Guyana’s flood disaster...
The National Response
Introduction

The natural disaster…and after

Torrential rain, a deluge, an inundation of parts of the Coastland, in short - the country’s worst natural disaster, was the experience of Guyanese during the January-February period. The average amount of rainfall in Guyana for the month of January for the past 100 years is 7.3 inches. However, the country witnessed more than seven times that in January 2005 - some 52 inches. From December 24 through January 31 the total amount of rainfall exceeded 60 inches, with one night’s rainfall amounting to seven inches. This resulted in severe flooding and Government declaring Regions Three, Four and Five disaster areas.

As the Administration planned its response, President Bharrat Jagdeo immediately called meetings of Cabinet Ministers, Leader of the Opposition Robert Corbin, Joint Service Heads and the City Council.

Later he met with representatives of the Guyana Red Cross and members of religious organizations and non-governmental organizations. From these meetings with various stakeholders, committees, including members of the Opposition, were established in charge of water, food, shelter, health care and infrastructure, to assist affected people. Cabinet Ministers were dispatched to affected areas and provided periodic briefs to the Head of State. A committee headed by Cabinet Secretary Dr. Roger Luncheon to coordinate assistance from overseas and the donor community, was also established. A Joint Operation Centre (JOC) was set up at Eve Leary and the relief efforts were coordinated through this entity, while the President’s Residence, State House was used as a resource centre.

The worst hit areas were the East Coast of Demerara in Region Four and Canal No. Two Polder in Region Three. The response focused initially on feeding, sheltering and providing water for affected persons. The Civil Defence Commission (CDC) was operationalised with Deputy Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defence Force Col. Chabilall Ramsarup as the Head. The CDC distributed hot meals for victims and dry ration was distributed in various areas.

The President and his Ministers fanned out to various communities to check on the situation and ensure relief was reaching the people. The religious community supported this aspect, as did many other public-spirited citizens from various parts of the country. Government distributed 120,047 hot meals, 73,889 hampers and dry ration and gave support to many other groups that cooked meals and delivered hampers.

Dry ration and hampers were supplied to all affected areas and supplies were sent to the Opposition PNCR and other groups who were part of the relief effort. Some 115 black tanks were supplied with potable water on the East Coast Demerara and 16 at Sophia, with some 161,184 bottles of water and 2.9M gallons being delivered to residents. Some 29 standpipes were also established on high ground in these areas. Water marshals were trained to deliver the water and private persons also contributed to the effort. All water stations are now back in order.

Fifty shelters were set up and housed approximately 4,200 persons. The shelters
were manned by the Army.

The health situation, even though the floodwater has receded, remains a huge priority. More than 350 health teams, including 3,000 volunteers, were deployed daily during the flood at various areas. There were some 450 medical personnel, including, Cuban, Venezuelan and several local public and private doctors, as well as other public health workers. Extensive fogging and spraying campaigns were conducted and persons were given the prophylactic treatment for leptospirosis, doxycycline.

A 150-man team was deployed to conduct round-the-clock monitoring and servicing of the conservancies, in light of overtopping at the East Demerara and Boeraserie Conservancies. The Maduni sluice was opened to ease the water out into the Mahaica and Demerara Rivers to avoid any catastrophe.

Some 60 pumps from Government, the Guyana Sugar Corporation, farmers and the private sector were deployed at strategic points, along with four from Trinidad and Tobago and the United States.

Days after Government’s relief efforts began, the donor community’s assistance materialized. Several pledges were made, most of which materialized. Government received US$806,197 in cash and the Civil Defence Commission received US$1,678,869 in supplies.

Throughout the relief effort, the President invited the Auditor General’s Department to ensure full accountability.

Recovering from the flood is a long-term task for Guyana, but the Government has led the effort by focusing on measures that can see recovery in both the long and short terms. Initially, $25M was allocated for clean-up in flooded areas. Two task forces are now working on drainage in Georgetown and the East Demerara Conservancy following the recommendations by a team of Dutch and local engineers. Contracts were awarded to strengthen the drainage system.

Contracts were also awarded for a massive clean-up and repairs to schools to facilitate their reopening.

As Guyana continues its recovery process from the flood, President Jagdeo requested that the Private Sector grant remissions to persons affected by the disaster.

He asked the Private Sector Commission to convene a meeting of the bankers, hire purchase agencies, utilities and other lending agencies to think about what kind of assistance they can give to victims of the flood. The Private Sector responded positively to the appeal and some institutions have already begun accommodating flood victims on a case-by-case basis.

But what did the flood cost the Republic of Guyana, an 83,000 square mile developing country at the gateway to South America, with a population of about 800,000? Or more so, what will it cost to rebuild? The answer to this lies in an assessment that is underway on the losses caused by the flood.

President Jagdeo continues his hands-on approach in the recovery effort, as was done during the flood to bring relief, to ensure the country is restored to normalcy.

Very soon, the President will unveil an assistance package for recovery and rehabilitation.

**February 28, 2005**
BACKGROUND TO JANUARY 2005 FLOOD

- Total rainfall from December 24 through February 4 – 61.2 inches. Highest in 100 years. Annual average before 2005 was about 9 inches
- Exceeded drainage capacity
- Compounded by neglect by Regional and City Administrations
- Came at a time when Central Government was intervening to improve drainage in affected areas due to neglect
- Drainage dependent on kokers and low-tide because Guyana is below sea level

“I’m the President of this country and if my people are suffering I can’t just sit on my hands and not get involved. That’s not my nature and it is not going to happen with me as President. Even if I have to go out and walk the streets and be with my people.” ...President Jagdeo responding to Opposition criticisms of his hands-on involvement in the flood relief
THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

• Guyana’s first natural disaster. No prior experience. No model to follow. Hence, the response had to be quick, comprehensive and wide-scale

• More than 200,000 Guyanese living along the East Coast Demerara, in South Georgetown, sections of West Demerara and along Mahaica and Mahaicony Creeks were affected

• No internal experience & technical support to rely on during first 72 hours

• President Bharrat Jagdeo led efforts working with concerned groups and citizens

*President Bharrat Jagdeo briefs the Opposition Leader Robert Corbin on Government’s flood response at State House*
THE NATIONAL RESPONSE

• On January 17, hours after flooding started, President Jagdeo summoned emergency meeting of Cabinet, experts and Leader of the Opposition

• The Army and Police were deployed to assess and support the relief response

• Ministerial Committees were appointed by the President to work on sectoral interventions.

• Opposition representatives were invited to sit on these committees as well as other groups

President Bharrat Jagdeo meets with his Minister and other officials at State House to implement strategies to bring relief to flood-hit families
National Response to the January 2005 floods

Committees established were:

- Food – Ministers Westford & Shadick
- Water - Minister Baksh
- Health – Minister Ramsammy
- Infrastructure – Ministers Xavier & Sawh
- Shelter – Minister Jeffrey and Mrs. Hinds of GRC
- Donor/overseas support – Dr. Roger Luncheon
- Public Information – Mr. Robert Persaud

President Bharrat Jagdeo discussing matters with Army Security Heads as it pertains to the flood. Everyday the President held meetings with various organisations, ministers and other officials to get a flood update.
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- Provide food relief
- Drain flood waters off the land
- Prevent outbreak of diseases
- Provide shelter for marooned residents
- Provide safe drinking water
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

• The President made an emergency allocation of $20M for relief in the first day. Two days later, he made an additional allocation of $200M

• Auditor General Department invited to ensure accountability in relief response expenditure

• On January 18, the President declared Regions Three, Four and Five disaster areas

• Civil Defense Commission was reactivated and Joint Operations Centre established at Police Headquarters
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

• Government appealed for local and international support
• Telephone hotlines were set up for flood relief information
• Health Ministry teams were in affected areas from day one to provide treatment and medicine
• Potable water distributed to all areas
• 50 drainage pumps deployed from GUYSU CO, mining companies and rice farmers

Prime Minister Samuel Hinds inspects one of the pumps donated by the Trinidad and Tobago Government
• President and Ministers fanned out to affected villages to assess damage and speed up relief

• President instructed the Army to open 15 more Shelters for flood-victims

• Government distributed cooked meals and dry ration on a daily basis for the first four weeks of the flood

Dry goods and water were distributed daily to residents who were severely affected by the flood
President Jagdeo visited the Sussex Street canal and instructed that the koker be opened and canal cleared after being clogged for 20 years. Koker obstructed by Toolsie Persaud’s illegal structure on the Government’s reserve.

Instructions given to clear all impediments blocking drainage systems across the country.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

Emergency pumping around-the-clock
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

• The religious community, private sector and NGOs invited to join the national relief effort

• President updated the Leader of the Opposition, community and religious leaders about relief efforts on a regular basis

• International response began to trickle in with Brazil sending the first plane-load of supplies

“We cannot afford to fall into despondency and despair and we must pray for spiritual strength for the courage to overcome and re-build.” President Jagdeo at National Day of Prayers for flood victims, February 03, 2005

President Jagdeo meets Government and Military officials and members of the Political Opposition to discuss the national response to the flood
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

• Government increased supplies of cooked food and dry-ration

• Soup kitchens set-up by Christian, Muslim, and Hindu groups and community spirited citizens received supplies from Government

• Food supplies sent to the PNCR at Channel 9

• President kept close watch over relief effort: overseeing the relief efforts by day, visiting shelters and flooded communities at night

President Jagdeo and Minister of Public Service Dr. Jennifer Westford visit a shelter on East Coast Demerara

A soup kitchen in operation
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

• Government appealed against unjust increases in prices for food items

• Government approved waiver of duties and taxes on all goods required for the flood relief and waiver of duties and taxes on an approved list of food items imported

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport Gail Teixiera distributes food hampers house-to-house in Region Three

Hampers being loaded into a truck from the Government’s Packaging Centre at Rahaman’s Park, Houston
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- Flood relief distributed with boats to persons in the backlands
- Thousands of hampers prepared by volunteers at the Rent-a-Tent. Goods were supplied by Government
- Hundreds of mattresses bought for distribution to shelters

Minister of Agriculture Satyadeow Sawh hands out food hampers to residents of Good Hope, E.C.D

Mattresses being dispatched from State House to shelters
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- Additional drainage pumps were working around-the-clock
- Strict monitoring of the Conservancy Dam increased because of rise in level of water
- Emergency works carried out to shore-up Conservancy Dam and vital drainage systems

Pumps were loaned from farmers and individuals to ensure proper drainage

An emergency drainage pump in operation
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

• Continued monitoring of relief efforts
• President requested international medical assistance
• President appealed to private doctors for support

H.E. President Bharrat Jagdeo comforts a Foulis, East Coast Demerara resident during his visit, as she prays for strength and courage for him to lead the nation to recovery from the country’s worst disaster – the floods.
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- A massive evacuation plan was put in place by the Joint Operation Centre if needed

- Health Ministry and international organisations collaborates in health response

- President ensured adequate drug supplies from the New GPC

- Government allocated $2M to Region Ten for flood victims who relocated to Linden. Food hampers were later sent to the families
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- Government ensured fairness in distribution of relief
- Opposition’s false claims of discrimination were rejected. Leader of the Opposition asked to supply list of areas discriminated. No list was ever supplied
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- Daily list of areas receiving relief were published
- Misinformation and disruption campaign sometimes, delayed relief
- Government accused of refusing help from US Government. This was denied by US Ambassador
IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

- All affected areas were receiving daily supplies
- Attention given to support livestock and other animals affected
- Ministry of Agriculture vaccinated animals to boost resistance
- Programmes to clean-up affected areas put into action
SHIFT IN FOCUS

With the relief effort in full swing, the President shifted the focus of the response:

- **Ensuring that gaps in food relief were filled**
- **More potable water provided**
- **Draining of land accelerated**
- **Health response intensified**
- **Clean up effort expanded**
- **Preparation for recovery and rehabilitation began**

Boxes of hot food being packed at the Civil Defence Commission, Thomas Lands
SHIFT IN FOCUS

• Work commenced on assessment of damage by Ministerial teams

• UN team working with Government, commenced assessment

• President Bharrat Jagdeo met members of the Private Sector and called on them to grant concessions and provide relief to persons affected by the disaster
SHIFT IN FOCUS

- Free distribution of mosquito nets to pregnant women and children under two years began

- On a daily basis, 30 medical teams were in the affected areas attending to residents

- Cuban Government dispatched a medical brigade. This was supplemented by health teams from the US and Canada

- T&T Government purchased three drainage pumps

- US government also purchased a drainage pump

*Minister of Health Dr. Leslie Ramsammy meets volunteers at the Ministry of Health boardroom before being dispatched into the fields*

*Abate granules were placed in plant pots to kill mosquito larvae. This was an initiative implemented by the Ministry of Health*
SHIFT IN FOCUS

• President made a further $85M allocation for the health response

• The food, water and shelter relief responses continued until the flood water had fully drained and persons could have returned to their houses

President Jagdeo visits a flood-hit community along the East Coast Demerara

Head of the Presidential Secretariat Dr. Roger Luncheon and Parliamentary Secretary Philomena Sahoye Shury interact with residents of Cummings Lodge to assess their situation
SHIFT IN FOCUS

- The public information campaign by GINA increased
- Mobile public address systems used
- The international media invited to get a hands-on view
- The President and other officials held regular media briefing
- GINA website converted into a flood update site for the international community

Ministry of Health continued its aggressive medical outreach to flood-hit victims

Information Liaison to the President Robert Persaud advises an East Coast resident to adhere to the medical advisories
SHIFT IN FOCUS

• Thousands of pamphlets were distributed and hours of television and radio advisories were broadcasted to residents advising them how to protect themselves from water-borne diseases

• As the East Coast Demerara flood waters receded, the focus shifted to the Mahaicony and Mahaica Creeks

*President Jagdeo meets farmers to listen to their concerns at State House*

*President Jagdeo at the Government’s packaging centre, Rahaman’s Park, Houston*
SHIFT IN FOCUS

- Water level rose, excess water released from the Conservancy into the Mahaica Creek to avoid any breach

- Farmers and residents in Mahaica and Mahaicony were alerted in advance. Government did some emergency works to ease the suffering

- President and Ministers visited the affected residents and farmers in the Mahaica and Mahaicony Creeks to deliver assistance and listen to suggestions

- Farmers received regular food and other forms of relief from Government

Minister of Amerindian Affairs Carolyn Rodrigues hands-over a food hamper to a Success resident

Minister of Public Service Dr. Jennifer Westford watches as food hampers are being loaded at Mahaica Creek
SHIFT IN FOCUS

- President assured flood victims of help to restart productive lives after the flood

- Ministry of Agriculture distributed feed, grass and molasses to farmers in flood-affected areas. Government allocated $6M for animal assistance.

Flood-hit victims were provided with safe drinking water daily

A farmer feeds his cow grass that was provided by the Ministry of Agriculture
SHIFT IN FOCUS

• The Ministry of Education conducted a comprehensive National Disaster Assessment of the losses incurred by schools in Regions Two, Three, Four and Five, including Georgetown.

• Schools in flood-hit areas remain closed until necessary sanitation activities had taken place in the buildings and compounds

Minister of Education Dr. Henry Jeffery and other officials visit a school in Georgetown to ensure it is fumigated

School children in affected areas receiving preventative medical attention
SHIFT IN FOCUS

- Common Entrance Examinations were postponed
- Government agrees to examine plans to allow students to make up for lost time caused by flood
- Children whose uniform and books were damaged would have these replaced

The clean-up campaign began as soon as the flood water receded on East Coast Demerara

After the flood water receded Government began road repairs
SHIFT IN FOCUS

- Government will finance emergency measures to save crops - President Jagdeo assures farmers of Mahaicony and Mahaica Creeks. These measures will take the form of supplying fuel to operate pumps and the hiring of machinery to assist in rebuilding the infrastructure.
The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security collaborated to offer counselling to persons who were affected by the floods.

The President called on the utility companies, banks and other businesses to provide concessions to affected residents.
President Jagdeo said that the display of courage and sharing makes him proud to be President of Guyana even in this time of disaster that has affected so many people. President Jagdeo made these comments at the Umana Yana during a national interfaith prayer service for the recovery from the worst natural disaster ever to hit Guyana.

During the disaster unity and compassion displayed by Guyanese across ethnicity, religion and class was comforting.
SUMMARY OF RELIEF

**Food Supply:**
- Dry ration purchased: 201 truckloads
- Hampers distributed: 73,889
- Hot meals: 120,047

*The amount spent in this area was in excess of $200M*

**Health Care:**
- More than 150,000 persons took doxycycline tablets to prevent leprosyrosis
- 400,000 pills were distributed
- 350 health teams including 3000 volunteers were in the field with 450 health professionals.

**Water supply:**
- Over 161,184 bottles of water distributed
- 2.9M gallons of water delivered
- 29 stand pipes installed
- 115 black water tank set-up at strategic points
# SUMMARY OF RELIEF

## Agricultural support:

- Over 10,000 animals were treated
- The President allocated $6M to be spent on support for livestock
- Grass, wheat-middling, salt, molasses and vitamin supplements were distributed to cattle farmers
- 4 veterinary extension teams visited flood-hit areas daily
- 2 feed distribution teams were out daily

## Shelter:

- 50 Shelters were set up in Regions 3, 4 and 5 to accommodate approximately 4,200 persons
- Government supported families in Linden who were sheltering 3,000 flood affected residents

## Infrastructure:

- 60 pumps were installed. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GUYSUCO), farmers, the private sector, USA, People’s Republic of China and Trinidad and Tobago donated pumps
- Emergency drainage works were carried out in Georgetown, East Coast Demerara, West Demerara, Mahaica and Mahaicony Creeks and both Conservancies Dam
### Sanitation:

- Government contracted the services of two waste disposal entities to remove garbage along East Coast Demerara at a cost of $25M *(as of Feb. 20, 2005)*
- Georgetown City Council was allocated $3M for City clean-up
- NDCs were also instructed to assist in the clean-up exercise and in distribution of cleaning agents and garbage bags
- Ministry of Health distributed 48,000 hampers with cleaning agents to flood-hit families

### International support:

- Government received US$806,197 in cash *(as of Feb 24, 2005)*
- Civil Defence Commission received US$1,678,869 in supplies *(as of Feb 24, 2005)*
- Guyanese groups in North America, the Caribbean, UK and elsewhere sent relief supplies in response to Government’s appeal
- Supplies and assistance were received from friendly countries and support agencies, these included: USA, Canada, UK, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, India, Inter-American Institute for Co-operation in Agriculture, Caribbean Development Bank, CARICOM, UNDP, World Food Programme
• The President in his Republic Day message disclosed that an assistance package for businesses, households and farmers will be unveiled

• Businesses, farmers and households are targeted for help

• President announced that a review of the drainage system will take place to increase capacity in all areas

• Emergency work started to prepare the drainage systems for the May-June rainy season

• Better management of drainage infrastructure was put in place

• Community infrastructure repairs programme in place for all flood-hit areas

• Ministry of Labour and Human Services began counselling affected families

• Medical teams have been visiting schools in flood-hit areas

“I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all who were part of this historic relief effort: my Ministers and other Government officials, the disciplined services, the religious community, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, members of political parties and the countless volunteers who gave of their services selflessly.”

President Jagdeo’s Republic Day Message, 2005
## AREAS WHICH HAVE RECEIVED GOVERNMENT’S FLOOD RELIEF

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AREAS WHICH HAVE RECEIVED GOVERNMENT’S FLOOD RELIEF

North East La Penitence
Better Hope
Anandalel
Vryheid’s Lust
Cummings Lodge
Paradise
2 Friends
B.V.
Beehive
Dochfour
Coldingen
Good Hope
Lusignan
Chateau Margot
Le Ressouvenir
Montrose
Meten Meer Zorg
Cummings Lodge
Success
La Bonne Intention
Vigilance
Courida Bush
Enmore
Non Pariel
Melanie
Cove and John
Industry
Greenfield
Success
Yarrow Dam
Non Pariel
DEndgrat
Felicity
Montrose
Brothers
Bel Field
Enmore
Hope Estate
Bee Hive
Clonbrook
Two Friends
Good Hope Housing Scheme
Cummings Lodge
Strathspey
Sheriga Scheme
Tucville
Craig Milne
Supply
Ogle
Foulis
Better Hope
Bel Air Village
Mocha
Goedverwating
Upper Mahaica Creek
Courabane Park
Friendship Sophia
South Ruimveldt Squatting Area
AREAS WHICH HAVE RECEIVED GOVERNMENT’S FLOOD RELIEF

Meadowbrook Squatting Area  Patentia
Enterprise                Wales
Kaneville                 Belle Vue
Hope West                 Standleytown
Chateau Margot            La Retraite
Industry Front            Toevulgt
Dazell Housing Scheme     Sisters Village
GreenField                Goed Intent
Kersaint Park             Middlesex
Bachelors Adventure       Resource
Logwood                   Alliance
Stratheavon              New Annlegt
North Ruimveldt          North Section/Conservancy
Hope                     Mon Desir
D’Hoop                   Belle West
Patentia                 Studley Park
St Cuthberts             South Section
Linden                   Pouderoiyen
Logwood                  Klien Pouderoiyen
Luluni                   Vreed-en-hoop
Richardsville            Crane
Mahaica/Mahaicony Creeks Best Village
De Ridders Faith          New Road
Oftend                   Wallers Delight
Versailes                Ruimzeigt
Goed Fortuin             Windsor Forest
Meerzorgen               La Jalousie
Longden Park             Hague
AREAS WHICH HAVE RECEIVED GOVERNMENT’S FLOOD RELIEF

Fellowship
Den Amstel
Blankenburg
Cornelia Ida
Anna Catherina
Lenora
Graenveldt
Uitvlugt
Zeeburg
De Willem
Meeten-Meer-Zorg
Kastev
Prem Nagar
Ocean Garden
Railway View
De Kindren
Boerasirie
Zeelugt
Tuschen
Vergenogen
Philadelphia
Barnwell
Greenwich Park
Marias Pleasure
La Grange
Bagotsville
Nismes
Malgre Tout
Endeavour
Soesdyke
North Section/Oku
LAventure
Vauxhaul
Beau Vosin
LOratoire
Bordeux
Jean Eve
Mes Delices
Jacob
La Desire
Anna Catherina
Noitgedacht
San Souci
Claybrick
Endeavour
Rosetta
De-Buff
South section
Java
Uitkomft
De Kenderen
Mon Bajou
Two Brothers
Vrief-en-Vens-Fchacb
Tenez Ferme
Orange Field
Map of Guyana showing areas hardest hit by the flood
Satellite image supplied by the Hydro meteorological Department showing the intense rain clouds during the December - January period.
Scenes of Guyana’s first natural disaster
Scenes of Guyana’s first natural disaster
GINA website providing minute by minute update on the flood situation in Guyana daily