries:* I have been warning about piracy of our fishing ground, by Venezuelan and other fishing vessels, especially when our **producers** are voluntarily parking their boats to allow the grounds to be repopulated. I warned that we do not have a marine biologist and that the sector was being neglected. I warned about this in my 2007, and again in my 2008 Budget speeches, which I made in this House. Well, the consequences have materialized, and the sector is in trouble, since as the Minister rightfully said, the fishing grounds have been depleted, and it will affect production this year.

As far as the other crops are concerned, I do not expect to see any improvement over 2007, when the production of heavy cash crops showed signs of dropping alarmingly due to flooding and bad support management. But undaunted, the Minister continues to visit farmers decimated by flooding and other disasters, and his only compensation is to give them was a few seeds, *[Laughter]* as well as the shocks. In summary, one has to say that this has been a very bleak picture for these main pillars of our economy, and therefore for this year, people will tell us that we imported 1,800 trucks, without understanding that “trucks” in this context may be Ford F150s and other pickups, which are identified as such by

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our licensing people - this is really sad. I am sure that there is not much hope for any realistic solution to our problems.

I want to sum up. I want to say that we are here to help. We are saying that there are people on this side who can help, who have skills, and therefore, inviting us to work together is a wonderful concept. Please make it a reality. Please! Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honorable Member.

Honorable Members, I think we will take the suspension. Can we limit it to forty-five minutes today so that we can have some extra time? Thank you.

17:27H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

18:17H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated, Honorable Members.

Honorable Member Mr Irfaan Ali ...

Hon M Irfaan Ali: Mr Speaker, allow me to offer my congratulations to the Honorable Dr Ashni Singh, on the presentation of a masterpiece budget; a budget that is crafted with great intellectual capabilities, and a budget that not only looks at the short-term economic framework, but builds up on successive years of

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macroeconomic stability, and looks way beyond 2009 into the medium-term. And of course, it is a budget that would lay the foundation for another resounding victory, come 2011, when we face the polls again.

Mr Speaker, I can understand, I can understand very well, the uneasiness; the uneasiness among the members of the Opposition, when they hear the theme “working together”, because they themselves have serious difficulties working together internally; so how would this manifest itself towards working for the greater national good? First you have to fix your internal house, then you will fix the more macro framework.

Mr Speaker, as has become customary, I would have to commence my presentation with the correction of some untruths. Let us look at what the Honorable Member Mervyn Williams had to say, on the water the supply in Region 3. He said that areas including Long Pond, Den Amstel, and Tuschen, have no access to water. Mr Speaker, may I read to you a letter I received today from the Chairman of the Hague/Blankenburg NDC, an NDC that is controlled by the Opposition? And that is what he had to say, Mr Speaker,

I am pleased to note that the supply of water from Guyana Water Inc is satisfactory. The NDC encompasses the communities of Blankenburg, Den Amstel, Fellowship and Hague. This is represented

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by some 450 households; approximately 90% of households are of benefit of clear, clear potable water.

And he went on to qualify the statement, he said “and at and above standpipe level. The quality of water is equal to bottled water. The NDC benefits from the services, the NDC benefits from the services of Pouderoyen interconnected system, which was established some years ago, and is an example, it is an example, of a well-managed system.

That is what the NDC had to say ... *[Interruption]*

Hon Robert Corbin: The Honorable Member read from a document; he was quoting, I did not get the source. He said a letter from a NDC Chairman. I think he should give the name ... who is this? I do not know ...

The Speaker: Name and Date

Hon M Irfaan Ali: Mr Speaker, I have no difficulties with that.

The Speaker: It's not your choice. The Standing Orders require you to identify the document.

Hon M Irfaan Ali: Mr Speaker, the letter is from the Hague/ Blankenburg NDC, dated 18 February 2009 and signed by George Nedd, Chairman of the NDC.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Thank you.

Hon M Irfaan Ali: Mr Speaker, while we on this side of the House recognize the challenges that face the water sector, we must also compliment and take stock of the tremendous improvement and development in the water sector. In Region 3 alone, for 2009, Mr Speaker, we will be spending in excess of \$1 billion. In Region 3 alone, where the Honorable Member Mr Mervyn Williams comes from, we will be spending in excess of \$1 billion on the development of water facilities. We heard, Mr Speaker, we heard nothing about this, we heard nothing about this. These projects include, Mr Speaker: The Parfait and Sisters Village and Tuschen wells; the water treatment plant at Vergenoegen; and the transmission and distribution upgrades through the region. Mr Speaker, this is what we are about on this side of the House ... qualitative development, development for the people.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member Mr Corbin, Leader of the Opposition, when he spoke, made a very laudable, very laudable commitment, and said, *we must extend our hands together, and we must clap together. It takes two hands to clap.* But, Mr Speaker, when we have reporting like we experienced from the Honorable Member Mr Mervyn Williams from Den Amstel, we have to be careful how we clap, because what we are seeing is that one of the hands is coming with spikes. So Mr Speaker, while it takes two hands to clap, one of the hands can't be

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covered with spikes. You have to have two clean hands, two hands that is equally committed to the cause. So Mr Speaker, while I say, Mr Speaker, we are ready to clap, we are ready to clap with you, we also implore you to take the spikes off.

Mr Speaker, let us turn to Region 7. Let us turn to Region 7, where the Honorable Member, geographic representative, Ms Judith Blair, the Honorable Member Ms Judith Blair had this to say: She said that Tuschen is getting development, Diamond is getting development and infrastructure in the housing scheme; you can see beautiful roads, and we are starved in Bartica. We are not getting anything. The government is doing nothing. Not a single road. That is the message that came across. Let me bring the facts to the table. Mr Speaker, under our housing program alone, under our housing program alone, we have spent in excess of \$375 million. Under the housing program alone, we have spent in excess of \$345 million; and some of the projects include the construction of approximately 4.8 km of road with DVSCCT finish; 9.6 km of roadside drains, 10 drainage culverts, and 137 metres of retaining walls. At Four Miles, Bartica, and then the secondary school housing scheme, we had the construction of roads and drains. The West Indian Housing Association we had similar developments. We heard nothing about this. We heard nothing about this. Yet the hands would have to reach over and clap together. But still our hands are up there; we are going to keep our

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hands up there, and hope that one day, the hands without the spike will reach out and hold together, and that is the day we hope for in this country, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, in the Water Sector, in the water sector in Region 7, we have spent in excess of \$25 million on improvement of water distribution mains. For us, Mr Speaker, Region 7 is not about Bartica alone. For us, Region 7 is about the hinterland communities which adjoin the budding township of Bartica. Mr Speaker, on this side of the House, we believe strongly in equality. We believe strongly in equality of access to infrastructure. We believe strongly in equality of the Government; in equality to the pie of development. So now that I have dispelled, now that I have dispelled these unfortunate statements, I would proceed to look at some of the jargons that came from some members of the AFC. And I say jargons, because, as the Honorable Leader Mr Corbin will join me in saying; since the launching, since the launching of the Action Plan by the AFC, it always fell short of details. It always fell short of details. It is good to come to this House and say “stimulus package”; that is international jargon, “; you are talking about? It is not just a jargon. Honorable Member Mrs. Sheila Holder, you asked for stimulation. You wanted stimulus in the economy. I would tell you what we are doing to give that stimulation. Mr Speaker, the \$46.5 billion invested in the PSIP this year is all about stimulation. It is all about stimulation.

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When the Honorable Member Mr Ramjattan spoke about job creation, let me give him an example of my sector alone. I would not tread on the sectors of my colleagues, but I would give you the analysis of my sector alone. Mr Speaker, simple analysis. Given that you would have allocated more than 500 house lots; and projecting that this year, we would have the construction of 1,500 new homes, new houses, let us take the analysis to another level. We have 1,500 new houses being constructed, and given that a minimum of five persons, a minimum of five persons are employed on each house. Multiply 1,500 by 5, you will get Mr Speaker, 7,500 separate jobs being created in the economy by this stimulus package alone, and that is in the housing market, and housing sector alone; 7,500 separate jobs being created in the economy. Isn't that stimulation? Isn't that job creation?

I say Mr Speaker, let us take, let us take the blankets from our eyes, and let us compliment the government for ensuring that our social programs; our social development programs, have not halted, and have not been impacted upon by the global financial crisis. Mr Speaker, we can take the analysis a bit further. Let us assume that 1,000 persons approach the banking sector for a low-income loan. Let us assume that 1,000 persons approach the banking sector for a low income loan. What does that translate to? Let us further make the assumption that a low income loan is \$3 million. So you have 1,000 by \$3 million, that is \$300 million. That is the immediate

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spending of \$300 million within the economy. Isn't that a sound economic policy? And here is where the synergies of the government, the synergies of the government. This is where the various sectors are working together to contribute to economic growth. And that is what is real diversification. That is what is real diversification, Mr Speaker.

And I want to compliment the Honorable Member Mr Robert Persaud, I want to compliment him; and I want to compliment the Honorable Member Dr Ashni Singh. We have all acknowledged in this House that the Sugar Sector has performed below expectations. We have acknowledged that fact. We are not accustomed to lying on this side. Mr Speaker, there is a bigger picture, there is a bigger picture; although, although sugar did not perform at expectation, we achieved a growth rate, we achieved a growth rate. The question is, why? Why? We have been speaking since 2000, since 1992, and more elaboratively, since 2006, about broadening the economic base; about widening the sectors contribution to the economy; about diversifying the economy, and all our policies since then were aimed at this; and Mr Speaker, I proudly say that we are seeing the fruits of this policy today.

We hear the Honorable Member Mr Ramjattan, speaking about cutting jobs, cutting jobs. Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, we hear him speaking about closing ministries; they don't

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care about ordinary persons. They have no concern about the working class. Of course, there are some in our society, who have enough reserves at a personal level that can take them through any crisis. So their concern is not for the ordinary person, but we on this side are always going to have concern for the working class, the ordinary people of this country. Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, how can we even, in this global financial crisis, seek to present to the people of this country that cutting jobs is one of our proposals? Mr Speaker, it is a sad day, but I understand why.

I want to look at the 2006 Budget; and you would know, Honorable Member Mr Patterson, that I am mentally reflecting on that budget. I am not going through historical reading documents, I am mentally reflecting on the contents of that budget. You know why I can do that? Because the importance we place on the policies we formulate for the people of this country is beyond writing a textbook, and beyond the sheets that you read from.

Mr Speaker, in 2006, we spoke about our approach over the next five years, and that approach was based on the concept of Pro-Poor growth. Let us not forget that. Let us not forget that our approach to development was not to achieve high growth, and forget about the social benefits, forget about the development of the social services, and forget about the development and delivery of education, and health, and water and housing. No. No. It was

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ensuring, those things remain priority, whilst at the same time, we strive for economic growth. That is the fundamentals. You talk about ideology. That is the fundamental basis on which our ideology is built over this period. And we are proud of that fundamental basis. And Mr Speaker, I commend again the Honorable Dr Ashni Singh for his foresight, when he drafted the 2006 Budget in this context. And Dr Singh, the framework, the framework you will be proud of, when we face the 2011 elections, because we are going to walk away with a bigger majority, now that the people know, now that the people know what has to be offered by the opposition.

Mr Speaker, talking about manifesto, let me take a journey through the manifestos. And again, again I would not tread on the boundaries of my colleagues, but I would stick to my sector. This is a document, Mr Speaker, this is a document that the AFC presented to the people of Guyana during the 2006 elections. Honorable Member Mr Corbin, they moved away from manifesto, they say, them socialists using some word named manifesto- what we have is an action plan. An action plan, this is what they had. Mr Speaker, I want the people of this country to know that nowhere in this action plan was any policy developed for the housing and water sector, not one single policy to deal with housing and water. For a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, for a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, water was not even mentioned once in this document. Further, Mr Speaker, housing was

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mentioned once, the word “housing” was only mentioned once. That is your document that you are proud of.

Mr Speaker, [Interruption] that would not change the content of the document. Mr Speaker, we have to give some credit to the PNC. This is what they had to say about the housing sector. One, two, three, four, five lines, the PNC had five lines about the housing sector. This is what it had to say.

The key to youth empowerment is the individual citizen’s desire for a meaningful stake in society, mostly, crucially, in place of work and in the home. We want youth to own their own homes, to possess land and property without having to leave Guyana. To this end, we will be allocating house lots to youths along the new four-lane highway from Georgetown to Soesdyke.

That’s it. We talk about equitable development, we talk about equitable development, and this is it? We will allocate house lots along the four- lane highway to Soesdyke. What about Region 3? What about Region 2? What about 1? What about 9? What about 8? What about 7? Mr Speaker, this is your document, don’t down, don’t down your head in shame.

Honorable Member Dr Singh, whilst the opposition down their heads in disgust at their document, I say to you, I

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say to you Honorable Member, and your staff, raise your heads high, raise your heads high.

The Speaker: You can't carry on a private conversation in the House.

Hon M Irfaan Ali: Mr Speaker, I say to the Honorable Member Dr Ashni Singh and his staff, to raise their heads high above, and smell the sweet scent of victory in the budget that you have presented to this Honorable House.

Housing and Water: Mr Speaker, if you are wondering whether we are ready, whether we on this side of the House are ready for the mid-term examination, I would even present to you our answers now, in the Housing and Water Sector. Commencing with the water sector, our first objective, [Interruption] I am going to that, Mr Speaker, I am going to present our manifesto objective and what we have done. Water. Water:

We will extend our program to deliver safe, potable water to all homes, with special attention to remote and isolated communities; remote, yes, this is our mission.

And to date we wish to report that 85% of the population on the coastal plain have access to potable water. We wish to report to you, that 65% of our people in remote communities have access to water. Mr Speaker, are we

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proud of this? Are we proud of this? No. No. We would never be proud of this, and we would never rest, until 100% of our people have access to this.

Mr Speaker, we said that we would complete a new \$1.2 billion water treatment plant at Corriverton that would supply treated water to the Upper Corentyne; also complete major systems at Anna Regina, Parika, Rosignol, Mahdia, Mabaruma, Linden, and Georgetown.

Our report card:

- 18,000 people benefit now, from the new No. 75 well that we have built. 18,000 consumers now benefit from that facility
- 60,000 people benefit from three water treatment plant that we would have built in these areas.
- Another 45,000 people will benefit from the iron removal plant we are building in Georgetown.

We have delivered. In our mid-term review, we have completed this objective, but we are going to move on. Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, we have delivered. We have delivered. We continue to subsidize tariffs for vulnerable populations and pensioners. Have we delivered? Yes we have. Our tariff subsidy today amounts to over \$2.5

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billion, with our pensioners benefiting from more than \$220 million. Mr Speaker, have we delivered? Yes we have.

Housing: Mr Speaker, if we look at the Housing Sector, we said: *we will create modern communities and empower all Guyana's families to acquire their own homes.*

Mr Speaker, to date we have distributed more than 79,000 house lots in this country. Between 2006 to today, we have distributed in excess of 8,975 house lots.

Yes, Mr Speaker, the challenge remains large. We still have another 40,000 house lots in the system we have to process. But, Mr Speaker, the good news is that we will. And we have a strategy to do this. First of all, we will consolidate the existing housing schemes. We are going to ensure that every single lot in every housing scheme is optimally utilized. We acknowledge, Mr Speaker, that a number of these lots are left unoccupied for long periods, and before we can improve any system, we have to acknowledge the shortcomings. If we are not willing to accept the shortcoming of any system, we cannot move forward.

So what we are going to do this year, Mr Speaker, is to have a complete field audit, we will have a complete field audit of every single lot that has been developed by the Ministry. We are then going to clean the system, and

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in cases where people would have migrated and left their lots, or some persons are in possession of two, three lots, we are going to rectify these. We are going to rectify these, Mr Speaker. And in areas where the demand remains great, and in areas where the demand remains great, we will expand the infrastructure and the schemes; and under the Low Income Project II, which is a US\$28.7 million program, this is the primary objective.

The Speaker: Time is up Honorable Member.

Hon Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, I move that the Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed ...

Hon M Irfaan Ali: Mr Speaker, part of the strategy to address low income families include the development of 400 core homes, 400 core homes for low income families. This will be available, Mr Speaker, through you, the Hon Member Ms Manickchand. This would benefit particularly those vulnerable persons within our society. We are going to collaborate with you to ensure that the most deserving and the most vulnerable benefit from this scheme.

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Mr Speaker, we have seen over the last month a reduction in the interest rate by the NBS for low-income loans; a reduction in the interest rate for low-income loans. Who does that benefit? The ordinary person. And, Mr Speaker, the biggest benefit that a house lot offers to our people is access to resources, they have equity. When a poor family, who squats along the railway for years leaves, and the government hands out to them a house lot, and they get a transport; and you go to them and you look in their eyes, and they say to you, and they say to you, and they say to you, Mr Speaker, Minister, our lives have changed: When they say to you Mr Speaker, when they say to you, I see now, a better tomorrow. When they say to you, when they say to you, Mr Speaker, that my family, that my family's future is secure, and my children will have a better tomorrow than I had, than that is what brings joy to you. That is what brings joy to the policymakers. So you can come in this House, and you can bring all the negative energy you have, all the negative energy you have, when we walk out of here, and we contact those persons, and they say to us, you are doing well, our energy is restored.

Mr Speaker, we spoke about identifying suitable lands for the establishment of more housing schemes in all regions of the country, including hinterland areas; allowing us to satisfy fully the demand for housing, and to eliminate the restriction on the granting of house lots to only married people with children. Mr Speaker, when we first started

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the housing drive, we had to restrict it to those who most needed it, and one of the criteria was having children ... Today, we can say to you that it has improved to such an extent that this criteria is relaxed. Isn't this development? Isn't this progress?

Mr Speaker, what does this budget mean to the poor person? I will again go to my sector. Mr Speaker, approximately 50,000 house lots, 50,000 house lots, has been issued to low-income families. At the present market value, Mr Speaker, at the present market value, the subsidy on each of these house lots amounts to \$400,000. That is the subsidy. That is a direct subsidy on each of those house lots. Let us look cumulatively at the market value. What that amounts to, Mr Speaker, is a subsidy of \$20 billion, \$20 billion, directly to the poor. Isn't that a caring government? Isn't this a caring government?

Water: Mr Speaker, let us look a bit at the water sector. And I want to look at the long-term projections of the water sector. But before I do so, let me address a few concerns. We have a misconception that we pay too much for water. The fact of the matter is, Mr Speaker, we have the cheapest water rates in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the rest of the world. An unmetered customer, an unmetered customer, pays less than \$45 for water per day, an unmetered customer pays less than G\$45 for water per day. Mr Speaker, that is less than the cost for a mauby.

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You are paying for water, the symbol of life, for less than a mauby. Isn't this a caring government? Isn't this subsidy? Isn't this subsidy?

Mr Speaker, I want to look at our performance too. Although we have a water sector, where the operating cost, where energy costs constitute 61% of the operating cost of producing water, we still produce water at the third cheapest rate in the Caribbean. Isn't this something to celebrate? Here it is that our government is producing water where 61% of the operating costs goes to electricity, and we can still maintain our cost per unit of water below British Virgin Islands, below the Cayman Islands, below Montserrat. Mr Speaker, this is the operational efficiency that we speak about.

Mr Speaker, in the medium-term, in the medium-term we have some goals, and when we speak about the medium-term, we are speaking about the next five years. What are the goals in the next five years, and what are the goals in the next ten years of the water sector? Mr Speaker, I can speak confidently of the goals of the water sector for the next five and ten years, because I am confident we would be there for the next five and ten years.

Mr Speaker, the first objective is to meet the millennium development goals defined to water supply in the coastal areas. In terms of coverage, we will extend facilities to provide water service to 95% of the coastal population by

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the end of Year-5; and to 98 % of the population by the end of Year-10.

Service standards: We would strive to provide water that meets all pathological standards, at the minimum of three cubic metres (cumec) at the service connection by the end of Year-5.

By the end of Year-10, 65% of the service population will be serviced by treated facilities that provide water that meets all WHO standards.

By the end of Year-10 the remaining 35 % of the service population which is not served by a treatment plant will receive water that meets pathological standards. These are clear, defined objectives.

Mr Speaker, we don't operate like the Honorable Member Mr Ramjattan, by textbook. We operate by clearly defined policies and visions that are measurable and qualified.

Mr Speaker, in terms of hinterland water supply, in terms of hinterland water supply, we are going to provide community-based water supply to 100% of the hinterland population by the end of Year-10. Let me read that again. We are going to provide 100% water supply to the hinterland region by the end of Year-10. And we project that this water would be available at not more than 300

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meters from the dwelling ... not more than 300 meters from the dwelling.

Mr Speaker, what are our financial goals?

Under metering ... We are going to continue the implementation of metering projects, such that 70% of our customers are metered by the end of Year-5, and 95% of customers by the end of Year-10.

What is our cost commitment? In order to reduce costs, we are going to reduce non-revenue water to 45% by the end of Year-5, and 35% by the end of Year-10.

In terms of self sufficiency at tariffs: We are going through a process of harmonizing the tariff regime, so that we can come up with the most applicable and suitable tariff system for Guyana.

Financial integrity: We are going to develop an effective financial integrity program, by strengthening the GWI internal departments, including the internal audit department, and the independent procurement department by the end of Year-1.

Institutional goals: We are going to develop and implement effective management structure and governance procedures by the end of Year-3. More importantly, Mr Speaker, to achieve these goals, we have to ensure that we have the manpower, the human resources; so we have to build a staff retention plan, and

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we are going to develop a comprehensive staff retention plan by the end of Year-5.

This is what you call a complete development planning framework. It is not a half-baked potato, it is a fully developed embryo, it is a fully developed embryo.

Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, in the hinterland, a number of the speakers spoke about hinterland water. This year, this year, Mr Speaker, we are going to develop 18 solar water projects in the hinterland, in the areas including Santa Rosa, Whitewater, Waramuri, Manawarin, Lima Sands, Laluni, Philippi, Itabari, Kamarang, Tiger Point, Karasabai, Nappi, Masara, Doca, Annai and Riverview. Mr Speaker, you can see the tradition of teaching we have on this side of the House. The Honorable Member Mr Nokta took his time in training us to pronounce these words properly. We believe in training, Mr Speaker.

So Mr Speaker, I do not want to keep the House long, but I wish to conclude this presentation by commending the Honorable Dr Ashni Singh for presenting a budget that is timely, that is relevant, that is optimistic, and we on this side, Mr Speaker, see the budget as a glass half full, and not half empty. We are going to work with you, we are going to work together; we are going to work together, and we are going to forge forward in building a Guyana that is united, a Guyana that is strong, and a Guyana that is prosperous. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honorable Member Mr Dave Danny ...

Mr Dave Danny: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr Speaker, before I go into my presentation proper, I would like to remind the Honorable Irfaan Ali that there is something called a speech for special occasions, and there is also a term that says you have to dress for special occasions. I would like to bring out two analogies that would clarify my point. If you are dressed properly at least, or if you intend to win a race, you would run with spikes; and if you are going up north, especially in wintertime, you would put on the garments that would keep you warm.

Mr Speaker, what Mr Irfaan Ali is saying, is that, he knows that his hands has grease on it, and he expects the opposition to come with spikes. And so the conditions warrant that we wear spikes to hold onto the greasy hand. This is the kind of desire that we have, to work together.

Mr Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak in this Honorable House. Mr Speaker, there is an old saying, you can't judge a book by the cover, but there is also a saying that there are exceptions.

Mr Speaker, I rise in the name of the PNC/R 1G, to speak on this, the 2009 Budget. Mr Speaker, the cover of the budget presentation 2009, given by the Hon Dr Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, tells the whole story. Most of

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us will look here, and we will see a beautiful picture. It is said that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. If we look on the outskirts here, you see jungle, and when you look here you will see darkness and if you look right up at the top, you would see a fist. Mr Speaker, this picture, everyone recognize the Berbice Bridge. Mr Speaker, this picture of the bridge gives us a vivid idea of this year's budget, and the future of the working class in our country. Mr Speaker, on both sides of the bridge, it looks like a jungle, and I dare the brave to venture there. We all know the danger of jungle life, snakes and wild animals which will soon devour you. This budget is one that will devour the poor people of this country. Mr Speaker, in the center, which is the bridge itself, like I pointed out, it gets even more dangerous. There are two rails which fence you in; you can see the two rails here. There are two rails which fence you in, so there is nowhere to run. Then the road takes you up, as on a cliff, then you see there is no end, which looks suicidal. In other words, this government surrounds you and refuses to free you; they refuse you your freedom and dictate as much as they can.

Mr Speaker, this year, the people of Guyana will have to be resilient. The strength of the people of the nation will be put on trial. Mr Speaker, I use "trial" here in the context of faith and patience. Mr Speaker, you would have observed that for once, the Minister got part of his theme correct. Mr Speaker, [Interruption: which part] the part of resilience. Mr Speaker, to complete my

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examination of this year's cover of the Budget 2009, I now turn my attention to the remaining part of the theme "working together"; immediately what comes to mind?

Consultation: Did the Minister consult with anyone before preparing the 2009 Budget? I don't think so. I stand corrected, but I am not aware of any consultation with the stakeholders, the people who will feel the ill effect of this year's budget. Dr Clive Thomas described it as *voodoo economics*.

Mr Speaker, on the subject of consultation, a perfect example would be that of the Barbados Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honorable David Thompson. In his 2008 Budget speech, he consulted extensively; so I would like to quote from his speech, his first year in office, this is what he had to say:

In keeping with our commitment to free, open, transparent and participatory governance, we consulted extensively with the people of Barbados, to obtain not only by how much we should ask them to tighten their belts, but to try to solve some of the little niggling problems they experience in their daily lives. The first form of consultation has been the ongoing discussion with ordinary Barbadians in

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their communities, whereby the Democratic Labour Party promised that, as the party in government, we would continue to interface with members of the public on a regular and consistent basis. I am pleased to be in a position to say, indeed boast, that every single member on this side of the House, has established a regime, whereby he or she has set aside a constituency day, to hold constituency clinics, or otherwise interface with voters on an upfront and personal basis

It is in that thought, such consultation, it is through such consultations that we have remained connected to the people, and also in touch and in tune with the issues that concern and directly impact their lives. Additionally, during the past two weeks, we have invited representatives of the various stakeholders' groups to sit with us and discuss how best to address the issues that confront our nation. We recently held a national consultation, involving established social partners, which incidentally this year, voted the largest ever. This was followed by forty non-traditional interest groups, individually sitting down with me, at the official residence of the Prime Minister, to explain the measures that they

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would like to see adopted. There are contentions that the sober measures recommend were nothing more than the birth pangs of the Barbados that is within reach, and that can only be achieved by making some sort of sacrifice. Further, my group made recommendations ...

I'm pointing out what you should do, an example, just in case you don't know how to conduct a consultation!

Further, my group made recommendations that had no fiscal implication. It emboldened me to sit frankly with the Cabinet, and make some quick, minimal efforts that will bring substantial returns. It is my intention to make permanent such annual consultations, and furthermore, to put in place mechanisms for ongoing dialogue among special-interest groups, ministers of government, and the public service at large. This is the open, accessible, and transparent government that we promised. This is the open, accessible, and transparent government that we shall practice.

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Mr Speaker, this is a good example of how a caring and responsible government will relate to the needs of its people.

Tourism and Tourism Products:

Mr Speaker, I will turn my attention to tourism and tourism products. In 2000 [*Interruption*] in Guyana. In 2006 Budget page 30, 4.10, and under the heading, “*Diversification of the Economy*”, we are told:

Guyana’s tourism product continues to grow, and attract significant interest from investors and non-investors alike, and its contribution will help to mitigate the impact of lost income arising from the sugar price cut. Work on a five-year strategic action plan for bolstering tourism in the country has started.

We were told also that:

... more resources were budgeted to exploit the existing marketing appeal of the country.

Then came the 2007 budget presentation, and one would have expected a progress report, telling us what contribution tourism has played towards the GDP, bearing in mind its contribution should have helped to mitigate the impact of lost income arising from the sugar

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price cut. But in the 2007 Budget, tourism appeared under the heading “Non-traditional Emerging Sectors”. We have changed the heading, and once again we are told, 4.14, page 12-36, from the Hansard:

Over the next five years, our goal for the Tourism Sector is to see it realize its potential...

We stick here, with potential and expectations, as a major contributor to the GDP, to the implementation of the five-year tourism development plan. The sector will embrace a mix of urban and natural based tourism, leisure events, and sports tourism. In 2008 budget, \$65.6 million was allocated to execute functions of Guyana Trade & Tourism Authority. Mr Speaker, at a glance, one would say that is a lot of finance, but a closer look will reveal that this is a drop in the bucket when compared to other countries. St. Lucia invested G\$1 billion in 2007, while Barbados in its 2008 budget, invested \$5 million in its revised program, an additional \$10 million, that would be about US\$5 million or one billion Guyana dollars. So you see Sir, the Guyana government is not willing to invest the necessary funds to make tourism profitable, and a contributing sector to its GDP.

Mr Speaker, now in the 2009 Budget, the Honorable Minister of Finance in his introduction, page 2, 1.5, used 51 words. My good friend, Honorable Minister Irfaan, said that five pages were used to describe water in the

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manifesto of the PNC,[Interruption: Lines] 59, whatever, tell us about Guyana, 5 lines. Well, here currently, we have 51 words to briefly, tell us about Guyana as a tourist destination, preferred choice, and cites our reputation for hospitality as the ingredient to make us a preferred choice for tourists. On page 31, 4.9, under the heading “*New and Emerging Sectors*”, this sector keeps changing heading all the time, every year budget we keep changing heading. The Honorable Minister of Finance used 151 words, you can go and check it, 151 words to address tourism. *[Interruption]*

Mr Speaker, I would like to draw your attention ... Mr Speaker, in the 2008 Budget, in 2008, the Barbados Prime Minister and Minister of Finance used five pages; so compare 151 words to five pages, on tourism development. In his budget speech, he opened under the heading of tourism, by saying:

... tourism is our main economic engine,

And this was some areas that he had dealt with in his budget, and maybe we could learn if we listen.

Regional international transport, regional brand, tourism master plan, revised program at the cost of \$10 million,

And this is not Guyanese,

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... amending the Tourism Development Act to promote tourism-related investments, help tourism market in Barbados, funds to meet the demands for loans, link tourism to the rest of the Barbados economy, tax incentives, joint venture with firms or individuals, etc,

to name a few areas that were addressed.

Mr Speaker, in the Guyana Chronicle, Wednesday February 11, 2009, page 5, it carried an article, "*Jamaica tourism arrivals increase in January*". I would like to look at the article, and see what is responsible for the increase:

Minister of Tourism, Mr Edmond Bartlett, has confirmed a 3.4% growth in visitor arrivals for January, compared to the same period last year. He pointed out that 138,000 tourists, who visited the island, is the largest number of visitors who have ever come to Jamaica in the month of January in any year. The minister credited the growth to intense advertising, intense advertising, marketing, and promotion of the island overseas ...

And, Mr Speaker, this is what we are failing to do in the tourism sector, to promote the product overseas,

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... and staging of the jazz and blues festival.

Mr Speaker, I would like to review, I would like to review a presentation given by the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Honorable Manniram Prashad. He opened by thanking the Minister of Finance for the funds allocated to his ministry. Well, we should always be grateful for little mercies. He then proceeded to give a report for 2008 which went something like this:

... food is within an affordable range; PPP/C is a caring government; \$100 million gas subsidy; reduction of transportation costs; we are self-sufficient in chicken.

Today as we speak, chicken is over \$300 per pound. And I don't know, we might have the chicken, but can we afford it with the meager salaries that we work for? *\$500 million for industrial estate*, but failed to tell us how this investment would contribute to the GDP. *Open new corridor of opportunities ... how many jobs?*

And this is what Mr Murray, the Honorable Member, was speaking about. We speak in general terms and in a vacuum, but no figures to match what you are saying. *Successful formation of arts and crafts association: The best quality craft products displayed at the Barbados craft show.* He did not tell us how many foreign exchange we will earn by attending these shows, or if it is

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an added expense to our already burdened economy. *SME training, small business development, successful staging of CARIFESTA.* We know that CARIFESTA had problems; a lot of people who participated in CARIFESTA have not been paid to date, so we need to speak about those issues as it relates to CARIFESTA. Delta came to Guyana; he did not say how expensive Delta is actually, it is more expensive than Caribbean Airlines. *Forty companies sell our tourist products, not forgetting birds. In 2008, we attended/promoted our tourism product at four travel fairs around the world, not forgetting bird fairs. Guyana is a top wildlife destination.*

Regulation for tour operators: \$203 million allocated for NCN. We are ranked among Peru and Ecuador when it comes to birding ... we have 800 species of birds. That might have been a good exercise, to sit and count 800 species of birds.

We are visited by top tourists from around the world, book your waiting on sports fishing? Guyana is the biggest secret. And Mr Speaker, that is what I was speaking about in my earlier presentation. Make some connection with what the other Caribbean countries are doing, like Jamaica and Barbados and St. Lucia. Guyana is the biggest secret in South America, and I am not surprised. This is because enough money, energy and imagination are not used to promote Guyana. Last but not least, this attracts laughter from both sides of the

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House, consultation, he was speaking about consultation, and both sides of the House went up in uproar. What he was talking about? The Budget - Consultation of Budget for 2010. Could you imagine this? You don't have to answer, Mr Speaker, but is this a joke for 2009? This is what was presented by the Tourism Minister. I just read his speech. Mr Speaker, Honorable Manniram Prashad told us that there were consultations with the Private Sector Commission. But this is what was reported in one of our newspapers. When asked whether the private sector expected to see significant movement on tax reform this year, Gouveia said:

... while the PSC was hoping that would be the case, we are aware that the consultations are still to happen, and these must happen before tax reform materializes.

My thinking is that the consultation process should happen in the next few months.

So you see Mr Speaker, we were misled by the Honorable Minister. When asked about the likely impact of the budget on the tourism sector, this is what Gouveia had to say: *Gouveia, who heads Roraima Airways, said while he has found nothing really significant in the budget that might stimulate the sector, he was not particularly surprised over this development.* So that was the consultation that he had.

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Meanwhile, according to Gouveia, *government would still need to tackle the issue of the tax reform as a matter of urgency, if some measure of economic growth is to be stimulated.*

In my view, tax reform is one of the single most important issues that have to be dealt with, if economic growth is to be generated. High taxation is a serious deterrent to economic growth.

For our Tourism Sector, we would first have to know which of our many products will come, will work for us, and the government must be willing to promote Guyana, our eco-tourism overseas. The National Development Strategy, pages 237-245, Chapter 20, deals with tourism in detail, and I recommend that the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Tourism have a joint meeting to iron out the framework, as to the way forward for tourism in Guyana. Just a recommendation for you, Mr Minister: For the tourism sector to have any life of its own, it would need forensic examination, surgical procedures, saline and oxygen administered to this sector by highly qualified specialists.

Mr Speaker, in closing, I find no reason to support this budget of 2009. According to Peeping Tom, *“the budget contains a stifling lack of imagination, the same old policies, devoid of vision. It is hollow and shallow, it does not lead anywhere but to a blind alley,*

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the one like on the bridge, going over the bridge.

I recommended that this budget be sent back to the drawing table". Unquote. That was quoting ... So Mr Speaker, I endorse this recommendation by Peeping Tom, and urge that the consultation process begin. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Mr Charles Ramson ...

Hon Charles Ramson: Thank you at last, Comrade Speaker. Comrade Speaker, rising as I do tonight, after about 8 or more years absence from these Chambers, these august Chambers, I have a certain responsibility, one of which is to you; and I wish to express my deepest appreciation for the effusive welcome you accorded me upon my swearing in, last Monday. I also wish to be placed on record, for the gracious welcome that I received from the Opposition benches, more particularly, in the light of the past relationship that we seem to have generated when I was last here; and I suspect that it would be in order for me to thank the Leader of the Opposition, the Honorable Member Robert Herman Orlando Corbin, for putting things behind himself and his grouping, for having accorded me that welcome. It is

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solicitous, that is the worst, and more than gracious at best.

In the same vein, I wish to say to my Hon Colleague, the Minister of Finance, that I was deeply impressed. I sat in this House before, and we have had presentations of equal value; but I was deeply impressed, more so because of his visible youth; for the kind of preparation and presentation of this budget, composed, as it was, with disparate threads, but woven into the rich and ornate tapestry of some enduring quality, notwithstanding what has been said by the Opposition ... They are doing their job. This budget is not only attractive to the ears and eyes of those who are willing to listen and learn, but is reflective of a picture of our carefully managed revenue environment, and lend with a brush of not only adequate vision, but some forensic purpose.

Comrade Speaker, the Honorable Minister of Finance is no mean erudite gentleman with respect to this area of activity. He is indeed to be complimented for having arrived so early, and those who have chosen him, have chosen well. I have a certain propensity and disposition, maybe uncommon views... maybe meritorious, maybe it is not. But I believe that wisdom can be garnered not only from those who have led us, but even from the grassroots. And one of my libating friends always reminds me; and Comrade Minister I wish you would listen; that there is no substitute for ability, and I suspect,

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it's a most appropriate thing, with respect to you, Sir. I would prefer to say that you cannot Xerox originality.

Permit me, Comrade Speaker, to deal with some issues, and I want you all to remember that I have been invited to join this House, this Honorable House, some two and a half years into its business; and I believe that there are certain issues that, when raised, coming from whichever source, high or low, that those issues must be dealt with, in order to ensure that the record reflects the reality of history. My good friend and colleague at the bar, Comrade; and I take the liberty of calling him comrade, because we have had in the past, a certain ideological synchrony, and I make no apology for that; the Honorable Member, the Comrade Leader of the Opposition, was quick to pounce upon the attitude of my colleagues, who are dealing with , or were dealing with the Softball Association; and there were certain imputations about the regularity of the process by which this government, by their actions; this government which I represent, the process that they believe was irregular.

But we have to look at everything in its historical context, and it is; it ought to have been avoided at this level, because its information was dated, was dated. I believe that we must recognize that there is a ... the office does not belong to the office-holder; and when that matter first came to my attention, or was brought to my attention, on my return to that office, I viewed it in a manner, and I

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seek the liberty of my colleague, the Minister who is responsible; I took the liberty of dealing with the matter myself, personally. It was not assigned to an officer in the Attorney General's Chambers. That has been ..., the problem we face in this country, is that there is no institutional memory. Fortunately, I know about the Softball Cricket Association.

The Comrade Leader of the Opposition ought to have been better advised, that a former Minister of the PNC government was a central operative in ensuring the benefit that was accorded by the contract or agreement in 1984. It amounts virtually to an incestuous relationship, political incestuous relationship. I know, contrary to what may be deemed contracted, that the major player in this matter was a former Vice-President in the PNC Government; and that agreement was signed giving him a certain permit to use the ground. And I merely wish to place on record that contrary to the impression the Leader of the Opposition was led to believe, I am sure, I am sure, like his predecessor who was misled in another matter where one of their former members sought to have me impeached in this House for causing the Constitutional bungling when he was ill-advised himself, because he wasn't fully familiar with the law. The law is a very attractive entity, it is very attractive, but you have to spend time to understand what the law says. I am sorry he is absent tonight.

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And I believe it was on that basis that the then leader of the Opposition distanced himself from him, and caused him to become a migrant. But be that as it may, Comrade Speaker, I have since revisited that matter, and I have given it the treatment the law would require; and I am very glad that my colleague, Comrade Corbin, recognized, at the time he was speaking, that I once held a high judicial office. With high judicial office goes the responsibility to ensure that the law is not disrespected; and once I hold this position here, I shall maintain that, whatever the agreement contemplates, contemplates, must be respected, and I am glad to see you nodding your approval, Comrade Corbin. I want to say this to you that we ought not to differ for the sake of being different in governance. We ought to differ on principle; and I believe that the Honorable Minister, and my other colleague, I believe, to my right, are in possession of documents which would prove that your information was... I don't seek any response, negative or positive, but what I say is as bright as the Northern Star. It's not your fault, Comrade Corbin.

But let me tell you that the Association, the Cricket Association, it was never contemplated that they would want to arrogate to themselves, the kind or measure of bombast that I read in the letter from their legal adviser and secretary. If perchance, the war has to begin, I am sure that my reputation precedes me in this House. Not one blind cent was ever paid for the use of this ground,

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from 1984 unto today; and then the Secretary or the General Secretary had the nerve to tell me; and he is a young lawyer, he should know better, that I must attribute reasons in writing, for my request, or my colleague's request, to have the agreement brought to an end, in a manner contemplated by the very agreement. I don't know, maybe, something has flown over my head.

[Interruption][Laughter]

Your apprehensions have been noted, Comrade Corbin. But if I understand the policy of the PNC/R; I don't know if it's PNC/R -One Guyana or PNCR 1G, I never could understand, but I am guided by my friend Mr Murray, he says it's the PNCR One Guyana; but we all have a responsibility to the students of the Technical Institute. The Technical Institute has been an institution of vocational training, which both sides of the aisle would wish to embrace; and its students' welfare and health, they must be given the preference, the best option. Whoever has to resolve the difference, if it can be done politically, or it has to be done through the means by which my friend Comrade Corbin indicated, those are matters which only time will tell.

Critchlow Labour College: Let me go now to the Critchlow Labour College subvention. I have lived in this country all my life, and I again speak; I am concerned about the institutional memory that some, including my chambers have a difficulty. We cannot trace what I did,

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in my previous life there, or in my two previous lives, except by way of a human input. Totally wrong; that is not a system to which I am accustomed. But I know about the Critchlow Labour College, because it became an entity, a physical being in this country, as a result of the intervention of the AFLCIO, which was an agent of imperialism in this country in the 60s. Well, I can only talk what I know about history, and I am satisfied that ...

[Interruption: 'Dr Jagan was a socialist, you know?' "I am a socialist, too, you know? You must advise yourself. I am not part of a masquerade. This party is supposed to be socialist. The PPP/C is supposed to be socialist. I don't know if it is or not, but I know, I would not be standing here if I did not believe that I was ideologically in sync with this government. And take it from me, take it from me, I have nothing to lose and nothing to gain. You know, Comrade Norton, there were two fellows sitting at the back of you there, they were talking about hoteling, that was my last time here, on the last occasion; I don't see them there anymore. I am not calling names. One of them is giving the licks of Lisbon to my good friend Comrade Corbin. I told you already, I don't ever forget. I can come back anytime. Comrade President sent for me, and I have arrived.

Let us get serious about it, I don't forget, I don't forget incidents. Both of them are my friends unto now; I meet them in Albouystown, one of them is in Albouystown; and I got another one who frighten even to come near to UG

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where I used to be. I don't bear malice, I just don't forget"]

But Critchlow Labour College has been at the center of a kind of political relationship with the TUC, the MPCA, the AWU; and I can tell you, I know about that because both of them, I went to the funerals of two of them, the MPCA man and the AWU man, they all bury right downstairs; and the gentleman, I won't call his name, I don't believe that he was eligible to be the leader of any group, but he was placed there in order to prop up, strap up, the TUC.

You see, in those days, in those days, and I may not have chapter and verse, but I know the song, I know the song good. It was the perceived arm, the perceived industrial arm, the TUC, through the TSA, perceived industrial arm of the PNC; and that is why the AFLCIO founded it through the TUC, and made that building there, a beautiful building. If I was in earlier times, I would have nationalized it! But now, times have changed, you have an outfit called FITUG, perhaps, appropriately named, FITUG. Now they seem to have taken over, [Interruption] maybe my pronunciation is a little bad, but I can tell you, they have been able to take away, and create a problem for the TUC. I follow day to day events, and I gather that they have more, they represent more workers in this country than the TUC, so the ball is now

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on this side of the ... [*Interruption: 'It is no longer softball, it is hardball they have now'*]

And I believe that there is a union called the TLU, it used to be the BGLU in my early days, and I believe that the Leader of the Opposition is the President of that union, I don't know, but I like to show respect for these things; and I know that in the fashion of the past, there are certain people who became President-General on ... and rightly so, as leaders of the various political factions. It happened on both sides. I don't know, but I suspect the historical record will now reflect that the GLU is part of FITUG; and it is on that basis I understand certain legislation was passed to reflect the representative capacities of the two umbrellas. I say so only without being advised by way of my research; but I have been living in Guyana, as I said, so I am not unfamiliar with what goes on in my environment.

And I feel, I feel very strongly that when certain things are done, there is a reason for doing so. The subventions were first granted; granted, in order to provide some sort of succor and comfort to those people who were virtually acolytes of the then government. That is my understanding, and you can't blame me for understanding what is logically contemplated and expected. If you have a man, who is a functional illiterate as the head of a union, who couldn't... unless you read the notice to him, he couldn't sign his name, I wouldn't call name; but he

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was a part of a paper union. He used to be housed in the MPCA building, and I tell you, the subventions that have been referred to in this House recently; those subventions, whether or not they have been lawfully withdrawn or not; logically, the House should record that there was a reason for doing certain things. They no longer represent so and so. I don't know about whether...

One of my colleagues, I think the learned, the Honorable, because he is not ideologically aligned; the Honorable Manzoor Nadir, referred to the political and the Labour Act, but I believe that the record ought to reflect that there is reason for withdrawing those things, and I don't know whether it is serving one section of the people, or the next section of the people. I know quite a few people have come out of that institution, the Critchlow Labour College; and I have a special reverence for one of the teachers, the former Chancellor of this country, who has advanced my cause with equal grace, as I being gracious to them; and I believe he is a man of some equanimity; but he might have been misguided on this case, whether or not there was any enclavic predisposition with respect to persons who had the benefit of the Critchlow Labour College; that is a matter which will have to be investigated. I do not wish to be associated with that type of thing. But I believe I ought to defer to the Honorable Minister, who would be more familiar with the kind of scale and the customer base of that place. I have never been to it, apart from going to the two funerals, and I

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don't think they would want to have me there, even for that.

So that disposes of that other aspect, as far as the historical record must reflect, but I come to something a little more, a little more current; the Obama, the Obama fever. It seems very fashionable now, for everyone to be speaking of Obama. Barack Hussein Obama, I am sorry my colleague on the other side; she seem to be virtually romanticizing the President of America. On January 20, 2009, when there was this historic inauguration, I too, stood still, not only the world, I too stood still. Obama's claim to fame is his realization of the dream of the great Martin Luther King Jr.; he was the right man in the right place at the right time. Put it this way, I like pot salt, I like pot salt, but without the salt, the pot can't work, you know! And I can tell you that there was an attempt in this House, in this Honorable House, to associate the practices of the PNC/R- One Guyana, or knock out the One Guyana and keep PNC. I know it as the PNC ... all the Rs run out already, Ming , Khan ... Khan, all the Khans do anything that ... they were part of this outfit. Take it from me, opportunism is a funny thing. I have every single ... for Comrade ...

The Speaker: Your time is up ...

Hon Leslie Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, I beg that the Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

The Speaker: Proceed Honorable Member ...

Hon Charles Ramson: I must make this point, Comrade Speaker. There is no better, no great ... between the two sides. It is completely different, the modus operandi. They are different in every respect. This man, President Obama, if you listen to him, he was able to convert even the worst terrorist by virtue of what is called ... logic and silky rhetoric. He didn't use force and pressure, and kith and kin, and slow fire and more fire. When Obama win, I may very well ... *[Laughter]* But they have not had ... that is not my experience. President Obama is not doing like the current Opposition; they are calling, and I must talk about threats just now, momentarily; I am falling into the habits of the ... He never issued any threat about how he is going to get rid of the government. He got rid of the government first, and then talked about bipartisanship, which is the equivalent of this shared governance business.

I wrote a paper in 2003 called "Anarchy, the anatomy of prevention", and I shared it with my colleague, Comrade Carberry; and it has a lot to do with inclusivity, and I agree; inclusivity is not something to be scoffed at, but shared governance has failed all over the world; failed. And there is no amount of threats in a country as small as this, that would allow for shared governance through force and pressure. Always remember that we are a small community, and I said to this House many years ago, that

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the same hot water that would soften the plantain would harden the egg! It is the same; whatever you give, we can give too. So let us dispel any doubts about the comparison between President Obama and the PNCR 1G, or One Guyana, or the rest of the Opposition.

My view, and I say strictly for myself again; I don't have the concurrence of the political directorate, but I do not believe in my readings, that shared governance worked in any place, in any part of the world; whether it is a heterogeneous society, whether it is a monolithic society, all levels of society. So the President of America was catapulted into the White House by winning over the hearts and souls of the American people. By that process, the modus operandi; whatever he is going to do now, only history will tell.

I have one other bone of contention, and I hope my colleague, my young colleague, the Honorable Minister who looks after the interests, and is doing a fantastic job of the welfare of people, whether male, female, children, or otherwise. But the Honorable Member Volda Lawrence, I think is her name, mentioned something about domestic violence. Domestic violence is a buzzword that has been taking over Guyana. Domestic violence is really one of those things, one of those concepts; it was transplanted, it was sent by way of some kind of transposition to this country; not because it never happened, and I do not condone it; I wish to place on

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record that I don't condone domestic violence; but it is the philosophy that people listen to. Any clinical psychologist or sociologist will tell you, if you keep telling a man on the street that, if a man is disagreeing with you, don't agree to disagree, you must beat him up; you don't expect it to enter the household? So what has happened here is that, we have a new regime of people; it never used to happen in my time, it wasn't a rampant thing.

Nowadays, there is no resolution by a slap, or a quarrel or a locking of the door. You got to beat up your wife, or the wife got to stab you up, or you got to shoot matty. That is what is called domestic violence; that is sheer, vulgar terrorism. If you can't agree, as the Honouable Minister said, find help somewhere; and hope that you don't find help, the help that you are seeking, is not going to be worse that what you are getting inside your house!

But before I leave the terrorism business, I want to refer, to revisit what happened with Martin Luther King; and I believe that I must give credit to Mr Ashton Chase, one of the better established lawyers, and for whom I have special association. At Page 37, this is only to confirm that things were done without violence, and Obama is virtually a student of the NAACP movement. Mr Chase, in his book, says:

Great credit must be given to Martin Luther King Jr. and his associates, and the

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NAACP, for the agitation, struggles and sacrifices made by them aimed at ending racial discrimination in the USA, and for the major steps taken to win equality for the descendants of slaves in the USA.

These struggles are well documented. *Rosa Parks' refusal to go to the back of a public bus; she didn't beat up the conductor, she just refused, passive resistance; that is why I was saying to my colleagues the other night, last night, that it was not civil disobedience, it is uncivil disobedience in this country. Her refusal to go to the back of a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama, where her country had discriminatingly assigned her, and secondly, in the case of Brown vs. Board of Education ... We lawyers would know more about that case, decided in 1954, and it concerned a lady, a child, at the relevant time, who at that time was 7 years old. She was denied admission into an all white school for citizens of the United States; and nearly 100 years after the end of the Civil War in the USA, in which whites and black fought together for the liberation of their country... That's 100 years before, but they were not fighting when it was time to socialize. We don't have that in this country. The case was a great moral test, rendered all the more important, because 50 years earlier, the highest court in the USA had held racism and segregation in schools as being constitutional, in the case of Petty against Ferguson. Brown's success in this landmark case resulted in an*

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army convoy to demolish this barrier and to enforce the court's ruling. It exploded the then... doctrine of "separate but equal."

It is the same thing; the PPP/C government has had to use the joint forces to ensure that there are equal rights for all of the people. People must enjoy living in Bartica, Lusignan, in Buxton, in Corriverton, in Northwest, wherever they may want to live. So there is a joint exercise, Mr Speaker, if America can do it, why can't we?

Comrade Speaker, having said all of that, I wish to return, not so briefly, to the question of the Budget. I believe, I believe that there is a general misconception about what it is all about. All budgets, all budgets, are revenue driven; one has only got to look at the Financial Audit and Administration Act I don't remember...;but I was looking at it the other night, and the definition section speaks to the question of how budgets are crafted. I believe, my honorable colleague would be more familiar with the Act, because it is clear to me that he did a superb job with whatever was available, and in this cascading global crisis, that seemed to be the center of all our attention. So budgets are generally revenue-driven, be they personal, corporate, national, regional or multilateral. And I don't expect people to be offended by what I am about to say, but this is how I live. I have to compare the ordinary, in order to explain the extraordinary.

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There is some among us who could not manage a cookshop in Stabroek Market, where a dish of kwakwari curry and rice, must be beyond their culinary expertise. Yet they seek to challenge, challenge in a place of record such as this House, where it will be recorded for posterity in the Hansard or whatever they call it. And his effort was designed to meet the various challenges and predicaments facing, not only the underprivileged, not only the poor, and the vulnerable, the rich and the middle class, but even the underclass. As I understood him, sitting here attentively listening to everything he was saying, it did not cause any further pressure on the ordinary man. And we have to live ... as my friends on the other side, my colleagues and comrades; they have recognized that there are difficulties in getting, coming to grips with the cost of living; but all over the world, it is worse, it is worse all over the world. You only have to listen to all these rumblings from the Caribbean leaders; those who were so keen to oppose the Comrade President's views of the EPA; and thankfully there is one man on the other side who bravely and courageously Studied ... his professional views, that the EPA should be seriously scrutinized for the little things that are hidden in the shadows, now coming to pass.

There is this hang-up about VAT. I don't know whether people have really understood that VAT is really an old institution; not a revenue institution, but those of us who had an urban upbringing; and the last time I checked the

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dictionary, I am glad you are laughing. I had cause to go back to that issue, because I grew in an environment in Georgetown, and almost every third or fourth yard, whether it is tenement or otherwise, had a very large, cast iron or open top vat; and it was served by the rain, the rain water is what sourced it; and every member of the neighbourhood or the community, was able to access it in times of need. But that is what “vat” was in the ordinary sense, and I checked the dictionary, and it says *a large open tank or tub, used to hold liquid in bulk*. Well the Comrade Minister, the Honorable Minister of Finance, I don’t know whether he considered this meaning; my understanding and his understanding, but this is my understanding. “VAT” is really an acronym of enormous significance and utility. VAT is an acronym. It is something, it is a fiscal measure that garners, garners a lot of revenue; not liquid, but revenue, cash, and it is an essential and allows for a wider aggregation of that very revenue; and the proceeds, when properly managed, as it has been, and our experience in this country 2007. I wasn’t involved then, but I pay attention, because I have to pay VAT too, although I used to pay my taxes, but there are lots of people who don’t pay taxes at all. VAT has caught them, VAT has brought them in.

And that very same revenue or resource, fiscal measure I call it, has been used to alleviate the suffering of the country in general.[Interruption: not alleviate, aggravate] I think that I am better advised by my own linguistic

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competence. With respect for my friend, Comrade Murray, because he was a comrade in the old days, but you have been with us for a long time, and your competence is not to be scoffed at, but neither can you scoff at mine. But economic forces which attend the global vicissitudes, for which Guyana can hardly be deemed responsible, those resources have been used, have been used to ensure that there is some alleviation of the financial woes that came cascading on the Guyanese people, due to outside forces.

You forget, not too long ago, there was something called Consumption Tax. There was a complete removal of the Consumption tax for agriculture matters, and for diesel, and for gasoline. Because I remember that when the price shot up to \$1,000 a gallon, I can afford it, it doesn't matter to me, I have to driving, I have been accustomed to drive, so I don't know about that. I would pay the thousand dollars, but I was pleasantly surprised, one day I drove up at Guyoil, because I prefer to put my money where the national interest is, I buy at Guyoil; and then I heard...[Interruption] No, if I have to drive down Vlissengen Road or whatever road. I heard a taxi man telling the fellow when I drove up, *I didn't know they had reduced gas*; he tell the man *fill it up* A hire car man saying so, you know, 'fill it up.' Then I realized to fill up the whole car was \$5,000 and not \$10,000; then I said look, "fill it up!" Those are things, you see; that is why I said if properly managed, you may have a grouse or

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grievance, if it is not properly managed; but I don't hear of any recession in this country. The day come, I don't know. I smell trouble when, I mean economic trouble; I don't smell anything yet. I have been around as long as you Comrade Murray. And I believe, in all fairness to the Honorable Minister, that he is entitled to take a bow. But we must bear this in mind, it is an aphorism, "*praise is not a to run for yesterday's accomplishments, but only an incentive to tomorrow's objectives*. So you have to continue doing what you have been doing; if I am here or not.

The Speaker: Your time is up, Honorable Member.

Hon Samuel Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that the Honorable Member be given another fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed Hon Member ...

Hon Charles Ramson: I thank you very much, Comrade Speaker. I have been advised that during the sojourn of my predecessor, there was a lot of work being done which fell under his umbrella; and I don't think in any form, what I have to report to you tonight; but I believe, having viewed what has been done, there has been a lot of movement since I was last here in 2001. I will be very

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brief, or as brief as I could. There is something called, Modernization of the Justice Administration System. Benefits arising from that program amounts to US\$25 million; and it is really... the focus of that modernization program, is something called the Reform Benchmark; and there is need for reform, not the reform that I have been hearing all this time. I believe, I believe that whatever is contained in this document, and in other documents, there is a human resource problem in this country; not the paucity of human resources, but a willingness of the human resources to put into effect what we all are required to put into effect, if we are to earn the dollar that we get at the end of the month. But it seems, the modern thing is to go by way of consultancy, and to have people spread across the spectrum.

I have been a judge in the Court of Appeal, or I was a judge in the Court of Appeal for roughly one year, a year and a couple of days; and I am proud to say that from the moment the three of us went on; three of us went on, virtually together, because we sit as a bench, I believe we were responsible for removing any backlog that there is at the court, by virtue of putting our shoulders to the wheel, and ensuring that those lawyers who came expecting to have adjournments were rudely treated, but with respect.

So we have this, the courts, the DPP, the AG's Chambers, the Police and some of the other disciplined forces, all enjoying something called "enhancing institutional

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capacity”; enhancing skills and productivity of judges and magistrates. Well, I didn’t know that I became a judge for anybody to enhance my productivity. I would have thought that I was eligible and supremely qualified for any job that you see that I accept, and I believe that all my colleagues, professional colleagues, so advise.

I believe, though, that there is need for some strengthening of the human resource personnel in the AGs Chambers. Maybe, there is an exodus, I don’t know. I went in there and I saw six lawyers, and they are still there. I don’t know, maybe they are waiting until I get there to run overseas. So whoever was peddling that rumor, I hope they would equally address it in the press. I have to be a glutton for punishment, to be able to allow all these people who would give me some assistance, to get rid of them and I have to do all the work myself. You must be a glutton for punishment.

So I am glad those who are there are still there. I understand that there is one young lady who six weeks ago left; and I believe it is out of a peccadillo rather than my announcement, the announcement that I would be there, because I had not been spoken to six weeks before. So she is either a see-far woman, a clairvoyant, or a witch. But I had not been beckoned, six weeks ago. I sat until the day before I was appointed here, without an indication that I am coming back. I saw a lot of newspaper reports, about who was in line. I don’t know

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who was in line. There might be a lot of pretenders, but only one contender. [*Laughter*] I gather, I gather, I don't mean that with disrespect to anyone, but there is a certain ... there is a certain level of precedence, and we lawyers know what that means.

That is why I objected to a certain course that the Full Court took in a certain matter. And I had certain things to say in my judgment. I hope it was recorded, and it will be discussed and regurgitated at the appropriate time. Sarah... in the hallowed, hallowed beyond redemption, in a matter which should have prevented some chaos in the court in a case called Attorney General vs King, decided some twelve or fifteen years ago concerning the exact same issue; and it was not followed, as was required by precedent, and we lawyers know what that means. I say no more on that, since it may have to be revisited.

Now I also have before me something called, that would please the ears of some of us,... It seems as though... I am sorry some of my colleagues on the other side who session to be ...the Deeds Registry, there seems to have been a lot of movement in that area, and all the business names and companies have been automated, very far, advancement. And there is a certain synergy being developed between those transactions there and the GRA-The Guyana Revenue Authority. So at the touch of a button, the Revenue People will know all those people who have been paying their revenue. And it says here that

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the trademark, to date 15,600 records have been entered into an automated system. When I was there, it was an order. It was a good thing my predecessor took over from me in 2001.

And the overall objective is to ensure that there is a reduction in time for all those commercial transactions. Instead of having 9 steps and 44 days of doing business, it will be reduced by about one-third or less. But when I was in practice, there was no need for all this extended period for completion of ... One had to be a little familiar with the Registry staff, and without entering into any kind of transaction that could compromise the integrity of the profession, things had to be done in a certain time. And I have been there for seven years. It happened in the past, and it will continue to happen.

So there is a lot of work to be done, and I must say that there is a former judge, who has been spearheading a lot of the work in this area; and she advises me, that the Judicial Services Commission has considered, the Judicial Services Commission Rules and Regulations; and they now in the possession; they have been referred to the learned Chancellor for his consideration and transition to the next stage. These things take time, and that happens when we have to seek consultancies of consultants from overseas. There is this High Court civil rule, and I gather those have been considered, because I happen to be on the Rule Committee; apart from being a judge, they had me

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doing a lot of extra work, they haven't paid me. I gather that since I left there, the final draft has been sent, or is being sent, to the Guyana Bar Association for their comments, which is the High Court Civil Rules.

There is one area that has caused me some concern, I have to look at it again, and it has nothing to do with the AGs Chambers. There is some framework which was not adequately addressed by a local consultant firm; and the better view is that it ought to be revisited by another, better placed, consultant. And I believe my colleague, the Honorable Minister of Finance, would know about that. And the financial management of the judiciary is consistent with Article 122(a) of the Constitution. There was an in-house consultancy, for which my Ministry was tasked, and the draft is available; I have been assured that the draft is available as of today, because it was supposed to be completed by February 8th, today is the 18th, so I expect that the appropriate coordination will be done.

And most importantly, I gather that there... I am yet to receive a status report on the development of an 'action plan' for the reorganization of the Chambers of the DPP, the consultancy for which began only last week, the 9th of February: And I can guarantee you, Comrade Speaker, that all things being equal, and barring unforeseen developments, outside of my competence, that even if I have to come and do a secondary report, when I am more familiar with all that has been done, or is expected to be

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done: I will ask your indulgence to lay it over, to have a Motion moved in this Parliament, through one of my colleagues, or myself, to bring to this House's attention, the progress on the various actions that are being taken to ensure that there is a free flow of judicial service in this country.

I believe I have taken enough time, and I thank you for your tolerance. And I believe that unless something happens between now and 2011, I will be here till then.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Mr Everall Franklin ...

Mr Everall Franklin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise today to actually take part in the debate. I remember 2008 Debate was characterized by four words, they were "the Ayes have it", and I took my seat. This year, the Ayes certainly will still have it, but I do believe that it would be wrong if I did not place on record some ideas, some questions for the Honorable Dr Ashni Singh, and some suggestions for this Honorable House. I must also say that I am sorry that I was not here in person on that day that Dr Singh delivered his; not his, but Guyana's Budget. I would also have to say, regardless if we agree,

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if we like it or not, it still remains our budget. We will swim or sink by it.

In this, in this time of great uncertainty, where philosophies have been turned on their heads, where capitalism in the largest of capitalist countries are resembling liberal socialist philosophies, just with a few different terms of buying back, and it is basically nationalization. Therefore, I would not envy the Minister of Finance, in the circumstances that the world finds itself in, and Guyana being a part of that, having to deal with such issues as important as the nation's finance.

Models that, economic models that we have adhered to in the past, have been turned on their heads, and therefore we all, people who are in charge of the nation's finances, have to find, if not different; but have to be flexible in terms of dealing with the country's finances. And just as an interjection, because I have been hearing a lot about indices, of how well a country does, and corruption indices and so on; and I have heard a lot of noise in the House about it, but what we have to always remember, the very countries that produce these indices are the countries that still lend money to countries that score very low on these indices; and so, one has to wonder what criteria they are really using. So I don't pay too much attention to that. We have to forge our own way, we have to decide what kind of development we want, and before you, we have to do this in a manner that brings all people,

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all stakeholders on board, because that is the only way we as a nation will survive.

My contribution in 2008, as I said before, had four words, 'the Ayes have it,' and indeed, this year's budget will be no different, since the Ayes have it again. Mr Speaker, I wonder if the time spent, and from the time this budget debate started, since Monday; if the time spent with us wrangling and tangling would not have been better utilized debating and going over the estimates before it came to this Parliament. We cannot say we do not have the time, because we were here, what, 2:00 o'clock yesterday? We have the time; but what we lack is the will to do things differently; and I think the economic situation of our times will determine that, if we do not do things differently, we certainly will sink. *[Applause]*

I think if we took that approach, we may be able to maximize and really put true meaning to those words that we bandy around so often, such as 'inclusiveness.' It would make more sense to me to have three budget analyses before the estimates are submitted to the House. Statistics, numbers, figures, must always relate to facts, and actual people. I think someone on the other side said that. But I found it amazing when the Honorable Minister boasted about the major increases in old age pension. And don't get me wrong, every cent that our people, that is increased on things like old age pension is welcome; but we have to deal with... we should not deal with it as if the

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student, after many years is getting a D minus. We can't throw a party for him, and probably invite a band, invite a band singer, have a party for that student because he now moves from a F to a D-. We still have a lot of work to do, and therefore we should not fall into the tribalsitic mode, because that energy, I think, we should use to further improve the lot of the people we were elected to serve.

And as a matter of sheer practicality, I would like the Minister of Finance, and for that matter, the Minister of Human Services, to show how one could actually survive on \$6,300. It is better than \$600, \$6,000, but I still would like you to show us how that could be done. That is all. Simple question. This is the beginning of the efforts, but does it mean that the last one was inadequate? I doubt it. The questions of, was the money well spent? Did we get value for money in 2008? How much, by your own estimates, Mr Minister, was wasted or inefficiently spent? In your introduction under Section 1.4, you stated, and I quote:

As demand contracts and prices decline, the investments that will prove feasible, and the companies that will survive and grow, are those that are able to produce goods and services of quality, and at cost that can compete with the rest of the world. In this regard, things will be no different in Guyana from anywhere else. The task of

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eliminating waste and losses, of maximizing effectiveness, of spending and soundness of investment decisions, and of ensuring that we optimize the productive use of every asset, and of every man-hour, must now preoccupy every manager and worker in the private sector and public alike.

And I agree with that.

But the question to ask is, didn't this exact task occupy the managers of the public sector during 2008? I am sure the answer would have to be, it ought to have. But there is an admission, and the Minister must be credited for that; for admitting that we have, still have, a lot of work to do. Those statistics, numbers, figures; and we need to have those statistics, that we will be in a better position to assess how large, in real terms, this budget is. Must each budget be bigger because we are less efficient in executing projects, bad management of finances, and sometimes downright stupidity? Where is the value for money statistics? That is an important figure we need to have.

I would like to ask the Minister also, what effect of debt that we have contracted, the internal debt; what is the cost of growth projected, when compared with our total debt burden? We probably need a new statistics, which would compare growth against total debt. If there is not one, we probably need to create one, because we can have

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phenomenal growth, with extremely high debt, which creates problems in the future.

I would like to ask the Minister also, what is the balance of the Contingency Fund, as of December 2008? I tried to find that figure within the presentation, and haven't found, haven't been able to decipher them. But I repeat, the Contingency Fund, that fund that repeatedly come to Parliament to receive additional financing for projects, capital expenditure, and what have you; what is the balance in that fund as at December 2008?

I would like to ask the Minister also, how this budget fits into a larger framework of ...long, medium and short term. What is the vision for Guyana, let us say, in 2020? However, this vision has nothing to do with a certain Peter. And what framework does this vision fit into? Is it the poverty reduction strategy, or a national development strategy; or are we, have we come up with a reactive strategy? We need to know the framework. Or, have we abandoned all those, because they are no longer relevant? What is the planned sequence, is poverty reduction and fiscal macro economic strategy the way to go at this junction? We seem to be blindly following a path that is prescribed by the IFIs, which many major players in those very countries have abandoned.

I would like to know, who are the economic planning functionary? What is the situation of State Planning Secretariat? Is that still legally in existence? If not, what

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are the institutional structures or arrangements formally in place?

The talk of the National Competitiveness Council, is this a new think-tank, making good use of brain power here and in the diaspora, which would examine on a continuous basis, the state of our economy, with a view to maximizing opportunities and resources? The danger of allowing operatives who are actively involved in the business sector to set policy, strategy, without impartial economic thinkers leads in many cases to self-serving policies and decisions, which may not be in the national interest. Any government must guard against this outcome. This government should be no less concerned in this respect.

We must move away from the practice of only calling on each other when a crisis is at our door, at our doorstep, or indeed sometimes, in our house. In this regard, Mr Minister, are you satisfied with your 2009 theme, “Working Together, Reinforcing Resilience”, or should it be, “Working to reinforce resistance to change and inclusiveness?”

What is the track record of the government in providing jobs? We have heard very little on that issue. General, from a sector, and labour... new Minister Irfaan Ali attempted to put the statistics together, very dubious. Well, he put the statistics together, which was severely flawed. Honorable Minister, a straightforward question:

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What is the unemployment rate as of December 2008? How many persons were underemployed, and how many school-leavers, technical, commercial and university graduates, have found or created their own employment during 2007-2008?

What portion of the manufacturing economy, these are questions for the Minister of Finance, does the private sector enjoy? Can we honestly say, at this juncture, that the private sector is the engine of growth? That I doubt is the case. How does the government propose to use or deal with excess liquidity in the banking sector? In light of the fact that the spread between rates for savings and loans is so vast, is this spread justified as an acceptable risk price? Is then government not responsible for the huge liquidity, due to banks' safe investments, in Treasury Bills and other financial instruments? Are plans afoot to decrease the interest rates offered for T-Bills and other financial instruments, to relieve the liquidity? How does one reconcile the lending to a private business, public funds, which then charges Guyanese consumers interest rates for hire purchase arrangements, ranging from 40% to over 150%? What is the arrangement for coordinating sectoral planning to prevent bottlenecks, and we had a few: cement shortage, flour disruption, minibus transportation, kerosene fiasco comes to mind.

Just a few questions which I trust will be answered by the Honourable Minister.

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The Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce intervened on consumers' behalf when flour prices rose steeply. I think it was well received, even though it was reactive rather than proactive. But did the Ministry ensure that consumers were still receiving value in particular, with the price of bread, when it appears as though the weight and size of the loaves after the intervention seemed to decrease; and in this regard, when one does such things, proactive approach, would be to use the Bureau of Standards to ensure that the interventions being made really address the concerns of the consumer.

The Minister of Tourism Industry and Commerce, Hon Manniram Prashad, boasted on Channel 11, in the pre-and parallel debate monologue on Channel 11 ... *[Interruption]* yes, a few nights ago, that his Ministry did not issue any import license for chicken in 2008, which is good, that was an achievement. Yes, I agree. At the same time, admitting that smuggling was also taking place with that item. But I must says that the local producers must have been thrilled. What amazing stuff!

What does the Ministry have planned for the next transportation crisis? Are we to have the zoning of buses to create more competition among the bus owners and operators, thus leading to stabilizing of fares? Have we suggested to the Minibus Association that they will be facilitated by the Commerce Ministry, to import fast-moving spares, which could then be resold to their

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members at cost, to reduce the operating costs; since this was one of their major concerns and arguments, that the cost of spares, and the cost of fuel, was the reason why they had to increase their fares? This is a proactive approach.

Are we also serious about tourism contributing significantly to our economy? I submit, Mr Speaker, considering the state of the world's economy, it would be better to concentrate on real developmental goals, drop the bird watching and magazine features. Before we attempt to encourage 50 people to come and for bird-watching, to work towards building a local tourist industry. We have people who have never crossed the river much less; we are not talking about Kaieteur. We have people who have never crossed the river, never went to Bartica, never saw Essequibo. I think that approach would make more sense, with the resources that are available to the Honorable Minister of Tourism.

We can never ... we cannot improve our lot if we don't create, if wealth is not created. And I have a few alternate sources of revenue, which may be taken on board. The environmental tax levied on plastic containers for soft drinks; we know that is a tax, and ... not sure where the money goes, probably to the Consolidated Fund; but it is only levied on soft drinks. What about lubricants, cosmetics, and a host of other products, all of which are placed in plastic containers, which find their

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way into the very environment? So it's lopsided, and I submit that the total amount of plastic containers coming into this country, far exceeds the soft drink and ending up in the environment; far exceeds the levy, far exceeds the amount placed on just the soft-drink containers, those that legally come in. There is a lot that come in smuggled, as we have seen in recent times.

I submit that we should ban the use of used tires. This is not a cost situation; this is a price difference. The price for used tyres is low, but costs more and anyone who has an idea of the use and length of time that a new tyre would serve you, would realize that it will cost you more to be buying used tires, than if you were in a position to buy a new tyre. I suggest banning the importation of used tires. It would reduce imported waste. We are importing other people's rubbish, creating expense on our own economy, hurting our own environment. It is even more expensive for the user, but we blindly go ahead, and continue allowing other people's rubbish to come into this country, causing death and mayhem, in some cases, a waste of foreign exchange; and if we did this, we would stimulate another area of lending, throughout our banking system. It would also alter Guyana's position in its quest to promote our standing forests, as worthy of financing. Because our general position, if we want to promote ourselves, as good environmental ambassadors, is that, in all aspects of our economy, we should project some environmental logic. I also suggest that we reduce duties

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on vehicles with low kilometers per gallon factors. This will have a long-term benefit on the economy; and not because fuel prices are what they are today, that they would remain. And it doesn't matter. If you can reduce the cost expended on one of our main imports, then we would be making good sense, both on the level of straight economics, and in terms of the environmental image that we are trying to project. It would also reduce the requirement of spare parts, which is also a foreign exchange component ... High kilometers per gallon cars and vehicles.

Under security, Honorable Minister Rohee gave a long synopsis, a long speech about his Ministry; and I must admit, the Ministry of Home Affairs has performed creditably, and it would be great if a number of the other Ministries, Culture and Sport and so on, performed as creditably as the Ministry of Home Affairs. But I thought that the Minister would have, in this budget debate, would have concentrated on the problems we experienced with our non-traditional commodities, and traditional commodities; with the problems we experienced with drugs. This has a direct bearing on the economy. I would have thought that some time would have been spent outlining the programs and plans to deal with this very important aspect of our economy, which quite rightly, the Honorable Minister, in his diversification thrust, is supposed to be another pillar .

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I really thought that Minister Rohee would have concentrated on this aspect of his ministry, which is relevant to the budget at hand, instead of threatening me, and informing the House of disorderly murders, and the fact that criminals like darkness, as one of his Eureka moments. I commend however, the Minister's successes, since being at the helm of this very difficult ministry, but securing personal and public property to encourage investment and entrepreneurship, and the bettering of the Joint Services/ Joint Forces livelihood and conditions of service, should have been the thrust of the Minister of Home Affairs' presentation in the budget debate.

The protection of lives and property is also part of the Hon Minister's portfolio, and I was pleased to see the money being allocated for the purchase of, it states here:

water tenders, water carriers, and an aircraft fire fighting vehicle.

But, Mr Speaker, if water is not available, where the purchase can be effectively utilized, all will go to waste. To this end, I suggest that the Government invite insurance companies, most of which have a stake in improving fire protection throughout this country, to sponsor the erection of water hydrants and water supplies in major towns and cities. This would make much more sense than sponsoring so called chutney contests.

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15.2% decline in output, due to stronger enforcement and grading activities by the Guyana Forestry Commission - that was stated in the report. Does this mean that less enforcement will allow for higher output? Some clarification is necessary. I think the wording in that particular section was unfortunate.

Forestry: Decline in output due to stronger enforcement. The decline in output was due to stronger enforcement. So therefore, it means if you have less enforcement, you will have a higher output. That is what this was saying. So you'll have a lower output. I think the wording in that is unfortunate; I think it needs revisiting.

Diamond production: A drop in production as compared to 2007 was due to the movement of investors into the gold industry as one example. Can it also be due to closer adherence and scrutiny to the Kimberly protocol which seeks to reduce the entry of conflict diamonds into the world market, passing through Guyana?

Question for the Minister of Finance:

Engineering ... *[Interruption]* got to ask your friends. Engineering/Construction: \$8.5, *[Interruption]* ... the Canadian friend. Does the Minister expect any major change in the construction sector with the introduction of the money-laundering legislation? Do you think that would affect this sector, when that legislation comes into effect? Question for the Minister.

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Under traditional sectors, the rice performance must be commended. I will leave sugar, because that has been bandied about quite extensively, and I will give you a break from that, Hon Ashni Singh. I know that the hat that you have to pull out the trick from must be a big hat, but I do not envy you, having to do the same.

The Speaker: Time is up, Honorable Member ...

Mr David Patterson: Mr Speaker, I ask that my colleague, the Member, be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Motion put and agreed to
Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed ...

Mr Everall Franklin: Modernizing the traditional sectors of rice, performance must be commended. The government's efforts to enhance and support these entrepreneurs must be supported. In bringing the science of cultivation to the field in this sector, as well as the efforts of NARI in fish and livestock farming, these efforts must be commended.

In bauxite, a realistic assessment of the industry was made, and I therefore found it strange that the same levelheaded analysis was not made in other areas of our economy.

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On the manufacturing, the Factories Act is still outdated, and in need of revision and updating. It is very inefficient, and prevents our small manufacturers from competing even within the Caribbean; and we have some work for the Honorable Manniram. Our Factories Act does not permit or encourage entrepreneurship for small manufacturers.

The focus on the Belvedere, Eccles and Lethem Industrial Estates is laudable. Efforts must be made to promote manufacturing, and value added activities, to maximize the potential of these estates. At this juncture, I may remind the House that one of the resources we have in South America is the English language, which we are not taking advantage of. This alone in South America is a billion dollar industry; and if we want to talk about going outside the box, using resources that we have available, then this is an ideal opportunity for us to take advantage of; and especially, the people in Region 9 would be well placed to spearhead such an action. This is an industry that we have neglected, that we have lost focus of, and it is one of the growing...

Under power generation, an aggressive energy policy must be implemented with a view to conservation, substitution, with alternative energy sources alike. To this end, the move towards Bunker C, or HFO, for GPL's generation is a very positive step. Consumers would like to see the benefits of such change, hopefully not in the

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too distant future. Government interventions to stabilize fuel prices during 2008 was welcome, and in most cases, very effective. It is not appropriate at this time... Is it not, Mr Minister, through you, Mr Speaker, at this time to discuss the issue of bonds to individuals, to raise financing for the power generation and distribution sectors, thus involving the general public in the wellbeing of these sectors; and offer investment opportunities for businesses and ordinary citizens alike.

The removal of duties and taxes on alternative energy components to encourage its use is a good move, but to promote its use, our party suggests, that tax rebates be give to house owners who actually use these technologies in the construction of new, and the upgrading of existing property; as a net savings in fuel acquisition costs would result over time. Suggestion; here is another one: The installation of the fiber optic network and data acquisition system for tele-metering and protection is a positive step, once again, in the power sector, and it should bring benefits to consumers over time. The deployment of new meters to reduce losses and faulty readings alike is also positive; however, an independent authority must be mandated to verify and check the accuracy of these new meters, if the implementation is to receive support, and engender confidence in these new innovations, and offer an independent reference source.

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The Honorable Minister of Amerindian Affairs, I didn't see her; but I will just give two samples; one from Region 8, where a citizen complained of the infrequent mail delivery, serious problems obtaining birth certificates, marriages being delayed. I understand the Minister is doing her best, but you cannot put your head in the sand, because you will expose very vulnerable parts of your anatomy to the outer world. It may be painful in the end. Children attending school without vital documents, deed polls, affidavits are difficult, if not impossible, to acquire; and poor access to post office services in the sub region.

One very disturbing, one very disturbing situation was brought to my attention, where we need industry; this region, a lot of mining takes place in that region, we are witnessing that some are openly committing crime in the Siparuni Ireng area. A particular ... this is his words; gangsterism, openly ruthless torture and brutality. Two persons were accused of stealing from one of these operations after they made an enquiry about their outstanding salaries, after they were gun butted, nailed shut inside wooden boxes for over 24 hours; on relief they were treated with cold water and battery acid; then subsequently forced to enter a large pits dug by an excavator, and forced to tread water to survive.

Villagers speak of the large arsenal of weapons being used by these mining concessionaires. Reports were made to the Village Council and the CEO and the Ethnic

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Relations Commission. I cannot verify if the CEO passed this information on to the Mahdia Police and the Minister of Amerindian Affairs or Home Affairs. If economic benefits are to be established in our interior region, bringing benefit to our first people, then they must be protected like everyone else, from unscrupulous, new - rich vultures we sometimes misname as businessmen. South American has numerous cases of brutality being meted out to indigenous people; let us not become a National Geographic feature in this regards, as we forge ahead with safeguarding our environment, and deriving benefit from standing forests, which our indigenous peoples have guarded for centuries.

Another one for the Minister of Amerindian affairs, - Region 9, and it is to do with the extension services in agriculture. People are willing to work, these are the words of the people there, but need help from the agri sector to make it a reality, with a bridge linking Region 9 to the fifth largest country; we need to do more to reverse this negative trend. There is only one agriculture field officer, no assistant, no livestock filled assistant, no working motorbike, no extension officers; and the badly needed technical help in the area for this growing population, to contain the various outbreaks in far-flung areas. Farmers have been crying out for supplies of drugs, insecticide, that can be made available, and they are willing to pay for them, it's not a free thing, but they need to have them available within the region.

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Under roads, in this same region: Every year, roadwork is being done, and still South Rupununi is in a deplorable state. The road to South Rupununi is in a deplorable state. One might hear that repairs are being done, but the quality of work is poor, resulting in it having to be repeated, resulting in waste of revenue. For example, travelling from Lethem to the South, after passing Churinam and Marinao, the culverts are back-filled with sand. Even the layman could see and comment that, with the first heavy rain, everything will be washed away, resulting in road that is dangerous, -vehicles being stuck, year after year. Villagers have requested that they be involved in these activities, as they are knowledgeable about the bad spots on the road, and the sites where the appropriate raw materials could be sourced. These are some of the comments people within the region ...

Quickly under education, I think one of our better functioning Ministries. With regard to achieving universal secondary education, our Minister must also be commended, because Mr Speaker, these initiatives ensure that our children receive an acceptable standard of education. In our quest to support low achievers, some effective program must be implemented to support gifted children in academic, technical and vocational skills. Excellence must also be supported and fostered; and I say that sometimes we lose focus on promoting excellence.

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Schools: new buildings, amidst declining personnel. What is the good of new buildings if trained and satisfied workers are absent? Teachers' conditions of service must be addressed. Maintenance of existing facilities must take higher priority. It is unacceptable that toilets, stairs and flooring are in such poor states in many schools while we build new ones to join the list of poorly managed and maintained older ones in the system.

Under health, an increase in this sector can only be of benefit to our people. \$12.8 billion, and this is of importance. Hopefully, we can officially import, store and distribute medication, and improve our laboratory capabilities to support critical public health initiatives in HIV Aids and tuberculosis eradication. Mr Speaker, without these capabilities, we are making a mockery of the hard work being conducted by the doctors, nurses and administrators within the sector. We cannot continue to send persons to Trinidad, which we pay millions over time to service our people. We need to spend some money to build capacity, quickly, in this area.

I do believe, too, that we have to pay more attention to the very important cog in the wheel of our health providers, that is, our nurses. In the last few years, this profession has been sought after, and our health officials here at home have taken advantage of those who have chosen to stay; and we have disregarded their basic needs as it relates to our present economy. They argue that the

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percentage increases in 1980s have been tremendous, clumsily disregarding the cost of living in those years and the reality of today. Can we create better conditions for our nurses? I am absolutely sure we can and must do so. What do our nurses require to feel respected and satisfied? They must know and be reminded that they are in a profession that is essential to this nation, and the nation must demonstrate it by making the necessary provisions for their well being, such as; basic salary of \$70,000 per month, preferential interest rate for home construction or purchase, with government guaranteed mortgage; free health care at any institution in Guyana; and should have a supportive contributory health insurance, which must include their dependents. Structured efforts must be made to facilitate nurses' continued education and qualification.

Development criteria: Set criteria should be made and known at the beginning of the nurses' career. How to finance the above? Raise the taxes on alcohol and tobacco products. We must find our own way. The Honorable Gail will contribute significantly to that. Mr Speaker, Mr Speaker, those are some of the suggestions that I have, and my comments on this Budget of 2009; and I trust that some consideration should be taken, and hopefully, we can forge ahead and do the people's work and make this place a better place for all of us. Thank you. *[Applause]*

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The Speaker: Thank you, Honorable Member. Honorable Members, I think this is the time we should have a few minutes of restoration. So I would recommend ten minutes.

21:39 H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

22:05 H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Clerk: Honorable Members, the Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated, Honorable Members.

Hon Member Dr Jennifer Westford ...

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: Mr Speaker, allow me to add my contribution to this 2009 Budget Debate. Like my colleagues who spoke before me, I would like to congratulate the Honorable Minister of Finance and his able staff, for the timely completion and the presentation of yet another piece of ingenious work.

Mr Speaker, the Public Service Ministry is charged constitutionally with the management of the public service, and to some extent, the public sector. Ours is a very dynamic field, characterized by ongoing remodeling, in response to the perpetual changes in the environment in which we are expected to operate. In my budget presentation of 2008, I intimated that the modernization program of the public sector was ongoing, and I itemized

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the areas that were identified for reform in the project documents.

In keeping with the requirements of the aforementioned document, the Public Service Ministry completed the following in 2008:

- 250 categories of job descriptions were reviewed and restructured. This restructuring allowed us to streamline the responsibilities of each worker, thus eliminating overlapping of duties, which was a prominent feature in the old job descriptions.
- All personnel officers in the public service were trained in modernized, advanced Human Resource Management, and also computer operations.
- The human resource database of the Public Service was automated, which now allows for inter-agency linkages and more efficient monitoring of the database by the Public Service Ministry.
- It is envisaged, Mr Speaker, that this year we will be linking the Human Resource Database with the payroll. This will be yet another measure of ensuring fiscal accountability.

Mr Speaker, in order to provide the nation with quality service, it is imperative that we have a qualified, well-equipped human resource base. To this end, Sir, the

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Government continued its unparalleled training record in 2008, and will better that performance in 2009. Last year, a total of 108 graduates, in the field of human medicine, veterinary medicine, agricultural science, forestry, engineering, sports, information technology, hydrometeorology and architecture, returned to Guyana from overseas universities. We also had fifteen graduates from the University of Guyana and the Guyana School of Agriculture, in the fields of engineering and agriculture, information technology and management. Mr Speaker, the pleasure is mine to report that all, and I repeat, all of these graduates are meaningfully employed by the Government of Guyana, in government agencies; and are contributing to our development.

Mr Speaker, scholarships were also granted to 31 persons in 2008, to pursue studies in cosmetology, cake decorating, sewing, carpentry, masonry and plumbing at local institutions. Mr Speaker, the issuance of these scholarships is geared at fulfilling our manifesto promise, of empowering sections of our human resource to be self-employed. Sir, it is envisaged that our scholarship awards will significantly increase this year, as a result of the generous increases in the Ministry's training budget for 2009. Oftentimes, this Government has been accused of not providing for our young people. The fact, Mr Speaker, is that 96% of our scholarship awardees are between the ages of 17 and 23 years. What better provision can be made for our young people, than

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ensuring that they become properly qualified professionals? It is said that education is the pillar of development, and we heard those sentiments echoed just recently in this Honorable House, by no less a person than the Honorable Member Ms Amna Ally, who is an experienced educator. We have not only made provision for our young people, Mr Speaker, we have empowered them to command their rightful places as future leaders in this evolving world.

Mr Speaker, the well-being of our students is vital to us, and it is for this reason that we have increased, overall, their stipends as of January 2009. For instance, Mr Speaker, the stipend for the 849 students we have currently studying in Cuba, has been increased from CDN\$50 per person to CDN\$100 per person.

Mr Speaker, in 2008, a total of 283 of our employees involving various categories, were sent on staff development courses, both locally and overseas; and that number will increase in 2009. Yet, Mr Speaker, we are accused of not investing in our human capital. Mr Speaker, there are a number of elements of the developmental equation that are often very hard to quantify, yet are fundamental to achieve the outcomes we seek. The first of these is the quality of services that the Government delivers. As has been seen over the years, this Government has created the enabling environment, by improving and implementing the necessary physical

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infrastructure, and equipping them with qualified personnel. But we need to ensure, Sir, that the service being provided are optimal. Mr Speaker, it will be hard for anyone to conscientiously say that this PPP/C Government has not provided the enabling environment for development in all of our sectors, but without a doubt, they will be able to find fault with the quality of services being provided. We are aware that our service provision needs improvement, and will be paying more attention to same.

When people experience poor service delivery, or our projects fail; then, not only are our citizens denied those services to which they are entitled, but in turn, their capacity to contribute further to the developmental process is undermined. Mr Speaker, we simply cannot and must not tolerate those who make pensioners wait for hours in the sun, because they have not bothered to arrive on time; or those who bring shame to their profession by treating patients and their families callously. We cannot, and will not tolerate the breakdown in elementary management, that results in inefficient service delivery.

Mr Speaker, a short while ago, the Honorable Member Mr Murray, mentioned in his speech that he was told, that anyone can go onto the website of the Procurement and Tender Administration's and access the contracts. He also reported that when he asked the Head of that Administration as to the accuracy of that report, he was

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informed that that website was not being properly maintained. Mr Speaker , this is yet another example of our personnel not performing the duties as they ought to be performed; and I can assure you Sir, in 2009 we are going to be taking serious account of those things.

Mr Speaker, those who do not embrace the Government's service enhancement plan, should do the right thing and leave the public service. Their lack of commitment and accountability hinder our ability to deliver. They also undermine the efforts of the many thousands of public servants who care and work hard to deliver meaningful service. To this end, Mr Speaker, a Performance Appraisal System will be implemented this year for all Permanent Secretaries, Regional Executive Officers, and Heads of Departments within the Public Service.

Mr Speaker, despite a restructuring exercise that may be of more recent vintage than that which obtains in our jurisdiction, we still have Ministries whose organizational structure constrains them from functioning efficiently and responding effectively to the needs of their clients. The presence of rigid, one size fits all structures, comprising of Permanent Secretaries, their Deputies, Assistant Secretaries, Accountants, Admin Assistant, etc., regardless of the role or responsibility of the Ministry, sometimes militate against the effective operation of the agency. We must recognize that the clients that some agencies have to service are changing. The needs are

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evolving, and the environment in which they are operating is becoming more complex. Therefore the structure of the agency must be allowed to change, if necessary, to adjust to these transformations.

This year, Mr Speaker, the Public Service will intensify its restructuring exercise within the public service, to facilitate better efficiencies. Mind you, Mr Speaker, I said, we will be restructuring the Ministries, and not getting rid of some of them, as was recommended by an Honorable Member of this House two days ago. We in government, the PPP/C Government, create jobs for our people, Mr Speaker, not put them on the unemployment list.

Mr Speaker, in 2009, the Public Service rules will be actively addressed. These Rules and Procedures encompass the employment of public servants and officers, the management of their career incidental performances, and the termination of their services. Not only are many of these rules and procedures outdated, Mr Speaker, they are also in some instances over-prescriptive. They do not focus effectively on the attainment of the key human resource objectives, and tend to emphasize process at the expense of the achievement of strategic outcomes.

Mr Speaker, at present, these rules are conspicuously silent on a number of critical issues, for example, on issues of sexual harassment; and provide no guidance in

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dealing with a situation where a female employee feels threatened or violated as a result of unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances by a coworker or supervisor. Surely, Mr Speaker, this glaring deficiency cannot and should not be allowed to continue. The rules are also mute on the use of technology in the workplace; therefore the inappropriate use of a computer, cell phone or any device of recent technological vintage is unaddressed. Consequently, we need to move to a situation where clearly defined public service rules and regulations govern the behavior of public officers.

To rectify these anomalies, and to ensure normal consistency and management flexibility, Mr Speaker, amendments to the Public Service Rules and Regulations, which were presided over by all of the Stakeholders, will be instituted during this calendar year.

Mr Speaker, once again, the issues of salaries and wages have taken front stage in this debate. Let me remind this House about a few things. This Government, since 1992, has without exception, given annual salary increases to its workers. Mr Speaker, we know that our workers deserve higher wages, and we would like to pay them higher salaries, but Mr Speaker, notwithstanding the difficult external economic environment, our Government has continued to give all government employees salary increases up to 2008, and this, Mr Speaker, will definitely continue in 2009.

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Mr Speaker, the issue, Mr Speaker, the chronic issue of contracted workers again surfaced in this 2009 Budget presentation. And let me once again repeat what I have said in Budgets before, and I will add a little more tonight. Mr Speaker, contracted employment in the Public Service is a legitimate practice, written, documented, and will continue to be endorsed and will continue to be approved by the Public Service Ministry; and there is no attempt at creating an alternate public service, as the Honorable Member, Mr Basil Williams tries to proffer very often. And Mr Speaker, Mr Mervyn Williams, who isn't in the House at this point in time, mentioned in his debate, a very disturbing remark. He said that, contracted workers are not allowed to pay NIS and income taxes. Mr Speaker, that is far from the truth; it is erroneous, and I hope it will not be repeated by him or anyone else, because that is not so. All workers, whether contracted or not, are entitled to pay NIS and income tax; and that is being done, that is being done, that is being done; and I dare anyone to present any evidence to the opposite.

Mr Speaker, let me emphatically say that I am highly optimistic about the future of the public service of Guyana. We have extremely talented and skilled public officers, many of whom are dedicated, hard working and conscientious. We also have a cadre of managers that are as good or better than any equivalent group in the private sector. Unless some of our policies are implemented

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efficiently, courteously, honestly and enthusiastically, we will receive far less than our people deserve. We need to create environments in which such obvious talent can blossom and realize its full potential to work towards the betterment of our society and country as a whole.

Mr Speaker, as I mentioned before, we need to address our inability to deal with the underperforming and inept, and we must establish clear and unambiguous standards to govern performance and behavior in the service. Most importantly, Mr Speaker, we must streamline and modernize operations of our highest decision making bodies, so that they may provide the policy direction and guidance required to mould the growth and development of the new public service.

With the Government's strong political will towards this process, the steadfast collaboration of the major Stakeholders, and all the dedication of the workers; I will say, with a high degree of certainty, that the Guyana Public Service will be classified as a career public service, where there is fair treatment, equity, justice and respect for its workers, as well as its clients. Mr Speaker, let me commend the staff of the Public Service Ministry, who work tirelessly and beyond the normal call of duty, to ensure that the management of the public service agencies is optimal. Apparently, the Honorable Member Mr Williams is not aware of what a performance

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appraisal means, what it looks at. That deals with accountability.

Mr Speaker, let me now deal with some of the developmental issues relating to Region 7. Firstly, let me congratulate the Regional Executive Officer, the Regional Chairman and their staff, for a job well done in 2008. A capital program totaling a sum of \$96,750, 000, and a recurrent maintenance program of \$117 million was successfully completed, despite the heavy rainfall during the May-June period. Mr Speaker, because of the lateness of time, I will just mention briefly. In 2008, we had work done in the education sector;

- we saw the completion of nursery schools in the middle, lower and upper Mazaruni;
- we saw repairs and construction of health facilities in the middle, lower and upper Mazaruni;
- we had roads, the Bartica road was done in Mongrippa, and Agatha roads were done;
- we had bridges at Issano and Enachu and Chinaweng in the Middle and Upper Mazaruni;
- we had sea defences;

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- they had land and river transport being bought;
- furniture and equipment for the health and education sector;
- and we also had public works done.

In 2009, Mr Speaker, it is envisaged, a total of \$93,650,000 will be spent in the following areas: In education, there is going to be extension of the Kako Primary School , which is in the Upper Mazaruni.[Interruption] I think it was Mr Norton.

We are also going to be having construction of the teacher's quarters at Waka Creek, which is also in the Upper Mazaruni;

construction of the sanitary blocks for the schools of Kamarang, Kurupung and Karatabo.

In Health: We will be having extension and rehabilitation of the Bartica and Kamarang Hospitals. The Admin building at Bartica, and the Amerindian Hostel at Bartica; there will also be extensions, rehabilitation of the Karabisi Road at Bartica and the one to Four Mile Road; and presently, Mr Speaker, there is an \$88 million project on the 1-5 mile road, which I think the Honorable Member Ms Judith David mentioned briefly when she

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said she heard there is such a project, but she doesn't know, she didn't see anything being done, so she doesn't know much about it. I am very surprised, I am sorry the Honorable Member isn't here, because the Honorable Member was with me yesterday when I enquired about that project. And I was informed by the Regional Chairman, who happens to be from the People's National Congress; so I am surprised, she probably does not believe or was not listening to what he said. He reported to me that the project has been awarded, the contractor has mobilized already, and work is expected to start within a matter of days. I also advised him that, I also advised him to ensure that that work is started and finished before the rains. And I can assure this House, Mr Speaker, that project is going to be completed.

Mr Speaker, in 2009, we are also going to be seeing construction of bridges in the riverain areas to assist our Amerindian communities in Region 7 to have ready access to and from their farms bridges are going to be done at Batavia, and also in the Upper Mazaruni at Chinaweng. There will also be land and river transport being bought for the Middle , Lower and the Upper Mazaruni.

Furniture and Equipment for the Health and Education Department: And Mr Speaker, water supplies ... and I would like to report to this House, and we hear water woes all over; that Bartica to date today is not having any

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water woes; and our new secondary school at the Three Miles, Bartica Potaro Road, they are having adequate water; and I was assured yesterday when I was there that all is well, and I hope that all continues well with the provision of water within the Bartica area. In the rest of the Region as it pertains to water, we have had several difficulties, several wells were dug, they were not efficient, they are not working as expected, and a different methodology is going to be employed, and we hope that they are more efficient than the ones that were done before.

Mr Speaker, this gives a brief outline of what was done in 2008, and what is expected to be done in 2009 in Bartica, and the rest of Region 7, which is the Middle and Upper Mazaruni. And Sir, may I once again congratulate all of the public servants of Guyana; but also remind them that efficiency and proper service are what we expect; and without a doubt, if they give us their service, we will provide all of the equipment, we will provide that enabling environment for them to perform to the best of their ability, thus together we will build Guyana and ensure that we are always there. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Mr Keith Scott ...

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Mr Keith Scott: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mindful am I of the need to balance time with the number of speakers; therefore I shall endeavor to be as brief as possible. Mr Williams, Mr Mervyn Williams, in response to what has just been said by the Hon Minister, has advised that the Government informed contract workers that they are responsible for the payment of their own NIS. The determination of whether they are self-employed, or if they are employees, is a matter by law for the NIS Board, not for the Government.

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: Mr Speaker, could I raise a point of order, Sir? That is an erroneous allegation.

The Speaker: Well, I don't know if the ... a point of order. This is the Parliament. I am sorry, it slipped me for a moment. What did the Honorable Member say?

Hon Dr Jennifer Westford: The Honorable Member is saying that he was informed by the Honorable Member Mr Williams, that the Government of Guyana has issued instructions to the contracted workers of this country that they are responsible for paying their NIS, which is erroneous, Sir. It is erroneous, Sir, and it is a very serious allegation.

The Speaker: The Honorable Member said that is not true.

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Mr Keith Scott: Perhaps the Minister can advise us whether a determination was made by the NIS Board as to the status of those contract workers; whether they were determined to be self-employed or ... It is the NIS Board that has to make that determination. However, Sir ... however ... Okay ... Thank you.

I have, Sir, the highest regard for the obvious class and scholarship of the Hon Dr Ashni Singh, Finance Minister. To my mind, his previous presentations in this House have shown a very keen mind, a great attention to detail and a disposition to be realistic in his presentations. It seems to me he would make a great Auditor General, as the Honorable Winston Murray would make a great Finance Minister. It is therefore, it is therefore unfortunate that so highly qualified a professional as Dr Singh undoubtedly is, could succumb to the political direction to be a participant in the creation of so unreal a document as represented in the production of this Budget. It paints a rosy picture of a country I do not recognize; and he, more than most, would be aware that many of his projections are unachievable; like, for example, the expected increase in sugar production. Yet, this commodity has been touted as one of the pillars on which we shall sustain the economy. Is this the resilience that he has been alluding to? How can you construct a budget on so shaky a foundation, failing sugar and failing sugar production; shaky rice foundation; falling bauxite returns; and to yet go ahead to make bold predictions on the basis

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of this. This would raise false expectations, and could have dangerous consequences for a government.

It is clear that this budget bears no relation to the needs of the masses. It is a prescription for disaster. No budget can work without the involvement and cooperation of the workers in our society. But today, workers are faced with the bleak prospect of retrenchment in the Sugar Industry. King Sugar has lost his crown. Rising inflation now stands at 6.4%, plus a wage freeze which no union or umbrella body can, and has been able to move upwards; while the cries from relief from the millstone of 16% VAT continues to be met with stony silence. The PPP/C Government has drifted further away from the people. In 2008, they condescended to grant a 9% wage increase in the face of 14% inflation. Now it is 6.4% inflation, it is therefore unthinkable for us to expect a raise in pay or a reduction in the VAT to 8%. The future then is frightening indeed.

The title, *Working Together - Reinforcing Resilience ...* I ask, working together with whom ... a secret society of budget magicians? We have the non-involvement of the Trade Union Movement; the private sector, the churches have not been involved in any prior discussions in this budget. We all know that they represent a body of people on whom every cent counts. We also know, as I said earlier, for us to have a budget that will work, there must be a communication and a unity of ideas and decisions,

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for us to make it succeed. If we don't have involvement; if people don't feel they are part of the process, then they shall become part of the problem. This non-participation of workers, and of business, therefore sends an ominous message; a message of arrogance, and rules out any willingness to accommodate a role for civil society, and other forces in any shared approach to good governance. We shall not progress like this.

Mr Speaker, the Government continued to refuse a housing plan. I go now to Housing. The goals outlined by a young, theatrically inclined Minister, Honorable Irfaan Ali, to my mind, they are laudable. These are goals, if they can be achieved, we on this side of the House are prepared to help as much as we can to help you to succeed; because we all want to see housing, and we all want to see water delivered at least to the first story, as is promised in Chapter 28:01 of the City Council's bylaws. But the Government's continued refusal to develop a housing plan over the years, can no longer be excused as ignorance. We have a new and youthful Minister. Perhaps if he accepts our offer of help, together, we on this side of the House, together with his ideas, can be able to craft something positive for our society.

The *World Bank Seminar on Housing 2003* was quoted by me last year, when I pointed out the special role that housing plays in the social and political life, the political

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dialogue of our society. It was also pointed out that housing can be a sector for stimulus in the national economy. Therefore, we must understand that it is our duty as a government, both sides of the House working together again, to see that we can put housing on a plane that it is supposed to occupy. We would therefore expect significant and meaningful infusion to underwrite a thorough housing plan. Again, we are regaled with nice words and promises. Page 42 of the Budget speech tells us of provision for affordable housing, increased occupancy and improved infrastructure.

However, let us examine the reality. In 2007, out of a budget of \$100 billion, housing was allocated \$1.7 billion, and water \$2.9 billion. That is 1.7% and 2.9% respectively of the whole budget. In 2008, from \$119 billion, housing got \$1.5 billion, and water \$3.7 billion. This is 1.26% and 3.11% respectively of the whole budget. In 2009, from the budget of \$128.9 billion, housing got \$1.6 billion, and water got \$3.8 billion. This is 1.25% for housing, and 2.95% for water. Now, we understand that in making a budget, and in taking over a government, you take over the responsibility to improve the lives of every single human being. This is why we over here, when we stand up, we don't stand up to criticize. We stand up to offer advice. It is therefore obvious, that the allocation for housing is insignificant, while that for water is marginal. In what way therefore, can we talk of growth in this sector, when we are this far

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away from \$119 plus million, or \$128 million, and you are only occupying 1% of that cake? *[Interruption]*

With this meager allocation government cannot build schemes; and with your house lot you cannot build a home. So when the Minister boasts of 12,000 house lots by 2007, and a further 5,000 for 2008 and 2009 combined, he is engaged in a numbers game, not a program for the development of homes. After you are given a plot of land, with a promise of lights and water, you are left on your own. They paint a picture of success in the numbers of house lots given out. No thought is spared for the development, or the social development of a community. You are expected... you are not expected to complain. Just be thankful for the house lot.

You cannot know that the execution of their secret grand design of democratic re-engineering, demographic re-engineering; many persons are moved from large areas of concentration to areas of few people, for example from Region 4 to Region 3; that is a clear example. That is how the PPP/C intends to realize their long held dream of capturing Region 4. Power is the motivation, not your welfare. The squatters on the Lamaha embankment are offered money, a lot of promises, and are given land on the West Bank. And this is last week, they were complaining about a lack of water and light ... *[Interruption]* You should stick to the media, bring

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Channel 11. It is a case of moving from one shack to a new shack. Old squat, new squat ...

Where are our town and country planners? Are they going to approve this plan? There is clearly no integrated housing and water plan. Lots are made available, but not the mechanism to ensure that water is available. For example, Grove, Dazzell Housing Scheme, nothing at all seems coordinated. Water here ... and not there ... At Diamond, you have one main entrance road, and the arteries cannot be described as roads. They have to be called tracks, potholed tracks. Where then is the infrastructure that we are told about? You can go to Diamond, take the Prados, and you will see for yourself. When you enter, you have a road that caves in. Those side roads are not fit to drive on, because they need to be repaired. The Government must return therefore, to the development of housing schemes, which would naturally have good roads, adequate water, proper street and house lights, reserved recreational areas, schools, clinics and churches. Let us hope, let us therefore develop new policies and incentives to cause the private sector to want to invest in housing, and in housing development.

Let the government provide the infrastructure, not like in 2008, when they laid kilometers of pipeline, yet were unable to deliver a proper water service to Sophia, and to Ruimveldt and to Tuschen, and to many other areas along the coast. Putting them in place, giving speeches of

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water, is propaganda. People expect to see the delivery on a regular basis, and at the proper pressure. We need to ensure that all the discriminatory promises with land distribution are eliminated, like the subtle separation of communities at Douchfour Hope, affected by the disparity in the prices for the house lots. This places some people out, who could not afford to pay those large sums; and only one set of people cannot afford in that area. This is ... now by the planned removal of these same poor residents who have constructed their houses along the embankments. We are told that this embankment, they need to have a 300 ft passageway so the canal can be constructed properly.

But do we know whether those persons who are living there were consulted? Do we know if there was any technical expertise brought in to consult and say if that is the right route? Have they considered turning the canal away from where the residents are on its way to the sea, so they can save those persons who have spent a lot of money to construct their houses only to have them dismantled ... We wait to see, if they shall go ahead with this plan; whether compensation will be given to these same poor people as has been done with the embankment workers.

Access to land must at all times be done on an equitable basis. We need to come together for the good of the community ... *[Interruption]* It is nice to hear a female

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voice at last from over there. I welcome the sound of female voices, because only a few short weeks ago, there was a tremendous amount of female silence on that part of the House.

We have got to have vision, Sir; we have got to have vision. Climate change is irreversible, a sea defense that can be breached at any moment; an inundation of the backlands. Now is the time to start, not only thinking, but to start the construction of homes, cities, away from the coast. A new capital must be created inland, with the cooperative help of all society. At present, everything is dysfunctional at the Central Housing and Planning Authority. They are asleep. The M&CC is comatose, and I don't think we have a town planner. So large buildings are going up side by side in residential areas, and commercial enterprises are appearing any place in our city.

Look at Sheriff Street in Subryanville; look at the confusion at Camp and Robb Street, Camp and Regent Streets; large buildings with no parking facilities. Where is the planning? Where is the city planning? We have a city with far too many cars at the moment, with no place at all to park, with no place to park. And remember, you can have as many cars as you want, but you have to have planning, you have to have places to park. Why can't the town planners therefore acquire a vacant lot? There are lots of vacant lots in Georgetown. We can have city and

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bus parks. The law provides for the acquisition. For example, where the old Philharmonic Hall was, it can be acquired for this purpose, and we can then construct car parks. It is time the Government stopped thinking of the revenue earned from the importation of cars, and develop constructive plans for the present as well as the future and long-term well being of the city.

We welcome the increase in the mortgage ceiling to \$12 million at the NBS. We also welcome the reduction of interest rates. And I have no doubt whatsoever, as I said before, whenever the government comes up with anything to alleviate the hardships of the poor person, we on this side of the House have consistently and have always given you the credit where it is due. But we expect you to also listen to constructive offers that can take the country forward. We are not here to criticize you or praise us, but we are thinking about Guyana.

This time, I recall in 2007; I recall in my presentation, I had asked for a raise in the ceiling and a reduction in the mortgage rate. I am happy that this has been done. We repeat again our call for a mortgage finance bank to be established, in addition to the NBS; and the reintroduction of the aided self -help program. If these programs are accepted, a real partnership with the Opposition, government and the private sector, and the co-ops, can be forged, and this will do nothing but redound to the benefit of the entire society.

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The water sector: Water is life, and without access to this resource, there can be no development of our country. While the GWI is headed by a very zealous and accessible CEO, the delivery of potable water continuously to communities across the country continues to elude the best efforts of this entity. The year 2008 was touted as the start of the turnaround of GWI. According to the Minister, \$3.7 billion was allocated to improve the service. In spite of the professional ability of Mr Karan Singh, many of the mistakes of Severn Trent continue to be repeated. Line losses which accounted for more than 60% of water, has not yet been arrested. We need to develop an integrated water plan throughout the coast. This does not seem to have been understood. Instead, kilometers of pipelines were laid, joined to old leaking pipes, with the result that areas like Grove, Buxton, Friendship, Dazzell Housing Scheme, could not be adequately serviced. I myself have seen people lining up to draw water... in Buxton and Friendship. This was money misspent. Are they part of the 85% access to water that the Honorable Ali was talking about?

Compounding this problem at GWI was the mass exodus of qualified engineers. Some left out of frustration, some due to discrimination, and others, it is claimed, were fired for offences yet to be proven in court. In spite of the commissioning of water plants, people are still not served with pure, potable drinking water. The proliferation of private water processing plants bears testimony that the

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people's confidence in GWI as a deliverer of safe water is very low. The installation of water meters to monitor customers' usage is not yet matched by the monthly or even quarterly meter reading. People now receive unreasonable bills which demand outrageous sums, far in excess of the water consumed.

The sewage system has virtually collapsed. Government should apologize, government should apologize to the residents of all the wards of Georgetown; the worst hit being Wortmanville and Stabroek. Most of the 28-30 pumps that service this system are either down or barely working. That this situation could be allowed to continue so long is inexcusable.

In the solid waste area, I propose that the Housing and the Finance Minister, together with their families, spend one week in Princes Street, Lodge, and one week in North East La Penitence. After that, I am sure that the Mandela Dump site will be history. This is a site, this site is a haven for germs, disease, and acute discomfort to citizens of the area. Its name does a great disservice to the great man. It is a disgrace that after two years of promises to close this facility, the modern site at Hague Bosch is yet to be completed. We await its progress, and hope for completion later this year. This failure to take care of garbage is manifest, as we move above the city. All seem to have given up on cleanliness. The pattern is even spreading now to rural areas. At Redlock, in Region 2,

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the very road that tourists traverse to get to Mainstay, garbage continues to be dumped there, while local authorities take their time to respond to the express concerns of the villagers. A new disposal site must be found.

A waste disposal plan, beyond the construction of a site, is needed. We have to educate our population, starting from nursery to university, churches, housing schemes, minibuses and hire cars, etc, on the issue of how to handle the disposal of waste. Incentives for people to be involved in finding ways to make productive use of waste must be found. All must see themselves as active participants in protecting and beautifying their environment. Such a program will get our full support. Mr Ali, I hope you see how much we tried to help you.

I am happy to hear of the great work that the Honorable Member Mohamed Khan spoke of, being accomplished in Region 2. Listening, one gets the feeling that it is only after the PPP came to power that progress arrived in that area. Perhaps he has never heard of the name Kayman Sankar and others who were there before. The rehabilitation work came through crop yields at Coffee Grove, Three Friends, Adventure, and Riverstown. The repairs of bridges and roads are welcome initiatives, but are there only farmers living in Region 2? What part of this great development plan includes Amerindians at Bethany, Machamo, Tacuma? What significant growth

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has happened? What can they now expect from this Budget? What great expectations can the largest village, Queenstown have, or Good Hope, or Henrietta, or Danielstown, or Dartmouth?

The 8th of May School has seen partial repairs, Mr Baksh, when the people in the area have been insisting that the time has come for a completely new school to be built on that very site. Anger is expressed by these villagers, when they observe the well-built streets at Affiance, Anna Regina new housing areas, Cotton Field, Golden Fleece, whilst Queenstown and Dartmouth are still awaiting the building of roads in their villages. Development cannot be discriminatory.

The Speaker: Your time is up Honorable Member.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, could you grant the Honorable Member 10 minutes to complete his presentation?

The Speaker: Continue ...

Mr Keith Scott: The Budget has allocated \$7.9 billion to drainage and irrigation for flood-prone areas. The construction of a new canal at Hope costing \$2 billion is slated to enhance the operational flood control capacity of the East Demerara Water Conservancy. But what of the continuous annual flooding of the Pomeroon River and the riverain areas there? Farmers are losing thousands of

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dollars in produce. What plans are there for payment of compensation to them? Where is the profile; what plan do you have to avert this tragedy that affects them in that area every time the rain falls? If we can build questionable airstrips at Leguan, and just nearby to Wakenaam, why then can't we attend to the Pomeroun area urgently? At Charity, the drains are still to be cleared by the market, as residents continue to experience flooding. The Charity back streets, we have people who are still living in stalls there, while they sell on the roadway, much to the anger of a Catholic school nearby. We are asking for this access road to be cleared.

Mr Speaker, this Budget presents large figures, but society is prepared at this time to expect the government returning to this House, a few months from now, to ask for supplementary estimates, which will be an additional burden on the backs of the poor masses. The public has come to believe that whatever is presented is just an excuse, is just an illusion. There is just no expectation for a better salary, a lighter tax burden, or delivery of essentials that would inspire Guyanese to want to look inwards, and to be part of a development process. What we have instead is just cynicism. Our party is ready to engage in meaningful participation, together with civil society, if the government really commits to a national approach, and to good governance. To succeed, all must be involved. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honorable Member Dr Ramsaran ...

Hon Dr Bheri Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr Speaker. In the wee hours of this new day, I rise to give my support to the Budget presented by Dr Ashni Kumar Singh. A budget is a crafted plan, and Dr Ashni Kumar Singh and his team, in my opinion, my considered opinion, have done a very admirable job in crafting this budget in circumstances that are well analyzed; circumstances which as you would know, and would have been reflected in many of the interventions over the past two days, as we debated, as we discussed, would reflect changing international conditions, and hostile, should I say, international conditions, having Guyana to operate in conditions not favourable, or not as favourable as we might have liked.

The budget is a crafted plan. To plan one needs to know where one hopes to go or wants to go; and usually to do that, one would want to know from where one came. Mr Speaker, in the run-up to the 2006 elections, the PPP Civic as an alliance, renewed its social contract with the Guyanese people, in the form of its elections Manifesto entitled “A Brighter Future for all Guyanese”. By now, that should not be a document unfamiliar to the Guyanese public, especially those on the coast. It has been made

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quite popular by the analyses being given in the media by the PPP PR Committee and Education Committee; only to mention the Getting It right program, which has been analyzing it for the past few months. I would like to point out that two ministers before me, Mr, Irfaan Ali and Ms Priya Manickchand, did a very good job in analyzing how we have delivered on our commitments. And why I mention this, Mr Chair, Mr Speaker, sorry, I am making that repeated mistake, is because I notice certain remarks coming from notably Mr Murray. He said such things to the effect that; promises were made but not kept, or that the people were kept in the dark about things they should have known. He attempted to question our commitment or our recognition of the seriousness for improvement in quality of life issues in the nation. He said, for example, our efforts could hardly engender confidence except in the case of PPP/C supporters. Let us look at things as they stand.

Before I get into actually looking at the provisions suggested or made by the Minister of Finance, let us look at the promises made and the promises kept; because as I said, the plan is our guide to where we want to go; and we of course would want to take pause and take stock, where did we come from. I want to take exception to the suggestion that promises were made and not kept. Let us look at the document, and since time is short, I will abbreviate my intervention and concentrate mainly on the health sector. Although in an aside, I would like to point

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out my abhorrence at the manner in which Mr Danny treated the Berbice Bridge; and to communicate to him that Berbicians would be appalled to hear the absolute inaccurate analysis of his presentation.

I think he did a disservice to his party, and I would like to tell you that Berbicians are proud of the Bridge, and that Bridge would mean a lot for the Guyanese future in the near term. I just intervened or interjected that to allow him to get on the right track. I saw how shameful, how ashamed, rather, members of the PNC were when they bent their heads, because that is a national achievement. That is not only an achievement of the PPP; it is an achievement of this nation: bridging our rivers, promoting social cohesion, and a sense of involvement, and belonging to and fighting marginalization; some of the things the very opposition benches speak about.

But, Mr Speaker, I wanted to look at the promises we made, and how well we have kept them, in an effort to entice you and the wider public, the nation to support this budget. Because my contention is, if we would have made certain promises, and kept them, it is reasonable to expect that we will also be good stewards of the new plan; that is, the Budget that has been presented at this session:

Health is a fundamental social right, and a priority pillar on which to build national development.

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Unless you want to know from where I quote, it's exactly from the social contract, "A Brighter Future For All Guyanese", the PPP 2006 Manifesto. The PPP, I continue quoting, on page 21, in the section entitled "The Next Term"; and that of course prompts me to say that this would be very relevant to some of the interventions made by other members from this side of the House. We are preparing already for the next term.

Investing in our people to improve social welfare: I continue quoting ...

The PPP/C believes that society thrives, because people, regardless of age, race, or where they live, enjoy healthy fulfilling lives, at school, at work and in their communities. In pursuing a brighter future for all, we want to ensure every Guyanese has access to quality health care. We are committed to fully implementing the various strategy sectors that are already in place.

Here are the highlights, and this is where we will be analyzing our promises, and what we have achieved. The solid foundation on which Dr Ashni Kumar Singh is now able to build his projections to project the vision where we are going to go. This is the foundation on which the present Budget we are discussing are built. These are the highlights:

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- We will complete the ambitious reconstruction of the entire physical infrastructure of the health sector, in order to provide clients and health workers with a comfortable environment, and to ensure the delivery of modern health care services.
- We will spend almost \$4 billion in the next two years,
- remember this is coming from 2006 quotation,
- to build new hospitals in several communities, including Georgetown, Linden, Diamond, Mahaicony, Leonora, Suddie, Mabaruma, Lethem, Bartica, Canje,
- that is in reference to the National Psychiatric Hospital.

Let me pause on the quotation there, colleagues. Now, [Interruption] yes, I go to the Fort Canje Hospital regularly, because we are investing in it, and we are changing it. Almost \$40 million dollars this year; and Mr Chair, to make light, to make light of mental health is not a good sign coming from this House. I must reprimand my colleagues on the other side of the aisle.

Now we have made a quotation from the social contract that we undertook with the nation. Let us look at the situation as it stands, especially as I attempt to point out

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to Mr Murray, for whom I still have great respect. We made promises, and this is how we have fulfilled them. I want the wider nation, and the public to note this. Diamond is up and running. One year already. It has gone beyond its mandate. Initially, it was expected that it would take the burden off the Georgetown Hospital. It has done this to such an extent, Mr Speaker, that a perusal of the residential list, from where the patients came, would indicate that they came from the East Coast, they came from the wards of Georgetown, they came from up the Demerara River, and so on and so on. That is a success. Mr Murray, this is a promise made, this is a promise delivered.

But what I would like to point out to you, Mr Speaker and colleagues, is an impending anniversary: the first anniversary of the Leonora Cottage Hospital, which has now been upgraded to a diagnostic and treatment centre. This of course will occur on the 27th of this month. The Leonora Cottage Hospital opened its doors on the 27th of February last year. We are celebrating that, and of course we have some things to trumpet about. And incidentally, another good program you should look at, which is going to be highlighting such issues coming out of the Ministry of Health, is a new program called Pulse Beat. You check it out, and one of the main programs now would be showing you the first anniversary of Leonora. That is being shown on Channel 69, 69; not five, nine; that is just a pilot. But Mr Murray, as an older gentleman, sometimes

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when you are at home with the grandkids, you can probably rock in the chair in front of the television, and be enlightened, how the promises were made and how they are being kept. It is just a pilot for the time being. *[Interruption]* I am coming to Channel 9; we are going to get it on Channel 9 shortly.

Mr Chair, Mr Speaker, sorry, I would like to remind us that so far, the Leonora facility, for the period that it has been in existence, that is, for just under a year, has achieved so far the following impressive record:

- 65,000 odd, just over 65,000 patient visits
- Ultrasound - 1,840
- X-rays – 1,338, that is information up to the end of last month
- Endoscopic investigation - 87

[Interruption]

My, you're not listening. The hospital which is now celebrating its first anniversary ... the Leonora Diagnostic and Treatment Centre ... coming out of the promise made, and one of the promises that Mr Murray did not know was kept ... probably we need to blow our trumpets more. What I would like to tell you is this, but I would like to tell you this colleagues, that some of the services offered at these facilities, which were promised, are

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sometimes not found in other parts of the health sector. For example, for example, the very effective non-invasive endoscopy, which allows a doctor to literally peep inside of you without having to be too invasive, without having to cut, and then to make a diagnosis.

[Inaudible]

Okay, that was just a storm in a teacup, but it is good to see that you are awake, this time of the day, this early in the morning. Mr Speaker, I can go on to describe the good situations, the satisfactory situations that are unfolding at the other centers, but first of all, let me remind you that we also have a similar center at Suddie, and one at Mahaicony. I would like to tell you that Mahaicony was launched; quietly launched, no big fanfare, but we get the work done; of July 16, last year. Unfortunately, we were not able to get surgical capacity up and running. But tomorrow, tomorrow, after tweaking certain of the civil works and electrical works in the theatre recently, surgery will commence. Tomorrow, seven surgeries, including two ... sectaries, i.e. two operations to remove the diseased gallbladder; this will be happening in Mahaicony.

What I would like to tell you too, to boast a little bit about the facilities offered there, services offered, is that; some of these diagnostic and treatment centers, exactly at the Suddie and the Mahaicony facilities, we have provided not one, but two modern surgical theatres. Why? One

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will be dedicated totally to safe motherhood. Why? Because we did an analysis, and it showed that we might have had some weaknesses in this department. We are remedying them. Remember I spoke about a plan? Remember I spoke about promises? We promised, we are delivering. Not only have we put two theatres there, one dedicated to safe motherhood, because of the foregoing reasons, but because of the distance from our premiere tertiary referral hospital,- that is the Georgetown Public Hospital.

The other centers built at Leonora and Diamond would have only one theatre. Why? Because they are at closer striking distance to the city, should surgical help be needed for our mothers going into some complications of pregnancy. Those are some of the things I want to bring out. That is the profound planning that went on. So when you would have seen that little paragraph in 2006, Mr Murray, colleague, that was the profound promise that the Government made,- the PPP Civic Alliance; and I want to tell you, we continue to keep our promises. And tomorrow, and shortly after, those seven patients, particularly the two who would have undergone in the local community, fairly complicated surgery for the removal of a diseased gallbladder, are going to say applause to the PPP Civic.

So when Mr Murray said that these claims, these good efforts might hardly, could hardly generate confidence

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except in the case of the PPP supporters, PPP/C supporters, I agree with him, because those numbers of supporters are growing and growing and growing. So probably 60% to 70% of the population who will vote, easily, at this point recognize that the PPP/C has indeed kept its promises. This augurs well for us in 2011. We will continue building on that foundation, and this Budget is a way forward for the administration and for the country.

Mr Chair, Mr Speaker, sorry, I would like to continue looking at what we did promise, and how it did turn out. Recognizing, I continue to quote from the said document:

Recognizing that poor vision contributes to poor quality of life, we will, that is the PPP Civic will, ensure a comprehensive prevention, treatment, and eye-care program, including establishment of a modern, developed- country standard eye-care specialized hospital at Port Morant.

Mr Murray, so promised, so done. Only today, at the end of the working day, 100 more patients were screened at the Port Morant Hospital for eye diseases; which means, colleagues, we can applaud ourselves,- the Government, by saying that in the past ten days, since screening started at the facility, some 840 patients have been screened already. That is something to trump about.

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Now, the quotation continues:

Besides the Port Morant Facility, a minimum package of eye care services to all regional hospitals, expansion of eye screening in all schools and communities, and produce more free spectacles to vulnerable schools.

I know time is short, and we are tired. Let me put it in a nutshell. All of these things have been delivered, and continue to be delivered, in an expansive manner. All the Diagnostic and Treatment Centers have eye care facilities to screen eyes, and if that is not enough, we continue. *[Interruption]* The Rotary is good, but the Rotary, in comparison to what is happening, is puny, puny. But we welcome their efforts, and we will work with them. But in the past, that type of effort was dealt with or thought to be the standard. We can say now, thank you Rotarians, but now we have gone on, we are strong; our facility at Port Morant is capable of doing 10,000 surgeries of different types on the eye every year. It is intended that our citizens from Caricom countries and from even the diaspora may very well benefit. I hear my friend Manniram whispering “health tourism”. Think about it.

Mr Speaker, these interventions have been quite costly. It has been a costly exercise. For example, the Port Morant facility, if we were to take a quick count of all that has

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been done, not counting the equipment, might very well be said to cost in the vicinity of G\$300 million; if we were to take into account that not only the hospital buildings had to be made or refashioned, but accommodation had to be created for the Cubans; the Cubans who would be there for the first five or so years.

Let me quote further to bring out the promises that we made and how we try to keep them:

We will reduce the need to seek medical care abroad by transforming the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation into a genuine tertiary care hospital, equal to any in the Caribbean; providing new services including open heart surgery, radiation and cancer therapy, and hip and joint replacement surgery, etc. etc.

Colleagues, you may not want to accept this, but many patients are benefitting, and they too accept that as a promise made, a promise kept.

Further, I am going to fast track it, I won't give you all, quote all the paragraphs from this section ... it says, and I now turn to Page 22:

We need trained staff to deliver quality health care services. We will double the number of doctors, dentists, nurses, medex,

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*CHWs, environmental officers, and other
health workers.*

Colleagues ... so promised, so done. Let us look at training, because I have been emphasizing the creation of plant and equipment; about plants at this hospital, and the sophisticated equipment, but obviously, those alone will not deliver service. You need to have the software. The PPP Civic, and this Mr Murray, is where the visionary approach will come forth, where it will be seen that Dr Ashni Kumar Singh has had a good foundation on which to build his present budget; and that is another reason why you should support it. What is the vision? That we train quality health care workers of all categories in their masses; in large numbers, starting from the time of the commitment, and right on to the near future.

Let's look at nursing. Someone was intimating from across the aisle, that we are not caring for the regions, and that our approach might have been leaving people out. Colleagues, the records don't show that, the records don't show that. I think it was Dr Norton, who intimated that; and incidentally, he made a little aside, and I must touch on it before I get to nursing; where in some newspaper, it was written that eyes would be transplanted. Obviously, that was a journalistic nonsense, because the journalist obviously misquoted or did not understand the technical terms. What I think was meant was the sclera transplant,

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that is transplanting an important part of the eye. Anyone would know that we haven't reached, modern science even, the ability to transplant an eye. But it is sophisticated to transplant the sclera, and I think that is what the journalist got confused about; and my poor friend Norton held on to that; my poor friend the Honorable Member Norton held on to that. But we will forgive him.

Mr Speaker, if we were to look at what has been happening to keep our promise as far as training; not only training, but massive, massive training of health care workers. If we were to look at that, you would see that we are not faring badly; and what you would see, not only are we not faring badly, but we are doing very well. You will see, if you are to peruse the projections in the Budget as presented by Dr Singh, you would see that this trend is continuing, because there are provisions of funds, resources in the Budget now being presented, to continue that trend, to consolidate that trend. I hear a voice saying, "All right", like when you get so much licks, you begging off. But let me hammer in a little more. We have nurses at all three of the schools, New Amsterdam, Georgetown and Linden. Some 430 were inducted last year, and just prior to that, the year before, 250. They come from all regions.

I will not take more of your time or patience to read all of this stuff. But for example, the number of nurses

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graduated by Regions at the New Amsterdam School of Nursing in 2008:

- Region 2, nine;
- Region 5, twenty-one;
- Region 6, thirty-eight;
- Region 9, two.

That amounts to seventy nurses only from that school. Number of current intake of nurses by Region, at the New Amsterdam School of Nursing:

- nine from Region One,
- two nurses from Region Four,
- nine from Region 5,
- sixty from Region 6.

And I can go on, and I can faithfully show you how all of the regions were getting a bite of the cherry.

As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, as a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, the Ministry has gone the extra mile: The government of Guyana actually rents a comfortable, well appointed building from the private sector to house these nursing students coming from the hinterland. Presently, one such facility houses twenty young people, all of them

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from Region 1 - Kaituma, Mabura, Moruca. That is twenty at different stages of preparation, two of whom graduated last Saturday: they finished their studies, and will be going back to Region 1. I am sorry that the Honorable Dr Norton is not here, because I am showing that we promised and we delivered; and not only that, I am pushing or pulling, I am pulling from under his feet the rug on which he stood, saying that we are not giving opportunity all round; and whereby, Dr Norton intimated that the indigenous communities were being neglected. This data which is very available from the nursing schools and from the Ministry of Health shows differently. I will not go through the other regions and the other schools, but trust me, Mr Speaker, similar patterns are noted. For example, nursing; the number of nurses graduated by Region from the Georgetown School: Region 2, Region 3, Region 4, 7, 8, 9, all represented, and so on and so forth. So Mr Speaker, we have been able to make promises and keep them, and at the same time, at the same time, we have been able to observe the principle of equity.

But Mr Speaker and colleagues, we are not doing this just out of the blue, we are doing it as part of a bigger plan, and that bigger plan is being promoted further by this Budget as presented. For example, we are training nurses right across the regions, because we are building hospitals right across the regions. It has become more fashionable now to speak about the Diagnostic Centers,- Diamond,

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Leonora, Suddie, Mahaicony and Port Morant, the National Ophthalmology Center at Port Morant. But let me remind you that the Linden Hospital is undergoing total remaking, total redoing. It is a brand new hospital; the hospital at Lethem ... totally new; the hospital at Mabaruma ... totally new; including for these two hospitals, the equipment, if you were to join the cost of the equipment ... to a cost of just under G\$80 million.

The Speaker: Time is up Honorable Member

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

Hon Bheri Ramsaran: Thank you Mr Prime Minister, Mr Speaker.

Hospitals on the distant periphery are also thought of. Let me tell you that the hospitals at Lethem and Mabaruma are practically completed. The contractor has installed equipment, and he is in the final stages of testing. But frankly speaking, there are challenges. Staffing these facilities will be a challenge, because you need not only nurses, but you need nurses of different categories. So we need to train more and more; as a result, in keeping with our promise, we are committed to continue the training of more nurses. If we are to look at the Budget as presented by Dr Ashni Kumar Singh, you would see

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the provision of the relevant resources under the relative heading in the Budget.

Mr Speaker, as we are on things indigenous and in the hinterland, I would like to point out too, that in the Manifesto, we had made promises regarding certain diseases peculiar to the hinterland, and how we would deal with them.. We promised, and we have delivered. Why I am emphasizing reference to the manifesto, is because we are at an interesting time. We are at the mid-term of the PPP Civic administration, and we are doing a mid-term review. We have been doing this in the media for several months, and these are the things that we are finding.

Diseases peculiar to the hinterland: There are many, however, I want to highlight a few bits on malaria. I am mindful of the fact that Dr Ramsammy is passionate about certain things, and he has a wealth of information to impart on these topics too; so let me just take out a little, small tidbit for you. Distribution of bed nets; specially impregnated bed nets; bed nets given free to certain vulnerable groups of the population in the hinterland; bed nets which are specially treated to repel the vector, that is the mosquito which will bite you and transmit the parasite that causes malaria. Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 – bed nets, hammock nets; bed nets 5,000, almost 6,000; hammock nets, over 2,000, to vulnerable communities, to vulnerable communities spread across the Region.

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This program of course, has been very effective, and what we would like to say is that the results coming out show a drastic reduction in malaria. There are still significant pockets in certain regions, but because of the success caused by the introduction of certain drugs like *cohartion*, for example, and the distribution, free of cost, to the farthest reaches of our vulnerable communities, we have made an impact. That is significant, because malaria is threatening to emerge as a significant public health threat; and incidentally, we are not past the danger point. We are turning it back, but we still have to be proactive, we cannot be complacent. That, colleagues, is another promise made and kept by the Ministry, to address certain diseases peculiar, and which were really absorbing our resources; both in terms of manpower, both in terms of sick leave and downtime, because people could not work. Malaria, I just give you a little bit there.

Mr Speaker, I am happy that Dr Norton has returned, because in recent days we have been having some good communication, short, but good and effective, in the case of trying to solve some problems for him; and together, we were able to do that and help some young people from Bartica, some nurses. What I would like to point out, there are some comments related to snakebites, and I would like to use this as the occasion to take the discussion wider. People could die from snakebite. People in the hinterland do die from snakebite, but incidentally, this also happens on the coast.

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We have, as was promised in the contract, the social contract, and as reflected in the present presentation, the present Budget, as is now before you; we promised to maintain a robust medical evacuation program. And I have been perusing it, that is, the records from our medical evacuation program, from 2006 to the present. And although we shared the concerns about snakebites, and although we know there is a perception that snakebite might be very prevalent in the interior, let me tell you that there are a few markings on my records to show that we did have that amount of snakebites. But it concerns us. What is of more troubling note, is the diseases related to complicated pregnancies, accidents, cave ins, caved in small mines, and so on.

So although we are interested and will continue to deal with the snakebites, and although we are very regretful that a death might occur, this is the exception to the rule: First of all, because snakebites are not very prevalent in our mercy calls. Mercy calls, as I pointed out, are predominantly indigenous or hinterland women with pregnancy complications. And I would like to point out to you that for this year alone, we have done just two flights, two mercy flights, costing just over half a million dollars each.

Let me just take a little peep, a little walk you through, walk you through the medical evacuation list that might have occurred, that we did in 2008. Let us take one of the

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snakebites that came from a place called, it was brought in by ASL, and that cost us \$336,000 to fly in that patient. That's money. But there is provision for it, and what I would like to emphasize is that I am very, very happy that a similar volume of resources has been allocated in this Budget. Promise made, promise continued to be kept. And indigenous health, indigenous health, is on the foreburner. I hope to be able to work closer with Dr Norton, as we have done over the past few days, to solve some problems; some problems, in the hinterland area. And I would like to point out, just as an aside, that Dr Norton's comments, Dr Norton's comments, that the anti-venom is not available, might not be necessarily plain. The anti-venom is not given to all levels of workers, because that itself ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: The Snakebite ... anti-venom for snakebite?

Hon Bheri Ramsaran: The snakebite anti venom. No, I am just moving on, the drug. And the drug might be ... would be made available, but it is erroneous to say that because it is not there at a certain level, we do not have it. You cannot give it to every worker, because they are not equipped to use it. Dr Norton should know better. It is a populist approach, to say it must be there. So you can very well cause anaphylactic shock and kill the patient.

So, Mr Speaker, I would like to, I would like to close by reminding us, by reminding us that in the present Budget;

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if we were to turn now to the present budget as presented by Dr Singh, there is adequate provision, there is adequate provision. I was just doing a review what we promised. We are going to the nitty-gritty now. We have over the past year, Mr Speaker, purchased new ambulances, for the system. Those are proving very effective. Unfortunately, those ambulances suffer very quickly at the hands of the drivers. We need to look at that. But in this budget, we also have provision for ambulances. I would like to thank the Ministry of Finance for that, for that insertion, because we are hoping to build gradually our ambulance authority, or ambulance fleet.

And I can go on and on, in the capital section on detailing capital expenditure. You would see that right across the Regions, there might not be as much money allocated as you might need or want, but there is strategic allocation of those scarce funds. Dr Singh, thank you for this. We thank your team for having entertained the consultations with the health workers, and I would like to close on the issue of consultation, because these figures, these figures, did come out of a process of consultation. The populist approach that you are taking to criticize the government, no consultation, no consultation, is false, because continuously over the year, as the budget cycle, as the budget cycle starts in August; for example, you start preparing in August or even before, different levels of the system are consulted. What is needed, what would you

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like, and in some cases you are told straight up, you can't get that. And we discuss, and before the budget is submitted to the Ministry of Finance, you have to sit down in focus groups, in focus groups, and discuss priorities. That is how it ends up at this; discussion and consultation in the system come us. And you end up with prioritization; and then we end up with what? a crafted plan of priorities. That, Mr Speaker, is what Budget crafting is all about.

I would like, after giving you this little excursion, to congratulate Dr Singh, for having done such a crafted; created such a relevant, needed budget, to build on what we have achieved, and to recommend that you support this budget as needed.

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Ms Cheryl Sampson ...

Ms Cheryl Sampson: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, as I rise to make my contribution to the business of debate, bearing in mind that this is my maiden presentation to this august body, I seek your permission to acknowledge some sentiments extended to me since my arrival here. Mr Speaker, I would publicly extend my gratitude to the representative of the PNC/R-1G list of candidates, who is the leader of the party I represent, as

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well as the leader of this side of the House, for extracting my name from the candidates' list, hence my appointment to this Assembly.

I also wish, Mr Speaker, to acknowledge the warm welcome extended to me by you and all the Members of the National Assembly. I know that we will at times, disagree to agree; nevertheless, I look forward to meaningfully participating in the business of the National Assembly, and it is my hope that my presentation will contribute to the improvement of the lives of the Guyanese people. Thank you again, Sir.

Having gotten that out of the way, allow me to return to the Budget 2009. Mr Speaker, the Honorable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, on Monday, February 9th, took us through 58 pages of a document under the theme "Working Together, Reinforcing Resilience". As I thought of the theme, I began to closely look at the words which made up the theme "Working Together". It makes me think of words like cooperation, collaboration, consultation. Even as these words come to mind, I have heard and read in public statements reported in the media, that stakeholders were not consulted during the present preparation of the 2009 Budget. Mr Speaker, consultation with other agencies has been done in the past. Why the change during preparation of Budget 2009? Aren't we going to keep our stakeholders engaged

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in all aspects of development in Guyana ? Mr Speaker, we must listen to the voice of the people.

Whilst studying the pages of a Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2003 Report, I came across a section entitled *People Power – Civil Society Advocacy Experiences*, and in that section, the words *working together* caught my eye; the same two words that began the theme of this year's budget. I read the following extract:

Campaigners working together have shown that the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. There is strength in numbers. Solidarity amplifies voices, brings diversity, harnesses a breadth of expertise, and increases audience reach.

Mr Speaker, the quotation highlights the importance of engagement, and if that 2003 report recognized that working together was important then, what about in 2009? Mr Speaker, it is our duty to keep the wider society engaged; consultation, I repeat, consultation, is an integral part of good governance.

Mr Speaker, in turning to what Budget 2009 offers the education system, I would like to focus on Technical/Vocational Education, TECHVOC, as it is commonly referred to. As a member of this august body, I thought that I should do some research. I decided to

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take a peep at the updated five-year national education strategic plan, which, according to paragraph 4(3)(a) of the Hon Minister of Finance's Budget presentation, I quote,

... identify as priority quality education, universal secondary education, technical and vocational education.

Mr Speaker, the section devoted to technical and vocational education begins with an honest quote, my apologies. Mr Speaker, the section devoted to technical and vocational education begins with an honest admission, and I quote:

There is a shortage of trained staff in some disciplines, and equipment and physical facilities need to be upgraded.

I hope, Mr Speaker, that this honest admission was recorded in the 2009-2013 strategic plan, because the crafters of this education policy document realized that sometimes the message we receive does not always tell us the true story.

Mr Speaker, when I had a look at the Honorable Minister of Education's contribution to the Budget Debate of 2008, I realized why such an admission would have been made. According the Honorable Member, technical and

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vocational education is going places. I wish to quote from the Hon Minister's 2008 presentation:

The government has provided a large sum of \$60 million in the Budget for the expansion of technical education in our school system. \$60 million. I want to tell you what we are doing. At present, we have ten schools, ten centers with the BCCP program. With the \$60 million, we will expand it to 16 schools. 60 schools will be refurbished, and will be given equipment to run the technical/vocational education.

Mr Speaker, change is inevitable. But there are times when, in order to put things in perspective, we need to remember where we came from, acknowledge where we are, in order to decide where we should go. You see, Mr Speaker, Community High Schools were introduced mainly to cater for the late developers; the ones who, during those days, missed the Secondary Schools Entrance Examination; and if not caught, would have been falling through the slots. During the early implementation stages of the community High School Program, the children were given a second chance to return to junior secondary schools, or they were channeled into a technical institution, or a technical institute.

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In keeping with the changes occurring in the world around us, changes were made within our education system, and the introducing of the Secondary School Reform Program- SSRP, some schools were reorganized to become discrete secondary schools. As part of the curriculum, students of the Community High Schools attended pre-vocational training, at 14 Practical Instruction Centers, PICs, as we call them; and 264 practical instruction departments (PID) which were operated by the Ministry of Education. Mr Speaker, if we are serious about helping those students who are not academically inclined, but are indeed the future of this country, the run- down state of the PICs must be reversed.

I always refer to someone I know, who is trained as a welder, but can only offer the students the theory, because the welding equipment in that institution has not been working. Mr Speaker, only yesterday I learnt that since the 1999 budget, there was an allocation of \$1million for the rehabilitation of the Kingston PIC. Today, ten years later, the Kingston PIC is still in the same run-down state. Mr Speaker, we must upgrade the PICs and PIDs. You see, Sir, if the children develop an interest when young, with the right facilities and the practical instruction, and with the right attitude, they will continue in the field, and so make further use of the training in the technical field. I have been advised that the Basic Competence Certificate Program (BCCP) referred to by the Hon Minister, has been designed to replace the program offered in the

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Community High Schools. Mr Speaker, from information gathered, I am also advised that this is designed to be a good program. Competency-based education is, and I quote:

... an educational system that emphasizes the specifications, learning, and demonstration of those competencies, namely knowledge, skills and behaviors', that are of central importance to a given task, activity or career.

Mr Speaker, this competency-based program should be designed to equip the students with the skills which will make them fit for work. Good for the intention, but something is going wrong with the implementation process. Mr Speaker, we will not get anywhere if the supervisors of the BCCP program themselves do not have the competency base. What are we doing to our children? Honorable Member, please, at this time, the blind is leading the blind. I implore you to have the situation corrected. I am also advised that persons concerned with the implementation of this program have set it up along guidelines of CXC, and that was not the intention. Remember, Honorable Member, that the students we are targeting are not those in the junior and secondary schools. We are talking about schools at the lower level, such as Lodge and BV Community High Schools.

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Honorable Minister, I am interested in finding out the results of the evaluation of this program which was implemented in the ten schools. I ask about the evaluation of the ten, because something may have gone wrong; because nothing has been heard on the other sixteen schools which the Honorable Minister referred to one year ago. If all was well with the ten, the sixteen would have been up and running.

Mr Speaker, I refer to what is happening in the BCCP program, because I would like this august body to understand that at November 2008, the BCCP program had only utilized \$2M of the allocated \$60 million in the 2008 Budget. The \$60 million identified by the Honorable Minister of Education, to expand the BCCP program to the sixteen more schools has not been utilized; at least, not for that purpose. You see, Mr Speaker, I am very interested in what happened to the \$58 million left from last year; for I am certain that all could not have been utilized by this program between November and December 2008. Where is the \$58 million? I notice, that despite the unfulfilled expansion, the Honorable Minister of Finance at paragraph 4.40 in this 2009 presentation, had made another position, I quote:

Further, the Basic Competency Certificate Program will be expanded to schools and practical instruction centers, for which \$50 million has been earmarked, and which will

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*directly improve the lives of more than
2,000 youths for the provision of skills.*

The sixteen schools did not come on stream, but the Honorable Minister of Finance, unlike his colleagues on the government side, was careful this time round, not to give a definite number of schools.

Mr Speaker, the Honorable Minister of Education in his 2008 Budget Debate presentation, also referred to the pilot Skills For Life Program, which was done at the BV Practical Instruction Centre. He boasted of success, I quote:

Sixty persons completed Skills for Life, and they were absorbed in the private sector. We will now proceed to put 200,000 students and out of school youths, 15-24 in particular, in this program here. And what are we doing here, is to provide employment opportunities for our young people who are out there.

Mr Speaker, it is, it would be good for the public to know that the level of training offered in this program. Were the participants exposed to training as semi-skilled operatives, skilled operatives, second year apprentices, senior craftsmen, or craftsmen? The levels of training such should influence the placement of trainees, and one would therefore appreciate what type of private sector

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jobs are available to these young people. You see Sir, in any training institution that is properly conceived, there should be a tracer study done, so that one can keep track of the trainees and know how effective the training was. Such a tracer study would indicate where they are working, how they are performing; and the implementers of the program would then have the opportunity to revise the curriculum if necessary. I hope the Honorable Member would provide the information.

So, after the pilot, what?, I hope the Honorable Minister could let us know how many of the 100,000 students and out of school youths, 15-24 in particular, benefited from the Skills for Life Program since the last budget. Mr Speaker, I also note that the Basic Education Access and Management Support (BEAMS) Civil Works Department, rehabilitated or built eight schools, namely, Lodge Community High School, Charlestown Secondary, North Ruimveldt Multilateral, Bladen Hall Multilateral, Tutorial High School, Aurora Secondary, Bartica Secondary and Diamond Secondary. I am advised that these are fully equipped institutions, with science and technology and workshop equipment. These schools should now provide top of the line pre-vocational training for students who are technically inclined.

But is this the situation? Do we have the full complement of qualified teachers to impart the proper training to students? Are these pieces of state of the art equipment

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being properly utilized? Take Tutorial High School, for example. This school has benefited from one of the workshops provided through the BEAMS program, but the identified operational area is not used for the specified purpose. Tutorial High School has a large student population and the equipment is packed up in an area that is being used as a regular classroom. To crown it all, I am advised that there is no electricity in the area. Mr Speaker, this is the age of technology. The Honorable Minister is only giving lip service to technical education, wasting the nation's money and misleading the people of this country. Mr Speaker, it is also interesting to note that the BEAMS sponsored equipment have not been placed in the senior secondary schools.

Take Queens College for example; this school has a technical vocational department, or industrial arts department, whatever they call it, which is in need of better equipment, but it seems that those responsible for providing same are not particularly interested in that field. Queens College emphasis is on the academic stream; hence there is hardly a chance that someone graduating from that school will end up teaching in the technical/vocational stream. Mr Speaker, QC eventually lost the teacher of that department. The person took up an appointment at a lower level school, where his skills are better needed. This tells you, Hon Minister that the high flyers would not become the teachers in the system.

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Mr Speaker, we have expensive modern technical equipment lying in boxes and crates at Bladen Hall Multilateral School, and the students are trying to learn without equipment, without the required experience. We are making a mockery of technical vocational education. Mr Speaker, if technical vocational education is not properly implemented and managed, the students will not be properly oriented. They will not have the opportunity to make full use of the state of the art equipment lying idle in boxes, and stacked out of the way in the corners of the classrooms. But even as I call for orientation for students, there must be the complement of competent, qualified teachers in the system to teach in the subject area.

Mr Speaker, this is the chicken and egg situation. If the students are not properly oriented, it becomes difficult to get them interested into wanting to become teachers in the technical field. When this happens, the teacher training institution, the Cyril Potter College of Education, will not get interested applicants. Then there is another problem there, because proper facilities to do training are not available at that institution. But I am not focusing on CPCE. I am also advised, Mr Speaker, that the four technical institutes: The Government Technical Institute in Georgetown, NATI, Linden TI, Essequibo TI, as well as the technical institutions such as the Guyana Industrial Training Centre (GITC), and Carnegie School of Home Economics, could do with some upgraded facilities. I do

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hope ...At paragraph 4.1 of the 2009 Budget Presentation, the Honorable Minister of Finance said: and I quote:

In order to ensure greater accessibility for all our young people through alternative pathways, a stronger emphasis on technical and vocational education will be seen in 2009. This has resulted in the allocation of more than \$400 million for the construction of two new technical and vocational training centers in Regions 3 and 5, which will commence later this year. These two institutions will benefit from updated training aids and equipment, while identified as priority, courses at seven other technical institutions, with the current enrollment of over 4,000 will benefit similarly.

Mr Speaker, I welcome this intervention, and I only hope that the proposed upgrading is not mere words in the Budget. The presence of obsolete physical equipment existing in some of the training institutions does not augur well for the practical training required. And Mr Speaker, even as modern equipment is installed, much attention must be paid to how it is being done.

Mr Speaker, the Carnegie School of Home Economics must not be forgotten, since this institution, which is also

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a member of the technical vocational education group, is the only training institution of this type for the hospitality industry. Improvement of its facilities is more needed, especially if Guyana hopes to boost its tourism capability. The graduates of Carnegie will no doubt contribute significantly to the tourism sector, which is in need of trained persons.

Mr Speaker, I am particularly interested in the construction of the new technical and vocational centers earmarked for Regions 3 and 5. Mr Speaker, we should stop putting the cart before the horse. I hope that these two facilities are not just a political promise being fulfilled to the constituency of the PPP/C. I make this remark, because I understand that the location, at least for the Region 5 facility, is still undecided. Will it be the Bath experiment to be exact, or Mahaicony as directed. I am baffled that the location of the project, already approved by the Caribbean Development Bank, is still not settled.

In passing, Mr Speaker, I have read of the Honorable Minister of Education saying the Guyana Technical Vocational Education Program is in tandem with what CARICOM is doing. I would just like to remind the Honorable Minister that Guyana is behind CARICOM. You see, Sir, there was a time when Guyanese personnel advised Governments of CARICOM on technical vocational education. Today, Barbados, Jamaica and

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Trinidad and Tobago are way ahead in terms of the CARICOM Regional Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. True, Guyana and Belize, and some member states of the OECS have now established a National Coordinating and Standard Setting Authority for training in workforce development. Mr Speaker, this is one of the reasons why I ask the question; I question the level of training of students who graduated from the Skills for Life Program.

Mr Speaker, one of the pillars of the CSME is the free movement of persons throughout the region. If Guyana cannot provide employment for its artisans and skilled technicians, then these personnel will have to move to the member states of CARICOM to seek employment. As a consequence, the issue of skills development through technical and vocational education and training must assume greater importance than mere grandiose expressions. Mr Speaker, the truth is, in my investigation, it was revealed that the so-called academic still is not taking technical vocational education seriously. It is relegated to minor roles in timetables. The physical space it should occupy is given to the so-called academic classes. The teachers of the technical/vocational education are eager to work for the first two years; but either leave the profession or leave the academic institution for one considered less academic. And the students continue to be shortchanged.

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The Ministry of Education is not training in sufficient numbers to stem the tide of erosion. Expensive equipment cannot be used properly. Mr Speaker, before I close, I must highlight the fact that, nowhere in the presentation last evening of the Honorable Minister within the Ministry of Education, was technical/vocation education mentioned. Mr Speaker, you can understand my amazement, especially when I discovered that technical/vocational education is the direct responsibility of the Honorable Dr Desrey Fox. If this honorable lady did not see it fit to address technical/vocational education in her budget presentation, then I am quite correct when I say that those responsible for technical/vocational education are only giving lip service.

In closing, Mr Speaker, I ask, is this the way we are positioning our technical/vocational graduates, for competitive participation in the global economy? Honorable Minister, beef up the staffing of the Council of Technical and Vocational Education and Training so that the proper advice can be given to you. If you cannot find the expertise, Sir, ask us on this side of the House; we can help. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Mr Odinga Lumumba ...

12:20H

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Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, first of all I want to congratulate Mde Sampson, Member of Parliament for her first presentation in Parliament; you have lived up to your standard of excellence. I know that you will be a good flag bearer for the PNCR-1G, you are a breath of fresh air and I hope that the rest of the Members on your side will follow your example. *[Interruption:]* Basil is my young brother; Basil is a good person.

Mr Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand before this noble National Assembly as an indication of support for the national Budget of Guyana for the year 2009, as presented by the able and efficient Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, as we all know Member of Parliament Dr Ashni Singh is not known for his theatrics or a flavoured presentation as some of our colleagues on the other side. On the contrary, he is precise, specific and credible.

Mr Speaker, this Budget must be seen in context of our own economic experiences and parallel with our social commitments and our continued desire to further reduce the pangs of past economic pains and social nightmares that were imposed on this country and its people by the then inept, corrupt, political, vindictive and vote-rigging regime of the Corbin led PNC illegitimate, unscrupulous ...

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Mr Speaker, if a foreigner or an ambassador from mars should visit this Chamber during this fiery rhetoric by the brethren on the other side, he or she would believe that the PNC left power under the following conditions: In essence the visitor would give the PNC credit for:

- Potable water for ninety percent to the Guyanese public;
- A new Bridge over the Berbice River;
- Scholarships for over six hundred medical students;
- Over 120,000 houselots for the Guyanese citizens and construction of over 50,000 homes;
- Construction of over seven modern hospitals;
- Construction of hundreds of modern schools;
- Upgrading and modernisation of our security forces;
- Implementation of a flood control mechanism that prevented the flood disaster of 2005 and recurring in 2008, even though the rainfall was twenty-five percent higher than 2005;
- Stabilisation of the Sugar Industry even when our colleagues in the Caribbean such as Jamaica,

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Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados are putting theirs to the torch;

- Stabilisation of the Bauxite Industry even when the world's bauxite industry is once again facing the blade of the world's economy, and even when our brothers in Jamaica is facing one hundred percent closure of their bauxite industry;
- Construction of a multi-billion hospital complex in Linden, the so-called home of the so-called Opposition leader;

Mr Speaker, this is not fantasy island; I am obligated to inform the man from mars that these things were done by this Government and not by the Opposition; and then also inform him or her of the deeds of the Corbin led People's National Congress. It is important that we make this point, because my brothers and sisters on the other side want people to believe that they are so pious, they are so holy and they have done all these nice things - misdeeds.

The PNC regime was known as the most vicious and anti-democratic regime in the Western Hemisphere with comparison to Chile, Papadoc Haiti and the Gary led Grenada. Ninety percent of the population of Guyana was denied access to potable water and was only obliged to drinking potable water when God sent rain. Schools lacked windows, doors, roofs, teachers, books; and the

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few teachers that existed then, had to sell sugar cake in order to boost their salaries.

The Army that the Leader of the Opposition wants to seize power from the democratic elected government were given guns without bullets, trucks without wheels, underpaid staff and yet the architect of vote rigging. The Leader of the Opposition attempted to coerce a small minority security force to participate in vote rigging exercises.

The Health Sector was a disaster; the hospitals lacked medicine, lacked doctors; and the PNC's inefficiency can be noted by the fact that the late President Forbes Burnham, when hospitalized for a throat infection died because of incompetent PNC management at the hospital, who were unable to operate a modern piece of equipment. They killed their own founder leader.

In the area of housing, the PNC was a total disaster. This is proof of an uncaring, inhumane and pathetic regime, with an annual housing budget of G \$750,000 per year. The Hoyte's regime gave out thirty-five house lots in fifteen years, but found time to send dogs and police on the squatters at Sophia; an exercise that they did not draw the objections of PNC's strong man then, Robert Corbin, even though the actions were compared to the activities of the white apartheid regime of South Africa. Remember Soweto, my PNC brothers? That incident will haunt the PNC for the rest of your career.

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Mr Speaker, you must remember that under the PNC regime Guyana broke the Guinness World Record for lines:

- for kerosene oil, butter, candle
- at the Exit Section at the Airport
- at the mad house
- for trucks to bring drinking water
- for bread
- for soap;
- at the mortuary, and
- for the sake of lines - just lines - every time you come out of your door there is a line.

Mr Speaker, it is from this economic doomsday volcano that our Minister of Finance, the President and Cabinet of this country must try to salvage the nation. Our budget must respond to the initial ninety-percent of our revenue that had to go to pay for the foreign debts that were create by the wasteful PNC regime of the past.

Mr Speaker, economic recovery is not instant coffee; it takes time and hard work; and it is even more difficult when the Leader of the Opposition, who is incapable of

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providing leadership for his own flock, is attempting to divert his internal problems by suggesting that the Guyanese public should support murders like that of Bartica, Lusignan and the Lindo Creek.

Mr Speaker, this noble Assembly had to be in shock last night when the Leader of the Opposition flirted with treason by suggesting that our army should or behave like their counterpart in Fiji. What will some folks do just in order to get piece of a government.

Mr Speaker, I must respond to some unscrupulous comments made by members of the opposition.

First, I would like to start with the lies or untruths, and Mr Speaker, you may need to help me with some Parliamentary language that describe the garbage or fumes that came from the mouth of Member of Parliament Mr Khemraj Ramjattan. *[Interruption]*

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order; the Honourable Member may have been able to get away with maligning Mr Corbin, but I am suggesting that he cannot, in this House say that a Member has spewed garbage, and I would ask that he withdraw it. I will rise every time that he makes any attempt with any Member of the Alliance For Change.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, I do not have a problem. Like I said, if the Member of Parliament as an

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Attorney can offer me some better language, I do not have a problem substituting the language. I do not know that *garbage* ... I have heard that in the US Congress, I have heard it in England. If a man is speaking garbage, is that bad language?

The Speaker: Yes, it is not parliamentary language.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: It is not parliamentary language.

The Speaker: No, Sir.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: What can I use? Mr Speaker Can you assist me? *[Interruption]* I acknowledge that it might have been bad language and I am asking for a better language. Can I say *rubbish*?

The Speaker: No, Honourable Member

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: What about *nonsense*? Can I say *waste*? *[Pause]* Alright, I withdraw that; I will find a better term.

Mr Speaker, this gentlemen continues to use this Parliament to spread improper information, and in many ways reminds me (I might get problems with this, but this is in the Bible) of the serpent that tarnished Eve. He also routinely apologises after unloading these baseless statements and I believe that he is guilty of parliamentary misconduct. Mr Speaker, in Guyana, even the blind and

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the deaf knows that Mr Brassington of the American Airlines scam was never hired by this Government to procure the helicopters. As a matter of fact, Mr Brassington wrote several letters attacking the Government for not accepting his proposal. There is a clear ethnic difference between Lex Barker and Brassington. There is a name difference between Barker and Brassington. There is a clear character difference between Lex Barker and Brassington: therefore how can a so-called successful lawyer continue to make these mistakes. Mr Speaker, Member of Parliament Ramjattan wants us to believe that he is the saint of holiness and keeper of the gate to heaven and he cannot come to this Assembly and say that he was never a party to illegal company registration violation; and that he, Mr Ethics, has never represented rapists, child molesters, murderers, drug dealers and political criminals. *[Interruption]*

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: Mr Speaker, I rise again on a point of order that the Honourable Member is imputing improper motives to a Member of this Assembly, and at the beginning of this ... *[Noisy Interruption]* Mr Speaker, would you allow me to advance my point of order? Mr Speaker, am I going to be allowed to advance my point of order?

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: I thank you. Mr Speaker, at the beginning of this Debate, you said that Members

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should refrain from imputing improper motives from each other or of each other. At no time during Mr Ramjattan's speech did he make any statements ... [*Interruption: 'You were not here' "I was here"*] [*Noisy Interruption*]

The Speaker: Kindly allow Mr Trotman, please.

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: ... about the character, so-called or otherwise of the Government ... [*Interruption*]

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Yes, he attacked the Government all night.

The Speaker: Allow Mr Trotman, please.

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: ... or any Member of the House, and I am saying on a point of order that according to Standing Order No. 41 that the Honourable Member is by implication, ascribing improper motives and conduct to a Member of this House, and I am asking you to so withdraw it.

The Speaker: Well, Honourable Member Mr Lumumba, nothing is wrong with a lawyer representing people charged with any of those ... that you mentioned.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: I am just pointing out that he does; I am not saying that he is wrong; I am just saying that that is his job and that he has a history of doing it.

The Speaker: Once you acknowledge that.

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Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Yes, I am not saying that he is wrong for carrying out his profession, I just want to emphasize that he is representing rapists, child molesters, murderers, drug dealers and political criminals. That is all I am saying. I am not telling the man that he must not do it, Sir.

Mr Speaker, it is your duty to tell Members of Parliament who have glass houses that they should not throw stones or boulders that would crack their roofs. They want to throw a stone, and when it is time for boulders, they suddenly jump up and say *nah, enough is enough*. It cannot be one-sided; you cannot want to come here and condemn the government and talk about ethics and everything else and when people respond to it there is a problem.

Mr Speaker, I am in my right to question the morality of any Member of Parliament who continues to spread untruths, who continues to behave as if this Chamber is a place to spread vindictiveness and employ political propaganda.

Mr Speaker, this is a House of leadership; this is a place to develop our county and therefore petty and misleading comments must stop or there will be an eye for eye or a tooth for a tooth.

Mr Speaker, Members like Member of Parliament Mr Khemraj Ramjattan should be more discreet in his

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criticisms of this Government, which I am part of. We must all object to untruths before this House. I find it amazing that Mr Ramjattan who is the leader of the AFC or one who is ... in this National Assembly, because of Mr Raphael Trotman and black votes will now call for the disenfranchisement of Afro Guyanese. *[Interruption]*

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: I do have to rise again, Mr Speaker.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: I have to finish my point; you do not know what I am going to say ...

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I believe that he is now imputing racism ... because he said that Mr Ramjattan came here on black votes and is now suggesting that Indians ... and that is an imputation of racism and ...

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, I am not finished with my point. He has to allow me to finish my point

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: ... unless he is prepared to support it ...

The Speaker: Let me hear Mr Trotman out, please.

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: Mr Speaker, it is a very serious and damning statement to Mr Ramjattan especially in his absence.

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Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Who told him to be absent?
Who told him not to come? [*Noisy Interruption*]

The Speaker: Honourable Members, please.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: He is getting pay and he did not come.

The Speaker: What is wrong?

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: There is now the introduction of racism.

The Speaker: What would be wrong if it is alleged that a political party gets votes from one section of the population? I do not. I know that is spoken about very often outside on the road, and many Members of Parliament say that.

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: Mr Speaker, if it is your opinion that it is proper.

The Speaker: I am not too sure about that.

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: I just wish to say that it is a very, very sad night for this Assembly.

The Speaker: Well, Honourable Member, I really do not know what you mean by that.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, can I continue?

The Speaker: Proceed, Honourable Member ...

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, Mr Ramjattan received four votes in the area of his birth, and I am saying that he is here because of black votes received to him by Mr Trotman.

Mr Ramjattan has called for the elimination of eight ministries and I find it interesting that he has not called for the elimination of eight sugar estates or DDL or anything else. Mr Ramjattan wants to send home Afro Guyanese. That is what I honestly believe. If Mr Trotman wants to endorse that I cannot stop him and the PNCR-IG is guilty of that by silence. Mr Ramjattan's pronouncement about the Public Service Ministry has some serious ethnic implications. Mr Ramjattan must know that eighty percent of the Public Servants are Afro Guyanese and just his position can be interpreted as racist or at a minimum immature.

Mr Speaker, I must only assume that the AFC or Mr Ramjattan or both is now the republican party of Guyana on this issue on the question of elimination of State employment, therefore endorsing sending home people of colour. Mr Speaker, it would be a sad day in Guyana to see my friend Ramjattan as an agent of racism. I am not accusing him of being a racist. I said that it would be a sad day if he is being interpreted as an agent of racism. But I do not have to believe Mr Ramjattan's position; and

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as I said earlier, his position is supported by silence of the PNCR-1G.

Mr Speaker, Mr Corbin the Leader of the Opposition, in his prolonged verbal abuse of the Government attempted to accuse the Government of discrimination. I find this charge amazing, ridiculous and without evidence. On the contrary, I am sure that we can find recorded information to show that the PNC as a Government violated the rights of Indo Guyanese by denying them access to the most fundamental assets of life, which is the right to have their votes counted.

In addition, what about the PNC's over-excesses as it relates to the response to the Amerindian Uprising? These are issues that we must raise and we must discuss it freely. Discrimination is not one-sided.

Mr Speaker, the violent anti-intellectual position of the PNC is characterised by the slaughter of Guyana's former intellectual Walter Rodney and the wanton destruction of the black middle class. Mr Speaker, were these acts democratic or based on discrimination and political vindictiveness? If the PNCR-1G wants to make claims of discrimination, show us the beast. Where is the beast?

Mr Speaker, let us start with the source of power in this country:

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- The President of Guyana is an Indo Guyanese and accepted in Linden more than Mr Corbin, who is from that area.
- Mr Corbin has been a Minister in the past government for several years, yet you cannot find a bridge that he ever built in Linden; a drain he ever dug in Linden; a tree he ever planted in Linden - not even a carrion crow tree. The only thing Mr Corbin has ever collected was Aubrey Norton and Vincent Alexander youth land which is now his farm.
- President Jagdeo has poured millions of dollars in bauxite in Linden, at the time when bauxite firms around the world were being shut down.
- President Jagdeo and the PPP/C have allocated \$2 billion in Region 10 and to be specific \$1.7 billion in Linden.
- The most powerful person in the Ministry is not the Minister, it is the Permanent Secretary. It is the Permanent Secretary who runs things. There are eight African Guyanese Permanent Secretaries in this Government. Where is the discrimination? The PSs must do their work.
- Furthermore, let us look at the Ministers in this Government who are non-Indians:

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Ms Jennifer Westford, Public Service Minister.

Ask Mr Patrick Yarde if she is anti-black and if she is not fair; ask the workers and recipients of scholarships including children of Members of Parliament on the other side.

- Prime Minister Samuel Hinds is responsible for mining gold, diamond, bauxite and uranium.

Outside of Forestry, Rice and Sugar, the mining industry represents our strength. The last time I checked, the Prime Minister was Afro Guyanese.

The opposition is obviously being colour blind. Prime Minister, will you please stand or at least raise your hand so that we can ensure that your colour has not changed.

- To the big contracts such as roads, seawalls, bridges, major infrastructures, billions and billions of dollars that were spent on dozens and dozens of contracts, and Afro Guyanese contractors have had their fair share.

The above mentioned is controlled by the Minister of Public Works, Mr *No-Nonsense* Robeson Benn.

- When people look at our country, the first thing they observe is our foreign policy and our Minister

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of Foreign Affairs is an Amerindian, the Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett.

Mr Speaker, again, I ask the Opposition, where is the beast? Where is the cry of discrimination?

- Our Army and Police are over ninety percent Afro Guyanese and at all levels including the Chief-of-Staff and the Commissioner of Police; and also the Minister of Home Affairs.

Please, Mr Corbin, where is the discrimination? Mr Speaker, the Army and the Police are led by men of dignity and not political appointments.

Mr Speaker, to my disappointment, Mr Corbin has implied that blood will flow like Lindo Creek, Bartica and Lusignan massacres. The last time Mr Corbin made this remark, blood spread in Guyana. Is this Mr Corbin's response to a democratically elected Government? Mr Corbin, wash your hands but not like Pontius Pilate.

Mr Corbin spoke at length about Local Government Elections; Mr Corbin was in charge of that Ministry and as far as I recall, he never held elections.

In concluding, Mr Speaker, it is important to note that unlike America, China, France, South Korea and Japan, where millions of jobs have been lost and where millions have lost their homes, our country remains stable. Our Sugar Industry has stabilised; our Bauxite Industry is still

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intact. Government has not retrenched a single person. The Banks are not seizing homes. Mr Speaker, this is good governance and confidence in the economy by the people as a whole and the private sector. This is an efficient Government

Mr Speaker, in 2005, we had tremendous problems with flood, yet we rose to the challenge. I admit, we were caught napping, but we did not have a Katrina syndrome. I make this point, because in 2008, rainfall was twenty-five percent higher than 2005, yet flooding was minimised and this was because of efficient management and sound planning.

Billions and billions were spent in drainage and irrigation and today we all have benefitted from this well-spent expenditure.

Mr Speaker, I close with the same hope and aspiration of all Guyanese, and I really believe that one day we will all meet on a mountain of peace and unity; and I again thank the Minister for a well crafted Budget. Thank you.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Ms Africo Selman ...

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Ms Africo Selman: I rise to make my contribution on the 2009 Budget, presented by the Hon Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh. Unfortunately the theme “Working Together, Reinforcing Resilience” is not new. The President in his inaugural address to the 9th Parliament said:

I have already signaled my intention to join forces with the political opposition to find innovative ways to work together to solve our problems This will be pursued within the enhanced framework for political cooperation, encompassing the principle of increased meaningful contact, the identification and implementation of an agreed agenda of national issues, and greater scope for the participation of civil society in the decision making process.

Regrettably, nothing happened after this pronouncement. It took two years and two massacres for stakeholders to be summoned for the first time to discuss a national issue. Guyanese expectations were dashed to the ground. After two and a half years, the budget now suggests that the government may be finally willing to embrace political participation, and inclusion of all stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs. Only time will reveal how serious the

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government is this time, but I am willing to give the Minister the benefit of the doubt.

The realities of Guyana indicate that there is continued high unemployment. Workers are dissatisfied with their working conditions and their salaries, as illustrated by the strike of the Air Traffic Controllers, approximately two weeks ago. I hope that the issues of these workers have been amicably resolved, and that they have been given the 10% increase, after the promised consultation by the President.

Mr Speaker, a budget should seek to address challenges facing society. This budget has failed to do that. The Minister has continued the unfortunate practice of listing projects and their price tag. Yes, there are many big projects outlined in the budget, the benefits of which will perhaps trickle down to everyone in the long run, but fail to deal with the immediate problems of the average citizens. After boasting of the biggest budget ever, there is nothing to provide immediate relief. Given their depressed state, everyone expected that the budget would have provided some relief for the workers; for example, tax concessions on mortgages, reduction of the Value Added Tax, and raising of the Income Tax threshold. The government has again disappointed them.

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Youth: Mr Speaker, it is well established that youths are affected by all policies and programs, be it health, education, housing and water, culture, sports, etc. The Minister of Finance, in presenting the 2008 Budget presentation said, and I quote:

Madame Speaker, it is our duty to ensure that their future is secure, and that our young people are fully engaged in their communities and the development of their country, and are empowered to lead the generations that follow.

Mr Speaker, leadership is based on a vision articulated, understood and made by an individual; an entire community participation, marked by creativity and innovation. Leadership is a case of planting a seed and nurture it in the kind of environment that will enable it to germinate and grow and be productive and bountiful. The government does not appear to be committed to making this a reality in the immediate future; having regard to the fact that, after two and a half years of the renewed mandate, there is no national comprehensive youth policy which identifies the focal areas for youth participation empowerment. In this context, to speak of working together is certainly a misnomer.

Mr Speaker, a number of the nation's youth between the ages of 15-24 years ... are prominently in Guyana's crime statistics, either as victims or perpetrators. Many of them

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are unattached and deemed to be at risk. When I speak of unattached, I refer to young persons who leave school without the requisite qualifications to continue into higher education or employment; and who are neither actively engaged in positive activities, nor linked to any form of uplifting social groups, and are sometimes involved in illegal and destructive activities. Hence the most fundamental problem faced by these young people today is the acquisition of skills for the employment market.

We, the PNCR, recognize that as the unemployment rate soars the government in collaboration with non-governmental and youth circle organizations have to find effective measures to tackle the problem under the guidance of a comprehensive national youth policy. In the absence of such a policy, the many grandiose projects and programs for youths in the 2009 Budget, and the expenditure allocated to them represents an ad hoc approach to development, without any basis for evaluating progress. There is no framework for rolling out the promises that the government made to young people in the 2006 elections campaign, and in their 2006 manifesto, which the Minister of Finance referred to in his Budget speech, when he spoke of fulfilling the contract with the people. It would be good to remind him of what was stated in that Manifesto. In the PPP/C 2006 Manifesto, young people were promised the following:

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We will expand on the special programs and facilities for youth, to ensure their well being and involvement. Over the next five years, we intend to spend in excess of \$1.5 million to train 25,000 young people with various skills.

It would be useful for the government to tell us at this juncture how many young people have so far benefited from these training programs. If we are to rely on the figures given by Minister Nadir on Tuesday in this Parliament, then only 10% has been achieved in relation to the target. The Manifesto also promised, and I quote:

... to revise the national youth policy, the reorganization of the National Youth Commission, with more active regional affiliates.

All that has been achieved so far are talks about a national youth policy, but none so far produced. A few youth officers in various regions, without policy guidelines, are insufficient to fill this void. The implementation of the national youth policy would represent the Government's genuine commitment to place on the agenda, issues, programs and projects relating to youth, and thereby expecting to deliver on their promises.

The 2009 Budget, and the presentation by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, and the Parliamentary

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Secretary in this Budget debate, gives no assurance of this commitment.

Mr Speaker, the Budget speaks of reinforcing resilience, but what is the government doing to achieve this objective? The government has managed to destroy a sense of nationhood that was so much a part of the Guyanese society. For example, the Minister of Education should tell us whether national songs are still a part of the school curriculum. National songs inspire a sense of pride in nationhood, a sense of citizenship, commitment to and love for country. Today, there is very little love for country, and this is compounded by the existence of high unemployment and underemployment. Consequently, young people feel comfortable to migrate to what they consider greener pastures. For many of them, it is their only hope of survival. The government must therefore design policies that would retain our skilled human resources. The 2009 Budget and its projections are wholly inadequate to address this issue.

Mr Speaker, I must commend the government for recognizing the importance of youth training centers, and making budgetary allocations for the continued upgrading of youth training centers at Kuru Kuru, Sophia and the New Opportunity Corps. It is noted on page 39, 4.41 of the Budget 2009, and I quote:

In order to ensure greater accessibility for all of our young people to alternative

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facilities, a stronger emphasis on technical and vocational education will be seen in 2009. This has resulted in the allocation of more than \$400 million for the construction of the two new technical and vocational training centers in Regions 3 and 5, which will commence later this year. These two institutions will benefit from updated training aids and equipment, while identifying priority courses, especially in a technical institution, with a current enrollment of over 4,000 will benefit similarly.

While this is commendable, a stronger emphasis on technical and vocational education will not necessarily ensure greater accessibility for all of our young people. What happens to those young people who are challenged and others who, through no fault of theirs, are falling through the cracks? What about the thousands of youths who are idle in all the villages on the coastlands?

It is noted that budgetary allocations have been made for correctional institutions such as the New Opportunity Corps. The government does this every year. What is always omitted is the mechanism to monitor the activities and behavior of the inmates after they leave those institutions. This is one way of evaluating the performance of these institutions, and whether the nation

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has received value for money spent. It is hoped that measures would also be put in place to assist these youths in finding jobs and meaningful employment after they leave the New Opportunity Corps.

Mr Speaker, under the PNC administration, sport and recreation were front burner government concerns. During that period, here existed many vibrant sports associations; and inter-school sport competitions were well established, and eagerly anticipated by all schoolchildren. Some secondary school students, with whom I have been speaking recently, advised that sports in most schools is limited to a single period around the National School Sports competition. No wonder so many of our young people are finding time for less constructive activities. Games should be a part of every school curriculum, and the Ministry of Education must take note.

Guyana was a regional power in sports, such as boxing, squash, chess, football, cricket, athletics and table tennis. This was a time when Guyana had many recognized sports heroes. This is a nation that has won Olympic and Commonwealth medals. Today, we are a shadow of our former selves. Most national teams leaving these shores get absolutely no financial support from the National Sports Commission; the corollary of which is that, there exists a situation where only teams or athletes who can find it, can participate in regional and international events. In many cases, the brunt of the expenses for

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junior or juvenile athletes, rest with parents who have to make tremendous sacrifices to ensure that the talents of their sons and daughters are recognized. Would the Minister of Finance say whether there are any provisions in the 2009 budget to assist these young people with talent? Unless this is done, despite all the huge expenditure, many of our promising sportsmen and women may never achieve their optimum potential or international recognition. Mr Speaker, I recommend that the government makes a special allocation for this purpose, and also provide increased financial support to sports associations and federations.

What is even more distressing is to see young athletes walking the streets, begging for funding in order to attend regional meetings. It makes one wonder, exactly what is done with the millions allocated annually for sports in the national budget. Mr Speaker, there is urgent need for a national sports policy. Unfortunately, there is none. All we have heard is talk of such a policy. Such talk is familiar, but given the track record of unfilled promises, one has to wait and see. Yes, there is a draft national sports policy. It has taken the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, two and a half years to draft a national sports policy. Is it going to take another two and a half years for its completion? I hope not. They will then probably boast of this achievement at the 2011 elections campaign.

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A national sports policy should promote the following objectives:

- To give our young people the opportunity to keep fit, focused and active in an organized way;
- Sports as a mechanism to develop leadership and participation in the community;
- Building inclusive and harmonious communities through sports;
- To foster development;
- To create career opportunities;
- To maximize the economic potential of sports.

It is instructive, Mr Speaker, that these objectives were identified at the first meeting of the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sports on 2nd June, 2005 in Canada. One can conclude, therefore, that sports constitute an important activity that can engender competitiveness, discipline, racial cohesion and community consciousness, leadership, good health, and physical fitness. The People's National Congress Reform wishes to see the expending of more funds for the promotion of sports in communities throughout Guyana. While conscious of the importance of sports in urban centers, we believe that the provision of funds, facilities, coaching services and other areas of assistance will yield untold benefits to rural and

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hinterland areas which would create a greater sense of community consciousness that is necessary for nation building.

Dr Frank Anthony boasted of the construction of two squash courts. Squash is a game limited to very few players in Georgetown, due to the costly nature of construction of the courts. What can two squash courts do to develop sports if it is not part of a general program aimed at the development of all young people? The Minister has made no mention of the construction of basketball, lawn tennis or volleyball courts, all of which would provide for a wider involvement of many more youths than the game of squash. One would expect that the first priority of the Minister would be to involve the largest amount of youths for the funds available; but Mr Speaker, that is the kind of difficulties which arise when we start any activity without a policy or a plan. Simply put, in the area of sport, there seems to be an absence of any coherence.

Mr Speaker, we believe that actions speak louder than words. We believe that this administration should provide an enabling environment for promotion of all sports. There are several grounds throughout Guyana that are abandoned and undeveloped. Mr Speaker, these grounds should be developed, and used as a hub of all sporting, cultural and civic activities in every community. The government should invite private initiatives for the

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development of these sporting and recreational activities. Some time ago, I understand, a group of civic-minded Guyanese had approached the relevant authorities in Essequibo for the use of the ground at Charity to be developed by them. But their request was turned down. This should not have happened, as there are many civic-minded Guyanese who are prepared to support the government in these initiatives to develop communal and recreational facilities for all Guyanese. Even our senior citizens will be well served if they have somewhere to go in their communities for recreation, exercise and leisure.

Mr Speaker, on the issue of playgrounds, there has been a very disturbing, if not ominous development over the past week. The secretary of the Guyana Softball Cricket Association received a written notice from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, for the said association to vacate the ground they occupy on Carifesta Avenue on or before 30 April 2009. The letter concludes, and I quote:

Note that your failure to comply with this notice will leave no alternative but to take such steps as we consider necessary to forcefully dispossess your association from the said ground.

Mr Speaker, is this what is meant by working together in the government's view? It is astonishing, Mr Speaker, that this association, which has occupied this ground for

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nearly twenty-five years; the premiere softball association in Guyana, recognized by the National Sports Commission and voted Association of the Year in 1991, should be served with a notice threatening the use of force, after the Association has done considerable work on this ground, and has built all the facilities to facilitate its use by players and the public at large, including a large pavilion, commentators' booth, concrete driveway and bridge, and the fence around the ground. The People's National Congress Reform strongly condemns the threatened use of force to remove an association which has a formal contract with the Government of Guyana and the Government Technical Institute to occupy this ground. This action is discriminatory, disturbing and disgraceful, and I hope the relevant minister will review his position on this matter, and that better sense will prevail. Such actions do not bode well for the future of sports in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, the theme of this budget bears no relationship to the Budget and the reality of Guyana; but taking the Minister at his word, I would like to conclude with a few recommendations:

1. Introduction of voluntary national service
2. Create a number of businesses ... well, I am repeating it ... create a number of business improvement interests by providing a range of incentives to companies and organizations that

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are willing to set up business or offices in high crime areas. The companies that would benefit most would be those willing to invest in resources, particularly youths, in terms of employment, education, training and welfare.

- 3 Develop national parenting and counseling strategies

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Mr Neendkumar ...

Mr Neendkumar: Mr Speaker, Honorable Members of this House, I rise to support the Budget 2009, as presented by Hon Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Kumar Singh. Further, let me compliment him and his competent staff for a job well done. Mr Speaker, I listened carefully to the Honorable Member, who spoke just now, but, apparently she did not listen to the Hon Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports who spoke about the sports policy. He did not ... She did not know also, that a youth policy was laid in this Parliament, and we are presently looking at how to improve the youth policy with help from UNICEF.

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Mr Speaker, it cannot be denied that this world is experiencing the worst ever financial crisis, a situation that we never thought would happen in our lifetime. Hence, the theme of this year's, 2009 Budget is most appropriate, "Working Together, Reinforcing Resilience".

Mr Speaker, it is customary, it is traditional, that during the budget debate, we discuss the year under review and projections for the year under consideration. Hence, let me congratulate the Government, and particularly our rice farmers, for in the year 2008, they produced 329,574 tons of rice, an increase of 10.5% and this production has almost tripled the production of rice from the year 1992, when the PNCR was last in office. Is this not a tremendous achievement?

Mr Speaker, the facts out of the Bauxite Industry revealed that Linmine made a profit of US\$10 million during 2008. This performance is showing that after 30 years, this company is now profitable. Again, in May 1992, former president Desmond Hoyte had threatened to close down Linmine operations. Today the Opposition is accusing the Government of being anti-working class. Let me remind this Honorable House that these same bauxite workers were beaten and tear-gassed by the PNC. The PNC whipped the workers and put their Trade Union leaders in helicopters, and threatened to throw them in the Demerara River. Mr Abel, from Kwakwani, who is still around today, was one of the very active Trade Unionists

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at that time who was very vocal against the PNC's harassment of Bauxite workers.

Mr Speaker, the Honorable Member Mr Khemraj Ramjattan remembered then, that he came out of the ranks of the PYO, and he was a PPP former member; but I am extremely worried that the Honorable Member forgets his friends and colleagues who he grew up with, and who still see him as a friend. Imagine, he stood over there, and said that this country is in a permanent crisis. He called on the government to recruit bright young people, and he attempted to explain that the Government does not have brilliant young people.

Mr Speaker, it is this PPP/C Government that produced two of the youngest Finance Ministers in this country. Our President Bharat Jagdeo was very young when he was appointed Finance Minister. And look at the brilliant Dr Ashni Singh. Is your vision blurred? You are not seeing that on the government benches, we have Minister Irfaan Ali, a young man; a brilliant young doctor in Dr Frank Anthony, and a brilliant woman with beauty and brains, Priya Manickchand. And you are not recognizing our young Foreign Minister, Caroline Rodrigues. Look at the back bench, to my left, is a brilliant young legal luminary Anil Nandlall. Look also to my right, at the young journalist Steve Ninvalle. And our young RPA General Secretary, Dharamkumar Seeraj. Mr Speaker, I would like to remind my friend Mr Ramjattan that he was

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one of the brilliant young men of the PPP/C who were appointed to this House by our Founder Leader, the Father of the Nation, Dr Cheddi Jagan.

So, Mr Speaker, on this side of the House, we have a blend of youth and experience. We are fully alert to continue the work of government and improve the lives of our people for another ten decades ... *[Interruption]* Mr Speaker, whilst today the world is experiencing a serious economic and financial crisis, all Guyanese are aware of the PNC's paramouncy of Party, poverty, nakedness and corruption. The victims of the Globe Trust Fraud are still without any compensation. Hundreds of poor Guyanese were robbed and are still begging the PPP/C to help them recover from the massive fraud. Further, further, the GAIBANK corruption is also vivid in our memory, and I understand that the Honorable Minister Nadir is looking at the GAIBANK fraud next. Mr Speaker, while under the PNC we had fraud, corruption and closure of banks, under the PPP/C we are witnessing the emergence of more banks - Citizens Bank, Demerara Bank and, Mr Speaker, the Republic Bank which reported a profit in the year 2008. This bank's net profit after theft was reported to be some \$485 million. Some \$345 million were paid in taxes to the government.

Mr Speaker, the Opposition talked about the Government's non-involvement of the private sector. Mr Speaker, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Banks

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DIH, Mr Clifford Reis, told the 53rd Shareholder's meeting that his company recorded the largest profit margin of \$1.42 billion dollars. He was proud to mention that this was the first time in history that the company crossed the billion dollar mark. Is this not an achievement? Mr Reis announced that this company will be drilling a new well this year to complement the ones in existence. Mr Reis informed his shareholders that the company will be relocating the Arawak Steak House, where the ambience will be more conducive for families. Further, Guyanese are awaiting the spectacular OMG Sports Bar. Mr Reis said, and I quote:

Even though future growth and uncertainties in the socio-economic and other conditions exist, we remain committed to be optimistic, proactive, and to pursue a vigorous approach towards maintaining and improving the performance of the business for the benefit of all stakeholders.

This is happening in our Region,- Region 4. Mr Speaker, Mr Reis warned of a revelation of the confidence that the private sector has in this country and its administration.

Bauxite: Mr Speaker, in Guyana, there is approximately 700 million tons of reserves in the ground, with an estimated value of over US\$50 billion, and this is a clear indication that the prospects for the bauxite industry looks good. China's Bosai Minerals of the bauxite operations

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at Linden, and Russia's Rusal of the AMC's operations have both increased their pool of reserves, and Guyana is far closer to their North American customers. Guyana is the top producer of calcined bauxite. This country's premium quality ore will remain very attractive to the users. It is estimated that Guyana has 125 million tonnes of this high quality calcined grade reserves. Both Bosai and Rusal are giants in their field. The blockbuster US\$1 billion agreement, signed in November 2008 between Bosai and the Guyana Government on the establishment of an aluminum plant, pending the result of a feasibility study to be completed by Bosai by June this year is certainly encouraging.

Mr Speaker, the PPP/C Government was responsible for the 12 million Euro or \$2.2 Billion Linden Economic Advancement Program (LEAP), which my colleague spoke about earlier. LEAP has set a target of creating 1,700 jobs, and attracting new investment to revive the ailing Linden economy, which was destroyed by the PNC. Mr Speaker, I am happy to report here that, the leadership of LEAP, in mid 2007, reported that investment to the tune of millions of US dollars was attracted to the community, and 700 jobs were created. Is this not development?

Mr Speaker, whilst the Guyana National Stadium at Providence was being constructed, the doom and gloom critics were writing and speaking against completion.

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Today, I am happy to report that the National Stadium is rated as one of the best Test cricket venues in the world, in the world. The People's National Congress, when they were in government, they closed down all the community centers; all they did during that time was to hold dances and bushes and snakes were in them. Bubble sessions were held. This PPP/C resurrect them, and make them what they are today.

Mr Speaker, I would like to let my colleagues in the Honorable House know that the National Sports Commission and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, represents and support all the people of this country. With respect to Region 7, we did not only help Bartica, but we are helping the people in Upper Mazaruni. We visited, organized games and distributed sports equipment. Our annual support to the Bartica Regatta is in the public domain; they know what we are doing. Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport was responsible for hosting and financing the interior football team that participated in the last highly successful Kashif and Shanghai Football Tournament. Earlier, Mr Vieira alluded that the stadium is a white elephant... Mr Speaker, I would like to remind this House that over 15,000 spectators attended the last Kashif and Shanghai finals at the stadium on New Year's Day, 2009. Hundreds of Berbicians drove across the Berbice Bridge, enjoyed the game, and returned to their homes fully upbeat. Mr Speaker, never before we saw such a big

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crowd at a football match in Guyana. We must recognize, Sir that the crowd at that match went to see two local clubs play. Better days are coming with international matches!

Mr Speaker, with Dr Frank Anthony at the helm of the Ministry, we have good innovations in our sports calendar. The Legacy Run which started in 2007, to welcome 2007 World Cup matches at the stadium: It must be noted that the Run attracted 1,800 participants in 2008. I am proud to say that on both days the Honorable Member Dr George Norton was among the most notable participants. Our Challenge Day activities around the country were a great success. However, the activities at the stadium attracted more than 1,000 participants. Our various sports programs in the Region accepted 8,547 participants; several Members of the House, of this House, graced those activities and made remarks.
[Inaudible]

This day's activity attracted approximately 4,500 students. Mr Speaker the year 2008 was indeed a spectacular year for sports in the Caribbean and Guyana. Jamaica at the top of the Caribbean, recorded gold medals at the Olympic Games in China. We are indeed proud of Usain Bolt. And I am sure that all Guyanese, including my colleagues over there, must be beaming with even greater pride over the great achievements of our golden boy, Shivnarine Chandrapaul, the number one Test

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batsman in the world. The Tiger should be arriving home on the 16 March and I am calling on all Guyanese to turn out and line the East Bank Public road. Let us give him a spectacular welcome ... one of our heroes who is flying the Golden Arrowhead sky-high.

Mr Speaker, I want to join with Dr Frank Anthony, and invite all Members of this House to be at the Stadium on Friday 20 March, and Saturday 22 March. Let us fill the stadium and rally behind our West Indian Cricket team who will be in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, last year I promised to establish regional sports committees in all ten regions. I must report that we were able to establish seven regional sports committees.

Mr Speaker, I promised last year that we will work more systematically in schools. I am proud to report that the Minister of Education, the Honorable Shaik Baksh, and our Minister, Dr Frank Anthony, held meetings and established a functioning committee that is working to have more sports activities in schools.

Mr Speaker, I would like to invite all Members to be at the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall on Sunday, this Sunday, at twelve noon, to witness an inaugural secondary school basketball finals, and today, after 25 years, we had a cricket match being played between QC and Berbice High by none other than former West Indies Vice Captain, former West Indies coach, former West Indies

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all rounder Roger Harper. Doesn't that tell you what the PPP/C Government is putting towards sport, that we had the Honorable Prime Minister, the Honorable Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, and both Ministers in the Ministry of Education present at that activity? That is only today this happened; and it happened at the Stadium, which you all say is a white elephant.

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 activity. A disciplined nation is a nation that has high moral standards, which will help us to achieve great success. Mr Speaker, \$20.4 billion will be spent on education this year. The people, particularly the students in Region 4, will be the biggest beneficiaries from this massive investment; and as a geographic entity of Region 4, I am extremely happy.

Mr Speaker, the Opposition benches, particularly some of the top leaders, some of the top leaders rant and rave about the government's help to single parents. Those who are the cause of several mothers being single parents must live up to their responsibilities. I know them. Some of those children, mothers and stepfathers, have complained bitterly to me, about the neglect, by some of the same who are ranting and raving today about the Government efforts. Mr Speaker...*[Interruption]*

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Robeson Benn, my Honorable friend, is a decent married man, who is looking after his children and family. He is not a single-parent, he is a decent married man. You must find out who got children all over the place.

Mr Speaker, the people in Region 4, in many communities welcome the idea to build the Hope Canal. It is our people's strong hope that our government will not be diverted by unfounded criticism, and will make this activity a reality, so that we could take better care of people during the heavy rainfall.

Mr Speaker, allow me to once more, congratulate the Honorable Minister of Finance, Dr Ashni Singh, and his staff, and urge all Members of this House to let us work together for a better Guyana. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Dr John Austin ...

Dr John Austin: Mr Speaker, Members of the PPP/C have an obsession with talking of the time when Guyana experienced difficulties of various forms under the PNC. If these persons want to be honest, they would realize that the PPP; if the PPP was in power during those times, Guyana would have been in a worse condition. My reasons for saying so are as follows:

The PPP publicly championed communism and socialism, while the PNC was a socialist party. Those who are familiar with the ideologies of communism and socialism would realize that a communist government would have had more draconian policies than a socialist government. The Americans who conducted a campaign of financial and other pressures against the socialist aspirations of the PNC would have done the same or worse, for the aspirations of a communist government. Hence, this country would have fared worse if PPP was in power.

The PPP criticized many policies of the PNC Government when they were in opposition. Now they do the same and they do worse. Some persons say that the PNC are worse when they were in Government. However, there are many Guyanese who say that the PPP is worse than when the PNC was in power. Persons like Freddie Kissoon, who is an anti-PNC person, say that the PPP, in its actions, in its governance, are worse than the PNC when it was in power. The persons who gave skewed and inaccurate information about the PNC's failure should instead stick to the facts of the budget debate. Many of these projects they claim as PPP successes are actually successes of the Economic Recovery Program that the PNC initiated and successfully conducted while Mr Hugh Desmond Hoyte was the leader of that party.

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The PPP should not talk about rigging of elections, since that party has been rigging all the elections since 1992.

Ms Gail Teixeira: Mr Speaker, under Standing Order 41, the Member has to be reminded that the International Observer Missions found no elections in 1992 and 2006 found any evidence of rigging whatsoever. Thank you.

Dr John Austin: The PPP does not even give Hugh Desmond Hoyte credit for allowing this country to have free and fair elections, and they have not, they have not ...

The Speaker: Honorable Members, it is now after 1:30. If the Honorable Member is slowed down, he will take a far longer time to complete his speech. So if you want to stay here until 6am, you could proceed in this way. If you want us to finish at a brisk pace, please allow the Member to continue uninterrupted.

Dr John Austin: The PPP has not allowed this country to have free and fair elections since they were given that privilege in 1992 ...

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I will suspend the House for a few minutes until Honourable Members can collect themselves ... marshal ...

1:35 H - SUSPENSION OF ASSEMBLY

2:15 H - RESUMPTION OF ASSEMBLY

The Speaker: Dr Austin, will you please continue?

Dr John Austin: Mr Speaker, I agree with the Honourable Members of this House, who say that free and fair elections is a right, and we demand that right. We would like to have free and fair elections return to Guyana. The PPP has no moral justification to talk about violence and racial strife. They are the architects of these heinous activities, and one would see, if one reviews the status of Guyana in the 1960s. We in Parliamentary Debates should deal with the facts, and stop trying to fool the public. We should stop trying to dishonestly rewrite the history of this dear beautiful land of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, this 2009 Budget again places inordinate emphasis on building and infrastructural works. We all aspire to build a modern and prosperous Guyana, as stated by the Honorable Minister of Finance in his 2009 Budget Speech. However, if we pursue inappropriate policies, our aspirations will remain only aspirations. Our first priorities should be to concentrate on developing our various human resources. Buildings and infrastructural projects, when appropriate, help to optimize the development of human resources. One should not forget that it is the activities of the residents which forms the developmental thrust of any country.

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Mr Speaker, apart from the inappropriate emphasis on buildings and infrastructural work in Region 6, we find other disturbing facts related to the utilization of budgetary allocations for various sectors of our economic activities. Since I recently referred to building and infrastructural works, I would use this category to illustrate my contentions. There is a pattern of overt and covert discrimination against non-PPP supporters, in terms of allocation and execution of building and infrastructural works in Region 6. Mr Speaker, I will give a few examples. In Corriverton, burnt earth was thrown in heaps on roads in Racecourse, on Goodridge Street in Princetown, and on Middle Street in Princetown. The contractor spread the burnt earth on the streets in Racecourse and on Goodridge Street in Princetown. However, the burnt earth is left in heaps on Goodridge Street, two months or more after it was thrown there. So they leveled the earth on the streets in Racecourse and on Middle Street. Further, on the East Bank of Berbice, almost yearly, there is roller ... from Tacama Turn to Hibury. The villages from lising to Kiwa are bypassed, and then these road works are resumed in Mara.

We thank this PPP Government for providing the Berbice River Bridge. However, the siting of this bridge is discriminatory to New Amsterdam. It is discriminatory to other areas, but specifically to New Amsterdam. And I will cite another example of discrimination against New Amsterdam. Recently, the Guyana Water Inc office

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located in New Amsterdam was closed down, and all activities were transferred to the GWI office in Chesney. Currently, if we the residents of New Amsterdam want to do any direct dealing with officials of the GWI, we have to travel to Chesney to do whatever negotiations with the GWI officials. New Amsterdam, a town with a water treatment plant, and a population of about 32,900 persons, the residents have to travel about 19.3 km or 12 miles, to do business at the GWI office in Chesney, which is a village on the Corentyne. Chesney has no water treatment plant, and Chesney has a population of less than 3,000 persons.

I will give my final example of this discrimination by talking about the road works that have been done in Black Bush Polder. The section of road passing through Zambia has been bypassed. So when one is driving on the Black Bush Polder road, one goes through a smooth stretch of road that has been rehabilitated, and then when one reaches Zambia, there are a set of potholes and rough roads, and when you get out of Zambia you get back on the smooth road. Mr Speaker, another disturbing fact concerning the utilization of budgetary allocation of Region 6 is the wastage of the money allocated. Sometimes, the money is siphoned into the pockets of persons,- illegally siphoned into the pockets of persons; and there is also wastage in the actual execution of the project. For example, many of the road repairs, if we take the East Bank Berbice Road, the West Canje Road, the

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Bermine Scheme Road, the Link Road, to name a few, we realize that rehabilitation works on these roads lasts for about four months to fifteen months, then millions have to spent again to repair these roads.

Another disturbing trend in the building and infrastructural works in Region 6, is that many buildings are constructed, not because there is a genuine need to have these buildings constructed, but because government officials decide to have these buildings constructed. Many times, these buildings or structures remain unutilized or underutilized for years. Examples are the hard court in No. 79 Corriverton; the President's Youth Choice Building in New Amsterdam, the one in Sisters, the one in Mara; the occupational therapy building at the National Psychiatric Hospital; the abattoir building in New Amsterdam. Mr Speaker, one wonders why this government places so much emphasis on building and infrastructural work, and not enough emphasis on development of our human resources, hence ignoring the importance of real developmental works. One reason is that these projects provide the opportunity for persons to illegally siphon money into their pockets. For the other reason, we have to do some retrospection.

After the PPP/ C took over government from the PNC in 1992, the Guyanese economy experienced a period of negative or marginal economic growth. Then in 2006, statistical reports on the real Gross Domestic Product

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indicated that the economy grew by 5.1%. In 2007, the figures reported a 5.4% growth. For 2008, figures report a 3.1% growth of the Guyana economy. We should not be deceived, however, into believing that this represents expansion of our domestic output in its real sense. These figures only represent growth in Gross Domestic Product. The Bureau of Statistics Report on the 2008 Gross Domestic Product states that, the growth of the economy, as demonstrated by the GDP increase, was due to strong performance in the mining, engineering and construction and the service sectors. Closer scrutiny of these reports, reveal that the components of the mining sector is bauxite and gold; the engineering and construction referred to public capital expenditure on roads, bridges and buildings for schools, hospitals, etc., as well as private sector expenditure on housing.

The services sector comprises the distribution sector and the financial sector. The financial sector is partly unstable, and the distribution sector is dependent on the engineering and construction sector. The more you build roads and so forth, the more you have to transport, get trucks and other vehicles to do the transportation. Hence we see that excessive spending on building and infrastructure projects significantly contribute to the positive figures of our Gross Domestic Product, and hence give a false impression of economic growth.

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Mr Speaker, we the residents of Region 6 generally had a difficult financial year 2008, and we expect that things would be worse in 2009. Currently, Guyana has an unstable macro-economic environment ... Economic reports from the Inter-American Development Bank state that in 2007 remittances to Guyana represented 80% of the 2007 budget in terms of figures, and 43% of the Gross National Product. Therefore, we conclude that the economy of Guyana is significantly dependent on remittances. We in Guyana know, and it is confirmed by the 2008 Multilateral Investment Fund Report, that remittances to Guyana have significantly reduced and continue to reduce. According to the MIF report of 2008, this is the first year since 2000 that these remittances have reduced in both volume and value.

Apart from remittances, other parameters of the Gross National Product, and parameters of the Gross Domestic Product are experiencing decline, according to the Bureau of Statistics. I will give the names: the fishing industry, the forestry industry, the sugar industry, the poultry/meat industry, the diamond industry, the manufacturing sector, the non-alcoholic products industry, and to make things worse, public sector employment is also declining.

The World Bank figures show declines in garment industry and decline in bauxite industry. Tourism in the Caribbean is declining, and there are many more hotels that are now either closing or laying off some of their

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staff. Hence, we must expect that our traditional and non-traditional exports would also decline, as it has started in 2008; it will also decline in 2009. The output of the modern sugar factory in Skeldon has been discarded because of poor quality. This factory is still not functioning.

Apart from these financial problems, wages remain, the public sector wages, remain ... at poverty levels and inflation and cost of living are rising.

It is difficult to save money towards supplementing the unreasonable, unrealistic old-age pension of \$6,300 a month. Mr Speaker, the 2009 Budget outlines projections, but does not go far enough to result in significant realizations of these projections. The schools in Region 6 have shortage, significant shortages, in classroom furniture and also staff shortages. Regarding the health system in Region 6, many persons complain about the results of staff shortage, and many times, the poor standard of health care delivery.

The security and justice system are many times abused in Region 6. Spending millions on equipment and infrastructure is not enough to solve these problems. There are repeated reports and complaints about community police and the regular police beating suspects and detainees. Little or no action is taken when complaints are made to the authorities. Some residents of Region 6 say, *some police behave like pigs ...*

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The Speaker: Honorable Member, you can't use that kind of language in the National Assembly. Be careful.

Dr John Austin: Mr Speaker, I withdraw it, if it is offensive. I was just quoting what people say. This is, there is an interesting report of a person who was taken to the police station for safekeeping. This was a man of unsound mind. His relatives took him to the police station to let them keep him until the following day so they can take him to the Psychiatric Hospital. The man ended up being shot three times by the police. Eyewitnesses report that the police started questioning the man, and they beat him.

The Speaker: Hold on a minute, hold on a minute. You are talking about an alleged criminal, , you are making an allegation of a criminal offence against the police. Am I not right in that conclusion? I gather you to be saying that the police wrongfully shot this person. If this matter is under investigation, have the people been in charge? Are they before the courts? I don't know if we can ...

Dr John Austin: No, Mr Speaker, there is no matter before the courts.

The Speaker: Yes, but you ... the assertion you are making, I gather, is that the police wrongfully shot this person.

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Dr John Austin: I did not say wrongfully; I just stated the facts.

The Speaker: We are adults here, Honorable Member. That's what you mean.

Dr John Austin: So do I ...

The Speaker: I am not going to allow you to make those very, very serious allegations not merely against the police, against anybody. I am not allowing those allegations to stand against people. That is a very serious matter you are talking about.

Dr John Austin: Mr Speaker, I withdraw it. I was just stating the facts of what happened at the police station. Another set of examples about abuse of the justice system relates to a High Court judge ...

The Speaker: Oh my ... be careful, Honorable Member. If you are going to accuse a High Court judge of taking bribes, you better stop right now.

Dr John Austin: It's not ... I ...

The Speaker: Stop before you start.

Dr John Austin: I will skip that section because ... I would move on, Mr Speaker, to the social care system in Region 6. The social care system has demonstrated a decline in coverage and in quality. I should here

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congratulate this government on establishing a Legal Aid system in Region 6, but its activities are limited.

Recently, there was review of the recipients of social assistance in Region 6. It was reported that the conduct of this review was badly executed. Persons who were deserving and in need of social assistance were denied such assistance. Imagine the official telling at least two mentally retarded women that they should go and look for work. I wonder what work this official expects a mentally retarded woman to get. There is one man who is an amputee, and the official told him to go and look for work. In Region 6, there are numerous men who have two lower limbs and can't find work, so I do not see how reasonable this official was to ask a one-legged man to look for work, when the two -legged men can't get work.

Agriculture would be boosted in Region 6 if there is better drainage. These recent floodings in Region 6, as a result of the rainfall in the latter part of last year, have revealed the weaknesses of our drainage system. Inadequate drainage and irrigation result in flooding of the agricultural land and prevent adequate utilization of these lands. Some villages suffer more than others. Examples of such disadvantaged villages include Gibraltar, Portland, Fyrish, Whim, Lancaster, Liverpool, Manchester, Ulverston, Alness, Stalern, Hogstye, Adventure, Limlear , Adventure, Linlear, Friendship, Nurney, Kildonan, Bushlot.

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Mr Speaker, with the current policies and programs, this Budget should be regarded as a pre-recession budget; yes, I say it, it is a pre-recession budget, when the facts are considered. There is a limit to how much money this government can borrow; there is a limit to how much money can be spent on projects which challenge the economic status of Guyana; there is a limit to how much this government can steal from Guyanese through their socially unjust tax system. There is a limit to how much statistical manipulation can be done. Then when these limits are reached, we would wake up and see reality.

Various government speakers talk about a stimulus package that is present in the Budget. This package is supposed to be intrinsic to the Budget, but this is wishful thinking. This budget, when adjusted for inflation, I mean the true inflation, this Budget is actually smaller in value than last year's budget, hence ...

The Speaker: Your time is up Honorable Member, your time is up.

Mr Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, please grant the Honorable Member five minutes to conclude his presentation.

The Speaker: Proceed, Honorable Member ... five minutes to conclude.

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Dr John Austin: ...hence there is no money in it which could be claimed as financing for a stimulus package. Mr Speaker, I query the inflation figures because of obviously partial statistics considerations. For example, the Bureau of Statistics used the cost of fuel in determining the consumer price index. Those of us who have to pay for transportation in this country know that the cost of transportation has not returned to the cost before the fuel prices increase of last year; hence a more accurate determinant of the consumer index would be transportation cost and not fuel cost. Again, the budget does not have a stimulus package, since the program for the 2009 Budget generally continue along the trend of the past three years.

Mr Speaker, there is some hope for salvaging our economy if appropriate measures are pursued. Salaries to workers should be increased by appropriate amounts, hence making reasonable amounts of money available for spending, but not too much money available, so that inflation would be minimized. We cannot get away from inflation, no country can get away from inflation, but it can be minimized. This would enhance the efficiency and productivity of our workers, and it would reduce the tendency for soliciting and taking bribes, which is intrinsic to many of our agencies, including our social and justice systems

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Old age pensioners should be given a better, more realistic, old age pension. Schools should be given adequate classroom and staff furniture, and each school should be adequately staffed. Widespread school feeding, widespread school feeding should be reintroduced. The government should correct the various health problems which exist in Region 6.

Mr Speaker, much hardship and inconvenience have been experienced by students and other commuters, especially in Regions 5 and 6, as a result of having to cross the Berbice River Bridge. We believe that if the toll is reduced, because it is unreasonably high, these problems would be removed.

Efficiency and productivity would be improved, if optimal staff and consumer welfare are catered for. Training of new staff is not the way to cater for staff and welfare problems; because you train the staff, and if the conditions are not right, the staff will just leave, as what is happening now. More money should be available to alleviate poverty in Region 6. Also, when building and infrastructure works are done, they should be done with the aim of improving the staff and welfare conditions in Region 6, so that the staff and the persons who have to be serviced by this public entity would be able to have better value for money.

The Speaker: Would you like to wind up now, Honorable Member?

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Dr John Austin: Mr Speaker, I would have liked to continue to make my point, but my time has been limited, so I am forced to stop.

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Mr Whittaker ...

Mr Norman Whittaker: Thank you very much, Sir. With your leave, sir, I would wish to briefly correct a bit of inaccuracy which the previous speaker, the Honorable Member Dr John Austin, brought to the attention of this House, moments ago. And that has to do, Sir, with allegations to the effect that, the People's Progressive Party Civic presided over unfair or fraudulent elections since its advent back into office in 1992.

Sir, either Mr Austin has been reading from the wrong text, or otherwise from the wrong chapter of the Guyanese history text. History records that international observers who were present for all the elections held since 1992 have pronounced on the accuracy, on the authenticity of those elections; and therefore I would wish that the Honorable Member be so informed.

Sir, for me, this is the third occasion in which I have had the opportunity, not only to listen to a Budget presentation from the Honorable Minister of Finance, but also to make my contribution to the debate on his presentation. I still vividly recall, Mr Minister, your 2007

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presentation, with its commitment to build a modern and prosperous Guyana. That Budget, Mr Speaker, and I quote:

... advanced the policies needed for sustained growth, wealth and employment creation ...

Come 2008, and when we assess our progress, our economy had realized real growth of 5.4% and we determined, Sir, to stay the course, as we continued the transformation of our economy. And that is why Sir, it behooves us as a people, to rise above the challenges we face; challenges of price volatility, unpredictable weather patterns, and resistance to positive change by some; and support our Minister of Finance, support our President, support our government, our people, as we collectively work, as we collectively work, to reinforce the resilience developed over the years of PPP/C's shrewd and sound management of our economy.

I am reminded also of Honorable Member Mervyn Williams for the negative outpourings of the Opposition; outpourings devoid of substance and meaningful alternatives, but laced with the now anticipated politicking and empty pronouncements that they often seek to pass off as debate. I have come to accept, Mr Speaker, these as interventions, no, interferences that add some humour and life to the Budget debate. We have accepted that, we couldn't expect more.

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Mr Speaker, I have determined that if we are to fulfill our commitments, we need to be mindful of the international financial crisis, and accept that the preparation of this 2009 National Budget was never going to be easy, and in fact, could not have been easy for the Hon Finance Minister. It is my understanding that a Budget seeks, among other things, to identify needs, to identify priorities, to identify resources that are needed; the source of these resources. So it is never going to be easy. And so, when we hear pronouncements like there is nothing in the Budget, I am puzzled. In fact, I have a feeling, I have a belief that if we ask the Opposition to prepare the national budget, and bring it here for debate, they will argue against it.

Sir, we in the Hinterland Region look forward eagerly to National Budget presentations, we look forward to them, unlike some who have this fear of Budgets. We look forward to it, because for us, it is a primary source of revenue. For us, it gives indications as to the direction in which we will move; as to the programs and activities that we will undertake. And these programs and activities, Sir, emanate from our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper; they emanate from our PPP/ Civic 2006 Manifesto. That document clearly sets out our Party's commitment to the Guyanese people, and therefore, for me, like many of, almost or all of my colleagues, it is a guide, or the yardstick by which we will measure progress.

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This year, the Honorable Minister of Finance, in spite of the economic downturns, so to speak, allocated to the Barima/Waini Region, which is the geographical constituency I represent on behalf of the People's Party Civic, \$153.9 million for Capital Works; Current, \$925.150 million, making a total of \$1,000,079,108. And when we check carefully, Sir, it represents an increase of 3.1% over our 2008 allocation, and for this we are very grateful. It means that it will allow us in the Region to continue to develop our social services; to continue to expand our infrastructure. And my little knowledge of economics tells me that this is necessary, this is the base from which we launch and do other things such as providing economic services.

Sir, in the Region, a lot of focus has been placed, and not without reason, on the education of our people; because in 1992, when we took office in a free and fair election, Honourable Member, the education standards of our people were the lowest they could possibly be. And if we accept that education is a key tool that we will have to use to bring our hinterland people out of poverty then we have to start from there. And what did we do, what have we been doing? ... Creating the physical environment that will allow teaching and learning to take place ... That is why we build schools. There are several schools here that we built, and I only mentioned a few; and I mention them only to allow you to see the spread, for those of you who know Region 1. Togarima, that's on the hill, not far

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from Mabaruma; Blackwater, that is in the Barima River; Kachekamo, that's in the Waini River; Santa Rosa Extension, that is in Moruca; Waramuri, Moruca, the spread. There is no such thing as a PNC area and a PPP area and an AFC area. It is the Barima/Waini Region, and there are people living there; people to whom we made a commitment, a commitment they accepted on the 26th of August 2006.

And so, Sir, we do these buildings so that our children can go to school and learn in a comfortable environment; and teachers could also teach in that environment. In addition to that, Sir, conscious of the fact that some of our people did not have the economic wherewithal to support their children in school, inasmuch as they recognize the importance of education, and the need to get them there, we supported them: exercise books, uniforms, school feeding, because we want them to go to school. And more than that, by extension, the school feeding program has begun to support even another sector, the farmers, because the persons with responsibility for that program are encouraged to purchase raw materials that are needed in the very communities, in the very villages. And that, what happens there, is that people, children start to go to school, and go to school regularly.

Sir, we recognize that the buildings by themselves will not deliver education, and this is what we did: we started to train our teachers, and you know what? We have

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reached a stage where a significant number of our teachers are trained. I just want to mention a few things here, Sir, that has happened over the past two years, in terms of teacher training, teacher upgrading:

- Twenty-seven senior teachers graduated in education management.
- A new batch of forty-five commenced a similar program in September 2008.
- I am not talking about Trinidad, I am not talking about Georgetown, I talk about the Barima / Waini Region.
- Fifteen teachers completed training at CPCE and graduated.
- Twenty teachers are now pursuing studies at CPCE.
- Eleven teachers at the University of Guyana.
- Two educators pursuing post graduate studies in Education at the University of Guyana.

These are people from the Barima/Waini region, considered a hinterland region. It means that we have a better quality of teachers, bringing about better quality

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education delivery in our schools. So how do we measure the investment? I will tell you. I will tell you by giving you our CSEC examination results over the past two years. I want the National Assembly to know that the investment in the education of our people in the Hinterland Region, and in this case, the Barima/Waini Region, has been a good investment.

There are three secondary schools.

Northwest Secondary: 2007, -127 passes out of 249, making it 51% pass rate, and 11 out the 39 students who wrote the exams got five subjects or more. The top student got nine subjects, eight grade twos, one grade one, and is now at the University of Guyana.

The same school, 2008, 182 passes, 43, (there was a drop,) 43.6% pass rate, but 12 out of the 67 students got ten subjects or more, and the top students got ten subjects, including six grade twos and four grade ones.

When we go to the Santa Rosa Secondary School, that is in Moruca: in 2007,- 103 passes out of 162, or 63.6%, and 11 students got 5 subjects or more; and do you know, the top student got 9 subjects with six grades ones, and is a student of Queen's College. I bring you these, my friends, Honorable Members, to let you know that Government's investment in the education of our people has been a good investment, and the 2009 allocation allows us to continue along that line.

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I want to deal a little bit with Health. Primary health , education and health care is a fundamental right, and we are committed to that. Indeed, we said in our 2006 Manifesto, and I quote

The PPP/C believes a society thrives because people, regardless of race, age, or where they live, enjoy healthy fulfilling lives, at home, in school, at work and in their communities.

And so, like we did in education, build health huts, build health centers, rehab health centers, rehab district hospitals. And you would have heard from the Honourable Minister Dr Bheri, about the Mabaruma Hospital that is being built.

But more than that, we train staff to deliver quality health services, because a building by itself can't work. And let me tell you about what has happened, briefly. Five persons were trained as patient-care assistants; that is what happened in 2008. Twenty-four student nurses are in training at various schools of nursing in Berbice, Charles Roza in Linden and in Georgetown. Three Midwives attended the ALARM training in Georgetown. All our Medexes were trained in basic management planning and microscopy ... training for microscopists ... and also health workers, a collaboration that allowed us to do so much more. Added to this, the fact that we have constructed a storage bond, and the drugs are now stored

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there; they arrive regularly, on time. Added to this is the fact that the distribution of treated nets has resulted in a reduction in morbidity and mortality with respect to malaria. Also our children, because of the hot meals, and because of the interventions in agriculture that I have talked about, have now become a healthier population. My friends, our investments in the areas of those two important social services, Education and Health, I say to you, have been well spent.

My friends, water. I mention water because some Members of the Opposition were in Region 1 on a pre-budget excursion, which took them into a few villages, where they had small audiences for a chat session. Coming out of those chat sessions, they had a number of pronouncements, most of which were inaccurate. Some were repeated by the Honorable Member, Mr Desmond Fernandes when he made his presentation, and I think, I would wish, Mr Speaker, to respond. The Honourable Member said that we made commitments to provide schools to two communities, one called Wanaki and the other Bunbury. In fact, he was specific, he said the Honourable Member Mr Harry Persaud Nokta when he was minister. You must know that Wanaki is a small community of about eight households, half of whom are related to the Honourable Member, they are his in-laws. His intention was good, I think he meant well, but you could not take taxpayers' money to build a school for about fifteen children. You couldn't do that. But

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notwithstanding that, what we did was provided an outboard engine so that the children can go to a school a little way off; and we helped them to set up a management committee to manage that engine. So that, if things were going wrong, and it wasn't being properly managed, one would have felt that the thing to do would have been to discuss with the regional authorities and see how they can help.

Next, we heard about discrimination; and in fact, the name of the person discriminated against by some Regional Chairman by the name of Norman Whittaker, former Regional Chairman, was mentioned: one VJ, now deceased; that VJ was doing his construction work and the Regional Chairman visited, saw him, and went back and arranged to take him off the job. In fact, both members, both persons, the Honourable Member Mr Fernandes and Mr VJ were comrades, they were both members of the PNC party, and they both like sports; and so when we talked about doing some work on the ground, they tried to outrun each other to see who would reach there first to start the work. And I thought that we were doing the Honourable Member a good by allowing the community to do that work, so as to save them the embarrassment that we knew would reach. And so that job was given to the community.

Matthews Ridge ... We hear that Matthews Ridge is neglected; Matthews Ridge doesn't have electricity, it

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doesn't have water, the road is bad. My friends, Honorable Member, Matthews Ridge has water. What residents have requested is an extension of the water supply to embrace some other outlying areas, but Matthews Ridge has water. Secondly, Matthews Ridge roads are maintained by the NDC, and that Body has contracted a company by the name of North West Investments to maintain those roads. Of course, with the heavy duty equipment and machinery around, it would not be like the roads we have in Georgetown. So it is not accurate to say that we have neglected Matthews Ridge.

Water for Kamwatta ... Had the Honorable Member spoken, that's Mr Fernandes ... had he spoken with the regional authorities, he would have learnt that all that was needed to reactive the pump at Kamwatta was what we call "packings", and perhaps the thing for them to have done, was having returned to Georgetown, to try themselves to send back the "packings." And that would have been the honorable thing to do. So the impression was created that we don't deal with water; that we have people in the villages, they don't have access to water. But I wish to tell you, the House, this: Approximately 13,000 of our 25,000 people access water from wells with hand pumps or windmills or spring with engine-driven pumps, or wells with solar. The rest will access water from the rivers and the creeks. And I have them by name of village, and by numbers, but I won't worry to bore you

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with that kind of information. But it is not accurate, the impression created that we were not dealing with that.

I want to urge members of the Opposition to try to get hold of the revised Hinterland Water Rehabilitation Strategy, and there they will see some of the plans for further rehabilitation and development of water supplies to the hinterland, and perhaps they can then determine how they will help to fulfill that obligation.

Honorable Members, I wish to deal a little bit with agriculture, and then some likelihood issues, and close there, because I know we are tired at this time. The impression has been created that agriculture is dying in Region 1, or dead in Region 1, and that little is happening. And not only in peanuts, -we have a glut, some 5,000 pounds of peanut for which there is no market. My friends, farming for people in the hinterland is both a way of life and the principal means of livelihood for a majority of the people. While some might do forestry, some gold mining, in Region 1, most of them are involved in agriculture, even if it is at the subsistence level. The sector offers opportunities, but of course, there are challenges.

In 2008, D&I improved drainage support systems through maintenance of community drains and culverts. The NDC assisted: In fact, in Region 1, contrary to what is being peddled, the Agricultural Field Assistants do go into the rivers and visit. They may not visit with the

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frequency that the farmers would want them to, because of limited resources in terms of transportation and fuel, etc. But they do visit. We have a VSO, we have an Agricultural Officer; in fact, my friends, Dr Ferlyn Narine, to whom the Honorable Minister referred in his presentation, is a son of the soil, a Region 1 resident who went to Cuba, was trained as a livestock officer, and proudly returned to the Region of his birth. Dr Ferlyn Narine, a Vet.

Besides that, we have what you know perhaps as NEOCOL, now called the AST, Agri-Solution Technology. This is a company established to take over from Wauna the Bio-Diesel Project. At that time, there was a danger that NEOCOL would have to close its doors; because the only purchaser for NEOCOL's products, the palm oil, had indicated that they could no longer purchase the quantities, and the writing was on the wall, that it would eventually reach zero. It is our President, His Excellency President Bharat Jagdeo who invited Dr Suresh Narine of the Institute of Applied Science and Technology; they met with us and out of that meeting was born a project to use palm oil and convert it to bio-diesel.

The Speaker: Time is up, Honorable Member.

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Hon Samuel Hinds: Mr Speaker, I ask that the Honorable Member be given another ten minutes to conclude his presentation. Thank you, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to

Motion carried

The Speaker: Proceed ...

Mr Norman A Whittaker: As a result of that, 79 jobs, permanent jobs, and 23 temporary jobs were saved. As a result of that, the RDC began to use bio-fuel for its generator. As a result of that, the Mabaruma Hospital started to use bio-fuel. In fact, there was a demand for bio-fuel. Even GWI wanted bio-fuel, but we just could not supply. Those farmers, those people, those 79 plus 23, who worked with NEOCOL, and still work with NEOCOL; a majority are from the very villages that the excursion team visited. But when you just drop in and you drop out, you do not have the time, you do not take the time to inquire and get the right type of information. So there have been fallacious reports about the entity's operations; but I say, Mr Speaker, to this Honorable House, that it is as I have just disclosed.

UNDP and the Government of Guyana funded a peanut project; you heard about this 5,000 pounds of peanuts. This project targets 31 peanut farmers from Kamwatta, Whitewater and Wauna, people who have persisted in

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peanut farming, in spite of the difficulties. It is a project to supply and install solar powered equipment to assist peanut farmers to roast and package peanuts. You know that peanut farmers face a volatile market, and so it was felt that by training them, helping them with equipment, their product will have a longer shelf life; and a private businessman who has been identified and who has already set up the business, will purchase the product.

Honorable Members, it is anticipated that 840 bags or 42,000 pounds will be harvested each crop, with two crops per year. Very shortly, the difficulties that the project presently faces, the teething problems, will be ironed out, and those farmers will be able to sell. Not that they are not selling, but they are not selling the quantities. And this thing about farmers' peanuts spoiling; farmers' peanuts does not spoil like that. The people, the 31 farmers that we are talking about, are people who know about peanut farming. They know about ensuring that the peanut is dried, and they can be there for months. So I don't know this thing about peanuts spoiling.

Mr Speaker, this has been another area in which our people have been making progress, perhaps not the desired level of progress. Our people have been diversifying. People who do not know Region 1 well enough, and who rely on what great-grandfathers and people, porkknockers who may have gone there years ago will be misled. It is no longer the ground provision

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farming that you know. People have begun to diversify. They understand that you just can't put all your eggs in one basket. So, what has been happening is that, instead of all the chicken coming from Georgetown now, people rear their own birds. Instead of the greens coming from Georgetown, people plant their own greens. That is the kind of diversification I am talking about. People process and make peanut butter. There is a women's group at Hosororo that makes peanut butter. And the intention at Wauna is also that the farmers will sell to the Blue Flame Group; will sell to the businessman at Wauna, and they will make peanut butter. So people get into all these things. They have been diversifying. And thanks to the Hon Minister of Public Works; with a steamer service coming on board at Port Kaituma, a lot of persons there have also got ten into farming, because there can be easier and more comfortable movement of people and goods.

Mr Speaker, Honorable Members, I would wish not to prolong my presentation, because I know we have one more speaker, but just to say that our people have made a lot of progress in the area of social service improvement. Our people have made a lot of improvement in the area of physical infrastructure expansion. Even in the Amerindian villages, our people have begun to manage their own little micro-businesses: \$29 million under the Presidential Grant Fund, given to 29 villages and communities in our Region, to be spent on projects of the

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people' choice; and the majority of these project that they have identified, have to do with agriculture and forestry, and providing their own little transportation to move people and goods. A forward thinking people, empowered by revised legislation - the Amerindian Act of 2006 - and the various training programs that have been developed through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs to target them and to target the Community Development Officers who help to support them.

And so Sir, under these circumstances, we wish to commend the Honorable Minister of Finance for providing us with that increased allocation, which will allow all of these programs to go on. And when we take into consideration the fact that private enterprise is also being encouraged; and in fact, there is going to be a lot of engagement through the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, with private enterprise, and groups in the villages; the future for the people of Region 1 looks very bright, thanks to the People's Progressive Party /Civic. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honorable Member.

Honorable Member Rev Kwame Gilbert ...

Rev Kwame Gilbert: Mr Speaker, colleagues, Honorable Members, Jesus said to his disciples, *Watch*

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with me for one hour ... We just have a few minutes to go, and I crave your indulgence. It is for me today a very humbling experience to be a member of this highly venerated National Assembly, and to be making here my first presentation to this Honorable House, albeit at this very late hour. Permit me, Sir, firstly to express my appreciation to the People's Progressive Party/Civic, vis-à-vis the administration, for the confidence that they have reposed in me, in appointing me to this esteemed seat; from what I believe to be a vast list of competent and worthy comrades. My appreciation, Sir, extends even further to the One to whom I owe my life: the very essence and purpose of my being, which is my Creator, for it is He who sets up one and puts down another; and my prayer is that as I serve my country here in this honoured capacity, that my service to Him will be well pleasing and acceptable.

May it please you Sir, I am now learning these things; allow me at this time to lend my voice in support to my colleagues on this side of the House, in commending the Hon Dr Ashni Singh, on what I believe to be a fantabulous piece of work, in both the preparation and presentation of the Budget, for the financial year 2009, under the very fitting theme, "Working Together, Reinforcing Resilience". This theme, Mr Speaker, gives recognition to the continuing political complexities of our day and time; pointing us back to our conception as a nation, the historical details of which I choose not to get

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into at this point. But implicit, is the acknowledgement that we have a problem, and if that problem is not a problem of national proportions, we would find ourselves, if not being able to establish a common ground of unity, having to deal with consequences that are far-reaching; it repudiates and rejects every pasture or ideology of party partisanship or paramountcy. This theme is an invitation, an extended hand of cooperation and collaboration. The theme suggests that there is a recognition by government, that the task of building a free and prosperous Guyana, requires the collective, committed involvement of all of us, black, brown, Afro, Indo, every race; Christians, Muslims, Hindus and unbelievers. But there is no Afro Guyana, there is no Indo Guyana, there is no PPP, no PNC, no AFC Guyana, only one Guyana; and that is the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Reference was made earlier to the fact that there seems to be a spirit of Obama-mania, and rightfully so, Sir, I believe that the persona, the message of the new President of The United States America, creating the universal euphoria, points each of us to the possibilities of the higher ideals, that we all embrace and we aspire to, that we can all do better; we can all be better, and in many ways I believe that he represents a standard bearer. And in his writing, "The Audacity of Hope", he posited that we have a stake in one another, and that which binds us together is greater than that what drives us apart; and if more people believe in the truth of this proposition, and

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act on it, then we might not solve every problem, but we can get something meaningful done.

This theme, Mr Speaker, represents a hand extended, but the fist must be unclenched. Mr Speaker, as we examine the estimates of the Public Sector as put forward by the Honorable Minister of Finance, one only has to, peruse, the sections that covers allocations made to Social Sector, and one would undoubtedly recognize the many values that this government attaches to the well-being of the peoples of our country.

Mr Speaker, some \$36 billion have been allocated to addressing the critical needs in Health Education, Housing and other vulnerable groups, and other targeted intervention. Is this going to be enough? Absolutely not ... It is evident that the needs and the demands are many, as was made very clear by many of the presentations before. That is the nature of every developing economy: limited resources, unlimited demands. But what we are sure of Mr Speaker is that this government possesses the political will and commitment to meeting the ever increasing needs of our people.

While I do not consider myself to have a mandate to speak specifically to needs represented in a particular geographical constituency, I nonetheless am of the view that I speak for and represent a significant group within the social demographics of our country. Being a religious person, or rather a man of faith, I believe I can

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to speak to and on behalf of the issues and matters relative to faith and religion, and the people of faith and religion.

Mr Speaker, the choice of theme for this year's Budget is germane to what I perceive to be a wider attempt by government to encourage an environment of inclusiveness. We have, in this House, heard repeatedly charges brought against the government by Members across the aisle, about the government not being inclusive. Evidence is there, Sir, to corroborate with every major accomplishment of this government, was only possible as collective or collaborative efforts or undertaking, the Berbice River Bridge project being one of the most recent of such undertakings.

This inclusiveness, Mr Speaker, was very evident and tangibly demonstrated under the stewardship of the Honorable Dr Frank Anthony, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. Guyana successfully hosted Carifesta X, and, and the religious community, Sir, was afforded the much merited and appreciated opportunity to give substantive participation and contributions to this truly awesome event. It was undeniably a true demonstration of the indomitable and resilient nation, of the spirit of the Guyanese people; for, as I recall, Mr Speaker, the season during which Carifesta celebrations were held, was one in which there is a pervading and pervasive atmosphere; was one of fear, intimidation and much trepidation..Yet, Mr Speaker, we saw on the 27 August 2008, an

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unprecedented response from the Christian community: a mammoth crowd of over 13,000 showing up at the National Stadium, not under duress, not having being cajoled or manipulated, but with much excitement and enthusiasm, of their own free will and volition, to celebrate the lordship of Jesus Christ, against the backdrop of race, national cultural heritage, and diversity.

This enthusiasm was not restricted only to the Christian community, but even as I took the opportunity to visit with and become further acquainted with the religious practices and culture of our other major religions, it was very evident that this same level of enthusiasm was manifested among the Muslim and Hindu communities as well, as they joined in the celebration of our proud cultural heritage.

Now what is the point of this, Mr Speaker? This unique opportunity that was given to the religious community of our country, which must be noted, Sir, and Honorable Members, according to the most recent census conducted in 2002, constitutes 92% of our population.; This opportunity afforded by the Government, and the concomitant response, suggest that the religious community in Guyana is committed to peace, and the continued progress of our beloved country.

Mr Speaker, I am very much aware of the age-old debate on the complexities and ambiguities of the separation of religion and politics. The problem of religion and

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politics has to do with the two... of activities in the lives of persons, who are committed to their core religious values, and at the same time, dedicated to the development of their country. Citizens who belong to religious groups are also members of the secular society, and this dual association generates complications. Religious beliefs have moral and social implications, and it is appropriate for people of faith to express these through their activities as citizens in the political order. The fact that ethical convictions are rooted in religious faith does not and should not disqualify them from the political realm. Hence, Mr Speaker, it is my considered view that our country can only stand to benefit from the establishment of social partnerships between our religious bodies and the political machinery of our country; without being required to abandon or compromise their religious liberties or doctrinal integrity.

The Christian community for decades has provided extremely valuable services in communities throughout this country via many of their social outreach programs. Life-transforming work has been done with youths in the areas of drug abuse, sexual and reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS awareness, and amongst women and single parents, especially in providing support in circumstances of abuse, divorce or desertion. Also, Mr Speaker, many churches and mandirs conduct regular weekly feeding programs. The organization, for example, that I represent recently constructed a new orphanage costing some \$50

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million, and by this way is providing valuable support to the efforts of the Ministry of Human Services.

The First Assembly of God for example, recently constructed a \$40 million facility, the purpose of which is to provide, free of cost, technical and vocational education to youths and unskilled adults. Mr Speaker, these are just a few of the many critical interventions provided by the community of faith. While, Sir, this Budget has no specific allocation to the work done by the religious community, I am very optimistic that because of the government's policy of inclusiveness, significant help will be forthcoming through one of its targeted intervention allocation, since the government has repeatedly signaled its intention to work with civil society and the religious community. Only recently, the President earmarked some \$15 million to be used by civil society groups comprising religious, labour and other such NGOs, to aid in their work against domestic violence.

In this fledgling democracy that is ours, we must recognize that all of us possess values worthy of respect, and can contribute to the national health in meaningful ways. Governments are mandated, through the electoral process, to provide certain requisite services and functions. What, or when they do not deliver, Sir, we must demand that they deliver. We must demand of them that they fulfill the promises that they made to the

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electorate. What I find, however, to be hypocritical, and outright deceptive, is that we are very quick to make demands of our government when they are not delivering, but conversely, we are very silent when the time comes for us to applaud government when they deliver. And to my mind, I believe that, that, Sir, is very dishonest, and that is the level of dishonesty that we find permeating much of our society today.

It is always very troubling to me to listen to people talk about the fact that nothing is happening; and it is disheartening, as well, to hear people that I have grown to respect as national leaders, verbalize, even in this National Assembly, that the Government is not doing anything for the country, or the country is worse off.

Sir, my father, who incidentally is a former Member of this National Assembly under a previous PPP/C administration, is an historian, and he takes great pride in history and ensuring that he retains documents that can show nexus and growth, and the development and the progress of our country. And when he returned to Guyana in 1989, in an attempt to make a contribution to national development, he brought much of his material with him, which included old newspapers from the 70s and the 80s. Back then, I found it very difficult to understand why would he travel; because he has lived in a number of different parts of the world, and he would take these newspapers with him, and I always found it very

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troubling. I even wondered if something was wrong with him, to be taking newspapers around the world.

But I see the benefit of it today, and our Honorable Attorney General talked about the lack of institutional memory. And in perusing some of those documents, Sir, I have been able to trace; I am always accused, when I attempt to represent these issues, and to point out the development that is evident, I am accused of being too young to know the history of our country. Sir, I am not as young as I look, and I am not as old as I sound. But I believe that we have significant sufficient evidence to establish, and to prove, that in recent times, this government, this government, has been responsible for significant development in this country. And for people to ignore that, it is either they are strangers to the truth or downright deceptive; and so I believe that we must make demands of our government to deliver. We also have moral responsibility to ensure that as they deliver, that we applaud them, that we give them the kudos that they deserve, when they make good on the promises.

I have also been informed that there are 120 single parents that will be trained at Herstelling, Servants of God, I think it is, or is it Full Gospel Fellowship; but there is a church that is supporting 120 single parents that would be trained, and appointed by \$2.3 million of the \$25 million training fund. Now, that may not sound like a lot, but I believe that it is significant, and I believe that

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if we give recognition to the simple efforts that are being made; and there is a saying that *one, one dutty build dam*, indicating, Sir, that the little efforts that are made will go a far way.

I believe therefore, Sir, that we in the religious community accept this invitation given by the Honorable Minister of Finance, for us to work together for the continued development of our country. We encourage our colleagues on the other side of this aisle to do the same. Mr Speaker, in his inaugural address, the new President of the United States of America, President Barack Obama, issued a warning to the leaders of the Islamic extremist world in these words, and I quote:

Know that your people will judge you for what you build, not for what you destroy.

I want to say the same to us, in our local vernacular, that history will judge us, our children will judge us, not for things that we have destroyed, but for what we have built. And each of us will have to give an account to our children for the opportunities; as the Scriptures say to us, *seeing that we have been given the opportunity, let us do good*, and I believe that each of us will be given opportunities to do good. What we will do with those opportunities?, I believe in a large way will determine the outcome of our country.

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It is a good time, therefore, Sir, for us to each ask ourselves, are we in our actions and attitudes, building or breaking our country? Our country cries out for a new type of politics; one in which we as their leaders choose national development over political ostentation; and unity of purpose over conflict and discord. Mr Speaker, it was noted by the Honorable Member Ms Lawrence, who, while sitting on the other side of the House, I believe that we share a common faith, with reference to the desperate needs and difficult circumstances of our vulnerable groups, that the Ministry of Human Services cannot do it alone. With this, Sir, I totally concur. I want to add that the government cannot do it alone.

I have heard repeated calls being made for the government to create jobs. Mr Speaker, universally, there is a call for a shift from big government to good governance; and in good governance, there is a shift in the role of the State from welfare provision, and a greater role for the private sector in job creation. Hence, Sir, in this struggle for national development, the private sector must stop pointing fingers at the government, and do their part, if this improbable experiment in democracy will work. Hence, I call on all of us to embrace the spirit of this Budget. And with this, Sir, permit me to leave with this Honorable House, a quote from the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 2 verse 17 and 18; and Nehemiah is a prophet who was speaking to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem at that time had gone through

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severe destruction, and left to ruin. And Nehemiah returned after many years, and attempted to rebuild the wall. And there were two men by the name of Sanballat and Tobiah, who agreed that here was a man who sought after the well-being of Jerusalem; and they devised a plan to get him to stop the work, and so they would call meeting after meeting, after meeting. Yes, Sir, it is in the Bible. They would call meetings and meetings to get them to stop the work, and Nehemiah said to them in response; *we are doing a good work, and I refuse to come down.* But I leave this quote with this Honorable House. Nehemiah, in addressing the inhabitants of Jerusalem said these words,

You see the conditions and the plight that we are all in, in Jerusalem, let us arise and build. And the people said, Let us arise and build. So they strengthened their hands to do the good work.

Mr Speaker, Honorable House, let us arise and build. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Hon Member.

Hon Prime Minister ...

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I move that we adjourn until 14:00H later today.

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The Speaker: The House is adjourned until 14:00H later today. Thank you very much.

Adjourned Accordingly At 03:45H