

# Official Report

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2012-2014) OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN*

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72<sup>ND</sup> Sitting

Monday, 31<sup>ST</sup> March, 2014

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*The Assembly convened at 2.05 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Gratitude**

Hon. Members by way of announcement, I would like to first, personally, thank every Member of the House who shared the family's bereavement with the passing of Mrs. Backer. Particularly, I would like to thank the Clerk of the National Assembly and his staff for the assistance given at the various events. I thought that I should place that on record.

### **Cancellation of Seminar**

I would like to further announce with some degree of extreme disappointment that a seminar which I had announced on the last occasion has been cancelled for reasons being that because of the Budget debate ensuring, we are unable to find an appropriate time. We are working on having that seminar held at the end of the month, but it is subject, of course, to the availability of the Members of Parliament from Scotland and also of Professor Hazel, who is lecturing.

## **Ambulances**

We announce, as well as you would have noticed, though with some degree of anguish, I have no doubt, that there are two ambulances parked in the compound. I believe, Dr. Ramsaran is making more of a statement than anything. We have today a medical team available to the House and we would like to recognise and thank them. As I said to them when we met a few minutes ago, I have no doubt in my mind that we will not be needing their services, but I invited them to enjoy the debate. But should any Member feel he or she needs any special attention, please approach one of the members of the team.

## **Excuse**

I am announcing as well that for today's sitting Mr. John Adams has been excused, and will be up until the 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2014.

## **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

### **For Written Reply**

### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE PARAMAKATOI PRIMARY SCHOOL**

#### **Mrs. Marcello:**

- (i) Could the Hon. Minister tell this House why construction of the Paramakatoi Primary School, Region 8 that started in April, 2012, has not been completed?
- (ii) Could the Hon. Minister tell this House when construction of the Paramakatoi Primary School would be completed?

*Answers were not circulated.*

## **MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER No. 71(2)**

Be It Resolved:

That Standing Order No. 71(2) be suspended to enable the assembly to proceed with budget debates.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have given consent in accordance with Standing Order No. 28(2) for the Hon. Prime Minister to move a motion in relation to the conduct of our debate for the budget. Please proceed Hon. Prime Minister.

**Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Essentially this motion seeks the waving of Standing Order No. 71(2) which provides for five days to be allotted for debate on our budget motion here. We seek that this Standing Order be waved so that the agreement reached by the Government and Opposition to extend debate to 7 days could be put into place.

I move that Standing Order No. 71(2) be suspended to enable the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenue of Expenditures for the year 2014 be extended to seven days.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Standing order suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** We will now have our debated continuing beyond five days for a seven day period. On that note Hon. Members, I just wish to say you will see at your desks some guidelines, not rules, I have worked out for the conduct of our debate taking into account matters which arose last year. I know the press has expressed some concern about some aspects, but we will try to keep within these guidelines. As I said, these are not rules, but guidelines and we will do our best to keep within them.

**Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]:** Mr. Speaker, I was just looking over those guidelines. They seem to be fair, but I was concerned about No. 17.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is with regard to members of the public, not to Members of the Assembly. Sorry, I should have made that clear. No. 17 pertains to members of the public and the press. They are not to participate in any way in our debates. In the past, we have had members of the

public trying to gesticulate, to point out, to intervene and even heckle. I cannot stop you from heckling and I would not attempt to do so. This is for members of the public, Sir.

**Mr. Benn:** I was just concerned that we would have spirited debates.

**Mr. Speaker:** We would not in any way try to curtail and circumscribe that. Thank you.

I recognise Ms. Ally.

**Ms. Ally:** Thank you Mr. Speaker, reference the very guidelines, I would like you to address your mind also back to item No. 5.

**Mr. Speaker:** Item No. 5 states Hon. Members that the Hon. Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Minister of Finance, when replying, will not be subject to time restrictions.

**Ms. Ally:** Mr. Speaker, could I have an explanation why for winding up the debate the Hon. Prime Minister has to fall into the category of the Hon Opposition Leader and the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Speaker:** Because Ms. Ally, the Prime Minister is the Prime Minister of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Leader of Government's business. It has been the tradition of this House that the Prime Minister speaks unhindered. That is the tradition I met sixteen years ago when I came, and I see no difficulty with it. It is our Prime Minister.

Is there any other matter for clarification?

Hon. Members there are ten speakers for today. As stated, we are going to do our best to leave here at 10.00 p.m. I would like to go, and I am sure my Deputy Speaker shares my view and that he would like to leave at 10.00 p.m. Even though I put that he will take over, I know he does not want to take over. So we will do our best to stay within the time so that we can have a good, healthy, robust debate and, as I said, these are guideline which, of course, we will seek to adapt, hopefully, not too much as we go ahead.

## **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

### **Presentation and First Reading**

## **LAND SURVEYORS BILL 2014 – Bill No. 7/2014**

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to enact a new Land Surveyors Act and to repeal the existing Act, to repeal the Surveys (Special Provisions) Act and to consolidate and reform the law governing the practice of land surveying, including aerial surveys, the preparation of plans, the maintenance of records of land surveys and for related matters.” *[Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment]*

*Reading of the Bill deferred.*

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **MOTION**

#### **MOTION TO APPROVE THE ESTIMATS OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER, 2014**

“WHEREAS the Constitution of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimate of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2014 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2014;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2014, of a total sum of two hundred and five billion, three hundred and seventy million, five hundred and eighteen thousand dollars (\$205,370,518,000), excluding fourteen billion, and six hundred and seventy six million, one hundred and forty three thousand dollars (\$14,676,143,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the under-mentioned schedule, and

agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.”  
*[Minister of Finance]*

*Assembly resumed budget debate.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members we will now commence debates on the 2014 Budget and the consideration of the Estimates later by the Committee of Supply. We will in respect of sitting times follow our usual practice and I have to amend my note. We will break at 5.00 p.m. for one hour and I will ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to ensure that we stay within that time and continue thereafter. Our first speaker today is the Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge. Go ahead please, Sir.

**Mr. Greenidge:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, especially for giving me my full name. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, since you seem to be in a good mood, I can just crave your indulgence to start by saying a personal word in passing concerning the lost of my erstwhile neighbour and shield, often; never mind the fact that she spent a lot of the time sitting next to me accusing me of stealing her papers and documents. I did in the end manage to forgive her and I just would like to express my own sadness at her loss.

I should like in keeping with traditions of the House to extend congratulations to the Minister of Finance for presenting another annual budget to this Assembly. He has done so in a climate of anxiety on the part of the populace, and judging from the silence and subdued mood on the part of his colleagues on that side of the House also.

Ladies and gentlemen, the challenges facing Guyana, I believe, have been very extensively aired especially in the last year or so on the economic front, perhaps more loudly and frequently than at any other time in the recent past. It appears, however, that the priorities that should inform the preparation of budgets and overall economic planning are not perhaps shared in a consensual manner, as they should be. So I would like to start by pointing to this area and saying a few words on this with a view of trying to see if one can ensure that at least on the other side of the House it is clearly understood where we stand.

The Election of 2011 yielded a result that left, I think, few of us really satisfied. And although on this side of the House an overall majority exists in terms of the number of seats, the manner in which those seats are allocated whether we like it or not the electorate decided not to place in the

hands of a single party a majority. That has the effect, and obviously everyone else would see it, of constraining the power of the Executive and its representative in this House. The significance of that outcome in relation to some sections of the electorate is, of course, often a topic for debate over drinks and elsewhere.

But the simple fact is with not a majority of votes in the hands of the governing party, the business of the House has to be a matter that is undertaken on the basis of some understanding or common understanding on both sides. If the government's programme is to be implemented it needs alliances or at least compromises over the programme that the Government would seek to implement. To conclude simply because a party has the largest single number of seats it deserves to be able to pass all the legislation it wishes, and to behave as though it is in control of the Assembly, is the source of what the Hon Minister described as a graphic parliamentary impasse. I thought it was important not to allow this matter to pass because, clearly, if we treat that impasse as some aberration, some mistake by the electorate that can be fixed simply by drawing to the attention the fact that on the other side of the benches we have a set of honourable and efficient people, we are not going to get anywhere.

In a democracy the expressed views of the electorate cannot be wished away as though they were an error in arithmetic. And as regards the procedure we use I want to say that with the reference I made to Mrs. Backer just now I am reminded that she used to very often speak to this question of the arithmetic that the election itself generates and would often, I think in deference to Mr. Manzoor Nadir, cite a comment he likes to make as regards this side of the House when you have a minority of seats. I think the expression is 'we could have our say and the Government would have its day.' It is a question of arithmetic in the end, and we should try to work to that rather than treating the consequence as the result of some devilish behaviour on the part of those on this side of the benches.

I want to say is that the Constitution itself does not qualify or circumscribe the term majority. Whether it is a majority of one the House exercise the same rules as to whether it is a majority of 40 unless, of course, in specific circumstances, and those circumstances require a two-thirds majority or a referendum. That I think is something we have to try and live with. I mentioned it because quite frequently I hear on the other side complaints that the Members on this side are exercising some undemocratic rights because they only have a majority of one. I think that is

most unfortunate. It reminds me of an observation by Mr. Ronald Reagan some time ago, he is not my favourite person, but he said governments exists to protect us from each other, and where governments have gone beyond its limits is in deciding to protect us from ourselves. I think that is a very valuable bit of information we should bear in mind.

The other point I want to make is that the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government recognised the need to try and deal with the fact that there is need for some sort of consensus in this House, and initially we had efforts at a tri-partite set of discussions. The first set of discussions did not go very far although as a result of a crisis immediately before the Committee of Supply met in 2012 the Government conceded on a number of issues in order to break the deadlock. I say a number of issues, but it was specifically on the issue of old age pensions. I mention that simply to point out that the parties were engaged in discussions which threw up many, many issues, all of which were recognised as important, and around which a consensual programme or core of policies could well have been crafted. The governing side did not agree and in the end the issues were examined in a preliminary manner and there seemed to be some understanding they would take them up in the distant future to try to resolve them.

I mention these again so that I can get the opportunity to remind you to the extent which we have been discussing important issues, on these two sides of the House, but many of those important issues seemed to have died after the discussion took place. Perhaps there was a failure to recognise in that list of issues goals that at least a significant proportion of the representatives of the people, as the majority in this House represents, thought they were worthy of attention and worthy of some more explicit considerations.

Very quickly, let me say to you that in the list of 2012 that had been passed to the Government and that we had discussion on were the following: the discussion on Value Added Tax (VAT) and the Berbice Bridge toll; the question of old age pensions and public assistance – not only the increase in those but a significant increase which we thought should have been implemented; the question of the subsidies to Linden, Kwakwani, Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) and GuySuCo; the question of the Public Service salaries - across the board increases as well as arrangements for the implementation of transparent mechanisms relating to the appointment of Regional Executive Officers (REOs), Deputy Regional Executive Officers (DREOs) and issues about management and modernisation of the public service; questions of raising the Public

Service retirement age; a depressed areas development fund; the burning question of National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and its impending financial collapse; its lack of financial viability at the moment which the actuary continues to draw out attention to; the issue of Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and the constitutional offices, and the way the resources for those agencies are captured in the Estimates – in other words the need to amend the estimates as currently presented; and there also was the question of National Communications Network (NCN) and Government Information News Agency (GINA) and the Auditor General; National Industrial and Commercial Investments Ltd. (NICIL) was the tenth item.

Following those aborted discussions, or as a result of those, the Government and the Opposition had some broad agreement on some of these matters. It was agreed, for example, that the NIS position or the response of the Government to the actuarial recommendation on the NIS would be submitted to this House by November of 2012, given its importance. Up to today, we have not seen that. On the VAT issue, the Government undertook to set up a Tax Reform Committee and to examine ways to share more equitably the tax burden and to ensure or to see whether there are any possibilities for reducing the VAT in one way or the other, if only to look at questions of zero rating and so on. That has not happened.

Also on the table we had discussions on were a number of constitutional issues, some of which arose from the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act and its conflict with the Constitution itself, especially as regards article 212(A) of the Constitution.

In the subsequent year, namely 2013, we went through a discussion as per 2012 in a bid to try to find some common ground and to agree a process that would cause us to avoid, or try to ensure that we avoid, these impasses and sorts of depression sometimes which captures the populace when we approach budget time as to whether a crisis is going to beset all of us. Arising out of those exchanges in November the party leaders on this side, separately and collectively, wrote to the President again on a number of issues – eleven on this occasion – ranging from across the board salary increases, the question of frequency licences, the Government's commitment to the issue of licences to the television station in Region 10, a status report regarding the transfers requested by GuySuCo and GPL, and an update on the plans that will enable them to get out of the situation of constantly calling on us for subsidies. The Government was called upon to reconstitute the Tax Reform Committee; there was also the question of constituting the Public

Procurement Commission, the establishing of an Integrity Commission, the Human Rights Commission and a number of the other commissions which were not properly established.

There was also the request in that letter concerning the extra budgetary agencies including NICIL and again the question of NIS arose and the implementation of the actuary report, actuarial recommendations. There was again the toll on the Berbice Harbour Bridge and the question of political dialogue and constitutional reforms, and a call again for the re-establishment of institution of arrangements so we can put in place a professional public service; also the question of dealing with contract employees.

I need not say that in the budgets between 2012 and now none of these matters have been properly addressed, let alone reflected in the budget document itself. In recognition of the dissatisfaction that this had caused on 17th April last year, the President in a meeting with Mr. Granger and Mr. Granger's team agreed on an exchange of letters between the Minister of Finance and myself which would set out a process, a process which would help us towards dealing in a more orderly manner with the pre-budget discussions. That letter, whilst initially we thought it might be the trigger for ensuring that, at least, this process is started after so many false starts, has also failed. Only the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) attended the sole meeting that was convened and at that meeting the proposals that were submitted were not discussed and no letters were exchanged as part of the commitment that had been made.

The point I want to make is that the Government is in receipt both of proposals pertaining to a budget that could capture a consensus across the isles as well as a process that could serve as a blueprint for dealing with budget discussion and some form of the preparation in future. But in spite of these efforts we come to the budget of 2014 without really having gone any way significant towards dealing with the challenges that give rise to the concerns in the first instance. I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the consequences because in dealing with budgets in the past we have had cause to cut the allocations requested by the Minister for a variety of agencies. I am thinking of the moneys pertaining to the Commissions, the NCN, GINA conundrum and the considerations that arose in implementing those cuts.

It is worthwhile saying amongst the conditions raised here, especially since in dealing with this in a letter pertaining to whether the Estimates were properly before the House, you had asked for

an explanation of what were the conditions governing, if you like, the decision of the House. I know we deal with that elsewhere but just to say to you that we had called for a cultural and social audit and for the adherence of these agencies to internationally accept professional reporting standards, as well as a copy of the report and the wrong doing within NCN in 2012. We had a number of other areas, the conditions pertaining to the transfers to GPL under the electrification programme, issues pertaining to contracts for some of the major projects of the Government including the speciality hospital order, the problem of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and the issue of Amaila Falls and the refusal of the House to approve the equity contribution that the Government had requested in that regard, and we also had cause to cut an element associated with the international airport at Timehri.

*2.35 p.m.*

Mr. Speaker, I am not going through these simply because I want to extend our deliberations today. I want to say to you that if we are aware that we have taken certain roots in the past and the efforts to try and ensure that we do not end up in a cul-de-sac after these exchanges or efforts, then we really need to seriously pay attention to establishing modalities for dealing with the difficulties that the majority identifies in relation to the Government's programme. At the moment it is the case that no mechanism exists for that.

I want to just give warning to my Colleagues, Cde. Speaker, that for example, in the manner in which the estimates have been formulated, as I had written to you last year, April, indicating, we are still of the view, which you confirmed in your ruling, that the format of the Estimates, as presented to this House, were not consistent with the Constitutional requirements. Now that has implications because I am recommending to my Colleagues, that they stand on that principle. In other words, the Government has an obligation to honour its constitutional obligations and we have an obligation, also, to ensure that they are held to those rules and they do not just break the rules because a Minister or someone on the other side believe that they do not have to be bound by rules. That is the reason for drawing these matters to your attention Mr. Speaker, and for drawing them to the attention of my Colleagues.

As we look at the budget of 2014, we see some of the broader issues that had been identified in our exchanges again, tend not to be adequately treated. Let me look at those mentioned by the

Minister himself in his presentation and I think one can have no difficulty with these. It is useful to know where the fashion or those who fashion the budget, makes these emphasises. They are not attempting to list these in any order or the order that the Minister had sighted them, but there were a range of broader goals at the opening section of the budget, ranging from aspirations for home ownership; raising levels of technical and professional qualifications; trying to pursue education for a better quality of life; access to decent public health care system; and the hope that every family should have good reason for being optimistic about their future and should be motivated and incentivised for personal fulfilment and upward mobility.

These are wonderful goals. We know of course, especially as it regards the question of optimism about the future. At least the most recent survey that I looked at amongst youngsters leaves us in a place very far from optimism because all of those youngsters between the ages of primary school and 25, would want to leave the country if they could have an opportunity, either immediately or within five to ten years ahead and it is a serious matter. This is one of the reasons why we should try to ensure that we can find common ground and move forward in a manner that is constructive.

We are pleased to see those goals. We also want to say that we would have like to see some others, many of which loomed very large in cutting waste and corruption. Amongst them is cutting waste and corruption, the question of the quality of Government services, the problem of emoluments and conditions of service, the regulatory regimes, especially as regards the financial and other sectors, the maintenance of mechanism to protect the poor and vulnerable, putting in place an adequate analytical framework and benchmarks to enable the target setting and monitoring of some of the very goals that the Minister has mentioned.

It is interesting that in a number of the areas when one looks at the proposals, broad though they are, clearly they are very desirable. What worries me is that it is unlikely that we are able, in a hurry, to provide a background that can tell us where exactly we are in relations to some of the areas that are mentioned, even in terms of the facilities or the initiatives, taken by the Government in the past in regards to some areas, such as employment, employment among the youth and so forth.

The issue is; have we got a wide enough set of goals set out in background that informs the policy making for budgets and financial plans? Are we taking account of the need to ensure that the data that would be available to help us to undertake the analysis is in place? I think these issues are especially urgent given growing evidence of income and equality in our society to an extent, I think, largely unprecedented or at least unprecedented in most of our lifetimes.

The question of the Minister, for example, in making his presentation took the opportunity in the opening to speak about the achievements that have been made since 2002, when this Parliament started its session. He listed a number of these areas, especially looking at how much was spent on a range of services. But you know, Mr. Speaker, at the end of that exercise, we still have to ask ourselves whether in fact the expenditures, large though they may have been, whether they have had the impact that was intended. An impact is something that is very much missing in terms of the analysis and the presentation of the 2014 Budget.

I will turn now to the three or four points that follow from these points that I was making earlier. The drafters of the 2014 Budget have deliberately ignored the legal and constitutional issues raised in the earlier exchanges over the Budget the APNU proposes to have these matters brought to the forum.

Secondly, in view of debates that has taken place on a number of fronts, whether it was on the LCDS the state of play in relations to the Amaila Hydro-Power Project, GINA and NCN, and so forth, that these debates seems not to have been taken into account and we see almost what is a contemptuous inclusion of items in the budget, notwithstanding the fact that in the earlier debates, the House had called upon the Ministers responsible for these sectors to present to it evidence or information, before they would be prepared to approve moneys for these areas.

I would like to single out for treatment at this stage the request for funds for GuySuCo... *[Interruption]* I know that the Minister has, in passing, made reference to what he called a promised, soon to be appointed, Board of Directors and senior management. I note that not a word about the demands for ensuring that the Board and the management enhance their competence and are less politicised in a manner raised not only by us but also by Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU).

I should also like to say this; the question of GuySuCo is a very important one. There are a number of sectors in this country that are very important, not only because of the number of workers they employ, but because of the import of the industry to our economic well-being and welfare. And because it affects the lives of so many of our citizens, sugar is one of the industries to which special attention has always been paid by certainly the Governments that I have been part of in the past.

Our position here, let me say for those that may have some difficulties with economics, that we have provided considerable support to the sector in the past and those of you that know a little bit about devaluation should understand that the devaluations of the 1980's had a lot to do with providing Guyana dollar resources to the main net earner of foreign exchange, so that they could throw a profit in Guyana dollar terms. So if you do not know, ask. Do not be heckling as though you know what you are saying.

It is clear that an industry which is important and deserves support, also deserves and needs to ensure that when moneys are requested on behalf of its workers to ensure that arrangements and plans are in place to ensure that the injection of money actually goes towards fixing the problems that gave rise to difficulties in the first instance.

The examination of the work done in relations to both the bauxite and to GPL, are the same. That is, that they are important enough to warrant financial assistance, but that the financial assistance should be conditional on the Government showing that it understood and it had made arrangements to remedy the difficulties that had gotten them in hot water in the first place. We have called for medium and long terms plans and when those plans had been provided, even before the period has been completed, the industry or the company has gone off track. That is the case of GuySuCo and the others.

There is no point shouting sugar workers because the problem is not the sugar workers, the problem is the Government. The problem arises because of Government's policy. A policy which seeks to fill the Board with a whole set of political appointees; a problem which seeks to appoint managers who are afraid of their own shadow. Government's own Member of Parliament over there, the GAWU representative, has spoken to this point and we agree with him in its entirety, that GAWU's analysis of the weakness of the sugar sector is accurate. We agree

with it and the Government must fix those things before they come for more money. That is what we are saying.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your time is up. An extension is required.

**Ms. Ally:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Greenidge:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Guyana Agriculture and Workers Union has a long list of management and policies inadequacies which were drawn to the attention of Government and the world, over the last five or more years. What we are saying is that those complaints should be addressed. In the longer term, GuySuCo itself, and I must say, in wearing a previous hat I had funded a study on GuySuCo and its future and how it would survive in the liberalised new market and that called upon the industry not only to improve its efficiency, but to diversify into higher value products. That also has to be part of the plan and we agree to that.

*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Allow Mr. Greenidge to make his presentation, please.

**Mr. Greenidge:** Mr. Speaker, the sectoral development that we have seen set out in the Budget leave us cold in many ways. Let me take bauxite. I notice that the Minister made mention of a transshipment and dry docking facility to be constructed in Trinidad and Tobago, presumably at Point Lisas. This for us is a puzzle because we had a facility there before; it turned out to be uneconomic in the 1980's largely because of the low volume *[Inaudible]*. The industry therefore developed a plan, which they implemented and which saved money to the tune of US\$3-US\$4 per tonne. It involved the construction of a turning basin or a dock at the mouth of the Demerara River and this operated until 1996. Later, Reynolds itself built a facility in the Berbice River and there were, I should say, producing larger volumes than the Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc. (BCGI) and RUSAL is now producing. Like GUYMINE and DIDCO, they ruled out the Trinidad option. So it is somewhat of a puzzle to understand how it is that Guyana has gone to that particular proposal. The maintenance of that facility or the attempt to establish a facility in

Trinidad seems not to be well founded. I think that we would be interested in knowing what underlies that proposal.

Secondly, I see there is a proposal for Kurubuka deposit at this stage. As regards that particular proposal, I should say that the experience here is that when one looks at the note they get the impression that this is an expansion of bauxite production, which is going to have a major impact on employment. In fact, of course, it is actually the establishment of a facility to replace the depleted reserves at Kwakwani , so it is not, in fact, additional production and it should not, in a sense, be portrayed in that manner.

I would like to say that in looking at the budget there are two more points I would like to make. First of all, in looking at the figures, especially at the estimates and the various economic balances, one cannot avoid the impression that many of the figures have been doctored in order to facilitate balance. If one look at both revenue and expenditure they will see that. That I think is a matter that must concern us.

The last point, I would like to make pertains to this claim that this Budget is the largest budget ever. Do you know Mr. Speaker that when a budget comes to the House there is one figure, in the following year that figure is revised and in the year after that the figure is settled as the final figure? Mr. Speaker, if you have a look at the Budget 2013, which was billed as the largest budget ever, in 2014 the \$208.4 billion, which was the largest ever actually turned out to be \$165.8 billion. In fact, in a revenue sense it was smaller than the previous year. If one looked at it on the expenditure side, it was not much different either.

The significance of the size of the budget turns upon when it is that one is actually looking at it. The other side is the economics of it. If one thinks that it is so wonderful to have as large a budget as possible, the limit on the size of the Budget is given by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When the Minister and his Colleagues presentations are followed, one gets the impression that... *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Allow Mr. Greenidge to speak. I am having difficulty hearing him. Go ahead, Mr. Greenidge.

**Mr. Greenidge:** Tremendous joy and celebrations would follow on the announcement that the budget was the largest it could ever be. In other words, it has taken all the Gross Domestic Product. What it means in fact when this budget gets larger and larger is that it is taking a larger share of the income that one earns. Ultimately the budget's limitation is the total bundle of goods and services that are produced.

The point I am making is that the significance of a larger budget has to be seen in the context of the share of income - of your income that it takes, not in terms of the absolute size of money spent in any particular year. That issue is a very important one because the share of the budget and the management of the resources that the Government garners have given rise to problems in this country before and it. It reminds me that we should also bear that in mind when we seek to stop this House from modifying that amounts requested by the Minister for funding. It turns upon the whole principle of taxation and taxation without representation. That is why one has a right to look at and amend those figures so that they are consistent with the will of the majority. Mr. Speaker I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Housing [Mr. Ali]:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to first of all congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and his competent staff for preparing a budget that is realistic - one that speaks to the issues facing our population and one that seeks to bring balance in terms of income distribution and balance in terms of the distribution of the national wealth. For this, all of us must congratulate the Minister of Finance.

There are lots of statements that were made prior to the commencement of these debates today. The Hon. Carl Greenidge led those controversial statements in the newspapers referring to the debates that we are engaging today as maybe a period of bloody war. He also, today took us down a road of outlining broad topics and making broad statements, without pointing to a single measure; to a single policy; or to a single input that he or his party would have liked to see in the National Budget that would have improved the lives of people.

When you are the lead speaker in relation to a budget that is presented, you have the responsibility of presenting the alternative you so wish to present. Today, I appeal to every single media house that is present here to carry the Hon. Carl Greenidge's speech word for word and let

the people out there judge whether he has an alternative in relation to the presentation by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. *[Interruption]*

I must deal with the issue of context and how the National Budget is crafted. The National Budget is informed by a number of national strategies on which the entire population were consulted, including the National Development Strategy, the Public Sector Investment Programme, the Low Carbon Development Strategy and the Manifesto of the political party that is elected to Government and elected by the people to represent their interest.

I want to correct something in this House. The Hon. Member Carl Greenidge keeps referring to the combine impact of the combine force in the Opposition...

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry one second Mr. Ali. Mr. Greenidge?

**Mr. Greenidge:** I do not recall making any such statement.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, the last time we checked, the PPP/C holds 32 seats in this National Assembly, the APNU holds 26 seats and the Alliance For Change (AFC) holds 7 seats. The majority party in the National Assembly is the PPP/C. But guess what? When we cry foul, we must also let the population know that this majority party does not hold even the Deputy Speaker's position. When we were in majority, the Opposition always held the position of Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker I hope I will get back my time. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay Hon. Members allow Mr. Ali to make his presentation please. Go ahead, Mr. Ali.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, all of us bear responsibility in here. On this side of the House we knew it would have been irresponsible not to allow the post of Deputy Speaker, when we had the majority. In the interest of the people of this country we did the responsible thing. That is what we did. *[Interruption]*

I will not be derailed in the substance of the matter we are here to debate on today, that is, in relation to the National Budget of Guyana 2014. This budget has wide spread support in our population and unlike the Hon. Member Carl Greenidge, who said that the budget has sent our

population into silence, only in the *Guyana Chronicle* headlines yesterday I read Private Sector Commission (PSC) supports measures. Is the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge saying that the members in the Private Sector Commission do not matter or their views in relation to the budget do not matter? *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, Mr. Greenidge is trying to speak to me and I need to hear. You may take your seat please Mr. Ali.

**Mr. Greenidge:** Mr. Speaker, can I just urge that our Colleagues stick to the truth. I made no such statement and if he ... *[Interruption]*. If he does not have anything to say let him find someone else to quote.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Ali was posing some questions. I do not know that he has deliberately said that you stated an untruth. Go ahead, Mr. Ali.

**Mr. Ali:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is a fundamental of debating. We are today enjoying in this country positive economic growth of 5.2%. This Hon. Minister of Finance has the distinction of sitting as the Minister with responsibility for the economy and overseeing our country growing consecutively for eight years with positive economic growth.

We must be responsible when we make public pronouncements, especially on television programmes. I was looking at a *Spotlight* programme and a Hon. Member referred to the Minister as an “accountant”. The Hon. Member was questioning the ability of this “accountant” in the preparation of the National Budget.

*3.05 p.m.*

But this accountant, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, has presided over eight consecutive years of economic growth. I would rather have an accountant, such as him, presenting my budget than an economist who took us to the poorest country in this hemisphere, any day.

Let us look at what the international community has to say. Guyana in 2013 is the highest in terms of our growth in the Caribbean, according to a 2013 report by Economic Commission of Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC). This is what that report, *Economic and Social Panoramic of the Community of Latin America and Caribbean State* says:

“Based on this report Caribbean economies recorded the following growth rates for 2013: Jamaica – 0.1%, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Kitts, Nevis, Bahamas, Belize – 1.6%, St. Lucia – 1.1%, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda – 1.5%, Dominica - -0.5%, Barbados - -0.7% and Guyana – 5.2%.”

The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge questioned our numbers. Inflation is 0.9%, but what is the justification for his questioning? Where is your alternative analysis? Where are your numbers? Where is your analysis? Where are your reports? What are you referring to, Hon. Member? We are referring to international reports, independent reports and the national reports generated by the competent professional staff that work in the public service.

Another important area that the ECLAC report alluded to earlier was the growth in domestic credit. In that context this is what the report had to say.

“The growth in domestic credit surpasses other countries in the Caribbean. During 2013, domestic credit in Guyana expanded by 24.2% compared to St. Kitts and Nevis at 23.4%. Trinidad and Tobago - -12.1%, Belize - -0.8%, Antigua and Barbuda - -6.8%, Bahamas – 1.7%, Jamaica – 17.7%.

This is the type of economic performance that should make all of us, as Guyanese, proud, that should make us happy, that should make us understand that we live in a country which is progressing, a country that is improving, a country that is creating wealth, but what do we see? Let me take you to what we see.

I want to outline some of the headlines in regional newspapers – “Bajans taken for a ride” (*Nation News*, February 6, 2014) - “The Bajan Government is borrowing 14 million per month to pay 7,000 casual workers”; “Puerto Rico slid towards insolvency” (*Reuters*, March 15, 2013); “St. Lucia PM calls for reduction in Government spending because it does not have the resources” (*Caribbean News*: April 27, 2013); “Wage freeze would go beyond 2017” (*Jamaica Observer*, March 10, 2014); “Grenada Government unable to pay arrears to public servants” (*Guardian*, March 1, 2014).

This is what the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago had to say “Build homes, create jobs” (*Trinidad Express*, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011). What does that remind you of Mr. Speaker? What does that

tell you about? It reminds you about this Government that would have created infrastructure for 30,000 new homes in the last four years alone. This is what the Prime Minister had to say, “30,000 people in the construction sector are currently jobless”. The Prime Minister went on, “The Central Bank Governor is saying that the Government needs to spend; the Government needs to invest in infrastructure, and as we do that we create jobs and as we create jobs that goes into the multiplying effect that stimulates the economy.”

Hear what the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge was saying, “Size does not matter.” Well, the size matters; it is an old aged debate. If we do not have the size, in term of a fiscal space, we will not be able to invest in infrastructure, we will not be able to create jobs and we will not be able to create a wealth. It is basic economics.

In the construction sector, this is what the Hon. Prime Minister is saying, “I am advised that 30,000 people are unemployed and we have so many houses to build and we will build homes and we will provide these jobs.” We also want to send the same message. Here, in Guyana, we will build homes, we will build hospitals, we will build schools and we will build hydropower because we understand the importance of this for our economy. We are not going to live without understanding the basic elements of growth and development. We have a responsibility as a Government and we are going to ensure that we execute that responsibility in developing our people and our country.

I continue. *The Trinidad Express* on November 4, 2010 reported, “24,700 Lose Jobs.” “Barbados job cut politics, some 3,000 Government workers...” [Mr. Ramjattan: *[Inaudible]*... Marriott. You did not hear. Answer the lady.] I will answer every single question. Consequently, 3,000 Government workers are scheduled for retrenchment within the first quarter of 2014. This is in Barbados. We are talking about increases and in Barbados they are fighting to save jobs and employment and that is why the subsidies are so important because in this Government we are not going to preside over the destruction of jobs. We are going sustain jobs while we create new ones.

Let the Opposition point to one period of the stewardship under the People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Government when we lost 12,000 jobs, when we lost 5,000 jobs, when we lost

200 jobs and they will find no evidence to support that. That tells the Opposition that we have run a tight ship here. When it comes to our economic performance... [*Interruption*]

**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Why everybody is going away?

**Ms. Shadick:** So what! That is their choice.

**Mr. Speaker:** Minister Ali, it was a colleague in the back bench who provided an answer to one of the questions that I thought you should have answered – why people are leaving? That is what led to lull, so it was an interruption from this side.

**Mr. Ali:** As I am saying, when it comes to the management of our economy, the Hon. Minister of Finance is standing on solid rock. Contrary, when it comes to his legacy in the way that he managed the economy, the Hon. Member Greenidge is standing on sinking sand.

This is what they say: in Trinidad “Residents want jobs through infrastructure” (*Trinidad Express, July 27th, 2011*).

Let us look at some of our local headlines. “Budget cuts delay hinterland development” (*Kaieteur News, 23rd October, 2013*) - this government providing money for hinterland development. Who cut the budget? It is not the Government. Who wants to create a better Guyana? It is this Government. Who wants to destroy that? It is the joint Opposition.

The second headline: “GINA begins staff rotation as budget cut bites” (*newssource.com*).

The third headline: “Muri Brazil pulls out... Opposition should stop playing games with project, gears towards economic development – Dr. Luncheon”, (*Kaieteur News, January 9, 2014*).

“Investors confidence in Guyana under political attack – Dr. Luncheon warns”, (*Guyana Chronicle, January 8, 2014*).

“Opposition continues to hold socioeconomic project to ransom” (*Guyana Chronicle, July 19, 2013*).

“Opposition cut to budgetary allocation for specialty hospital, mind-boggling” (*Guyana Chronicle, April 24, 2013*).

These are some of the headlines that our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean are reading about us. Do you know what they are saying? They are saying what is wrong with those people. We want those investments and we want those projects. Why are they denying the people of Guyana those projects?

Let us look at the issue of job creation and I will give a few examples. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project: This project will save consumers US\$3.5 billion over 20 years; this project will reduce our fuel import bill by 25%; it would add six cumulative points to our GDP; it will allow the generation of energy through 100% renewable; it would create thousands of jobs, thousands of new business, thousands of new industries in the manufacturing sector. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? This Opposition, which cries so loud that it cares about job creation, has blocked this project.

Let us look at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) expansion. This is another project that will create new opportunities, new jobs, expand our economy, and guess what? This Opposition blocked that project. How can this Opposition present the moral authority to speak on job creations when the fundamental investments, which are being made by this Government to create those opportunities, are being denied? Do you know why they are being denied? They are being denied because of the combined power of one. [Mr. Ramjattan: That will be cut. Do not bother with him.] That is the attitude. The leading Member of the Alliance For Change (AFC) is saying, "Do not bother with him that will be cut". The debate, and the facts that we present here, does not matter to him. It does not matter to him.

Let us look at the investment in the industrial development. An investment of \$200 million is earmarked for the Belvidere industrial site and the Lethem industrial site. Let me take you through the mathematical scenario, the economics.

In Belvidere, 21 new plots will be available. [Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger: Belvidere, where is it?] The Hon. Member does not even know where Belvidere is. That is how lost they are over there. How can they represent the people when they do not even know where their communities are? I am shocked. This Hon. Member served in the army at the highest level and does know where Belvidere is. [Interruption from the Opposition Members.]

Mr. Speaker, I notice that you are offering no protection.

**Mr. Speaker:** You seem to be revelling in what is going on. I notice that the Minister of Finance seems to be directing an orchestra and every time his hands go like this Mr. Neendkumar's voice goes up. You seem to be in good hands. Go ahead.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, I have no problem. I can handle any level of roughness that comes my way. I was just pointing it out to you.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at an average investment of \$18 million on every plot at Belvidere you will see that in that one initiative \$378 million will be spent. On an average, if 20 persons are employed for each development 420 direct new jobs will be created during construction. When this industrial estate is completed it will create approximately 525 new direct jobs for the people in Belvidere and Region 6. This is economic expansion; this is diversification; this is creation of wealth and this definitely is a budget that brings betterment for all Guyanese.

Let us look at Lethem. In Lethem, we will invest \$180 million for 140 plots. We assume, based on the proposals, that an average of \$24 million will be invested in each plot. That would mean that private investment would be in excess of \$3.3 billion in Lethem. This will create direct employment for 2,800 persons. Let us assume that an average employee earns \$50,000. This would mean that in Lethem we would be able to generate, in that economy, \$174 million every month.

Let us look at some of the impacts, in terms of our social expenditure. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge asked where the impacts are and what the measurement is and I wish to point to some of that.

Extreme poverty, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has reduced. It has reduced from where you left it, Hon. Member, and it has reduced substantially from where you left it.

Guyana has achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) relating to nutrition, child health, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and universal primary education. This is where the investments went. The Hon. Member asked for impacts and I am giving him the impacts.

The Human Development Index rose from 0.06 in 2000 to 0.633 in 2011. You want to know about impact? Guyana is now categorised as medium human development country - impact Hon. Member.

Infant mortality in 1999 was 25.6 per 1,000; today it is 12.9% - impact. Under 5 year old mortality in 1999 was 26 per 1,000 now it is 15 per 1,000 - impact. For 1989 we could not have found the statistics.

Improvement in number of physicians and nurses: in 1999 it was 2.6, in 2013 it is 9.5. Number of nurses per 10,000 population, in 1999 was 8.6, today it is 15.3 - impact. [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) **Harmon:** Everything else is bogus.] That is what the Opposition is reducing this budget to, unsubstantiated statements riddled with inaccuracies.

Let us look at another measure in the budget. Let us look at the Rural Development Fund. In this fund \$1 billion... [Mr. Nagamootoo: *[Inaudible]*...slush...] the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo referred to this as a slush fund. I find this insulting. Mr. Speaker, you cannot refer to funds set aside for single parents, vulnerable groups and people who need these funds for their existence as slush funds. That is insulting. It is insulting for any Member in this House to refer to funds such as this as a slush fund. We must stay away from such irresponsibility. This \$1 billion fund... If we look at the Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED) investment to employment ratio which is \$282,000 creates one new employment, then this \$1 billion would create approximately 3,546 new jobs.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, your time is up. You will require an extension please.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, do you want to know where the money is going? I will tell you. If we spend \$100 million in Leguan and there are 3,300 persons in Leguan, let us assume that a household size is four. This means there are 825 households. If we are to divide an investment of \$100 million by the household it would mean that we would be investing \$121,000 per household.

If we take this down further. For every 2.3 household in Leguan we would be creating one new job. This would mean that in Leguan... **[Mr. Nagamootoo:** For what? For cutting grass?] I wish to tell the Hon. Member the people in Leguan must not be reduced to cutting grass. They are hard-working rice farmers. The Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo must apologise to the people of Leguan. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Ali, we will take all of those demands outside this chamber. You will deal with that on the campaign hustings. We are not going to use words such as “nonsense”, and so forth. Let us go ahead.

**Ms. Shadick:** I beg to put in my two cents here. I am a native of Leguan and I take offence at the Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo making fun of the people of Leguan. I do not know if he has ever been there but I think what he has done was crossed the river and has gone to the court to collect the people’s money. Do not go back.

**Mr. Speaker:** Ms. Shadick. Hon. Members... *[Interruption]*

**Ms. Shadick:** You need to apologise to the people of Leguan.

**Mr. Speaker:** Ms. Shadick...

**Ms. Shadick:** Mr. Speaker, he needs to apologise.

**Mr. Speaker:** One second, please, Ms. Shadick. When I was asked by Hon. Minister Mr. Benn, if I am going to prohibiting heckling, it would have appeared that the House wanted the right to heckle. If a Member feels slighted or offended that is the basis on which we function in this House. We have to have thick skins. If you are offended by Mr. Nagamootoo because of something that he said during heckling then you take it up with him outside of the House. If it is something, as I have said, that goes to a person personally, that person family or so... *[Interruption]* If a Member says something about the people of Berbice, I am a *Berbician*, I may be offended but that person will stand or fall by his or her statements at the next campaign, but we will proceed with this debate. We will proceed.

**Mr. Ali:** This investment will create 355 new jobs in Leguan. If we assume that the average income of each new employment is \$60,000 per month, then in Leguan we would be creating \$21.3 million every month on that island.

*3.35 p.m.*

It is new money to the economy. This would mean that for the year, we will be creating new wealth in Leguan to the value of \$255.6 million per annum. This will be transposed to many other communities across this country. It is not whether we intend to do it; we, on this side of the House, are going to do it!

Let us look at the water sector. There is a proposed spending in the water sector of \$2.5 billion. The budget has provided for the water sector \$2.5 billion. Some \$1.135 billion is allocated to coastal programme. That would mean that this Government would be investing \$9,000 dollars on behalf of every citizen on the coast to improve the water situation. In Linden, we will be spending \$627 million. That is a per capita investment of \$30,000. In the hinterland, we will be spending \$190 million. That is a per capita investment of \$31,000. In Georgetown, we will be spending \$600 million, a per capita investment of \$11,000.

What will be the output of these investments? We will have five new wells, construction of two new water treatment plants, 12,000 new connections and the upgrade of 6,000 existing connections.

What, then, would be the impact of the output? The impact to the economy will be as follows: the creation of direct investment of \$2.9 billion and value-added impact of \$1.3 billion. The total impact is estimated at \$4.2 billion. Some 20,000 persons would benefit from new service connections. Demand will be created for 5,500 sacks of cement. Demand will be created for 1,600 loads of sand. Demand will be created for 3,470 cubic metres of stone. Demand will be created for 3,000 metres of timber. Demand will be created for 22,000 lengths of pipes. Demand will be created for 2,200 pipe fittings. Treated water coverage will move from 49% to 65%. Are these not impacts we should all laud?

Who will benefit from the demand for sand? The trucks, sand pit operators and the labourers will benefit. Who will benefit from the production of pipe? The engineers and the mechanics will benefit. Ultimately, our Guyanese brothers and sisters will be the beneficiaries of *Budget 2014*.

Let us look at housing. Some 5,900 house lots are to be distributed. There will be the upgrade of 45 kilometres of existing roads in 36 villages such as Sophia, Barnwell, Diamond, Enmore, Eccles and Grove. There will be the construction of 176 core homes. There will be construction of 100 single flat homes. There will be distribution of 134 subsidies to low income families. There will be distribution of 54 subsidies for hinterland families. Some 71 low income families will benefit from improved sanitation. These are the types of investments that will ensure a better quality of life for our Guyanese brothers and sisters all across Guyana.

What will be the impact? The proposed spending will result in direct investment in our economy of \$4.4 billion with value added impact of \$1.98 billion. Total spending would be in excess of \$6.38 billion. There will be the creation of direct employment for more than 1,700 persons with various skills, including engineering, architecture, surveying, foremen, operators, driving, masonry, carpentry, plumbing and electrical works. This is what the Hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad is trying to get her Government to do. We are doing it here and we should be proud of doing it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Incidentally, Sir, she has just dismissed another minister within her Cabinet. It happened a few minutes ago.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, the Ministers in this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government are of high conduct and excellent performance. We are not reckless; we will never be reckless. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Order! Hon. Members, please. We need the Minister to compose himself and be able to complete his presentation. Take your time, Minister. Your time will not be diminished. If the House takes five minutes to settle down, you will get an extra five minutes.

**Mr. Ali:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2013, Guyana was featured in regional and international publications such as *Caribbean Beat*, *Zing Magazine*, 16 birding publications, including *Cox & Kings* and the *Guardian UK*.

**Mr. Speaker:** The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), two weeks ago, also said that this is one of the best destinations to come to.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for making that very important point. We have been featured in *Fortune 500 Magazine* which reaches over five million people. We have been featured in documentaries and other magazines which reach more than 15 million people globally and we should be proud of that. [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]* drugs...] I will tell you. Patience. *Gold Rush*, which was voted the number one most watched show in American in 2012, did its entire 10 episodes in Guyana. Do you know what? That investment was in excess of \$2 billion. In 2014, Guyana is being referred to as the best kept secret in South America by the prestigious *National Geographic Traveler Magazine* and is among the 20 destinations being touted to visit in 2014. The list reflects what is authentic culturally rich sustainable and...

In 2013, there was a 135% increase in the number of yachts that came to Guyana. [**Ms. Ally:** Time.] Is this how we are treating the tourism sector? When we are outlining our plans, the Comrade is calling on time. When we speak about tourism, time should not limit us. In 2014, we already had one cruise ship. By the end of this year, we expect another three cruise ships.

In 2013, total investment in the tourism sector was \$53,905,000,000 and I want to congratulate the private sector of Guyana and all those foreign investors for investing over \$53.9 billion in the tourism sector. Some 18 tourism projects were completed. The total jobs created were 626. In 2014, the total value of investment in the sector is projected at \$70 billion with 30 new projects. This will create a further 300 new jobs in the tourism sector.

Four new hotels were completed in 2013. In addition to the Marriott, we can now boast of Park Vue Hotel, Millennium Manor Hotel, Aruwi Enterprise and Rupununi Eco-Hotel. The hotels have approximately 399 rooms and at two persons being responsible for a room, we are talking of more than 1,000 new jobs being created in the tourism sector.

**Mr. Speaker:** Sir, you have five minutes within which to conclude your presentation.

**Mr. Ali:** I want to touch briefly on the issue of sugar. There has been a lot of debate concerning this important, national issue. We, in this Government, would never ever contemplate any system that would see the destruction of jobs and that would see the destruction of our industry. The

Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, referred to his period and what the Government did then. Just for the records, I want to remind the Hon. Member what occurred. Could you remember when we had an estate in Diamond? Hon. Member, who closed that estate? Could you remember when we had an estate in Leonora? Hon. Member, who closed that estate? Hon. Speaker, could you remember when we had an estate in Versailles? Who closed that estate? There is one name that is constant in the question as to who closed those sugar estates and it is the Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge.

**Mr. Greenidge:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that the speaker is fabricating information. Which estates have been closed in this country and which ones have I been associated with? I am not aware of having closed any so I do not know what he is talking about. I am saying that he is making it up. That is what I am saying.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Mr. Ali, you stated that one name is associated with the closure of all these estates and that name is Carl Greenidge. The Member, rightfully, has challenged that unless you can show that he presided over, directed or authorised the closure of these estates, I believe you will need to reword that or withdraw it.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, I always follow your advice. The Hon. Member, indeed, said that he was part of that government and he was part of the system and government at that time.

**Mr. Speaker:** That formulation is acceptable.

**Mr. Ali:** For us, the investment in the sugar industry is critical to sustaining 18,000 families. The investment in the sugar industry would secure the livelihood of 74,000 people. The investment in the sugar industry would secure the livelihood of 120,000 people indirectly. The 194,000 people who benefit directly and indirectly from this sector must be supported and deserve every single cent of subsidy that we are putting in the sugar industry. We understand the importance of this sector. We are not saying that we must not look at the industry in a holistic manner, but we must allow mechanisms which are there to function. We cannot want to jump to the media when we have an avenue through the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services. On many occasions, the matter of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) came before that Committee. We have a responsibility to air our views there.

**Mr. Greenidge:** Which many occasion? I am not aware of it coming before the Committee. When is he speaking about, Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Greenidge, that would not be a valid point of order. I believe what the Member is saying is that many of the matters that are being discussed in public could be brought for consideration by the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services. That is what my understanding was. It was that many of the matters being discussed on the outside of this House could be brought before the Committee.

**Mr. Ali:** Mr. Speaker, you have interpreted me correctly.

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me hear Mr. Greenidge.

**Mr. Greenidge:** I do not want to challenge you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that I heard him say that these matters had been brought to the Committee. I am on that Committee and these matters have not been brought there. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, could I be heard? Mr. Greenidge is right in a sense. Are you speaking about this Tenth Parliament? I believe Mr. Greenidge would be right in that sense. If so, please qualify, Mr. Minister.

**Mr. Ali:** In the Ninth Parliament, I was also a Member of that Committee and it was brought many times before that Committee.

**Mr. Speaker:** Very well. You have qualified it. Thank you.

**Mr. Ali:** It is important for us to send a positive message to our population. It is important for us to let the people in the sugar sector understand that we, in the National Assembly, would support their interests. We must let them understand that we will make the necessary intervention that would secure the industry and, in turn, secure their jobs. That is a moral responsibility we, in this National Assembly, have.

I conclude by saying that the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and his team at the Ministry of Finance have presented to this nation, have presented to our brothers and sisters out here, have presented to the people of Guyana, a budget that would, indeed, make Guyana a better place, make our lives better and make our people's lives better. In so doing, I not only commend the Budget and the

Hon. Minister, but I can see the impact of the Budget. It even silenced the Hon. Carl Greenidge. He did not have much to say about the Budget. He strayed from the Budget but I hope when the time comes for him to support the interventions for our people, he would not stray away and vote against them; I hope he will support those interventions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Scott:** Mr. Speaker, allow me, Sir, to express my appreciation to you for affording parliamentarians and the parliamentary staff the opportunity to pay homage to our fallen Colleague, the late Hon. Deborah Backer, Madam Deputy Speaker, by having her body fittingly lie in state in the compound of the Public Buildings.

Diminutive Debbie was like the small hummingbird that flits from flower to flower after which each flower fulfils its destiny. So, too, each person that she touched found fulfilment in the knowledge that they were in the company of one who cared for her fellow mortals. We always sat together at each break in the parliamentary proceedings and it was fascinating to hear her soft analyses of Gail, Amna, Raphael, Khemraj – it was always first names – or how a motion or a Bill should best be approached and handled. After that, we had quiet talks about the progress of our families. Yet, in a nanosecond, a loud hail up would be given to Neil or Bibi. Debbie is now in the company of the political and parliamentary giants and women greats of the past, those who have passed, like Janet Jagan, Jane Phillips-Gay and Margaret Ackman-John. Now, the bird is on the wing. Goodbye little bird. Goodbye Deborah Osman Backer. *Adios Mariquita Linda.*

Allow me to congratulate Dr. Ashni Singh, the Minister of Finance, for once more presenting a budget to this House and also for his longevity for being able to survive so long in presenting budgets that are well known for their size rather than for their substance.

We keep hearing about the attacks on this side of the House in that we ought to be able to present alternative solutions to the projects and ideas that the Minister of Finance presents. Let me say that this is not the role of the Opposition. It is the role and duty of the Government and Minister of Finance to come to us with projects. Our job is to help them by pointing out the areas where there can be improvement, and that is exactly what we do when we stand and talk. It is not that we are attacking for the sake of attacking; it is because we have the nation at heart. When we see something that is not correct, something that can be improved, money is being channelled and

wasted – we in the committees can attest to the areas of corruption that we point out at the committee level – we stand up and oppose or point out what should not happen. It is not that we are against it. We want to see Guyana go forward. Mr. Minister, please understand how we think.

I have heard it said on the radio that it takes seven minutes for a man to fall asleep. If that is correct, during the presentation of this Budget, we would have fallen into that comatose state 25 times. The sustained and unusual silence on both sides of this House indicated the mighty struggle that was waged against that desire. The Attorney General and the Alliance For Change (AFC) must have had advance notice. They took countermeasures.

The Minister of Finance himself, a victim of the somnolent mood that he had induced, titled his budget, *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*, when, in fact, he really meant to use A Partnership for National Unity's (APNU) Manifesto title, *A Good Life for all Guyanese*. As they say, coming events do cast their shadows.

As in the past, once again, the presentation of this 2014 Budget is without the active involvement of the mass based party, APNU, and of that of the AFC. It exposes the trend of arrogance of this Government and the contempt that they have for us. And lays bare the belief in their mantra that one party – their party and their party alone – can develop Guyana. Now, they come to us today hoping for an endorsement of something for which we did not participate and something for which the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) and labour bodies did not participate. How can you expect us to really endorse something in which we had no hand in crafting? How can you expect us not to want to attack you when you stand up here and we hear for the first time about projects that have never existed before, moneys being voted for bridges when areas such as the Soesdyke/Linden Highway cannot be driven on and people cannot see where they are going at nights? We know that it is too dark to travel and nobody is stopping to say that rather than giving money to a hospital that is not ours, let us put some of that same money towards having a lighted Highway.

They seek to yoke us to this Budget that offers no meaningful relief to the poor, no increase in wages for workers and no vision for good and accountable government.

When we talk about 5% as being an increase, it is the same old that we had last year. How could they talk about 5% when we need to have 20% as a living wage, when we need to have

discussions to know exactly what the real living standards and requirements are? Only then can you know whether a 5% is meaningful or not. We can say right now that 5% cannot work.

4.05 p.m.

We are not here to quarrel. What we are asking you for is a return to the collective bargaining table so that you can involve unions and workers in what is best for them and you would then really know what is required to pay them and what you can afford to pay. The money that you are going to spend on Amaila, the money that you plan to spend on the Airport, those billions can be redirected and channelled in such a way that the very workers who are, today, crying will be in a better position to live comfortably and yet look for better projects.

When we come to sugar, there are “bailouts” - the popular word and the mantra of this Government. Bailout seems to be the quick resort for this Government when it comes to their pet projects like sugar and even rice. When sugar loses, the solution is a bailout and when rice makes a profit, the force of habit donates more money to more bailouts. Hence, they boast, on one hand, about the amount of rice that is going to be exported to Venezuela and, yet, at the same time, talk about giving bailouts. How can one give bailouts to a profitable institution? This is where we, on this side of the House, are saying that unless you talk to us, you might very well find yourself guilty of giving away the taxpayers’ money.

Professor Clive Thomas in his *Stabroek News* newspaper edition of 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2014, tabled the annual losses of GUYSUICO, 2000-2009. He called it ‘Mired in a Sea of Losses and Bailouts’. The Finance Minister, himself, in his 2011 Budget Speech, at page 20, said:

“To say that 2010 was a disappointing year for the sugar sector would be an understatement of considerable proportions...”

Nothing has changed since then. The labour force still keeps leaving in the sugar estates. The production still keeps falling. I will not call out the falling annual production figures at this point. I did that last year. Yet, Skeldon Estate’s colour is getting whiter and the Government now wants to donate \$6 billion. This is like throwing good money after bad. This we cannot accept under these conditions.

APNU offered solutions during the year before the last and last year for this industry. Our problem, Comrades, is that when these solutions are offered, you seem to think that we just stand up and talk. [Ms. Teixeira: What solutions?] Our side has offered, in the past... Let me repeat some of them. Get out your pen - a competent board of directors; that is one of the things we offered last year. Once you have that - right now your directors are at sea - they will be able to craft new policies, depoliticise the entity and diversify the production that you have. Instead of attacking us and stating that we want to close down GUYSUICO, instead of slandering our names that we want to close down... [Ms. Teixeira: You said so.] This is false. It is not so. [Ms. Teixeira: It is so.] We are as committed to the survival of sugar as any PPP Government. Do not ever forget that our ancestors were the bedrock of sugar in this country.

Nowhere in any previous budget have I found any gift of taxpayers' money donated to any industry that is making a profit, as I said before, but, amazingly, rice, the flagship of success with a guaranteed market not only in Venezuela but the West Indies and Latin America on the horizon, has been awarded \$500 million. Are we that rich to give handouts to places like GPL and now to rice while we refuse to give living wages?

The 2012 World Bank Report rated Guyana as the third poorest in the western hemisphere and the poorest in South America. If we have that poverty, what was Mr. Irfaan Ali speaking about concerning our progress and the money that we are making when these people have us pegged as the poorest in South America? I do not understand. This is a bit confusing to me. All I am saying is that I am confused. We would like to see employment go up, Minister Ali. Minister Ali was just regaling us with the numbers that we would have created 600 jobs here, 200 jobs there, 300 jobs somewhere else so he gives the illusion to you that employment is being created, that people are being given jobs. [Mr. Ali: Illusion? It is fact.] Why then does the American Government tell us that 49% of the youths are unemployed in this country? I do not even want to use those figures. I do not think that as a Guyanese, I ought to use the American Government's...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your time is up. You will have five minutes to conclude your presentation.

**Mr. Scott:** I do not wish to use those figures. If the Government gives us the unemployment figures for this country, then we would be able to do two things: refute whatever America says and, secondly, only then can we measure whether jobs are being created or not.

The GPL tells us that fuel prices remain high and they have not increased tariffs for a long time. This scenario is painted to justify their allocation of \$3.7 billion in 2013. For that year, they got \$11 billion. In the year before they got \$6 billion. They are still to tell us in what way we are benefitting from those bailouts that they received in the past before they can go further. [**Mr. Ali:** Oh, is it GPL now?] Yes. What they have not told us is that the 2013 IDB Report pegged Guyana as having the highest cost of electricity in the Caribbean and yet they continue to deliver unreliable service to consumers. We cannot support any request for bailouts for this entity.

In the past, our solutions to GPL were rejected – no new directors, no new professional managers, no non-political people in place, nothing done to reduce line losses. Let us reintegrate the business men and bring down the rates of electricity at the highest level and then one can know whether we can have any money to give to them.

The cleanup campaign of Georgetown has left us dumbfounded. When we hear the Minister admits that a serious sanitation problem abounds in the capital and other places, the blame for this disgrace must be placed at the foot of the ruling party. From 1994 to now, there has been a deliberate policy of wilful neglect of the capital city and the rundown state of NDCs and City Councils add to the woes of villages. What happened to the cleanup motion that was passed in this House? Why was nothing ever done? Why were all attempts by the City Council to raise funds and to effectively manage the city stymied? Why are the outfalls not dredged to prevent flooding? One billion dollars to clean the country and \$500 million to Georgetown... Who will manage this money? For too long, citizens have suffered. We demand that the President assents to the Local Government Bill. We are ready for Local Government Elections, ready to recruit a qualified Town Clerk, and ready to end micromanagement of the city and other local authorities. Elections of people's representatives will deliver a clean city, a flood-free city, and usher in the role of local democracy. It will have success where \$1 billion will fail.

The tourism sector is yet to take off, even after spending money each year. Various schemes have been flouted. One year, we have spent a lot of money talking about having Essequibo as a

harbour for winter for yachts. I have not seen any as yet. We talk about bird watching. Are there yachts which come in winter here as was in the scheme that you outlined? No. You talk about bird watching. How many people have arrived in this country to watch birds? Those birds are a different kind of birds. Nothing is being done...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will have to start wrapping up now. Please wrap up.

**Mr. Scott:** I wish to warn people about the proposal that intends to have a hospitality institute. I advise you to visit the Bahamas, Jamaica and those other places that have tourism and tell me whether after you have seen what the product is of those institutes, whether you want your son and daughter to follow in the footsteps that you will see. I have seen it and I will not comment on what you would find but if you want, go and see and then come back... Why not think in terms of development? If you want tourism, find ways of encouraging Guyanese... [**Dr. Singh:** Why do you not elaborate?] I am doing it now! Find ways to...

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Scott, do not be bated. You do not have the time to go and follow every little thing that is dangled in front of you. My suggestion is to stick to your script and wrap up your speech and make the points you intended to make.

**Mr. Scott:** This Budget fails to address the cry for a living wage for workers. It fails to bring pensioners the basic cash that... We had asked for \$15,000. We are still to get to that stage and inflation is taking it even higher. By next year, one will need \$20,000 a month and we demand that our attention to the old, the aged and other places be given some attention. For as long as the poor continues to be marginalised, no amount of money spent on projects will deliver a prosperous and contented people. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Rev. Dr. Gilbert:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. Permit me to, first of all, quickly express to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his competent team congratulations on the preparation and presentation of the 2014 National Estimates.

In adding my voice to this debate, Mr. Speaker, I am constrained by the fact that there is much that could be said and should be said about the measures that are outlined in this Budget but, as we know, time is of essence and I am aware that my very capable Colleagues, over the next few days, will elaborate extensively on the numerous measures allocated to the different sectors in

this Budget. I should endeavour to contain my discourse to a few thematic areas in the social sector, but I also wish to pause briefly and say that with respect to the Budget, in totality, I would posit in one word that it is a visionary budget.

Helen Keller, a woman born blind, was asked the question: what is worse than being born blind? She responded: to have sight but no vision. A vision is the ability to not just see things as they are but as they could be. A vision is birthed in the tension between what is and what could be. This Budget takes cognisance of the present and points to the future. This Budget recognises the challenges of our present. It does not ignore the present. It recognises the inadequacies and the impairments of our present - socially, economically, politically and otherwise - but it dares to present a bold and ambitious roadmap of what must be done to move us as a nation from where we are to where we should be and we have heard, in the presentations that preceded, statements being made that, I believe, identify, from the perspective of the Hon. Members, some of those challenges as they see them.

What is of concern is that if we are to examine the Budget for what it really is - and every budget, not just this one but every budget that preceded in the years before - no budget can be or should be seen or understood in the context of itself in isolation. A budget represents a continuity of an agenda, a roadmap that moves a nation from one place to another, economically, socially and otherwise. While the Hon. Members have identified a few things that they see as our present circumstances, what is ironic is that many of the very measures in the Budget that are intended to address some of these very issues are ignored and would be voted against. For me, that does not suggest that there is any kind of rational thinking that guides the action so I want to say that anyone who dares to cut/diminish – whichever word you want to use – this Budget, both in size and significance, is saying to the Guyanese people, “You do not deserve more; you deserve less.” My question to our Colleagues on the opposite side, which I would like to be answered, is: are these measures, as presented by the Hon. Minister in this Budget, intended to make the lives of our people better or worse? For those who would say “worse” and dare to ignore the evidence, let me remind our Colleagues that there has not been one single area of budgetary reduction in this Budget.

In every sector - and my Colleagues, over the next few days, will elaborate on this - we have seen – consistent also with previous budgets, incremental increases in every sector that intended

to address the immediate and future needs of our people. Why, Sir? It is because our people deserve more.

In the social sector alone, the sector which deals with direct investments in our people through the provision of services, if my Mathematics is correct, there is an allocation that exceeds over a third of the National Estimates and that is visionary. We have not even begun to talk about hydro electricity. We have not begun to talk about the whole issue of investments in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and all of the other areas that are futuristic and visionary in its trajectory. We are talking about the social sector that gets services to our people. We have heard words used like 'bailouts' and 'handouts' and such adjectives that would suggest... I am not sure if that is what the Hon. Member is trying to suggest, but if one were to take the descriptive adjectives offered about how this Budget was described by the Hon. Member, it somehow would suggest that the Government should leave any industry that requires its support to flounder and fail. I am not quite sure why a responsible government, as this Government is, would see an industry requiring its support and not provide that support. I am not sure why there are such words like 'handouts' and 'bailouts' even being suggested or used. I am not sure what message is intended to be conveyed. Because investments in our people are the most prudent of investments, I believe that our people deserve the very best and so the allotment in the social sector represents the value that we place in our people.

I have been reliably informed that in a previous administration, prior to 1992, the budgetary allocation was provided by a certain distinguished gentleman on the other side for the Foreign Ministry alone which exceeded the amalgamated allocation for health, education and agriculture. That does not sound very visionary to me. [**An Hon. Member:** What? Who was the Minister?] A distinguished gentleman.

The Government of Guyana, through its consistent allocations to vulnerable groups and other targeted interventions, has continued to work unrelentingly to fight to eradicate the social bane and the economic burden of interpersonal and intimate partner violence from our society. While the political will and the humanitarian compassion and commitment remain for the empowerment of our women, particularly our single parents, through the Single Parents Training Programme, Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, Women of Worth initiative - and the Hon. Minister later, I believe, will speak and elaborate greatly on these - there is also an 'eco'

commitment and resolve to pursue interventions and find solutions in transforming the social context of men being viewed/perceived as perpetrators of violence to becoming partners in the fight against violence.

In this respect, it is important to note the several initiatives that have been undertaken to recognise, firstly, that our approach should not be just to vilify the male section of our population, but to find ways in which we can help men to understand why it is that they find it necessary to respond violently in the context of conflicts in their relationships and to provide opportunities for men to have interventions brought to them. I am speaking here in the context of those men who are prone to violence and those men who are in relationships where they are perpetrators of violence against their children and their spouse. To this end, the Ministry Services and Social Security has embarked on a national gender-based violence initiative, involving collaboration amongst the Men's Affairs Bureau, the Child Care and Protection Agency, the Probation and Welfare Services, just to name a few. This initiative is an outreach, I have been told, to schools, both public and private, the New Opportunity Corps (NOC), youth groups and also working with Community Based Organisations (CBOs).

There is an initiative being contemplated, currently, drawing on a model observed in Grenada, where the perpetrators of domestic violence are sent to be a part of a Perpetrator Accountability Programme, where they have to, I think, complete in excess of 160 sessions, something to that nature. I rather suspect that this is a very valuable intervention.

Additionally, the Government of Guyana, under the auspices of this Ministry, that is the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, continues to demonstrate its support for the role and the value of the family as the fundamental pillar in human society and, as such, through the work of the National Commission of the Family, the Ministry has conducted several parenting workshops across the country. Even as we speak, work is being done to design a special curriculum aimed at educating men to be more effective in their roles as fathers and husbands.

Again I must reiterate that this Budget is a budget of vision. Time would not permit me to speak in great detail of the developmental work being done by the Childcare and Development Services Regulations or the Childcare and Protection Agency or to elaborate on the over 2,000 children

who were prevented from being separated from their families in 2013, or the 519 children that were removed from abusive situations. The Minister will elaborate, I believe, on many of those.

Programmes and initiatives targeting vulnerable groups and populations, including our children, being primary in that group, cannot underestimate the need for us to, as a National Assembly, recognise the importance of the allocations made to the social sector. One must conclude, in view of all of these critical interventions, which can be and which have also been for the good of our nation's children, that this Budget, in its present form, with its allocations and with its measures, is a visionary one.

Our youths, also, are beneficiaries of this Budget in very significant ways and I will not seek to take away anything from the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport as he speaks later, except to say, and I think it is useful to note, the great benefits in 2013 as it relates to training under the National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment (NTPYE), the Apprenticeship Programme and the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training programme, but just to touch quickly on the fact that the Government's commitment to equitability and opportunity would ensure that in 2014 we see the commencement of a Hinterland Training Programme, expected to target 150 persons in Region 9, and this is significant because, as you know, there is always the view that much of the interventions are concentrated on the coast.

The Hon. Minister will, later on, elucidate on the national pride and benefits of the athletic track at Leonora and the National Aquatic Centre at Liliendaal and some of the other things that we have done and will continue to do as deliberate interventions to impact our youth in this nation.

There is no need for me to say further, except to say that our Friends on the other side of this House will have great difficulty in miniaturising these national landmarks as symbols of the value that we place on our nation's youths.

*4.35 p.m.*

So we may want simply to say there is not much there. While I agree with the Hon. Mr. Scott that their responsibility is to point out areas of deficiencies, they also have a moral responsibility to recognise when there are benefits there and not seek to miniaturise them simply to be political.

This Budget does not lay claim to being the solution to all of our social and economic challenges. This Budget is in no way a panacea to our social, economic or political difficulties. But I am confident that it is a visionary road map which recognises our immediate challenges but points to a future that is pregnant with boundless potentials and possibilities for the development of our country.

Permit me, Sir, to share a little story.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member you have four minutes within which to conclude.

**Dr. Rev. Gilbert:** I am about to conclude, Sir. Thank you very much.—Last evening I took a friend of mine for a little tour around the city. He had lived for many years in Canada. He was very, not shocked - shocked I think is a little too extreme - he could not help gushing about the level of development he had seen in his few days in returning to Guyana. I think it would be very unpatriotic for anyone who lives here to look at our development and simply say that nothing has happened, but I will tell you a little story as I conclude. There were two men standing at a window looking out. One saw stars and the other saw mud. You may ask how this is possible, it was because one was looking up and one was looking down; it is all about perspective. I wonder therefore what my colleagues on the other side are seeing.

Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan on or about 5.00 o'clock I would just inquire whether you would wish to conclude or you would advise that we take the suspension. The decision will be yours.

**Mr. Bulkan:** I would prefer to conclude.

**Mr. Speaker:** Very well; proceed.

**Mr. Bulkan:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the Motion before us, the one standing in the name of the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, Minister of Finance, and which seeks the approval of this Hon. House for the spending of \$205-plus billion being the Estimates of Expenditure for Financial Year 2014. In so doing I am mindful and conscious of your reported remarks directed to Members of this House, urging that in making our presentation

we be competitive and not destructive. If you were quoted accurately your exhortation was that we put aside petty, personal and partisan differences and put Guyana first.

The latter, that is to avoid being personal, is easy to comply with, the former however is not quite so simple as this is serious business we are engaged in. To this I will say that I owe it to myself, but, moreover to the many thousands of my countrymen and women who have sent me and my colleagues here to robustly represent their interest. My fallen Comrade would have wanted this too, and I think of her as I make my contribution.

As a matter of fact, the Minister himself expected this and in his speech predicted that his Budget will come under the microscope or, in his words, will be dissected from every imaginable perspective. However inadequate it may be, I too, have a perspective.

It is true that a budget is about money, or moreover numbers. It is even more true though that the figures before us did not fall from the sky nor were they randomly plucked from a sack but rather are informed by a philosophy and tell of the priorities of the Government. It is because of my firm belief of the significance of the foregoing that I choose to spend time addressing and assessing this question before turning to some of the figures.

With regard to the philosophy that underpins this Budget and the Minister's observation that Budget 2014 is the largest budget ever, and having assessed the proposed allocations, I am reminded of my colleague, Hon. Member Mr. William's plaintive cry in his 2013 Budget presentation when he pointedly asked, bigger for whom, the masses or a small cabal? The Minister boasts of economic growth but when we go into communities across our country, as we have been doing in the past 26 months, we have to ask where the development is and where are the jobs. The income and wealth disparity continues to widen within the society and dangerously so. The poor both employed and unemployed are being left behind and their ranks are swelling. This Budget does not present a vision to correct the structural imbalance of the economy, and to show the way to the good life which our people deserve. The economy is highly dependent, some may say un-healthily so, on just two industries, these being gold and rice, with gold accounting for 47% of total 2013 exports and rice 17.5%. Together they account for two-thirds of all exports. This reliance is not expected to change in 2014 and the Minister's projections show gold exports to remain at 47% and rice, marginally less, at 16%, again representing almost two-thirds

of total exports. Yet the Minister speaks of transforming the economy, and of progress made in diversification, but figures do not lie. Should we as a nation be concerned about this Mr. Speaker? I say we should. I am no prophet of doom, but the simple truth is that no one can predict the future world market price of gold, and it is unwise to plan an economy on so tenuous a foundation. What is going to happen to the many thousands who now depend on this industry to feed themselves and their families should gold prices head south? Where is the cushion going to come from to save them from possible indignity?

It is because a budget is not a book-keeping exercise, but an executive function or responsibility that I am spending time looking at this document which promises a better Guyana from this perspective, as opposed to focusing on the minutiae or the numbers contained in it. In any event, we will have seven days to scrutinise each line item. Let me look briefly therefore to the sugar industry.

The Ministry informs us that the Government has injected \$9.7 billion into this industry over the past two years and Budget 2014 seeks the approval of this House to transfer a further \$6 billion to GuySuCo. What is the basis for this request? Let me not interpret or paraphrase the Minister but quote him directly. These are the Minister's words accompanying his request for a further \$6 billion:

“With a soon to be appointed new board of directors and senior management, and the injection of more innovative thinking into both the strategic and operational challenges that continue to beset the industry and the more harmonised industrial climate, the emergence of a revitalised sugar industry is anticipated.”

The APNU has previously expressed our concern at the massive transfers to GuySuCo, as well as to GPL, in the absence of a bi-partisan agreement on appropriate reform proposals. In the absence of this we see these transfers as a handout. In the meantime the industry produces less and less, and last year exported a mere \$112 million - there are actually contradictory figures in the speech because under Appendix 5 the figure of \$114 million is given. The Minister may wish to correct this, decide which one is correct - or less than 20% of gold exports, and the projections on for this year is for it to earn even less or US\$103.3 million.

This Corporation has produced so many turn around plans in the past decade that one industry export has opined that it is in danger of getting eye-turn. In the meantime the Minister is seeking to transport us to utopia and himself has donned the cap of Voltaire's character Pangloss. There is rhetoric and there is reality.

As for the rice industry, the figures give cause for even more concern. Sales of rice and paddy under the Petrocaribe arrangement for the period July, 2011 to January, 2014 totalled US\$336.5 million which represents 77% of total rice exports in 2012 and 2013. Given current events and political instability in Venezuela, no one can be certain that these arrangements will remain in place in the long term. In the absence of other available markets the potential for dislocation and disruption to this industry is real. **[An Hon. Member: Why you do not go and get some markets?]** When we are in the government we will get more markets. So while the Minister boasts of economic growth, macroeconomic stability and of diversification, the economy has a structural imbalance.

I turn my attention to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Government, what is now a mega ministry. The first thing we need to establish is what is supposed to be the role of this Ministry and to see if its actions are consistent with same. Its role is defined or, more like circumscribed by the Constitution and in particular in three of its articles.

These are:

Article 75 which says:

“Parliament shall provide that local democratic organs shall be autonomous and take decisions which are binding upon agencies and institutions, and upon the communities and citizens of their areas.”

Article 77 which reads:

“The development programme of each region shall be integrated into the national development plans, and the Government shall allocate funds to each region to enable it to implement its development programme.”

And Article 77A which says:

“Parliament shall by law provide for the formulation and implementation of objective criteria for the purpose of the allocation of resources to, and the garnering of resources by local democratic organs.”

In conjunction with the foregoing, we have to refer to the Fiscal Transfers Act which was passed in this House in August of last year, and assented to by the President in November of 2013. Section 6(2) of this Act states:

“In arriving at the determination of the annual subvention from Central Government to local authorities, it is acknowledge that Central Government has responsibility to provide financial resources to local authorities to supplement their own revenues, and in order to assist them to discharge their functions and responsibilities.”

There are 81 such local democratic organs. *[Interruption]* My Friend, if you listen, you will learn. Ten of these are Regional Democratic Councils, six municipalities and sixty-five Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), and the Constitution says that they shall be autonomous which means having the freedom to govern themselves and to act independently. The role of this Ministry, therefore, is to provide support to these 81 democratically elected councils, not to seek to suffocate them and certainly not to undermine or marginalise them as it currently happening.

While the Constitution states that these councils shall be autonomous the Central Government is using its steel heel via REOs, clerks in the case of our municipalities, and overseers in the case of NDCs, to subvert the authority of these organs in a naked display of despotism. The equivalent of this would be a Permanent Secretary exercising more authority than his or her subject Minister, or of all of the Permanent Secretaries as a collective dictating to the Cabinet. This is the absurdity of what prevails with regard to local democracy and the functioning of local democratic organs. It is the Government which is refusing to hold Local Government Elections to have the life of these councils renewed, yet the Minister comes to this House and uses incendiary and unbecoming language, like comatose to describe these bodies.

The Minister seeks \$1 billion to fund a programme he refers to as a clean-up campaign, which in his words would be spearheaded by the Government. It is clear from the Minister’s speech that this allocation would not be given to the various councils as the law requires but, rather, the

intention is for it to be dispersed directly by the Government and its collaborators. This is an invidious initiative and one designed to make the existing councils look bad. Its purpose can be only to score political points; it represents the height of lawlessness. It is not really about a clean-up campaign; it is part of an elections campaign. Instead of being part of the solution, the Government chooses to be part of the problem.

Let us examine the allocations to this mega-Ministry from 2012 to now. I am looking at just current expenditure which represents employment cost, and something which is referred to as Other Charges; no capital expenses. In 2012, the allocation was \$278 million; in 2013, \$325 million and in 2014, \$333 million under Programmes 131, 132 and 133. When we look at the stated objectives for the respective programmes we begin to appreciate how misguided the Government is. Programme 131, Main Office, the programme objective as described in the budget says:

“To ensure the successful implementation of the Ministry’s plans, policies and development programmes in accordance with good governance, facilitating infrastructure and human resource development in the regions.”

Incidentally, this programme has a total staff of seventeen persons and every one of them are contracted employees, but that is a different story.

Local government is about local democracy, it is not about what Central Government wishes, that was perhaps the old construct, prior to the enactment of the 1980 Constitution and of the strengthened provisions relating to local government in the amendments of 2001. I have already related Articles 75 and 77 which provide for local democratic organs to be autonomous and that the Government is obligated to allocate funds to each region as well as other local organs to enable them to implement their development programmes. *[Interruption]* You will have your turn Madam; you will be able to answer.

But the Government comes to this House and says it wants money to implement the Ministry’s development programme. Here we have one unit undermining and subverting the authority of 81 statutory bodies; the centralist perversity. This degrading of the authority of local democratic organs does not stop there, there is a whole parallel structure that now forms part of this unlawful framework. And here, I am referring to the overwhelming authority of public agencies among

these being the sea defence, National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), Lands and Surveys and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In local communities, the experience is that they exercise enormous authority without any duty or obligation to consult with local democratic organs in dispensing national resources or direct local ones to their friends. The Government has recently added to this mischief with another body under its control called anti-litter regulations with litter wardens doing what is the job for local democratic organs. This addiction to control is immoral. *[Interruption]*

This Budget proposes an allocation of \$795 million under line item 1900400 with the executing agency being the Ministry of Finance the project description...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members it is unfair to Mr. Bulkan for a sub-debate to be going on over his head. Go ahead please, Mr. Bulkan.

**Mr. Bulkan:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. This Budget proposes the allocation of \$795 million under Line Item 1900400 with the executing agency being the Ministry of Finance. The project description shows that it is for interventions in communities countrywide. There is something called a poverty programme with a proposed allocation of \$725 million. This programme we are told is to provide support to vulnerable groups through community development programmes and projects. There is a Youth Initiative Programme with a budget of \$69 million; again we are told for small community driven infrastructure projects. So right here there are allocations totalling \$1,589 million almost \$1.6 billion for community projects to be executed by another central government body. What is the capital subvention for 71 local government organs? It is \$359 million or less than one quarter of this single component under the Ministry of Finance.

In response to parliamentary questions asked by my colleague Mrs. Lawrence we learn that for 2013 allocations under this so called Poverty Programme \$15 million was given as support to the National Director of something called the Community Development Council (CDC). Unless I am mistaken, the national director of this body is Ms. Philomena Sahoye-Shury also known as "Fireball." I do not know if this so called CDC is a statutory body as it does not exist in any of the local government legislation, namely Chapters 28:01, 28:02 or 28:09. But why should we have a CDC when there are already 81 statutory bodies which are being underfunded? What I do know is that the CDC Director has been going about the country assisting in dismantling elected

bodies, that is NDCs, and replacing them with appointed ones or Interim Management Councils (IMCs). This is not a fireball but more like a wrecking ball.

Among the activities funded in 2013 under the Poverty Programme, were \$71 million through Public Works Ministry to clean up sections of Georgetown; \$16 million for the now infamous San Jose Bridge in Moruca, which I believe my colleague, Mr. Harmon, will speak about, and \$54 million to host the National Tashaos Council (NTC) last year. Of course, much of the NTC meeting was devoted to bashing and vilifying the majority of this House.

This Programme is aptly titled as it is named Poverty Programme and not anti-poverty programme. It is being used however as a massive slush fund. The problem gets worse as in 2001 the Constitution was revised and new provisions were introduced, as I said earlier, to strengthen local democracy. One of the new constitutional Articles is 78A which requires the establishment of a Local Government Commission. The article reads as follows:

“Parliament shall establish a Local Government Commission, the composition and rules which empower the commission to deal with as it deems fit, all matters relating to the regulation and staffing of local government organs and with dispute resolution within and between local government organs.”

It took the PPP/C 12 years for the legislation to be enacted to allow for this entity to come into being. It finally happened in August of last year with passage of the relevant bill and which received Presidential assent in early November, 2013. This Act, however, is waiting on a commencement order from the subject Minister for its operationalisation. Even though it is thirteen years since the Constitution dictated that we have this body the Minister is unmoved and apparently unconcerned. The Budget speech makes no mention of funding for this important constitutional entity designed to professionalise and de-politicise the management of communities. Instead, the Budget Speaks of bypassing the statutory responsibility of local government bodies and for Central Government to spearhead the clean-up of communities. The Government is making a mockery of democracy. The phenomenon of which I speak is real, not imaginary, and I can assure you that my surname is Bulkan not Quixote.

Let us look at how Central Government actions are leading to underdevelopment in the regions and to hardship for our people. I will use Region No.8 as an example, and what happens there

applies to all 10 Regions, but particularly regions where the PPP/C does not have a majority on the RDC. The action that I refer to is that of sidelining the RDC from administering the affairs of the region as prescribed by the Constitution. In 2012, \$8 million was approved under line item 2402200; \$5 million of which we were told was to purchase a Bedford Model M truck to be used for health services in the Region as well as to take drugs into the Region. Two years on there is no evidence of this truck, and the health committee of the RDC has not been given any information as to why this is so. It is suspected that what was bought was another pickup, PRR 3520 – I have pictures of it here – for exclusive use of the REO even though he had a perfectly functioning vehicle, PNN 9505. Both of the vehicles are here.

*5.05 p.m.*

A truck for the benefit of the region or a new status symbol for the REO? The question has been asked, who is to benefit from these bigger and bigger budgets, the masses or a privileged few? The philosophy seems to be, “to him that halt shall be given”. Meanwhile we are advised that the Region’s vehicles are being used to doing party political work.

In last year’s budget money was approved for teachers’ quarters at Paramakatoi. I was there last week as part of APNU’s team that visited the North Pakaraimas. Residents there complained of this incomplete facility and the effects of students not having trained teachers at the secondary school. This time, both the Ministries of Public Works and Education committees are ignored – sidelined.

Again, in the 2013 Budget, \$12 million was voted for an ambulance for the Mahdia Hospital. This ambulance is yet to arrive; there is clearly no urgency. A 4x4 double cab cruiser was bought last year, ostensibly for education. This vehicle, PRR 7145 – this is another one here.

And what is the transportation provided for the head of this region, the Regional Chairman? Here it is, a fully air conditioned motor bike. Central Government’s message is clear and it is that they will handicap the statutory body and empower their officers. It is happening all over the country, this is iniquitous... *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member, Mrs. Garrido-Lowe, recently received answers to questions she posed concerning vehicles PKK 2288 and PLL 6278. These questions were repeatedly asked by the Regional

Chairman to the former Minister and to the REO, but he was never accorded the respect of a reply. In any event \$2 million was spent on PKK 2288 and approximately \$1.4 million on PLL 6278, both in 2012. The thing is that PKK 2288 never returned to the region. It seems like it was lost like the Malaysian aircraft. Since its repairs or it's so called repairs, PLL 6278 never worked properly. Here is a picture of PLL 6278. [*Mr. Bulkan displayed the picture.*]

Even something as basic as the supply of pure water is not being delivered to residents in many parts of the Region, despite what the Hon. Member said a short while ago. Due to insensitivity and incompetence on the part of the Government and its appointed officers, while elected officials are shut out from their lawful role of administering the region's affairs.

Perhaps the most galling problem though concerns electricity supply to Mahdia, the administrative centre of the region and where residents presently receive a maximum of 12 hours daily, and have to pay \$100 per kilowatt hour. In this budget the sum of \$208 million is sought for power supply in Mahdia, Matthews Ridge and Linden. Later we will learn... [**An Hon. Member:** Linden?] Yes it says Linden – the Estimates. Read the Estimates. Later we will learn how much of this is designated for Mahdia, but what is certain is that it will represent a band-aid, when a win-win solution, as well as a permanent one, is already there. I refer to the Tumatumari Hydro-Electric Plant, on which a test run in 2012 established it to be functional.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member your time is up. You will require an extension of 15 minutes to continue.

**Ms. Ally:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. I move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put and carried.*

**Mr. Bulkan:** While the Government has entered into a contract with a private promoter who has the know-how for lease of this facility, as well as a power purchase agreement, the contractor has so far been unable to raise the financing for the full rehabilitation of the power plant and to run the transmission line to Mahdia, mainly due to the unavailability of developmental capital locally. I say that given the importance of electricity and the presence of this facility in the region, there can be no valid reason why the Government could not have found a way to see the

facility become operational by way of a simple equity contribution and to benefit thousands of persons, by fostering development, as well as job creation. A mere \$30 million would have been sufficient and not by way of a hand out, but as I have said, an equity contribution. We recall that massive concessions and incentives were given for Cricket World Cup in 2008, but it appears that the residents of Region 8 are second class citizens. This is why residents there have told me that they believe that they are a part of apartheid.

While we wait to hear from Government's spokespersons why they could not have intervened to raise people's living standards, I point them to Article 16 of the Constitution, which says that the State shall foster the development of such relevant forms of corporation and of business entities as are seen to be supportive of the goals of economic development.

We must not cherry pick those parts of the Constitution that suits our purposes. I can see no impediment to the Government's intervention in a case such as this. The point is that were the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) engaged in the way the Constitution specifies this would have been a priority project for funding. Long before today the residents from Mango Landing all the way to Mahdia, would have had access to continuous and reliable supply of electricity at about half the price they are currently paying. Once more I say the problem is worse than what I have outlined so far. When the allocations are approved, the RDC is shut out from the award of contracts.

Further Parliamentary questions from Mrs. Garrido-Lowe finally revealed the contracts awarded in 2012 and 2013. In 2012, 96 were awarded and in 2013 a total of 102 contracts for all types of works throughout the region. These contracts were awarded by a Central Government body called the Regional Tender Board from which elected officials of the RDC were excluded. This is the aberration that the Government practices. I say shame on you.

Guyana is a large country and it cannot be effectively or efficiently managed from the centre in the absence of meaningful engagement with the ten regional Governments. It is dangerous to try and craft a national budget from Main Street and such an approach will fail. So ingrained is the disrespect for local democracy and local Government bodies that these estimates have not been given to the Regional Chairman that I have spoken with. I suspect that we might be told that they

have to wait until after the Estimates are approved for them to be given copies. I maintain that this is the height of disrespect.

Mr. Speaker, in my 2013 Budget rebuttal, I urged ... *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Settle down please. Hon. Members, Mr. Bulkan needs not only to finish, but to be heard.

**Mr. Bulkan:** I urge that what is needed is a comprehensive approach to the needs of the region and of hinterland communities, but that this task has to be approached from the bottom up, not from the top down. In other words, the regional Governments have to be meaningfully engaged to identify their priorities, not what currently obtains, which is, Central Government unilaterally deciding what hinterland communities will receive, such as inadequate net books without internet connectivity, when young people cannot even get jobs.

We have to find out who are actually benefitting from these interventions – the suppliers of goods or the hinterland residents. Seeking to place hinterland economies on a sustainable path has to be a priority of any Government if we are to do justice to the expectations of our people and afford them a good life.

I also then called on the Government, as I previously did in 2012, to cease the invidious practice of breaching provisions of the Constitution; I do so again Mr. Speaker.

Projects and interventions in the regions must not be the sole responsibility of a handful of unelected officials. It is no secret that the combined Opposition was not engaged in the crafting of this budget, yet the Minister bemoans and decries what he refers to as legislative stalemate and of its debilitating consequences. When required to make good on their own obligation; what is the Government's responsibility? What is the Government's response? *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Dr. Singh could you allow the Member to speak please.

**Mr. Bulkan:** What is their response? It is here on the cover of the Budget Speech, I refer to this cup here on the right. What it says is that we will do it our way. Had the APNU been consulted, there are many areas of concerns that we would have engaged the Government on. Some of the priority areas to be addressed include job creation, training, education and health access; the high

level of taxation and the inequitable burden being borne by some segments. We would have wanted to see that there are transparent arrangements to ensure that the resources of the State are appropriately and fairly managed and distributed, concerned as we are over the unacceptably low standards to which financial management has deteriorated.

Other issues include operation of the Consolidated Fund – I refer to the withholding of deposits to it, disposal of State assets, granting of fiscal concessions and the award of contracts; the inadequacies of the regulatory framework which led to, for example, to the Clico fiasco with severe consequences for the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), the absence of national buy-in of key capital projects and the criteria and rationale for the overall programme. Projects as we have already heard such as Amaila, Cheddie Jagan International Airport (CJIA) terminal building, Marriot Hotel, Hope Canal, the four lane extension to Diamond and to Betterhope, the need for a social and political audit on the NCN by an independent entity, the operation of Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) as an independent institution, the need for an independent broadcast authority and that discussion would necessarily involve the scandal as what is known as the spectrum give away. The list is long, but my time is up.

Finally, if it is that the whole is the sum of its parts, then how can you have a product where the main components are missing, which is meaningful engagement with the majority of Members in this House, as well as, the ten regional Governments? This budget therefore, cannot fly. It has terminal defects with regards to good governance, accountability, transparency and respect for the Constitution. There will have to be modifications to it. The Minister will have to go and come again. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Members, we will take the suspension. As we prepare to do so, I would just like to say that Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan, during your presentation you had made reference to the disappearance of the Malaysian aircraft. I did not intervene because I knew that you did not intend to trivialise that incidence and I just wish to say that I have been in contact with the Speaker of Malaysia and we as a Parliament, I believe, should show as much concern for that airline, but more so for the families that have been affected. Thank you very much.

*Sitting suspended at 5.19 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 6.20 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Members, the sitting is resumed. We will now have a presentation from the Hon. Minister Dr. Frank Anthony.

**Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Dr. Anthony]:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I rise to make my contribution to Budget Debate 2014, under the caption, “*A better Guyana, for all Guyanese.*” Indeed listening to the Minister Ashni Singh, and subsequently reading the details of the presentation, it is clear that there is something for everyone, whether you are young or old; whether you are school age or middle age; whether you are from the hinterland or the coastland; whether you are employer or an employee, the budget has something for you.

There is no doubt it is difficult to collate all these competing interests within the country into a comprehensive and coherent presentation. Minister Singh and his team have demonstrated that this is not just a theoretical exercise, but one that is taken seriously and it is deliberate plan to increased prosperity for all Guyanese.

It is little wonder that despite the world economic crisis, post independent Guyana has recorded the longest period of uninterrupted real economic growth from 2006 to 2013. This is indeed a commendable achievement. This is also testimony to our prudent policies of investing in Guyana and Guyanese. There is no doubt today, that a great deal has been achieved. But to consolidate the gains that we have made and to build upon the foundation that was laid we have to invest more, especially in our young people.

Again government must be commended for its multi-sectorial approach. This year we note the substantive increases in education, health, housing, sanitation and water. All of these investments will benefit our young people in a direct or in an indirect way.

In addition to these general investments, they are more youth specific investments under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Labour and Human Services and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. These include the programmes such as:

- National Training Program for Youth Employment,

- The Apprenticeship Program,
- The Board of Industrial Training Program and
- The Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Program in the Hinterland.

Together these programs are intended to reach out to every young person who needs assistance as their transition to the world of work. The Ministry will continue to run its traditional programmes providing educational support to young people who need a second chance at an education. The residential programs at the Kuru-Kuru Training Centre and New Opportunity Corps (NOC), the non-residential programmes at Sophia and Vryman's Eryven have trained hundreds of young people and have apprenticed them at job sites. The President Youth Award Programme and the Youth Volunteer Platform continues to offer young people an opportunity to be positive role models in their communities. Both of these programs are growing; the President Youth Award Programme is expanding with the formation of new units in various regions. This year we will expand the pilot volunteer programme to more schools.

In addition, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport will like to recognise successful young people who have played a positive role in their communities. Later in the year we will start the National Youth Award Scheme. The criteria for these awards will be published shortly and we encourage everyone to nominate progressive young people for these awards.

During 2013 and into 2014, extensive consultations were held to formulate the National Youth Policy. A youth steering committee was formed to guide the process, and a stakeholder group was formed comprising a representative sample of young people to bring the views of their peers. In addition, about 1000 questionnaires were distributed across Guyana to solicit the views of young people about what they want in this new National Youth Policy. After these extensive consultations, a first, then a second and now a final draft will soon be completed. We are thankful to the Commonwealth Youth Programme for their assistance in making the new National Youth Policy a reality. We envisage that based on the policy, a number of new initiatives will come on stream, including creating structural mechanism for coordination and implementation and addressing concerns and priorities that have been outlined in this document. With the implementation of these programs, this year promises to be another good year for the young people of our country.

Culture and cultural expression are multifaceted and all encompassing, reflected in knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, customs, traditions and distinctive institutions and in numerous ways, giving meaning to life and civilisation. Yet, like the air we breathe, its contribution to society can often be ignored or taken for granted.

We in the Ministry have been working hard to ensure that we realised the full potential of our cultural assets. With this in mind, the Ministry has placed a lot of emphasis on cultural education through the dance, art, music and drama schools. These schools are training our future choreographers, dancers, artists, musicians and dramatist.

This year the National Dance School celebrates 45 years of service to the development of dancing in Guyana. We are pleased to say that we have expanded the programmes that are offered. Currently, we have 440 students enrolled at our main school, with another 180 students in our satellite programmes. Another 300 young people were introduced to dancing and drumming in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, through our dance outreach program.

Last year we ran a small pilot programme where we encouraged three members of the National Dance School to write CXC Theatre Arts Option 2. Of the three persons that wrote the exam, all passed with grades I. But more importantly, as a testament to the high level of dance education that we are offering at the school, Mariela Bennett and Jerusha Dos Santos was 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, respectively, on the Regional Top Ten Merit List. We are encouraged by these results and we intend to scale up the program in future years.

The Ministry continues to promote the masquerade art form. In 2013, we developed an instructional handbook and DVD to assist dance groups and soon we will be making this online so that anyone can go and download the programme.

In the area of art, the E.R. Burrowes School continues to make a positive contribution to art in Guyana. We have 51 students currently enrolled in our programme and we have started a special programme where 39 students are now being prepared for Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) Art. This is new programme that the school is investing in because we see these students as potential students coming into the Burrowes School for its diploma programme. We are also going to be running some new courses, which includes fashion design and

photography. Apart from these specialised courses that the institution is running, we will start a course in art appreciation, which will be available to the general public.

At the Castellani House, our National Gallery, this year our priority programme would be to repatriate artwork done by Winslow Craig in New Zealand and to back them to Guyana. These beautiful large sculptures were created while Mr. Craig was on a study tour. Once we bring them back to Guyana, they will form part of the National Collection.

During the year, we want to also extend the holdings of the National Art Collection and bring the Collection to the people. One way of doing this is to publish photographs of our art holdings. We have received a commitment from Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Company (GT&T) to fund a series coffee table books depicting the art heritage of Guyana. This multiyear program will commence this year and it will make our collection more accessible to the general public.

I am pleased also to announce that this year we will have the 2<sup>nd</sup> Visual Arts Competition and Exhibition under the patronage of H.E President Donald Ramotar. This exhibition and competition will take place in November of this year. We once again expect that there will be a high level of participation and we feel that this would be one of the highpoints in our cultural calendar for 2014.

In the area of music, the National Music School has expanded its intake almost fivefold. Despite this expansion, we continue to enjoy 100% passes in the external exams and we are writing the Royal School of Music Exam. We have expanded the school steel band program. This year we are currently in 13 schools, in Region Nos.3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. Again, during the year we have budgeted moneys for two steel bands, one will be in Region No.8 and the other will go to Region No.9. We will also be providing them with instructional manuals and DVD once that have been developed by the Ministry.

Last year, we partnered with the Guyana Music Teachers Association to host the biennial Guyana Musical and Arts Festival. There were about 500 entries in the 69 categories of the competition. This has really renewed and revived music competition in Guyana. This year we continue to work with Guyana Music Teachers Association in training music teachers in preparation for the next Festival.

Again, for the first time, we ran a National Song Competition and again we were pleased with the response. We had 30 choirs taking part and the New Amsterdam Multilateral School was the winner in the large category.

In the area of drama, the National School of Theatre Arts and Drama is now offering a certificate and diploma programme in Drama. On the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2013, we had our first convocation where 12 students graduated with diplomas. For the current academic year we have about 45 students in the diploma programme and 15 in the certificate programme. We also continue with the National Drama Festival, which has now become a cultural staple to drama development in Guyana. Last year there were 43 plays that were entered into the festival; 42, which were specially written for the festival. We are pleased with the opportunities that are being offered to our dramatis by the festival.

Last year was not without its challenges at the National Cultural Centre. As you would know, the air conditioning system of the National Cultural Centre, which is almost three decades old, finally collapsed. We need to replace the system. One of the things that we have done in this year's budget is that we have allocated close \$55 million dollars to replace the system.

*6.35 p.m.*

In addition, substantial sums of money will be spent to improve the sound and lighting at the National Cultural Centre.

In the area of film, later in the year, we will be working with various stakeholders and a programme will be launched to teach people how to make films in Guyana. We recognise that there is a need for us to tell our own stories, by producing our own films about ourselves. We hope that this programme will eventually grow into a full-fledged film school. Apart from our film programme, this year we will be working very closely with the Catholic community to host a documentary film festival. We intend to develop this into a premier film festival for local films. We hope that we will receive the support of Members in the House.

In addition to what we are trying to do, we are pleased that over the last year a number of international film companies had been attracted, coming to Guyana to produce documentaries. As Minister Ali would have said, there was *Gold Rush* which was being produced here but in

addition to that there was a company from Germany, Blue Paw, that came and did a film, it is called *The Journey*, where it traced the source to the Essequibo. It started from the mouth of the Essequibo and tried to trace the source of the Essequibo River. In addition, it did another film called the *Day of the Caiman*; another is the *Eyes of the Harpy Eagle*, one is on the anaconda and one that is called *Big Five*. These films are now on the international market and are bringing Guyana to the rest of the world.

There was the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) which came down here and did two films last year for the television series on National Geographic called *River Monsters*. They did a special film on Arapaima and another on the catfish called the *loulou*. These films will be aired during this year. Again, because of the viewership that it attracts, I think, Guyana would now become better known in the international community.

By September of 2014, one of the things that we would like to do is to bring these four schools, which I spoke about, together into, what we are calling, the Institute of the Creative Arts. This would allow us to manage our programmes more effectively and to offer some core courses on Guyanese culture across the different faculties. We are also exploring various partnerships between our institutions and other universities abroad. One such partnership would be with the University of Ohio.

I will now turn my attention to the national archives. At the Walter Rodney National Archive over the last year our focus has been on digitalising our archival holdings. There were two projects, which are ongoing concurrently, one to create a searchable digital database with all the indentureship immigrant records and the other to take digital images of these records. Later on the two will be merging, and then eventually taking them online so that people can research online. Substantive progress has been made in this area. This year we have budgeted sums moneys to continue with the building of this database. A programme has started in which our audio holdings will be documented and we have been able to identify thousands of audio recordings in various institutions such as the University of Guyana, in the National Communications Network (NCN), and so forth. What we have found with these audio holdings is that some of them have been infected by fungi and we need to clean them up and preserve them. During this year the national archives would be contacting these institutions and bring

these recordings into the archives. Later on we would be digitalising those sounds and create an audio archive in our national archives.

Works also have started on conservation of our Dutch holdings. These are a lot of paper holdings and we have been working closely with the archives of the Netherlands to ensure that we are able to make a proper catalogue and to describe what we have in our Dutch holdings.

Last year we would have benefited from a number of scholars coming from the archives of the Netherlands to work with our staff at the archives. They have assisted us in setting up a paper conservation lab and this year we have budgeted sums of money so that we can expand the paper conservation lab.

At our museums, again, they continue to play a very vibrant role in Guyana's cultural life. At the National Museum there would have been more than 15 exhibitions. Apart from that, it would have started the mobile museum programme which is now benefiting close to 66 schools. Schools would request of the museums and they would be sending out cases of museum pieces to them. There are 66 schools enrolled in this programme.

Through the Walter Roth Museum, apart from up keeping the museum, there were several initiatives being taken in the area of archaeology. We have been able to work with a number of stakeholders to develop an archaeological development plan for the Berbice River area. As you know, I would have told the House in previous presentations, of the importance of the findings in the Berbice River area. We have been able to map several archaeological sites and this year we will continue this research. We will be partnering with the University of Florida during this year and we will be working to identify the artefacts that are there and carbon dating some of those artefacts.

Last year we were able to do work in Region 9 where we discovered artefacts that are close to 300 years old. We have to do a lot more work with our local communities because we are being told that there are persons going into the area, raiding those sites and taking away the artefacts. If we are not careful we will be losing this part of our patrimony. This year we will be spending a lot of energy trying to do work in these communities.

At the National Trust we will be spending moneys to upgrade the 1763 Monument site. We will also be working on the restoration of the armoury at Fort Zeelandia and some additional work on the windmill at Hog Island. Some preliminary work will also start on the restoration of the roof of St. Peter's Anglican Church in Leguan. This year also work will commence on the site at Palmyra for the indentureship monument.

As trust to protect our national heritage, one of the things that we will be doing is signing up to two United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) conventions. Cabinet has already given approval for Guyana to accede to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage and to the Convention on Intangible Heritage. During this year we will accede to these two conventions and we feel that it will open the door to more technical and other assistance in the area of heritage protection.

In the area of literature, the Caribbean Press continues to publish books about Guyana's past and present. To date, the press has published close to 68 books about Guyana and has another 45 books listed for future publications.

This year, on the 16<sup>th</sup> December, would mark 100 years since the birth of Edgar Mittlelholzer. We want to feature Mittlelholzer by publishing some of his works. I am pleased to say that this year, among the publications of the Caribbean Press, would be a book that was done by Mittlelholzer called *Shadows move among them*. For that book, the scholarly introduction has been the practice, or the preface of the book has been written by Dr. Rupert Roopnarine. Three volumes of the Mittlelholzer Lectures would be done. Those lectures, which was started by A. J. Seymour in 1967, we have been able to put together and they have been edited by Andrew Lindsay. Hopefully by the end of this year those three volumes will be available for the general public.

One of the things, which will be done, is publishing another book about Mittlelholzer. As you know, on the 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1965 Mittlelholzer ended his life tragically by committing suicide. The book, *The Idyll and the Warrior*, was written by his widow and tells us about his final years and his frustrations as he led up to this tragic point in his life.

A book, which has been lost for about 100 years, by Egbert Martin, will be published. It is a book of prose called *Scriptology*. We are pleased that this year we will be able to bring that book

alive. A book by A. J. Seymour's book, *Collected Poetry*, will be published. Again, I am pleased to say that Ian MacDonald and Professor Jacqueline de Weever have contributed to the forward of this book.

A number of contemporary writers will be done. We already have received their work and they are being edited. These persons include Portia Dodson, Pearl Lewis, Andrew Hutson, just to name a few. Very shortly an anthology will be launching in which 21 young poets will be featured. I am very pleased that one of our Member of Parliament (MP) in this House, the Hon. Member Mr. James Bond, who is one of the poets, has been featured in this publication.

The publication of the presidential parliamentary speeches will continue. So far the 7 volumes of Dr. Jagan's speeches from 1947 to 1987 have been completed. We are still doing work to try to find the missing period from 1987 to 1990. Two volumes of Mrs. Jagan's speeches in Parliament have been published and three volumes of Mr. Burnham's speeches in Parliament have been completed. This year work will continue on another volume of Mr. Burnham's speeches. Later on when the Burnham Speeches will be completed we will move on to our other Presidents.

The Ministry is also very serious about developing the creative sector in Guyana and to helping our cultural practitioners to be able to earn a living from their trade. One of the things that we did last year was in partnership with MASHAV and the Young American Business Trust. We were able to host a business lab for cultural practitioners. This week long lab we were able to teach cultural practitioners how to move from a concept that they might have about creating a business to actually working them through and be able to come up with a detailed project document for that business. I am very pleased to see in our budget, this year, that there are many avenues where these young people can now turn to for affordable financing. Under the initiative announced by the Minister of Finance for small and microenterprises, I am sure these cultural practitioners would qualify and be able to start their businesses this year.

Earlier this year we invited a prominent Jamaica professor in the creative industry, Dr. Dennis Howard, to come to Guyana and to assist us in the formulation of a strategy for the creative industry. We were able to host consultation workshop where we attracted about 40 people from various areas of culture. They have produced a preliminary draft and Dr. Howard is currently finalising this which he will present to us later in the year. From this document we will then be

able to map a strategy of how we move forward and things that we ought to implement to facilitate the creative sector.

A lot can be said about sports in our country. Sport is indeed very vital to the development of our country. Studies have shown that for every dollar invested in sport it returns an average saving between \$3 and \$41. A study, which was conducted, shows that in terms of physical and mental health, for every dollar invested it returned close to \$3.75. In the area of community regeneration, for every dollar invested it can turn over about \$3.00. In the area of community safety, for every dollar invested we get between \$3 and \$41. These figures were tabulated from various sources and presented in the national sports plan. Using this as a guide, we can see that the investment of \$995, 381 million in this year's budget, certainly the multiplying effect would be a tremendous one for our country.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you would require 15 minutes for extension.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Anthony:** Again, in the area of sport, it is the Government's aim to have every Guyanese participate in sport. To do this the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport has adopted a life cycle approach to sports, meaning that it wants everyone, young or old and all those in-between to take up a sport and to be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day. This is more challenging than it sounds, since we live in an obesity promoting environment. When we survey across many ages and stages of life, the barriers include lack of knowledge about how to begin an exercise regimen, time and scheduling challenges, lack of social support and insufficient motivation or energy to pursue such a regime. To this end, during the year the Ministry will be offering programmes to help people overcome these barriers.

In his book *Disease Proof*, Dr. David Katz has pointed out:

“...that improvement in lifestyle can lead to an 80% reduction in heart disease, a 90% reduction in diabetes, and a 60% drop in cancer rates.”

We want our citizens to reap the benefits of exercising and eating right, so that during the year the Ministry will work with villages, with our communities across Guyana to establish community exercise groups (CEG) to promote healthful living as part of our “Get out and Play” programme.

Cricket has had its fair share of difficulty off the field and it has impacted on the game on the field. We hope that later in the year we will be able to pass the cricket legislation by consensus which will assist the game to grow and develop. Regionally, the West Indies Cricket Board has given permission, as you know, to Caribbean Premier League (CPL) for the T20 which had its first matches in 2013. This private sector venture really invigorated the game in the Caribbean. During 2013 there were 24 matches in six countries and with 29 broadcasters picking up this broadcast and broadcasting it to 25 countries for more than 2,635 hours. The matches, which were broadcasted here, or from here, helped to put Guyana on the world stage.

The Mona School of Business & Management did an impact study of this tournament and it stated that overall in the tournament close to US\$23.2 million was invested. The direct impact of that on Caribbean economy would have been \$36.4 million and that the direct and indirect impact, across the Caribbean region, would be close to \$105.6 million. Here in Guyana the study also shows that we would have benefited from direct and indirect impact of close to US\$4.9 million. This clearly shows the economic impact of this tournament and we look forward, and we have started talking to CPL, to ensuring that Guyana is one of the venues in the 2014 edition.

By the end of this year the national synthetic track, at Leonora, will be partially operational. We expect that by the end of the year the synthetic track, the football field, the 2 northern stands, the parking, access roads and the club house will be fully completed. With those sections completed the facility can be put to use. However, the two southern stands still need to be built and these capital expenditures, we anticipate, would be in future budgets.

During the later part of the year the Ministry will be hiring staff to administer this facility. We would also be recruiting full time athletic coaches who would offer programmes at the synthetic athletics track.

At the Guyana National Stadium, development of this facility will be continued. This facility has now become one of the popular venues for live entertainment. The Ministry will procure some

mobile stands, which can be easily set up on the tarmac, so that when there are concerts there can be seating available. During the year the outer parking lot will be fenced. This would prevent the indiscriminate dumping of construction material that is currently ongoing on the Ministry's property.

We are once again pleased that \$300 million have been allocated to the development of community grounds. Over the last three years Government would have spent \$500 million on community grounds. This would have resulted in a welcome transformation of these community assets, with close to 500 communities benefiting from this grant funding. Within the next few months, the lights at Albion will be able to turn on when this is completed. For the first time there will be lights at Albion and international matches will be played, if we like.

The Guyana Football Federation (GFF) has approached the Government of Guyana to build a football training facility at Leonora. The request is for the Government of Guyana to provide 10 acres of land, and the GFF would build the football facility using resources allocated through International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) Goal Project. The projected investment over the next five years would be approximately US\$6.5M. The Government is very supportive of this request and would be signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the GFF shortly.

Last year the Guyana Motor Racing Club (GMRC) became a full member of the international motor racing body, the International Automobile Federation (FIA). The FIA has given a grant of €800,000 to the GMRC to be able to develop a master plan for the circuit at Timehri. The aim is to make the circuit into a class 3 track. Already a team visited Guyana and has commenced the discussion and design of the class 3 track.

We expect, also, that our partnership with the Guyana Karate College will come to fruition. As it is known some time Government would have allocated one acre of land to the Guyana Karate College for the construction of a Dojo. This year we are assured by the college that it will be able to start the erection of a permanent home for karate at Liliendaal.

We will also urge the Guyana Olympic Association, which the Government would have given one acre of land, to also follow to suit.

The Ministry remains open to develop partnership with national, or local, organisations or individuals who would like to invest in the sports sector. We have received other expressions of interests to develop cricket, golf and tennis facilities, and each of these would be considered on its merit.

As we debate this budget, Guyanese, from across our country, are watching what we do in this House. They are paying attention to how we conduct ourselves. What will they see? What will we tell them? What will we show them?

Already, we have seen and we have heard from the Opposition benches, and I am not sure what signal is being sent. When the speakers were talking about Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the moneys that we wanted to invest in it we are getting, I think, mixed signals. On one hand, we are hearing that we care for the sugar workers and, on the other hand, we are hearing that we are not ready yet to invest in the sector. I think it is important that we invest in the sector. As someone who have grown up on a sugar estate - I come from Enmore - and who come from a sugar family, I think it is very important that we invest in this sector.

Many of us who are here - I heard the Hon. Member Keith Scott talked about our ancestors - we came here transplanted from the different continents, coming here to work on sugar plantation, and sugar has been part of the history of this country.

There was a popular saying in the United States of America, not so long ago, during the 2007 economic crisis, that some for the main pillars of its economy was too big to fail.

*7.05 p.m.*

If we look and put it in context in our economy, sugar is too big to fail. Therefore, we must not make the mistake of not investing in the sugar sector. Those who dare to do that would do it at their own peril. Therefore, I urge that we reach across party lines for the good of our people. They are weary. They are tired. They are tired of this politics of frustration. They are tired of this threat of cutting and chopping. I know we can do better in this House. Our people deserve better. Let us behave maturely and let us vote for this Budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Dr. Ramayya:** I was fortunate to be saved from some three hours or more of the same from the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) cabal...

**Mr. Speaker:** One second, Dr. Ramayya. We are in the House, so "the Hon. Members from the Government side" would substitute for the word "cabal".

**Dr. Ramayya:** The Alliance For Change (AFC) made the right decision in boycotting the fantasy speech by the Minister on Monday last. After studying *Budget 2014*, there is one theme that is very clear to me. The needs of the majority of Guyanese would again go unmet and the aspiration of our youths would continue to go unrealised.

The Minister's speech was nothing but an insult to the theme, *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*, since the entire 2014 Budget was designed as a pre-electioneering budget to fool rural Guyana. On the cover of the Minister's speech, which I have here, I saw half of a cup which contains bitter coffee and no sugar or milk. To describe this \$220 billion Budget and the absence of the sugar and milk is the decline of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the bread and butter that has been taken away from the sugar workers.

The leakage of the cup is the decline of Dr. Jagan's legacy which resulted in a minority government. Let me remind this House of Dr. Jagan's legacy by quoting the daughter of the late Dr. Jagan when she spoke less than two years ago about the betrayal of Dr. Jagan's legacy in fighting for the working people, the sugar workers being at the heart of the fight. She made this indictment:

"I think the party has moved away – not the party but certain elements in the party – from these very, very important values that held the party together. For me, when I look at some of the things that are happening, my parents would have been turning in their graves if they had been buried, but they must be churning up in the waters of the rivers in which their ashes were sprinkled."

Let me turn my attention to the 18,000 sugar workers and their families. What does this Budget mean to them? It does nothing but save face regarding the octopus Skeldon estate no longer called the white elephant. The over US\$200 million taxpayers' money invested in it could have rehabilitated all of the estates countrywide, rather than to keep this transfusion of taxpayers'

money to operate a factory below 25% production. There is no electricity, as boasted about from the inception.

The Action Plan of the AFC could have brought a budget better than this whereby the sugar workers could have been given a decent increase in their wages so that their coffee would have been flooded with enough milk and sugar. This is a “direct impact” that we can talk about, quoting from the Hon. Minister Irfaan Ali.

The AFC’s obligation and action plan aim to satisfy the needs of the Guyanese people and their aspiration realised, but it is not so under this Government. Mismanagement, poor vision from the top levels and poor administrative conduct sunk the industry. Since 2011, the Minister advised us that he injected close to \$10 billion into the sugar belt, but the industry continues to struggle. This is, again, a direct impact. He now has the audacity to come and tell the nation that after spending all of this money in the sugar belt, sugar production contracted some 15% to 186,807 tonnes, the lowest production under the PPP/C Government. Even after the great floods of 2005 that injured GuySuCo, the industry produced over 250,000 tonnes of sugar. Why, Mr. Speaker? It is because of poor cane husbandry practices leading to poor cane yields, sloth in the mechanisation process leading to a loss of control over the cost of production, and disincentive for private cane farmers to get on board when this can help to reduce the cost of production. Sugar is in a coma today because of square pegs.

The Skeldon factory remains the principal reason for the almost 40 cents per pound as the cost of production and no one is being held accountable.

I challenge them to call the local government elections so that the people of the sugar belt can speak directly to them and they would not like the message.

I feel for my fellow Berbicians. The current Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy, was given a basket to fetch water by his predecessors but he cannot come here and ask for a further \$6 billion without a clear and detailed plan on what this money will be used for, when this money is needed and what the clear justification is for why we should support this cause. We are willing. The AFC, in principle, stands with the sugar workers and their families and we shall vote for any funds for the sugar belt once there is a clear justification for the request.

Mr. Speaker and fellow Guyanese, the AFC always continue to stand with the sugar belt but we are not *pagalee* – it is a nice word, Mr. Speaker – to provide billions for the PPP/C to squander and not service the sugar workers. That is a direct impact.

Let me turn my attention briefly to the \$625 given to our pensioners as an increase, which is only \$21 per day. At three years old, we refused to accept that from our parents to go to school. Again, the AFC Action Plan, since 2011, called for \$15,000 per month. Today, our pensioners could have been receiving \$20,000 per month under an AFC government.

The Minister of Health continues to boast and brag about how good our health system is functioning but yet patients admitted at the regional hospital are asked to supply their own bed sheets and clothes. This is coupled with shortage of medicines and patients are given prescriptions to buy their own drugs. Where are our taxpayers' dollars going? I ask that question in this honourable House.

There is no trauma team. The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) team, which is underequipped, fail to recognise the need for emergency care. Only recently, a regional councillor of Region 6 went to the New Amsterdam Hospital with serious cardiac problems and was placed in a ward without oxygen. There was no doctor or nurse to assist him in his last moment of life. This is a shame, Mr. Speaker. Even my bedroom is better equipped. Instead of building a specialty hospital costing billions, why not upgrade the prevailing health facilities to ensure better healthcare for our people?

There is one problem that has been haunting me night and day and I cannot escape but reveal myself at the mercy of what is happening in this country and that is crime. The Minister spent \$17.3 billion on the security sector, yet the seriousness of the crime statistics for 2013 revealed that there were similar to the awful days when domestic terrorists were running wild all over the country after the Camp Street break out and in the days of the “fine man” gang.

In a country of 750,000 persons, some 4,204 serious crimes, which included 155 murders, were reported in 2013. What really did the PPP/C spend this \$17.3 billion on? I ask this question in this honourable House: what was this money spent on?

We have no air police unit...our new helicopter to quickly detect and investigate serious crimes in this country. Only now we have high-powered boats capable of plying the high seas to fight the pirates who continue to terrorise our fishermen. The majority of Guyanese continue to live in an environment that presents deadly threats to our personal security with no respect. What really is the PPP/C spending all of these billions of dollars on? I ask the Minister this question.

The AFC's Action Plan has outlined our commitment in detail on how we intend to confront crime and improve the personal security for all. If we want to build a viable tourism product, we have to bring down the runaway crime rate now. Enough talk; it is time to act.

It was the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that reminded the nation that a higher crime rate hinders Guyana's development, but reality continues to evade the Hon. Minister Clement Rohee who is now asking for \$19.5 billion. He continues to be very elusive on the specifics. The AFC continues to stand by its commitment to increase salaries of all law enforcement officers by 20% across the board. We believe if an officer of the law is not focused on hustling a dollar, he would have more time to solve crimes and the long-term economic impact will be positive. That is a direct impact.

The AFC also calls for the reappointment of the Police Service Commission so that all eligible officers can be promoted accordingly. This is what we do not see in our police department. People of high calibre, people who are proficient and efficient in practising their jobs to protect the society, are not given the opportunity because they are vocal with what they say and because they are honest in their jobs. They are not given the opportunity and this speaks for itself, Mr. Speaker.

The AFC, in principle, will support the establishment of a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team which we see as a good, strategic method to combat the serious criminal...but we cannot understand why the PPP/C was so slothful in its establishment.

We also welcome the establishment of the Forensic Laboratory at the University of Guyana (UG) since we seriously think that Guyana has too many unsolved crimes. The AFC believes that the time has arrived for the police to have their own air unit at Ogle Airport and we would commit some \$200 million to make this project a reality. We also believe that the police marine unit

urgently needs at least three fast boats, especially in the Berbice area. An AFC Government would have released \$120 million to start this process.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have five minutes in which to conclude.

**Dr. Ramayya:** This is a clear message to the political directorate at the Office of the President (OP) that we will have no confidence in Minister Rohee at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

In conclusion, in his budget speech, the Minister reminded the nation of the gap between the rhetoric and the reality on the ground. As I illustrated in the three significant sectors, the lives of the working class have been under clear and present danger for over a decade under this Jagdeo/Ramotar Government and the 2014 Budget is more of the same and makes a marginal difference in the lives of those at the bottom of the economic ladder. This is a direct impact. I love to quote the Hon. Minister Ali. The working poor, the unemployed, the single mothers, the youths, the elderly and the disabled are under the gutter at this stage in life in this country with this type of budget.

What the Minister forgot to mention was the Value Added Tax (VAT) which is mainly paid for by the final consumer which is the working class. It went from \$21 billion when it was launched in 2007 to \$34 billion in 2014, an unreasonable increase of \$13 billion on the back of the poor and working class. This is a direct impact. What are they doing with the extra \$13 billion every year? They did not give any to the workers by way of a reasonable wage increase in 2013. They clearly are not offering it to the pensioners because all they are offering them in 2014 is an additional \$20 per day. It cannot even buy a butter flap much less the butter and the cheese to put inside and they cannot even dream of the milk to put in the tea to go with it. This is a direct impact. This House sits and looks at \$20 increase which cannot even buy a butter flap for a family.

They remain out of touch with the grass root people. They remain out of touch with the poor people. Only the rich people can survive today in this country with this Budget and we will have to continue to suffer. *Budget 2014* failed to deliver a better Guyana for all Guyanese.

If time permits, I would like to answer the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. Many of the cricket grounds and sports facilities in Region 6 are not equipped to promote sports. Yet, they

come here and ask for a big budget because they want to see sports and better healthcare with people participating in sports. It would not become possible under this Government if we do not have the Public Procurement Commission to see where our dollars are going. The Public Procurement Commission has to be put in place, Mr. Speaker, because money is being allocated to many facilities, but the money is not being properly spent.

I want to thank this House for listening to this presentation. We can do better with our tax dollars and make a direct impact, as Minister Ali said.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Webster]:** I rise this evening in this honourable House to lend my support to *Budget 2014*. First of all, let me extend congratulations to my Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Minister of Finance, and his team for articulating a vision in this year's budget presentation, which seeks to support our Government's pro-poor approach to enable a better quality of life for all Guyanese, including through the improvement of quality social services being provided throughout Guyana.

The theme of this year's Budget – *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese* – speaks to our Government's primary focus which is to address the needs of our people. *Budget 2014* is practical and it is people-centered. *Budget 2014* is good for Guyana. *Budget 2014* is not as what my Colleague who just spoke before me said. He said it is not good for Guyana.

It has captured the key issues that would enable us as a people to continue along a trajectory that continues to realise and harvest Guyana's potential. It would be remiss of me, Mr. Speaker, if I did not acknowledge that Guyana's economy, over the past eight years, from 2006 to 2013, has seen the longest period of uninterrupted growth and real economic growth in independent Guyana, from a growth rate of 5.1% in 2006 and 5.2% by the end of 2013. We must not forget that during that period, the world economy saw a downturn as a result of the global financial crises which had a negative impact upon many economies around the world.

In *Budget 2014*, the budgetary allocation to the social sector is one third of the national budget and greater emphasis has been given to social programmes for the vulnerable and at risk

populations within our society – youths, elderly, women and children. Through a menu of targeted interventions, the ordinary Guyanese man or woman will benefit.

Our Government has demonstrated over the past years, through our policies and programmes, continued commitment to better the lives of all Guyanese. We have a track record that is premised upon the approach of sustainability through a number of measures being implemented throughout all the sectors. While some detractors may say that this Budget is deficient and that it does not address issues affecting ordinary Guyanese, I wish to assure everyone in this House that our Government's position is supportive of every Guyanese having access to the same opportunities. Let us not be sceptical about the benefits this Budget brings to our people, but let us recognise that what matters now and, equally, what will ultimately matter is our contribution to making Guyana a better place. Therefore, all of us, as representatives of the people, must see the need to work together in the interest of all our people.

In 2014, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, in accordance with its mandate, will continue to focus on the provision of human services through prevention as well as remedial work and other targeted interventions for vulnerable groups.

In 2013, the Child Care and Protection Agency diligently prevented 2,432 children from being separated from their families whilst 519 children were removed from abusive situations. Like similar agencies around the world, the Agency, in 2013, performed admirably to meet the increased demand for services to children and their families.

In Guyana today, our populace has become more aware of societal ills which have affected our children. Our Government, therefore, has seen the need to support the placement of children within family settings instead of placement in institutional care as a preferred option. We will continue to provide alternative care options for our children, training and support for parents to prevent the unnecessary separation of children through parenting initiatives, conduct effective monitoring of children placed in home care, undertake mental health and therapeutic services for affected children and their families, foster community awareness and psycho-social support for vulnerable children and their families, support those vulnerable children in the school system and, through inter-agency collaboration, advocate on behalf of those children whose rights have been violated to ensure that there is access to justice.

It is important that we recognise the range of services being provided and that we accept that no single agency or organisation working in isolation from others can address these demands successfully without inter-agency collaboration between Government and its partners. Vulnerable children and their families do require a number of services. The pooling of resources, skills and coordination of care services must be seen in a positive manner for the purpose of interdependent problem solving which focuses on improving services to children and their families.

7.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, just think about a child or a family having to visit several social service agencies for assistance and having to provide the same information on every occasion. This can be very frustrating.

Inter-agency collaboration must be seen as having tremendous benefits to vulnerable children. It will provide easier access in a timely manner to services, increase the quality of case monitoring and evaluation, more effective use of limited resources and eliminate duplication of services being provided to victims. The Child Care and Protection Agency will work to ensure increased collaboration with other key governmental and non-governmental agencies. I am sure that all of us in this honourable House will agree that working with families is a key strategy to ensuring the continued wellbeing of children whilst forging strong family ties and discouraging the development of dysfunctional families.

*[Technical interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I prefer if we can pause to rectify this problem because it is really going to affect your ability to deliver the presentation you want to deliver. Could one of the technicians assist? There is something with an electronic signal nearby. My apologies, Minister. Please proceed.

**Ms. Webster:** I am sure that all of us in this honourable House will agree that working with families is a key strategy to ensuring the continued wellbeing of children whilst forging strong family ties and discouraging the development of dysfunctional families. To this end, the sum of \$382.5 million has been budgeted for the delivery of effective childcare and protection services.

It is also our intention to promote foster care as an alternative care option. Training will be conducted in all ten Administrative Regions for approximately 2,000 parents. Whilst there are some children who will have to remain in institutional care, greater emphasis will be placed on monitoring the 19 privately managed children's homes in Guyana to ensure that the operations of these homes are in accordance with the minimum operational standards and guidelines in place.

Towards the end of 2013, three juveniles from a children's home in Region 6 were charged for wandering. There was a lot of criticism in the press about the maltreatment of these three girls. As Minister of Human Services, whose mandate entails oversight of issues pertaining to our children, I appointed a team of competent persons to undertake an enquiry into this incident. The Committee has since submitted its findings, along with its recommendations, through a comprehensive report. I am please to inform this honourable House that the minimum operational standards for children's homes state that homes must ensure that all children within their care are protected and their rights respected. In addition, the diversity and individuality of each child must be promoted and supported to encourage his or her personal growth and development and participation in decision making. This enables each child to develop an individual identity and to grow up with a sense of belonging. Among some of the key recommendations are:

- Immediate establishment of a management committee to review and have oversight responsibility for the operation of that home;
- To develop and implement procedures that govern the rights of children living in that home;
- Training of personnel on the relevant laws for the protection and rights of children in Guyana;
- The need for the recruitment of a tutor to assist the children with homework and assignments; and
- Disciplinary actions to be taken against those officers who fail to execute their duties in accordance with the public service rules.

However, we must ensure that all the gaps in the juvenile justice system be closed to address issues relating to minors who are placed before the court. It is, therefore, important to ensure that there is compliance as it relates to the protection of Guyana's children who live in institutional care.

Work is currently ongoing on the completion of regulations for the Childcare and Development Service Act, 2011. This will be completed shortly. It will support the registering and licensing of day care facilities and the privately managed children's homes and orphanages. It will be a requirement that all of these facilities operate at the minimum operational standards or cease operation. Registration and Licensing Officers are currently being recruited and will be trained. The Childcare and Protection Agency will conduct an awareness campaign to sensitise the providers of day care facilities on the prescribed requirements for the operation of these facilities.

The Tell Campaign in schools and other activities for breaking the silence on childhood sexual abuse will be expanded this year as well as education awareness activities being conducted in various communities as it relates to children's rights and protecting them from harm and abuse.

The Halfway Transitional Home for Children, which will be housed in the recently renovated building located at Sophia, will facilitate the aging out of children from the formal care system. Among other activities to be undertaken by the Agency, as part of services that will be developed for vulnerable children, is to have increased mental health services provided for our vulnerable children and their families.

In the year 2013, through the Difficult Circumstances Unit, the sum of \$33 million was expended to meet the cost of poverty alleviation initiatives such as funeral grants, which amounted to the tune of \$2.7 million; the provision of eye care assistance to the elderly, vulnerable children and public assistance recipients to the tune of \$1.8 million; support to persons with disabilities towards assistance to acquire prosthetic limbs and hearing aids at \$2.3 million; food assistance to the underprivileged at \$800,000; small business initiatives to support women's groups for which the sum of \$2.2 million was expended; support to victims of trafficking in persons for which the sum of \$1.7 million was expended; and transportation costs for disabled people network and persons from other differently abled groups at \$2.1 million. These which I have highlighted are

only some of the initiatives of which poverty alleviation interventions have been provided by this Government to support the vulnerable within our society.

### **Trafficking in Persons**

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that trafficking in persons is a global phenomenon and it is the world's second largest criminal activity. Notwithstanding the extent of this problem globally, repeated assessments have revealed a low prevalence of trafficking in persons in Guyana. However, the potential impacts of trafficking in persons on the safety and human rights of citizens have driven our Government and its partners to develop strategies and programmes aimed at combating trafficking in persons. Initiatives aimed at combating trafficking in persons have been undertaken under the guidance of the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons (TIP). The policy of this Government on the issue of trafficking in persons is to wage a consistent struggle against perpetrators; however, we will always honour our obligations to offer protection and assistance to victims. We have no objection to partnering with stakeholders, including NGOs, which is contrary to some of the recent public press pronouncements.

The barriers to inter-agency collaboration are many, but true professionals will continue to work towards the removal of these barriers. It must be noted, however, that investigations of reported incidences of trafficking in persons are conducted by the Guyana Police Force and all files, matters with respect to trafficking in persons, are duly reviewed by the Commissioner of Police or an authorised officer. There is an established protocol in place as to how such matters are dealt with. It is the Guyana Police Force that is responsible for informing witnesses, alleged victims, of their scheduled appearance in court. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security is primarily responsible for the support of alleged victims and their families and we have diligently done so and will continue to do so.

Communication is a key element in relationship building for effective inter-agency collaboration. For the year 2013, there were 20 alleged victims, 9 reports, 3 convictions and 6 cases which were brought before the courts. One case was dismissed. The three convictions pertained to matters in 2012 with respect to the three cases in 2013 which were not brought before the court. No charges were instituted based upon legal advice provided by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security has never rejected any alleged trafficking in persons victim, but has rendered support in the form of financial aid, the provision of housing, food, and accommodation, together with training opportunities and job placement for victims to facilitate their reintegration into society.

I wish to take this opportunity to urge our citizens, as concerned Guyanese, to report all incidents of TIP. We would like to assure everyone that our Government will work with all of our partners to ensure that the issue of trafficking in persons remains an issue that we feel, through collaborative approaches, can be countered.

### **Shelter and Rehabilitation**

We continue to exhort our efforts to improve the quality of life for those vulnerable persons within our society so as to transform their lives in a significant way. Very shortly, the Hugo Chavez Centre for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of the Homeless will commence operations. This signifies our Government's commitment and concern for the welfare of our citizens, especially those who are faced with difficult circumstances and have no place to go. During my budget presentation last year, I had indicated to this honourable House that the facility would have become operational in 2013. However, there were some challenges which included the conclusion of some remedial work which was deemed necessary and the procurement of furniture and equipment was required to be concluded. It is our intension, however, to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of these individuals into society through training programmes in farming, raring of poultry, various skills training programmes in the fields of catering, office ethics and basic computer skills, carpentry and plumbing. The facility has the capacity to house 180 persons.

### **The Elderly**

The National Commission on the Elderly continues its work during 2014. This year, the National Commission will conclude the formulation of minimum standards for all homes and facilities providing care to the elderly. We will work with the Commission to make the Palms Geriatric Institution a model for elderly care with the focus on establishing best practices as we seek to build the capacity of our patient care assistants who care for our elderly in that Institution. In addition, there are plans to partner with state-based organisations to establish centres for the

elderly in various communities across our country. Just a few days ago, there were reports in the media about incidents where two of our elderly women were targeted by criminals and have lost their lives within the confines of their own homes. At least one of the victims, it is alleged, was raped. This is horrific. We cannot condone this sort of violence within our society and, as leaders, we must, by our actions, send a signal that this must not be tolerated in our society. The recent murders of Joyce Lewis, age 75 years, and Yvonne Adams, age 76 years, who both lived alone, raise concerns about the need for the protection of the elderly. This is a worrisome trend and it needs to be addressed urgently. My condolences are extended to the families of these two elderly women.

The abuse of the elderly within our society must be addressed. There are cases where some persons are taken to hospitals for treatment and abandoned by their families, while some elderly citizens within our society are abused on a regular basis at the hands of family members and their pensions taken away from them. The Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security has received such complaints and has had to address these matters. To this end, the National Commission on the Elderly will work to conclude the formulation of legislation for the protection of the elderly. We must uphold the rights of the elderly within our society. We will work with our elderly in our society to make them more security conscious and I strongly support my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, in the expansion of the Community Policing Groups which will enable our communities to be safer.

The Hon. Member, Dr. Ramayya, mentioned the increase in the old age pension which was announced in this year's Budget. I would like to say to this honourable House that for the old age pension from the year 2006 to 2014, we have seen annual increase and that the old age pension was meant to be a subsidy. It was never meant to be a living wage, Mr. Speaker.

### **Gender Equality and Empowerment**

Mr. Speaker, let me address the issue of gender equality and empowerment. At the recent 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women which was held in March to review the challenges and achievement in the implementation of the millennium development goals for women and girls, Guyana reported on good progress made in its efforts to reduce hunger, increase access to social services and benefits, improve enrolment in and completion of

primary education and the empowerment of women. Those were among some of the areas posited. Guyana, by virtue of adopting a people-centred development approach, has come a long way towards mainstreaming gender equality and the empowerment of women in national policies. Recognising the importance of creating space for women to contribute, strong advocacy was done at the international level for standalone goals to be included in the post-2015 development agenda with respect to issues relating to gender equality, for economic advancement and support of our women and girls, the protection of women's rights, together with the issue of the illumination of gender-based violence. Our Government understands that it cannot achieve these objectives alone and that the broader political and civil climate will remain critical in creating a conducive environment to encourage greater investment in our country. Further, a well developed civil society has a vital role to play in supporting enduring democracies underpinned by good governance practices.

Among the challenges faced are gender-based violence and persistent gender inequalities in employment which require urgent attention. The 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development concluded that in the context of gender equality, patterns of progress and opportunities through community-based interventions to support those men in our society who are prone... and need to seek psychosocial help in dealing with anger management and other disorders.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you would require an extension of 15 minutes, please.

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move to have the Hon. Member be granted another 15 minutes to continue her presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Ms. Webster:** In addition, the National Commission on the Family intends to conduct training with men on parenting skills and techniques for fathers and design a public communication campaign to ensure that the messages are known by all.

In 2014, the Women's Affairs Bureau will continue to support the advancement and the empowerment of our women through training opportunities in micro financing to support women in small business enterprises. The Bureau intends to engage the legal fraternity to assist in

developing simple user-friendly handbooks entitled, *Know Your Rights*. In addition, there will be a countrywide campaign to sensitise women and girls about their rights, which would assist them in making positive choices and decisions in their lives. This activity will be a collaborative effort with all partners and stakeholders, NGOs and educational institutions. In addition, the conversation on gender-based violence will continue in schools in collaboration with the Men's Affairs Bureau.

A national action plan, as required in the Sexual Offences Act, 2010, has been developed by the Ministry. We intend to consult all stakeholders on the Draft National Action Plan, shortly.

Corrective policies are needed which focus on persistent gender disparities, given the evident elimination of socioeconomic development in and of itself in addressing these disparities. Studies in the region have shown that gender inequality represented a socioeconomic loss to our society and a cost to human development. In addressing the challenge of gender inequality, I am of the firm view that this requires a change of attitude and approaches at multiple levels. In this regard, the role of our men and boys and that of the family as the fundamental unit of society are crucial and must be strongly and visibly supported. There is also greater need to promote equal opportunities to continue women's access to economic and investment opportunities which promote entrepreneurship and the financial independence as well as women's participation in all levels of decision making in our society.

I am happy to say this evening that in this year's Public Sector Estimates, Volume II, under the Ministry's programme outline, we now have a sub-programme titled, Gender Equality and Empowerment which contains activities clearly identified for the protection of women's rights, protection of men's rights, economic advancement and support and the elimination of gender-based violence. Is this not testimony of our Government's commitment to these issues?

8.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this year the old age pension which will be increased from 1<sup>st</sup> May from \$12,500 per month to \$13,125 will see some 42,500 senior citizens benefitting. This will result in some \$6.6 billion being provided to meet the costs of old age pension. Since the introduction of the old age pension electricity assistance programme in 2013 7,026 pensioners who were customers of

Guyana Power and Light (GPL) were eligible to receive that subsidy. I shall provide a breakdown on this Hon. House.

From Region No.2, there were 898 pensioners; Region No.3, 951 pensioners; Region No.4, 2,985 pensioners, Region No.5, 619; Region No.6, 1,456; Region No.7-117 pensioners. This year that subsidy has been substantially increased by 50%, so the total subsidy this year will be in the sum of \$30,000 for every pensioner. For every succeeding generation who is born of the sacrifice of the previous one our elderly would have contributed to the development of Guyana in many ways. I wish to reassure this House that it will always be a major priority within our Government's remit to provide for the elderly and to meet their needs.

The Women of Worth (WOW) Microcredit Initiative has two main purposes: to improve the socioeconomic status of women in Guyana, and to promote a pivotal component in Guyana's quest towards attaining a society that is economically vibrant. The Women of Worth Programme continues. However, we recognise the need for the women to first benefit from training in the management of their finances and the execution of their business plans as a prior condition for financing. The Ministry has since held discussions with the partner banking institution, the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry, for a more coordinated approach to be undertaken to tackle the default rate of existing beneficiaries and to evaluate the impact on existing beneficiaries before the next phase of expanding the Programme to eligible beneficiaries later this year. Since the introduction of the WOW Programme in 2010 there has been fifteen second-time loan recipients in Region No.6, 39 second-time loan recipients in Region No.4 and 34 in Region No.2, totalling 88 second-time borrowers. In Region No.2, there has also been five third-time and two fourth-time loan recipients. This is commendable. This is testimony to the support that this Programme continues to provide through micro-credit enterprise development in the agriculture sector, poultry rearing, food processing, clothes vending, catering and cosmetology among others.

I would like to share with the Members of this Hon. House some success stories of this Programme. There is a single mother in Region 5 who now owns a thriving variety store in which she offers both Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GT&T) and Digicel mobile credit to her community. There is another recipient who is a single parent in Region 6 who now owns a well established boutique. Several other recipients have used their loans to expand their

catering businesses, hairdressing and cosmetology studios. Another beneficiary utilised her resources from this Programme to expand her veterinary clinic in Region No.4. These are some of the success stories under the WOW Programme. Is this not testimony to our Government's commitment to the continued advancement and empowerment of women in Guyana?

In concluding, I wish to note that our work in the area of social services, be it our children, women, men, the elderly or the homeless, will continue to receive priority attention from our Government. As Mahatma Ghandi said, a nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members. Here at home former President, the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan, noted:

“Democracy can only prosper in an environment of economic, social and ecological development. Poverty atrophies the vigour and initiative of the individual and deprives the society of incalculable human resources.

Our Government has demonstrated throughout that the core of our poverty reduction efforts has been to empower our men and women to become viable citizens. Citizens who have the opportunity to earn and achieve a higher quality of life, citizens who have become responsible parents to their children, and caring sons and daughters to their aging mothers and fathers. We will continue to pursue this path and as always we reach across and invite our colleagues on the other side of this August House to join us in these efforts and to let us together build a better Guyana for our beautiful Guyanese family.

I, therefore, add my endorsement to Budget 2014. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** And I thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Members we will take a suspension for half an hour.

*Sitting suspended at 8.12*

*Sitting resumed at 8.38*

**Mr. Speaker:** Good evening again Hon. Members this sitting is resumed. Please be seated.

Hon. Members we are making good time. I invite the Hon. Member Ms. Vanessa Kissoon to address us.

**Ms. Kissoon:** Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, all, good night. It is difficult to ignore the pain and grief this House is going through, but characteristic of our late Hon. Member, Mrs. Deborah Backer, could we hear her voice, she would utter words akin to Constance Jenkins:

“Weep not for me though I am gone;  
Into that gentle night.  
Grieve if you will but not for long,  
Upon my soul’s sweet flight.  
I am at peace,  
My soul’s at rest.  
There is no need for tears.  
For with your love I was blessed;  
For all those many there.  
There is no pain,  
I suffer not,  
The fear now all is gone.  
Put now these things out of your thoughts.  
In your memory I live on.  
Remember not my fight for breath;  
Remember not the strife.  
Please do not dwell upon my death,  
But celebrate my life.

On behalf of the people of Region No.10, and on my own behalf, we remain grateful to have known and worked with this phenomenal woman. May “Debbie’s” soul rest in eternal peace. Having said this, I know the Hon. Member would be nudging me to get on with my presentation, and thus I begin.

It is Budget time again. And while the Executive boasts it is the biggest budget ever, many do not see the budget as having corresponding impact on their lives, from the pensioners who got a

measly top-up of \$625, which is equivalent to \$20 a day, to the public servant whose wages and salaries were not budgeted for on some flimsy excuse, to the ordinary sugar workers who know the majority of GuySuCo's subventions will go into the pockets of the new mimic men.

You see, Mr. Speaker, rising inequalities is affecting all. Those who voted for the party on the opposite side of the House also view the talks of big spending, promises of building and improving infrastructures, as more opportunities for corruption. This must be of concern to all in this Hon. House and collectively we must work to stamp it out.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2013 during the presentation of six workshops Members thought that an integrity committee or the establishment of an integrity code would help to counter corruption allegations. Those Members acknowledged corruption in the party and Government and made known it has a negative image on the party and needs to be addressed. One of the other issues that was raised was directly tied to corruption allegations, and that was the loss of respect and lack of humility of party members. For those who may not recall this event it was the 30<sup>th</sup> Congress of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). The workshops rapporteur was Mr. Nigel Dharamlall. Should Hon. Members need further reading on this rendering, it can be found in the Stabroek News article of 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2013 entitled "*People's Progressive Party/Civic Workshop Acknowledges Corruption.*" So, having made known this party's internal findings and admission, I yield to the adage, "honesty is the best policy", and will present none of the preponderance of external souring on corruption.

Page 72, paragraph 6.14 in this year's Budget, the Hon. Minister of Finance boasted that \$3.2 billion is allocated for electricity subsidy to Linden and Kwakwani. This issue has to be placed in its proper prospective. The people of Region No.10, whom I humbly represent, do not see this subvention as a favour or one borne out of compassion, but a responsibility of the Government who had dismantled their electricity infrastructure without regards for its history, their input, and investments made through deferred wages and salaries.

May this House be reminded that this continuity has not been without the shedding of innocent blood; sweat and tears; loss of three innocent lives, namely Ron Somerset, Shemroy Bouyea and Allan Lewis – may their souls rest in peace; injuries; destruction of properties; the young labelled criminals in the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2012 state-owned Guyana Chronicle Editorial; and the

disruption of decades of peace. Let it not be forgotten this allocation is also a result of unity and months of protests by a steadfast people to secure their right to equality and self-determination. Let it be written in this nation's history, our struggle continues, the cause endures, the hope lives on, and the dreams shall never die.

To date the 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2012 Agreement between Central Government and Region 10's Regional Democratic Council is yet to see full implementation even though this House on 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2013 approved a motion in support of it. On instruction of the Regional Democratic Council, I am advised to inform this House the Agreement shall be realised, with or without the Central Government's support, because what is due to a person it shall be received. Attention is drawn to the Region's determination of an Economic Plan which would have factored it into Terms of Reference (c) to which I quote:

“Review Linden and Region 10 facilities and capacity for food self sufficiency, and to the extent feasible develop a plan for self-sufficiency as part of the Regional Development Plan.”

Region No.10 borders six regions with access to over 80% of Guyana's agricultural market. The geographic location of this region presents opportunities for exploring and exploiting the country's agricultural potential. However, this is being ignored by the Government raising valid questions as to why and for what ends. The Region's potential for massive production of crops and livestock production exists and is validated by Go-Invest and other companies which have noted that vast untapped opportunities exist in the intermediate savannahs of the Region for production of beef, milk, mutton, citrus, corn, cashew nuts, legumes, peanut, soy beans, dairy products and orchard crops. *[Interruption]* No goats.

Also in support of the Region's agricultural potential Go-Invest has recognised the ideal farming conditions including soil... *[Interruption]* If you will be quiet Mr. Carberry will bring your grass.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay, let us proceed.

**Ms. Kissoon:** ...drainage, fertilisation, creation of an ideal environment for the application of high technology and the establishment of medium or large scale agricultural operations.

*[Interruption]* You are a slaughterer.

**Mr. Speaker:** One second. Hon. Members, at the beginning of the debate we agreed that we will not get personal. Mr. Neendkumar I am hearing you; it started with you about money received as a Member of Parliament. If so you may bring a motion against the Member. Let us avoid getting personal.

**Mr. Neendkumar:** She talks about goat.

**Mr. Speaker:** Did you feel offended by that statement? Did you feel offended by the goat reference, Sir?

**Mr. Neendkumar:** There were allegations, but you were not here when the matter was dealt with in the National Assembly.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, there was an allegation made that people were slaughtering goats at the Sports Hall. Unless you were directly involved I do not see how you can be offended when she said they are not farming goats. In fact I personally thought that another Member of the House...

**Mr. Neendkumar:** Mr. Speaker, I know for example there is a big problem in Linden where money was collected for the One Mile School.

**Mr. Speaker:** You can bring that up on a particular motion but you cannot... if you have such information you know what you have to do with it. If there is any Member of this House who could be slighted by a goat reference it is not you. And the Member is not seated here now.

**Minister within the Ministry of Finance [Bishop Edghill]:** Mr. Speaker, just a Point of Clarification. I have noticed that you sought to bring correction to Mr. Neendkumar's reference while he is sitting, but I am sitting here and heard the Hon. Member refer to him as a slaughterer and that was not attended to, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Very well. In fact, Ms. Kissoon, I intervened when I heard the retort so we will refrain from any references please. Make your presentation; I think many people are depending

on you to represent them tonight Ms. Kissoon. You know that a lot rests on your shoulders; see it through and let us get it over with.

**Ms. Kissoon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers can unleash their potential, creating wealth for themselves and the nation through cooperative ventures, of which pilot projects have begun in Region No.10. It must be noted that much more can be achieved were our farmers receiving support from the Central Government in areas such as land titling, better drainage and irrigation systems, logistical support, agriculture inputs and sustained extensive support.

And this brings me to the point of acknowledging this Nation's tri-sector economy – private, government and cooperative. It is no accident this country is named the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, even though it is noticed that emphasis is placed on de-emphasising it in public documents such as the Guyana Passport, and the name can only be changed through referendum. We must learn from the past. The economy of the former enslaved indentured servants and colonised was based on cooperatives. And since these groups represent the masses in our society, cooperatives have a major role in the acquisition of assets and self determination.

The responsible Hon. Minister of Labour, Dr. Nanda Gopaul, is reminded as the Guyana Chronicle of 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2013 carried his views, and I quote:

“We cannot just wish away cooperatives.

He said that the assets of the cooperative movement at the moment amount to nearly \$15 billion. When considered against other financial institutions it is the fourth or fifth largest financial system in the country.”

This is unfortunate, however, when in an interview with the Guyana Times, 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2014, the Hon. Minister said the Government is moving to dissolve, and I quote:

“Approximately 220 of the more than 1,800 cooperative societies in Guyana.”

This is a travesty and will not only cause loss of income, assets and increased poverty, but a blow to a major sector of this nation's economy. And while it is noted the Hon. Member attributed shuttering these coops due to the violation of the Cooperative Society Act, it would have been

better had Government invested in this sector through increased allocation of resources towards capacity building such as skills set training.

I call on the Hon. Member to revisit his position and remember that the strength of the country lies in the respect for the diverse sector where participation and wealth is advanced, with the only caveat being that some be done consistent with the law.

Note is taken that the Hon. Minister of finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, in his presentation addressed Government's desire to expand bauxite output. It was the late President Dr. Cheddi Jagan who reminded this Nation that development must carry a human face and as stated in the New Global Order, I quote:

“Human rights must embrace the civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights.”

As we are now witnessing, the party of Dr. Jagan is drifting further and further away from the principles he espoused.

Bauxite expansion or rather the exploitation of our renewable resource to the enrichment of foreign oligarchs and their few local counterparts, creaming the wealth of this Nation and violating the rights of workers by disregarding the laws of the land would be condemned by Dr. Jagan as much as these are condemned by our regional government, where companies like RUSAL/BCGI continue to transgress the rights of workers to a trade union of choice, working in a safe and healthy environment. Bai Shan Lin continues to engage in bad cooperate practices and the destruction of our roads.

**Mr. Speaker:** One second, Ms. Kissoon. What I would say is continue to allegedly engage. I suggest to you that you say allegedly engaging in. That is all; proceed.

**Ms. Kissoon:** ...allegedly transgressed the rights of workers to a trade union of choice working in a safe and healthy environment. Bai Shan Lin continues to allegedly engage in bad corporate practices and destruction of our roads posing threat to lives, limbs and the economic wellbeing of those living in the community. Dr. Jagan would have put his foot down on it and today so are the people of Region No.10.

The BOSAI company continues its alleged poor environmental management resulting in public health hazards such as pollution of the Kara Kara Creek, the clogging of the – and this is not alleged Mr. Speaker, this is fact, so I take back the word alleged – Hymara Creek and the dust in Linden would not have been tolerated by the late Dr. Jagan.

Expansions in our Amerindian communities such as Hururu without regards to human rights is not development, it is encroachment, and Dr. Jagan would not have tolerated this based on his belief, and I quote:

“The necessity for new global human order in which the needs, hopes and aspirations of each citizen will assume primary importance.”

As such, the Region insists that these expansions must be built on mutual benefits.

I turn my attention to Linden Enterprise Network (LEN). Outside of involvement of a comprehensive economic programme which forms part of the 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2012 Agreement this illustrates the vision that this Government is promoting for the people of Region No.10 which is piecemeal for we would know from the recommendations of the evaluation report of the role to ensure the involvement of the people whose lives this project is intended to impact on. However, the consultation process used demonstrates Government’s unwillingness to adhere to these recommendations outlined in the evaluation of the European Commission’s support to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, September, 2008.

So from the fundamental of its composition, for the Government to have adapted the mechanism to have an impartial board that has to date not had their first meeting and without its Terms of References (TORs) for functioning, is only a recipe for failure.

President Ramotar in February and March made some unfortunate statements in reaction to the Opposition’s just demands for justice and passage of an effective Anti-Money Laundering...

**Mr. Speaker:** I caution you Ms. Kissoon. The rule says that you may not invoke the President’s name in a debate. You may mention the fact that some statements were made, but I think you should move on after that.

**Ms. Kissoon:** We on this side of the House have been called unreasonable and unpatriotic. For the record, it is not unreasonable or unpatriotic to ask that existing laws and agreements be enforced.

**Mr. Speaker:** Ms. Kissoon you will require five minutes to conclude your presentation.

**Ms. Ally:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Ms. Kissoon:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was not unpatriotic or unreasonable for the People's Progressive Party/Civics' party comrades in August, 2013 to call for the stamping out of corruption and the creation of a system to ensure integrity. It is a coming together of diverse forces in the most reasonable and highest form of patriotism to call on the PPP/C to stamp out the regressive management of the Nation's affairs.

In deference to protocol, an appeal is being made to fellow Lindener, the Hon. Samuel Hinds, Leader of the Government's Business in this House, to relay to His Excellency our concerns. Though the Honourable Colleague and I are on opposite sides of this House, I am sure he will agree with me that when Lindeners believe in something we put our all into it. Not even police brutality or an uncaring government can douse the spark in our spirit or slow the stride in our steps in the march for decency, justice and fair play.

The people of Region No.10 witness daily in almost every infrastructure the Government's touches. For instance there continues to be substandard works in there Phase 3 Amelia's Ward area where so far 80% of recently done roads, have already shown signs of deterioration and in some cases, collapsed.

*9.00 p.m.*

Sixty nine million dollars was misused through sloppy patch works done on the Linden Soesdyke, Highway, which sees an approximate daily traffic of 25,000 persons and hundreds of vehicles, resulting in same being brought to the responsible Minister's attention by the Regional Democratic Council of Region No.10.

And so, this side of the House shall go through this Budget, section by section, line by line, exercising judgement on behalf of the people who sent us here to keep watch over our Colleagues on that side of the House and work with them to bring back sobriety to governance. We shall cut the fat and ensure the health of the cats. It is a duty we hold sacred.

It would be remiss of me to ignore the Kaieteur News's letter of 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2014 under the audacious pen of the Hon. Member Mr. Anil Nandlall in response to Mr. Eusi...

**Mr. Speaker:** Be careful. Just make your comments without the adjectives about the other Member, thanks.

**Ms. Kissoon:** Oh okay, Sir. ...in response to Mr. Eusi Kawyana, a former Member of this House. The Member had this to say:

“I do not usually engage in exchanges in the press with non-lawyers on matters of law. I extend this rule to some lawyers as well, when the content of what they espouse is devoid of legal scholarship... To the extent that the Constitution, the voice of the people, expressly or by implication, inhibits these representatives, they are restrained from acting. This is precisely why the Constitution is supreme and not the National Assembly.”

The equaliser here is that we are all lawmakers, lawyers and non-lawyers alike. If the Constitution, written, perused and approved by fellow former lawmakers tell us at Article 13 that the principle objective of the political system requires involvement in decision-making on matters that directly affect our well-being; Article 165 (1) says the National Assembly may make rules to govern its behaviour consistent with the Constitution and Article 171 (2) (a) (ii) says we can reduce any charge on the Consolidated Fund, then so shall it be.

This House must not shirk from its responsibility to ensure fiscal discipline, accountability and equitable national development by utilising the tools at our disposal. As an experienced teacher, I can attest that failure to institute discipline results in delinquency and can be detrimental. In children it leads to all sorts of anti-social and unproductive behaviours; in adults it is worse. As Chair of this National Assembly, Mr. Speaker, yours is the task to preside over the administration of discipline. Acknowledgement is taken of your desire not to relinquish it with

the move to the Court of Appeal to challenge the ruling by Acting Chief Justice Ian Chang in the 2012 budget cuts.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Dr. Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, I should have been inured by now to the ramblings without substance that seem to emanate from that side of the House, but I have to confess the sheer emptiness of one particular presentation by someone who seems to have been in a time warp boggled my mind. But I still live in hope that one day the alternatives which are touted all the time, in every presentation of better than this budget, I will hear of them coming from that side of the House.

Budget 2014 offers Guyanese a comprehensive and integrated approach to improving the quality of their life. It emphasises Government's commitment to poverty eradication with focus on vulnerable groups and generation next. Budget 2014, aptly titled "A better Guyana for all Guyanese" recognises the importance of enabling our young people with tools to carve a future for themselves. It opens new doors for our first people, allowing them to improve and market their traditional skills and products. Budget 2014 unapologetically, takes Guyana into the exciting world of technology, with a visionary trajectory of enabling all, from the youngest to those in the most far flung recesses with the resources required to utilise computers through the One Laptop Per Family Programme (OLPF), tied to the very visible and timely agenda of e-governance, interconnectivity and job opportunities. Women, the differently-abled, the athletically inclined, the young couple looking to own their first home, the single parent who now becomes the breadwinner in the home – every Guyanese is offered an opportunity to ascend the steps towards their goal or their dream.

I have to say though that what really gladdens my heart is that Dr. Jagan's name resonated from that side of the House. I have to say that the Dr. Jagan I know would have sat and quietly smiled because when once in eight years, when he was unable to speak, and you know why, today...

**Mr. Speaker:** It was not eight years.

**Dr. Persaud:** Today, his words still resonate in the House from quarters we never would have thought.

If last year's Budget proffered an unshakeable foundation, the 2014 Budget offers up strategically placed building blocks to take Guyanese many stories upwards to heights which are not flights of fancy as some like to move into, but which are tangible and accessible. This Budget offers real solutions to people who are embarking on life's journey and speaks to crucial areas which influence, not only the individual's welfare, but our country's economic stability, progress and development.

Budget 2013 provided relief through tax incentives and this year Government continues to demonstrate its commitment to all people as the budget seeks to increase disposable income in the hands of the contributing population, as well as those who have contributed and are now ready to spend their days enjoying the fruits of years of labour and simultaneously ensures that the very young have that chance to access education and opportunities at every stage without hindrance. Education and gainful employment implies that Governments' mission to eradicate poverty is in full swing. Our Government does not preach hand outs or laziness; it allows people to develop to their fullest potential, by offering other alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, for me the education/cash grant provided to parents of every child attending a nursery, primary, or secondary school in the public education system in the amount of \$10,000 per child, benefitting some 188,000 more, at a cost a total of \$2 billion, demonstrates that commitment vividly.

As a passionate advocate for education among other subjects, I feel that this sector, which prepares our youth for the next stages of their life, has been strengthened with the emphasis on scholarships, not 5 or 10, but over 400 to our Hinterland students. All around the country more schools will be built and rehabilitated; that 100% of our schools will be equipped with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) labs, for me, that is heartening.

The other thing, this is but the beginning. This hammers home the point forcibly that we should never look at succeeding budgets in isolation, but as the harbinger of continuity knowing fully well that Government has not traversed the road of ensuring the best for our people to its end, but that this PPP/C Government will continue to fight to improve our people's welfare steadily every year, by crafting new empowering initiatives as the dynamics of our country changes.

Government remains committed to Guyana, her people and their upward mobility. An objective person will acknowledge this much.

The fact that over 3,000 youth will benefit from continued training to increase their employment potential and their earning capability, whether we mention, training in marketing, research and entrepreneurship, we are still investing in hinterland communities, by allowing our indigenous people to reap the fruit of their traditional skills by empowering them to market these traditional skills. That we are utilising the cultural traditions as feasible marketing possibilities, that is, utilising the Arawak language in programmes. This cannot be dismissed like I heard one Hon. Member dismiss our important sectors; sugar and rice, as pet projects. What is wrong with you? I could not decide whether to be appalled or to recognise that vision is only granted to a few.

I must mention the Guyana Women Leadership Institute (GWLI). More women and single parents continue to be trained in isolation or along with the Board of Industrial Training (BIT). One of the greatest initiatives that we have embarked upon is to not only to train these women, but to find them markets so that they can have an income. How are we going to do this? We are piloting a sample office at the institute where any woman could bring their product or skill and that product or skill will be improved so that it could be marketed for the best benefit for the woman. It is real; the empowerment of our women financially, as well looking out for them in a caring manner because we are not only confining these programmes to one institute or institution, but we are taking these programmes to their doorsteps. We are incorporating within these programmes, elements dealing with social issues, such as domestic violence so that they can face vicissitudes of life and triumph over them. That is commitment.

Employment for our youth has always been the subject of heated debate in this Chamber. I too feel that while training and education are imperative in young people's progression, job opportunities must abound for them to demonstrate their potential and leadership abilities.

Public- private partnerships highlighted in the 2014 Budget is a big step in the right direction, as is Governments foresight in Budget 2014 to enable Guyanese with the resources to earn a livelihood.

Today, our Minister detailed the cultural diversity of our country. He spoke about the many programmes implemented so that our young artistes, those who have creative ideas and

expressions can take those to another level so that those creative concepts and perspectives could be marketed. These people will no longer see that as just a hobby or just something they do on the side, but now they can become recognised, not only in our country, but in the outer world. I think that is the right step for culture in our country.

When we speak about entrepreneurship, loans applications for new and established entrepreneurs are currently being assessed and processed. That is intended to create more small businesses. We recognise that small businesses have been the mainstay for communities for generations and have provided livelihood and comfortable lives for hundreds scattered across Guyana. By encouraging these entrepreneurs to have their own business, by an encouraging and enabling climate, we are in essence encouraging our young people to think outside the box, not to be confined to the traditional professions, but to go out there, to reach for the stars, to climb higher and make a name for themselves in Guyana.

The vision continues as does the training, as over 1,000 persons will be trained in business development and technical skills. The Government is empowering the leaders, not only for today, but for tomorrow. The Government is saying, “Young people, we have got you covered”.

The value of ICT can never be over emphasised as it places us a country and people on par with the developed world. More importantly, it opens vast areas of opportunities to our people. Coupled with thousands of laptops which are continuously being distributed, Government has now placed our people in the enviable position to not only be poised for the advent of E-Governance and to be well informed, but they are now allowed to access global opportunities and enhance educational resources. Government through this, has facilitated the youngster who wants to make his name by accessing the wherewithal to do non-traditional jobs or someone who wants to work from home, if need be, through the software that will allow those who need jobs to be registered and those who have vacancies to be registered. This connectivity ensures that those who are in need; that their needs will be reached by those who want the skills they offer. The single mother can work from home, that is the power of ICT! The school child who wants to excel in his studies, the elderly who wants to explore income generating options after retirement, the average Guyanese who wants to connect to her family and relate to world developments and opportunities. It is all online! So, we will soon have online degrees offered at the University of Guyana. Please, let us be very objective and rational today. Let us not look at that how we can

cut, axe and chop, instead let us look at how we can be adding to what already exists so that if one really wants to do it better the welfare of all our people.

Budget 2014 offers that level of exposure and opportunity. Who can deny that? Hold on, actually, I do know who can deny that. I am sure you know, Mr. Speaker, all those opportunities can and will become real if they if they are allowed to. That is, if our Colleagues on the other side of the House lead by those with scissors and the perpetrators of dark depressing years... Is that it Mr. Neendkumar or was it the lost years? I cannot recall. Do not deprive our people of what should have been theirs, as you did last year by slashing without understanding, compassion or rationale. Being the eternal optimist I think I am, no, I believe that if like this Government and I, you are serious about progress and you care about my Guyanese brothers and sisters, you will not continue to deny and deprive; you will not relegate them to a time of ineptitude and hopelessness.

Guyana has offered the world athletes and sports personalities who have not only captured fame and medals, but hearts. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport opens new vistas to the young athlete whose dream it is to blaze trails through the athletic track and the National Aquatic Centre. Millions have been poured into this area – justifiably so. Why should our youth have to give up their dreams or go elsewhere to access these facilities? They should and will be offered those, right here, at home.

Budget 2014 continues to ensure that, from its community grounds enhancement initiative to the development of professional venues in the arena of sport. I cannot help, but applaud the continuing initiative of offering land to our valued and hard-working citizens, police officers, nurses and teachers to construct their homes. This is in recognition of invaluable service.

Budget 2014, it is all in here. Colleagues read it carefully or should I say, at least read it. If you are serious let us hear of the solutions you have, of the better that you have to offer. Let us not go off into flights of fancy. I have not heard it as yet. Most of all, let us remember that the welfare of our people must be paramount as this Budget says, “*A better Guyana for all Guyanese.*” Do not let what you are offering today be tainted by politicking and partisanship, but let objectivity, maturity and rationale be the hallmarks of this debate in 2014. I, unhesitatingly, commend this

budget to all my Colleagues, the people of Guyana and I congratulate the Minister and his dedicated team on Budget 2014.

Amongst all of this, I miss one voice and that is the voice of the late Deputy Speaker. She would have chimed in with her entertaining and witty rejoinders and kept everyone busy. I am sure wherever she is, she is smiling today because I am sure that she believes that you will do the right thing and give this budget a chance to provide for people. Mr. Speaker, I say to my Colleagues, let us debate, but in this debate, let us be objective and most importantly, let us fulfil the clarion call of Budget 2014 and it is simple, “*A better Guyana for our people.*” Do the right thing. [*Applause*]

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank Hon. Member you were exactly 15 minutes. Hon. Members remarkably, we have completed our set agenda for the day and I would like to thank each one of you for your cooperation. We will, subject to the Prime Minister’s motion for our adjournment, resume tomorrow. Prime Minister, please?

**Mr. Hinds:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned to tomorrow at 2 p.m.

*Adjourned accordingly at 9.21 p.m.*