

Georgetown, GINA, January 5, 2008

President Bharrat Jagdeo during a visit today to the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Creeks disclosed that government would be allocating \$3B to construct a canal from the East Demerara Water Conservancy (EDWC) to the Atlantic Ocean that is to serve as an alternate outlet for the drainage of the conservancy.

The Head of State said that the land has already been identified and that half of the money would be allocated in this year's budget with the remainder to be provided next year.

He told farmers that a further \$100 M will be set aside for post-flood relief for affected farmers across the country.

President Jagdeo interacting with residents of Perth, Mahaicony

The drainage intervention would see a canal being dug from the EDWC, through the Hope area and two control sluices installed at either ends.

This would reduce the volume of water in the Mahaica and Mahaicony Creeks when it is necessary to discharge water from the conservancy.

The Head of State visited several communities where he assessed the situation and explained to farmers and residents the reasons for discharging water from the East EDWC into the Mahaica/Mahaicony Creeks.

The three communities were affected as a result of the water released through the Conservancy's Maduni outlet.

President Jagdeo speaking with farmers and residents of Onverwagt, West Coast Berbice outside the MMA/ADA Office

The President explained that prior to the rainy season the conservancy was taken down to 52 GD (Georgetown Datum) but because of the amount of rainfall experienced it had increased to 59 GD and this had endangered the conservancy dam. This made it inevitable that the discharge was done because, had the water from the conservancy not been released, it could have caused the conservancy dam to break, emptying the over 100 billion gallons of water it contains onto the coastland creating devastation.

Questioned by farmers as to why the conservancy was not reduced to a lower level before the rainy season, the President said that the dam could have collapsed inwards causing other problems.

He told residents and farmers in the Abary Creek that arrangements would be made by Government to provide excavators to assist the farmers to empolder their land free of cost as was done in the Mahaica, Mahaicony and Pomeroun areas.

President Jagdeo at a meeting at Mora Point, Mahaicony Creek

He said that the long - term solutions to this problem for which studies have been done, revealed that some US\$400 M was required to develop adequate infrastructure in Regions 4 and 5 to cope with the excessive rainfall being experienced.

The Head of State informed that Government is looking for short - term measures that could bring relief to citizens and the canal through Hope is one of them. He, however, said that the allocation of funds to construct the canal would require that some other infrastructure programmes would have to be put on hold as the resources available to Government is limited.

Abary Creek farmers explained that the drainage system was coping adequately with the rainfall until the water from the EDWC was released into the creeks. This caused an overload in the drainage system that spilled over into Abary creek.

The Head of State in the Mahaicony Creek after having completed a visit to some of the creek's communities to assess the situation

Farmers voiced their concerns to President Jagdeo about their inability to pay their drainage and irrigation rates for lands in the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary /Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) area when they lose crops due to the heavy rainfall. The President then instructed that the authority examine each case and make arrangements for waivers where necessary.

President Jagdeo said that that the Government was prepared to support the MMA/ADA with the cost and would aid farmers by providing seed material and fertilizers to help them return to their farms.

The issue of private farmers damaging dams and not maintaining their drainage canals on their property was again highlighted.

The President was accompanied on his visit by Minister of Public Service Dr. Jennifer Westford, Agriculture Minister Robert Persaud, officials of the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority, and Region Five and the MMA/ADA.

Areas the President visited included the MMA/ADA office at Onverwagt, Onverwagt 27 Creek, Washclothes, Mora Point, and Perth Mahaicony and Baiboo and Broken Water Land in the Mahaica Creek.