

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

74TH Sitting

Wednesday, 2ND April, 2014

The Assembly convened at 2.25 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

QUESTION ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

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?

No reply received.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you, Sir. May it please you, Mr. Speaker. I made a remark yesterday while Mrs. Lawrence was speaking and I want to make it clear that that remark was not intended to disrupt Mrs. Lawrence - in fact, I have said that to her myself - or to, in any way, disrupt the House and/or offend Your Honour in any way.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members, we will resume the debate on the Budget for the year 2014.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2014 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 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 Estimates 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 2014-03-24

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.

Dr. Norton: May it please you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to this, the third Budget debate of the Tenth Parliament of Guyana. Before I move into my presentation, let me say, probably disappointing some of my Colleagues in this House, that I am here to debate the 2014 Budget and I will not flatter with a reply to the caustic comments made by the Hon. Bibi Shadick about me and my professionalism, except to say that with all sincerity, I would like to publicly express my sincerest sympathy to her and the rest of her family on the passing of her brother, “my dear friend” as she did say, and to say that Bill, as I know him, would always remain my dear friend.

I am one of the Members of Parliament of APNU who shadows the health sector and would comment on some of the performance of this sector over the past years. I would just like to remind all of us in this House, especially those in highest offices of the health sector, that the job we are being paid to do would never be as easy as our appointments to the job. The job comes with criticisms; it comes with regular scrutiny and it comes with a mandate to serve the people of this country with integrity, fairness and accountability.

The expenditure of the health sector was increased from 5.8 % of the national budget in 2000 to 8.9 % in 2013. Over the first two years of this Tenth Parliament, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has invested a total of more than \$36.2 billion in the health sector with the promise, of course, that all Guyanese would have readily access to a decent public health care system, a promise that has left much to be desired. This is so because, for some reason or the other, the powers that be in the health sector over the years seem incapable of getting it right. This is in spite of those large sums of money allocated to this sector.

In 2012, of the \$17 billion expended in the health sector, \$335 million was spent in training public health personnel. Likewise, in 2013, of the \$19.7 billion expended in the health sector, \$369 million was budgeted for human resource development, including the training of one of the most important pillars of any health care system, namely the nursing sector. Here we have some serious problems.

Nurses training in Guyana has been described as a ‘severe chronic disease’, while public concerns are voiced about mismanagement, mistreatment and mistakes by nurses in the different health institutions throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. The results of the recent nurses’ examination in the three nursing schools of the Ministry of Health are evidence of serious deficiencies in their training. Of the 255 students who entered the three-year professional nursing programme in 2010, only 120 wrote the final exam and, of those, only 19 were successful. There was a total failure at the New Amsterdam School of Nursing. Yes, Mr. Speaker, no one was successful. Stated more concisely, it can be said that less than 10% of the original intake completed the programme successfully. This catastrophic phenomenon can best be described as a waste of scarce resources.

The problems cited for the failures, among others, were pointed out in my budget presentation in 2012, but no one was listening. Neither was anyone listening when it was mentioned by senior officials of the Guyana Nurses Association that the student nurses were best described as ‘weapons of mass destructions’ in the making. The problems of the training of nurses are largely the same today as they were then. I would now advise the Government of how this problem can be solved so that our nursing school can once again be internationally accredited and we will once again produce professional nurses of the highest quality as in the past for health institutions both locally and overseas. Just to mention a few:

- The number of nurses per cohort must be reduced in order to make it manageable for training purposes. There should never be overcrowding in the class rooms. At times there were as much as 255 students in one cohort.
- Every effort must be made to achieve an acceptable student to tutor ratio by having a full quota of full-time tutors. There must never be understaffing. The efforts boasted to get doctors to come on board seem not to be of any major success.
- There must be modern audio-visual aids and relevant and current text books. We should have a public address system, access to the internet and personal computers and all necessary and adequate teaching materials. The nursing schools must be made internet hot spots.

- We must make certain that infrastructures are adequate, correcting the unhygienic and insufficient numbers of sanitary facilities at the Georgetown Nursing School where males and females have to jostle each other for the use of the same sanitary facilities.
- We must put in place arrangement for counselling and access to a social welfare department to curb indiscipline such as abusive and immature behaviour, absenteeism, unpunctuality and, most serious of all, substance abuse. Tutors must be allowed to discipline students so that this is not only done at the level of the Ministry of Health.
- The School of Nursing personnel should have some input in the selection of students for the programme as some of these students are found by the tutors to be totally unsuitable for training to become nurses. In other words, the Nursing school personnel must be allowed to be more involved in the decision making process with regards to the functioning of the nursing school.
- The stipend of the students must be of practical value. The student nurses are paid \$500 a day while some have a transportation cost of \$1,100 a day for those who live as far as Parika.

Unless the aim of nurses training is to achieve quality and not quantity, as it appears to be, especially of recent, nursing will never be up to acceptable standard and there will continue to be newspaper headlines such as “Man dies under hospital bed, nurses found him later”, and this is not meant to be nurse bashing.

In the Budget of 2014, referred to as *A better Guyana for all Guyanese*, \$21.5 billion has been allocated to the health sector and \$428 million is allotted to strengthen the human capital of the health sector. We, on this side of the House, insist that the spending of this country’s taxpayers’ money must be efficient enough to change for the better the quality of nurses training in Guyana.

The Guyanese public is waiting with baited breath to see if the \$12.912 million of the \$2.4 billion allocated from this Budget for the construction and upgrade of health care facility will be used to complete the \$27.149 million extension at the Georgetown Nursing School that has been ongoing since 2011. This is so since the \$1 billion in 2012 and the \$1.2 billion in 2013 that were

expended from the budget to construct and upgrade health infrastructure seem not to be sufficient to complete that construction.

In the Budget of 2012, the upgrading of the National Psychiatric Hospital was also mentioned and here again in this year's Budget, from this \$2.4 billion, moneys are also budgeted for construction at the National Psychiatric Hospital. Here again, we seem not to be getting it right at the National Psychiatric Hospital. Less than a month ago, I visited the aforementioned hospital and, in order for the Ministry of Health to get it right, the following must be done:

- The compound that is covered in bushes with tall grasses actually growing into some of the wards must be cleaned immediately.
- The broken roads with pot holes in the compound between the wards must be fixed and paved.
- There is dire need for adequate lighting in the wards and in the compound.
- The playing field that has become a pasture needs to be rehabilitated.
- There must be adequate water supply and not only from 9.00 a.m., as is happening now, and it must be available every day.
- The laundry facility with the broken machine must be fixed.
- Adequate means for occupational therapy must be put in place; at present, this is non-existent.
- I was told that nurses are given 'begging sheets' to seek donations on the streets of New Amsterdam to help out in the running of the Hospital for groceries are limited; 10 rolls of toilet paper for 30 patients for two weeks; no wash room cleaners; one linen to a bed and sometimes none. These are only examples. This must be ceased forthwith and suitable arrangements must be put in place for the proper administration of this important institution of this country.

The Minister of Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, at 4.84 of his Budget Presentation said:

“Recognising the growing incidence of personal and domestic violence, the provision of services in mental health will focus on the prevention and management of suicidal behaviours.”

It is time that this Government must recognise that suicide is a serious public health issue here in Guyana. The Government should stop being complacent towards suicide and demonstrate a more dynamic leadership in curbing suicides in this country. According to Ms. Supriya Boddan of the Guyana Foundation, there is a mental health crisis in Guyana that is largely being ignored by the PPP/C Government. The move by the Indian Arrival Committee to become involved in this crisis area is most welcomed for Guyana is ranked fourth in suicides per capita worldwide and has the highest rate among South American and Caribbean countries, according to the World Health Organisation.

This country has recorded 111 suicides in 2013, with the highest rate coming from Region 6. There are already 23 suicides for this year 2014. The New Amsterdam Hospital, Region 6 alone, recorded 114 cases of attempted suicides and, of those, 10 died, while the Suddie Hospital in Region 2 shows that 117 persons attempted suicide, with 16 dying. In Region 4, two weeks ago, a twenty-one year old mother of two from Mahaica attempted suicide after poisoning her two young children to death. Georgetown is having its fair share as well with the latest being the 10-year old boy from the Greater Georgetown area, Sophia, who, with his belt on Sunday last, became an addition to the number of attempted suicides. Yesterday, a 13-year old male, the most recent, was successful in taking his life by hanging, at Hope West, Enmore. There were even recent cases of attempted suicides among the medical fraternity. In Guyana, on an average, there are over 200 suicides annually and this is certainly on the increase. Studies by the American University of Research here in Guyana have shown that the majority of those committing suicides were young males between the ages of 12 and 20 years. They were likely to be poorly educated and employed in a low-income occupation. This is exactly that which makes this crisis so much more serious.

The revised Mental Health Act is long overdue for the existing one is terribly outdated. Besides, it does not permit the leverage to effectively tackle certain situations involving persons who manifest mental instability. We call upon the Government to table the revision of this Act in this

House as early as possible. That is one of the Government's Bills we of the APNU will readily support, with the necessary amendments.

The National Committee for Suicide Prevention established six years ago was a total failure for it failed to curb this epidemic of suicide here in Guyana and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy was nothing but a still born.

There must be, in adequate numbers, post-graduate training in Psychiatry and in Psychology; so far, we have only seen that of psychology in the daily media to Indonesia. We call on the Government to let part of that \$428 million allotted for specialised training be used to train more psychiatric nurses that are in short supply and are non-existent altogether at the different health institutions. At the National Psychiatric Hospital, there are only two staff nurses; the other members of the staff are nursing aids and patient care assistants.

Speaking of training, ever since I began to deal with matters concerning health, I do always point out the need to have postgraduate training in the different specialties in human medicine. One such field is that of Pathology. I am happy to hear the Hon Dr. Jennifer Westford saying that there is some postgraduate training in Pathology, among other specialties, for currently Guyana has two very senior pathologists, one in Georgetown and the other in Berbice. There is none in Essequibo and the residents are clamouring for one there. The oldest of these pathologists is over 63 years and the other is only slightly younger. One who has been around as a pathologist for nearly three decades is particularly overworked, for he has to travel all over Guyana to do his work. This doctor should be given a National Award of a very high order but, of course, with this Government, National Awards seem to be out of fashion or something of the past. I take this opportunity to call on the Government to do all that is necessary in the shortest possible time to get more general practitioners to do postgraduate training, in sufficient numbers, in the different fields of human medicine. We also appeal to the authorities for these postgraduate awards to be made public as much as possible by placing the advertisements or the notices in widely read and circulated newspapers.

Last year, \$19.7 billion was allocated to the health sector with the aim of achieving universal health coverage through the primary health care approach. The objective of the primary health care service is to ensure that the Guyanese public has access to equitable, accessible, technically

competent and socially acceptable primary health care. Due to mismanagement by the PPP/C Administration, the primary health care system is failing, especially the women, children and the aged, particularly in the hinterland, rural districts and Amerindian communities. Actually, one of the strategies of the primary healthcare system is to provide quality health care to women and children, including family planning. It is now freely admitted that Guyana's target to achieve the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Numbers 4 and 5, which concern the reduction of both maternal and infant mortality rates, are unlikely to be met by 2015. This was so stated under the headline "Guyana battling to achieve elusive MDGs" by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) representative for Guyana and Suriname. We, in Guyana, are fortunate to have the recent launching of a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) by UNICEF. This survey can provide needful data to identify fatal trends in infant and maternal health in order to activate plans for our national primary health care system to adequately address them.

There are several problems that hindered the national primary health care system here in Guyana and every effort must be made to solve them. We can advise the Government on what has to be done in this regard. The most severe of all the problems is the administrative incapacity to the delivery of maternal health care. This has to be put in order. Eighteen maternal deaths were recorded last year and, according to the Chief Medical Officer, that figure is way too high and has caused even the Hon. Minister of Health to lament, and I quote, "We are somewhat alarmed, at the level of Cabinet, about the maternal mortality rate." It is not only at the level of Cabinet, but all over the country. Even his Excellency, the President, if I may be allowed to mention him, on 30th December, 2013, expressed his concerns over the incidents of maternal deaths.

I will point out that every maternal death is one too many and the Hon. Minister must, if not fully, then in a large way, bear that responsibility. I beg to remind the Minister of a poem by one Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, since those deaths occurred under his watch.

Ah! Well-a-day! What evil looks

Had I from old and young!

Instead of the cross, the Albatross

About my neck was hung.

Some one of us has an albatross around our neck.

The maternal mortality rate rose from 220 per 100,000 in 2002 to 280 per 100,000 in 2010. Guyana's maternal mortality ratio is second only to that of Haiti for CARICOM countries. Government plans to spend \$72.6 million of this year's Budget to improve the quality of care given to maternal health patients. We are looking forward to the Hon. Minister getting it right this time. According to an official from the Ministry of Health, the health sector now has in place, under its family health manual, a recommendation that each pregnant woman be evaluated at least once during the initial phase of her pregnancy by a clinician and any high risk patient diagnosed would be evaluated by an obstetrician. He said, "So regardless of where they are around Guyana, we need to get them evaluated either by referring them or by us providing an obstetrician on a roving basis." This, to the hinterland communities, to the Patamonas in Kurukubaru, might sound like an old pipe dream. The leadership of the Ministry of Health certainly may have never gone to the Pakaraimas regions of this country where there is not even a medic in most of the villages in Sub-Region 1 much less a clinician. The Regional Health Officer, who is a medical doctor, does not even visit that Sub-Region where, according to the Medic at Paramakatoi, there is a very high birth rate. There is not even a machine to measure the haemoglobin count of those pregnant mothers much less to be evaluated by an obstetrician.

The Ministry seems incapable of responding promptly to the prevention of preventable diseases. Neonatal mortality remains still a critical issue since too many children still die from preventable causes within the first month of life. Infant mortality rate is stagnant at 29 per 1,000 for over a decade. There were 144 deaths over a 12-year period from 2001 to 2012 due to Acute Gastroenteritis/Acute Diarrheal Disease with 61 % being children under five years of age.

Another source of serious problems of the primary healthcare system is the Administration's clumsy treatment of its nurses. Nurses at the Linden Hospital Complex, Region 10, and the West Demerara Regional Hospital, Region 3, threatened to strike in order to call attention to the non-payment of allowances and to the security lapses at the hospital. Nurses are made to work in adverse conditions at the various health facilities with low salaries, with no incentives and hardly any benefits. Their meal allowance is the same as it was even before the PPP/C came to office

with a uniform allowance for the year which can only buy a proper pair of shoes. There is inadequate security for nurses at institutions like the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. It is impossible for the nurses to save and become rich even if they are living with their parents and are without children as how one goodly Minister accounted for the remarkable accumulation of wealth by a notorious someone here in Guyana.

Nurses must be considered for duty free concessions for motor vehicles and special arrangements for adequate housing must be put in place for them, among other benefits, including appropriate remuneration, and they must become entitled to adequate risk benefits. This will certainly contribute, in a very large way, to the lowering of their high rate of attrition. If the nurses are paid peanuts, the nurses will give you a corresponding quality of work. The nurse/patient ratio dropped from 10.5 per 10,000 in 2002 to 5.3 per 10,000 in 2012, meaning there are now fewer nurses per patient here in Guyana.

2.55 p.m.

The dysfunction of the regional hospital and community health centres are contributing to the weakness of the primary healthcare system and all efforts must be made to correct the situation. This is catered for by the regional and clinical service with an objective to ensure that adequate and appropriate healthcare is available to all the peoples of Guyana regardless of their geographic location. The Skeldon Health Centre in Region 6 was abandoned a few months after it was commissioned, while the Minister of Health publicly commented about the general dissatisfaction among Berbicians about the health service being provided.

In Region 1, money was budgeted for the construction or the rehabilitation of the Port Kaituma District Hospital last year and again this year, the same is done. We shall be looking out next year to see if that will continue.

There is no community health worker in the Health Hut at Big Creek and this Hut is used as a guest house. Likewise, at Tasawini, the Health Hut is non-functional and the one at Five Star, is occupied but not by health personnel.

In Region 2 the Medic at Siriki is otherwise employed while using the boat and engine of the Ministry of Health for personal use and for purposes they were never intended for. The Ministry

of Health seems to have no idea of the cost, distance and difficulty of the transportation and communication in the hinterland.

In Region 7, the staff at Imbaimadai Health Centre were instructed to send seriously injured patients to Kamarang, a journey of many hours by costly privately owned boats. The Medic in Paramakatoi in sub-region 1, Region 8, must seek permission from the Regional Health Officer in Mahdia, sub-region 2, to evacuate patients. The high cost of medical evacuation has been a consequence of the dysfunctional community health centres. In 2011, the Ministry of Health spent over \$25 million to evacuate medical emergencies from the hinterland. In sub-region 8, sub-region 1, which is only accessible by air, there is no medical doctor and many villages are even without a medic. There are two Medics in all of sub-region 1. Kato has a so-called hospital with neither a doctor nor a medic. Paramakatoi only has a Medic in spite of the promise made by the Minister of Health to provide a doctor.

It was expected that at least one would have been provided since the 278 Cuba-trained medical doctors recently returned to Guyana. A Cuban doctor was sent there in 2009, but only for one month. The health centre at Mountain Foot which started construction in 2012 is probably not of any importance to the Ministry of Health for only the foundation and the pillars are completed and no work is ongoing. Only now after years of neglect and pleading with the Ministry of Health, the residents of Kamarang in Region 7 would benefit from the service of a doctor. The absence of a national ambulance service and a core of emergency medical technicians is a source of yet another problem affecting the primary healthcare system.

The entire country had only about 25 ambulances, seven more were added at the end of last January, but none was earmarked for the hinterland region except for a second-hand one that was sent to Kwakwani. The question must be asked why a second-hand ambulance and why to Kwakwani? Is this a case of George Orwell's, *Animal Farm*, "where all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others?" It seems that the Guyanese in the hinterland regions will have to be contended with ambulance and their patients, including pregnant mothers in labour, on an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) as is done at present if there is one.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member your time is up. You will need an extension of 15 minutes.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given an additional 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Dr. Norton: Villages like Bamboo Creek are without the services of an ATV. And all that is needed is a part to repair the broken one. They have that the Community Health Worker (CHW) claims he can fix should he get the part.

At Bartica, there is neither ambulance nor ATV. Bartica is in both in need of a water ambulance as well as one for the road; for years the residents have been clamouring for this. One can only hope the \$117 million allocated for the purchase of ambulances would make it possible for the hinterland regions to be blessed with at least one of the 12 to be bought.

Another sore point that is negatively affecting the primary healthcare system in Guyana is the non-availability of drugs in the public health system. Actually, one of the strategies of this system is to ensure adequate medical supplies. In January of this year, during an interview with *Kaieteur News*, a senior official from the Ministry of Health while acknowledging this state of affairs of drug shortage in the health sector, promised that the Ministry of Health would be tackling this shortage which he described as a daunting dilemma. He also deemed these shortages as *Ad hoc* and sporadic. He did confess that there are times when very essential medicines are not available. I do agree with him, however, when he said that the Ministry of Health is short-changing the Guyanese people when this condition exists. This is totally unacceptable and the effort now to correct same might be too little too late for the People's progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). He typically blames it on so many different reasons like everybody else, but certainly not on the incompetence of the Ministry of Health. I would like to remind that official of Shakespeare Julius Caesar's Act I Part II that says:

“The fault dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves”

If, as he claims, the primary reason for shortages is linked to the tendering process then this process should be changed stat, forthwith. If there is no change, then it might be implied that the Ministry of Health is prepared to let the *status quo* remain as it is. As far back as 2005, the late Hon. Mr. Winston Murray was making repeated calls to the Government to purchase drugs and

medical supplies in accordance with the procedures established by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) through open tendering and for the Government to stop the use of a Cabinet Order for the purchasing of pharmaceuticals. Of course, the PPP/C Government, true to form, ignored these calls and continued its abuse of this process by moving to the short listing of companies in a manner which did not follow the Tender Administration Procurement Act.

A particular company has become the Government's main supplier since 2005 delivering 75% of the Government's requirement. This is in spite of burning questions over the cost of drugs supplied and its untimely delivery. The banner headline of one of the daily independent newspapers screamed, "*Government pays \$18,000 for \$2,000 pressure tablets.*" What is apposite to note is that the company and the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) have defended the purchases saying the prices were okay. The goodly Hon. Minister himself claimed that he conducted an investigation and he too was satisfied that the pricing was okay. Last year, new instructions were issued of how to shortlist the prequalified suppliers, but these guidelines will certainly give this company an unfair advantage over the rest of suppliers. We from A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) are saying that this process should be ceased forthwith and revisited with all the potential suppliers, to create as much of a level playing field as possible.

This is particularly so as it was pointed out by the Auditor General's Report over the years, which revealed a number of unsatisfactory features in respect of the performance of this company. For example, as of 30th September, 2013, medical supplies valued at \$58.583 million had not been delivered to the Georgetown Public Hospital and the related bank guarantee had expired in April, 2013. Similarly, as regards to the Ministry of Health, medical supplies valued at \$164.603 million had not been delivered and there were no bank guarantees in force to cover this amount. There were also outstanding deliveries in 2011 totalling \$59.835 million while for 2008 there was no evidence of supplies valued at \$79.262 million. Despite these shortcomings...

Mr. Speaker: One second, please, Dr. Norton.

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, I heard the Hon. Member quoting the year 2013 in the Auditor General's Report. I would just like him to cite the page of which report because I know we have not had the 2013 Auditor General's Report as yet.

Dr. Norton: Accepted; 2012 I meant.

Mr. Speaker: If you can the page, please.

Dr. Norton: I can provide it at a later time.

Mr. Speaker: Members of the press when you are entering or leaving the Chamber please allow the door to be pulled in softly rather than be banging behind you.

Proceed please Dr. Norton.

Dr. Norton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite these shortcomings, no action was taken against this supplier for non-compliance with its contractual obligations. Between 2005 and 2012, the Government's expenditure on drugs and medical supplies were more than tripled. Correspondingly, procurement from this organisation also tripled, increasing from \$973 million to \$3.033 billion. Why should the Ministry of Health persist with a supplier that is failing to comply with the recommended delivery schedule unless there is some hidden Agenda? This again reminds me this time of Shakespeare's Hamlet, *Prince of Denmark*, Act 1, Scene 2, "something is rotten in the state of Denmark".

The Ministry of Health would tender for medication and medical supplies for the entire year, but this supplier is permitted to deliver in tranches to cover the need for only three to six months in spite of the fact that the Ministry of Health now has adequate storage facilities. Is this supplier being allowed to do what he so chooses? It is definitely not in the public's best interest to have one supplier having a virtual monopoly in the supply of drugs and medical supplies to the Government. We must correct this situation in order to stop this shortage of drugs. That can be so done if efforts are made by the Ministry of Health to improve the process of distribution of drugs and medical supplies to improve on the time of re-ordering and to have effective communication between the Regional Health Authorities and the Ministry of Health Bond at Diamond.

This must be so done since medications might be in stock at the central bond or the regional health bonds, but it is not getting to the peripheral levels. Every effort must be made by this Ministry to ensure that the management capabilities of the regional offices be sufficiently improved so that the delivery of these essential services will not be neglected. Besides, according to a Ministry of Health official, the Health Ministry is mandated to practice overstocking whereby a buffer stock is always available in the event that the demand exceeds expectation. Reports such as that of a six year old boy - an only child - being recently added to a list of two persons who died at the Leonora Cottage Hospital due to shortages of medical supplies, in this case oxygen and medication, must become a thing of the past. The Guyanese public deserves much better than that, especially in a region that someone spuriously claimed as the best run region' in the country.

It is said that apart from the continuous and dangerous instances of shortages of drugs that have been affecting the entire country, a large percentage of the medications is expired so much so that according to an official of the Ministry OF health (MOH), the Health Ministry is working assiduously to minimise expiration of pharmaceuticals. The Auditor General's Report stated that when a physical verification exercise was conducted at the GPHC offsite location and the Pharmacy Bond, there were 265 instances of expired drugs as at June, 2013, totalling \$65M; and at a number of bonds and warehouses of the Ministry of Health 327 items of expired pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies were found with an approximate value of \$208.090 million. This means that between Georgetown Hospital and the Ministry of Health more than \$273 million in drugs had to be discarded last year. If I am allowed, Mr. Speaker, to quote the President on this issue of shortage and wastage of drugs, on 30th December at the Guyana International Conference Centre he said, and I quote:

"I do hope we are picking the right people for the right job."

I want to agree with him. He continued:

"We spend billions of dollars every year to buy drugs yet we are confronted with shortages of drugs at health facilities nationwide."

The President could not be more correct. He continued:

“Millions of dollars of expired drugs are written off and dumped in large quantities; this is totally unacceptable.”

One cannot agree... APNU calls the President to urgently put in place an independent Commission of Enquiry into this fiasco of expired drugs with full investigative powers.

While medications might have been donated to this country, as was informed by the Minister of Health, it begs the imagination as to why medications that were expired since 2010 would only now be sent for storage to be destroyed later. There is need for an acceptable explanation for and the reason of dumping these medications in the compound of the Agricola Health Centre rather than following the accepted protocol as is established to be carried out by the Food and Drug Department.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Dr. Norton. I now invite the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, the Minister of Health to respond. Doctor, I just like to say that I have received from your staff the items that were sent for the promotion of health and wellbeing.

Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsaran]: Wellness Warrior T-shirts.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Dr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to address us on this significant issue of the health sector and concerns that might have been raised by the Opposition benches.

First of all allow me to congratulate the Minister of Finance for a well presented Budget, well crafted. At the same time allow me to congratulate his hardworking team. I know many nights I was summoned by his staff to go to that building at upper High Street to help them craft the budget or liquidate queries they might have had while they tried to create a document that would have reflected accountability and continuity. This budget - and a budget is a costed plan - comes in the wake of last year's Budget which did certain things, for example, laying the foundation for us to bring around radical change or continuation of changes already started in the health sector. In other words, we are thanking the Minister for a budget which dove-tailed or synchronised with our previous efforts.

I do note in the social sector that the Ministry of Education now has a little adage over us. In the past years, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education were running neck to neck. So I congratulate, too, the Minister of Finance for recognising the good role that another social sector Ministry is playing. I am not unhappy or jealous. I am happy that the education sector is so endowed because health is not run in isolation by the Ministry of Health. We have been benefitting remarkably, Mr. Speaker and Mdm. Minister, from the input of a better and better cadre out of the education sector into our training programmes. So I am quite happy that although the health sector is not significantly increased we are adequately increased from the \$17-plus billion we had to the early \$20s in the billions. That will allow us some room to address certain new issues and challenges while at the same time looking on gleefully as our sister ministry, the Ministry of Education, continues to produce cadres that we need for our training programmes. The point that I am making here is that this is a budget, a plan, and it must not be looked at in isolation.

Similarly, before I get into the health sector directly I would like to look at other things which we should not look at in isolation. For example, our pensioners will be better able to perform because they have a little '*toupe*' in the addition to their pensions. At the same time pursuing the theme "we must not look at things in isolation", we must look at their subsidies in electricity. At the same time we must look at the moneys their grand children would be getting to go to those better run schools by the Minister of Education. In other words, I want us to look at this Budget as an integrated whole. I would like, for example, to note that the Ministry of Health also benefits significantly from another Government of Guyana body or national agency, the University of Guyana (UG).

The University of Guyana over the past few years quietly, unsung and sometimes unrecognised, has been adding significantly to the cadre of qualified health workforce. I note in the Budget on page 40, paragraph 4.76 that significant sums are added to help that sister body, the University of Guyana, grow and improve. I welcome this because we too, in health will benefit. Later, if time permits, we will see how it integrates into my contribution because I will be wanting to speak to you about the post graduate programmes the Ministry of Health, the University of Guyana, and the Government of Guyana are crafting so we can ensure, not only professional progression of

our graduate doctors in Guyana, but at the same time better, more specialised services, from those upgraded doctors to the patients.

Let me continue to congratulate the Minister for this well crafted document and now turn to some things more specific to health.

The Ministry of Health relies on the input of several other partners. I think it was my colleague, Mr. Hamilton, who referred to the term “the social determinants of health”. The Health Ministry, for example, will depend on the integration and support of the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and I mentioned the Ministry of Education. For example, there is the misguided impression that suicide is the purview, the remit of the Ministry of Health. Suicide is a very complex issue and the Ministry of Health is happy to play its part – I should say unhappy to play its part in this event - because usually we come in contact with the suicide victim or attempted victim at the end of a chain of events.

So that is the theme I am pursuing, that we need to look at health as a more complex manner. That is why, am I am picking out this subtheme on suicide so as to illustrate this point - the integration of the budget - and how it helps many other sectors to help the health sector. We see depression, for example, as one of the underlying causes but there are other social factors that lead to suicide. As a result, the Ministry of Health recognised in the past few years that mental health needs to come more closer to the front burner and get on the front burner, as for example some other areas of health we have some concerns of – Rehabilitative Medicine. I would like the media and the audience in the gallery to note that this was very much publicised. The Ministry of Health conducted early in this year what it had said it would with the continuing education campaign, whereby some 150 operatives, not only from the Ministry of Health, but from the Prison Service, the Police Service, the Municipality, the Regional Government, the Private Sector, the Women Affairs Bureau, Women and Gender Equality Commission and other such bodies, attended a session for those people who deal with the wider society on depression. Because the Ministry of Health is convinced it is a multi-tasked, a multi-disciplined approach and effort which is needed.

Here again I am bringing out to the goodly gentleman, Dr. Norton - and I am certain he knows better, but he was making some political points, pinching at the Ministry – suicide is not only the

business of the Ministry of Health; it is the business all of us. Your Ministry of Health is on the move. Only recently, I told you 150 people – and it was advertised, people were invited, many agencies took part and the Nursing School demanded that we make it not only a module of higher education but that we integrate it more often or more frequently as a module of their routine education programme. So things are happening. What surprises me – and this is where I probably reflect on what Dr. Persaud said – “what is wrong with you people”, do you not see what your Ministry is doing? It is there; it is visible. There were 150 people trained. Those are some of the initiatives we are taking.

However, we do not do our business in the media. Probably we need to look at that, how we should blow our own trumpet. I would like to recognise the concerns of my goodly colleague across the way about suicide but ask him to join in the efforts too. For example, when such training sessions do come around there are organisations he might belong to that can take advantage of it. That particular training – and I do not want to spend more time on this – was done by an overseas-based Guyanese who is a trained nurse and at the same time a trained mental health nurse and has many other letters behind his name. We are seeking the right persons to come and do the training. A smaller session was also held at the New Amsterdam Hospital for some of the staff and other persons there. Those are some of the things we are doing to address the issues and to assure the audience, the House and wider public that we have identified the right issues.

I am happy that Dr. Norton is in an advisory mode today, he is being very poetic too, but I will advise him that it is not enough to be poetic; we need to be practical and realistic and look at the wider canvas against which we are delivering health in Guyana. For example, we speak about delivery of health services at the primary healthcare level. This country has made bounds and I do not like to go back five or ten years much less twenty or twenty-five years. Let us look at the audience some might not know this, at one stage in this country the only ambulance that was functioning was a little rickety one that the St. Johns Ambulance Brigade had. Why are you laughing Mister? This is serious. I think persons like Mdm. Teixeira might recall that – the only working ambulance in this country was the St. Johns Ambulance, a little white, square vehicle. What a shame that was twenty or thirty years ago. What is happening now? The change is here.

Your Minister of Finance has allocated this year again multimillion dollars to buy more ambulances, to strengthen, the national fleet of ambulances. What is laughable? What is wrong with you people? Last year there were seven new ambulances bought. And what I want you to know Mr. Speaker, you will see around the corridors young men and women dressed in black uniforms. Those are not ordinary doctors, they have been given further training and that is what you have to look at, creating an Ambulance Authority – and I would not stay long on this point – is not simply buying the ambulances. The infrastructure has to be set up; the training has to be set up. I want to congratulate those young people who have for several weekends, several evenings, stayed back at the training courses which incidentally Mr. Speaker has been piloted, guided, encouraged and nurtured by International Centres of Excellence. *[Interruption]* I hear a voice in the wilderness shouting Vanderbilt (University).

These guys actually know something; they actually do read something. *[Interruption]* Somebody is complaining about their salaries but look at the young people, gleefully coming here to do their job and loving it. Why? Because, as I will tell you, we do not only have salaried incentives but non-salaried incentives such as training, such as giving you a mark in life. Such as making you an Emergency Medicine Specialist! That is what we have been doing and I would like to tell you and coming only from the humble ambulance - I made certain there are two ambulances because at a certain time in this country you would have had to push the old ambulance of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade to get it here - now two good ambulances are outside. But I want you to look at the crew: those are good people who are going places.

3.25 p.m.

The Ministry of Health is a learning organisation and by definition a learning organisation trains, retrains, continues to train and realigns. To achieve this the Ministry of Health cannot do it alone, so we have been able to extend our hands for help to what we call Centres of Excellence. My goodly Colleagues across the way, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, mentioned one, but there are so many. Recently, we have been able to construct relations with other Centres of Excellence, for example, the Libin Institute of Calgary University. That has been going on quietly for the past two years, whereby ... *[Interruption]*. So, we were speaking about the non-salaried incentive besides the pay. We are giving them training and they are staying. As a matter of fact, we have

persons who want to know when the next tranche of training is coming, but I was distracted a little bit.

We are crafting our relationship with Centres of Excellence, so two things will happen: our graduate pool of doctors - and congratulate the Administration. They do not like this terminology, "The Jagdeo Scholars". That is get them in a *tizic* because he had trained, he crafted training 500 of them, and they are now going to become the specialist under the post graduate programmes of the PPP/C Administration, utilising the strength and power of some of the Centres of Excellence I spoke to you about. What we are doing? We are creating the future generation of Specialists in Guyana.

Currently, we have almost 300 students who just came back and they are moving on, not only to be Specialists in Emergency Medicine, but in Paediatrics. We had a recent batch which graduated. In general surgery; in Cardiac Paediatrics. More interestingly, we have made a certain good move, supported by our partners overseas. Some of the surgeries we were doing overseas only at the beginning of this year, for example, almost totally *pro bono* I was able, or the Ministry of Health was able to send overseas, 10 little babies, some of them not so young, 11 years old, with serious cardiac issues and they were treated and are back Hon. Member - shortly - because of our expanding reach and cooperation with those Centres of Excellence will be done here in Guyana. Right now, a few days ago a team came to help us further. We in the near future, hopefully shortly after the mid-year mark, will be able to do those surgeries here. No expense, no social dislocation; and what else? Our young doctors will be getting to rub shoulders to shoulders with those top level specialists and get exposed. That is the way to go, a progressive organisation... **[Interruption]** I am hearing another voice in the wilderness. Let us go back, not to 300, but to 500... **[Mr. B. Williams:** Why are they not going into the hinterland?] Why now are they attacking my doctors?

I want to say that in this country we have approximately...

Mr. Speaker: Do you have a cure for bad lighting?

Dr. Ramsaran: That was Mr. B. Williams' interrupting.

Mr. Speaker: I see.

Dr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, that is one aspect I am trying to address. I am trying to say that we have been able to invest heavily over the past period of this Administration and weigh in on the work of the past two PPP/C Administrations into Human Resource Development and Management. In other words, not only did we think to create the cadre of Graduate Doctors, but even before they graduated, we were crafting post-graduate programmes. Congratulate us for that! At the same time, and that is why I spoke to the University of Guyana. It is not help but yet it is health. It is an integrated approach to managing health. They are going to make or help me produce those qualified persons. Guyana is a large country. We are as large as the United Kingdom, but we have a population that could barely fit into a large street in London and we are scattered all around the country. This Administration is forced to delivered quality services to a small population scattered all around.

What have we been doing? We have been indulging and this budget supports it further, as you would see from the speeches, the relevant paragraphs of the Minister's speech and we will discuss this further next week, line by line. More moneys are being given for training. Nursing was mentioned and certain figures were given. I thought I should look at that. Yes, we have increased the number of nurses that we are training, but what is not being said so nosily this year, is that we also have evening classes.

I remember when I introduced evening classes it was scoffed at – “the night school”. Well what we are doing is not only expanding the East Street Nursing School backwards right into the alleyway and it is a huge building, although one sees only a small facade, but we have been able to split the sessions in such a way and we were criticised, right by these benches here: “What are you doing in the night? Why are you training nurses in the night? The night classes right now are getting better results than the day classes.... [*Interruption*] Where are you living?”

Be careful with the interpretation of data. I look about in the audience and I see people who I think can crunch figures. There are six different exam papers that the nurses have to write. The failure rate, as being touted by the goodly doctor, indicates that some might have fail, not all. There is a small portion that might have passed all; there might be a larger portion that might have passed not all, but what they are not telling you is that, the system allows three re-sits and those who might have gotten four papers can re-sit again. That is the system. We can address it.

Do we give them one re-sit or do we give them two re-sits? What I want to tell the goodly people in the gallery is that even while they are re-sitting...

Mr. Speaker: One second, Dr. Ramsaran. I meant to bring to your attention that you seem to be spending a lot of time with the ... You are to address your comments within the House and to the Chair. You are not speaking to any public gallery today. Thank you.

Dr. Ramsaran: I take your guidance. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I never meant to slight you. Anyhow Mr. Speaker, the cameras are this way. But let me get this over more for the wider consumption. The nurses are allowed three re-sits. One of the reviews that we are doing is that should we say that this is too much. Is this one of the reasons that they do not push their best? Those are things we need to look often at... because do you know what, Mr. Speaker? When we are having them re-sit, they still get their stipends, though small it is.

I want to address this issue of stipend and pension. The stipend is small because it is not intended to be a salary. In some cases we provide limited spaces in our dormitories. This is to facilitate persons who might have come from the hinterland or are in difficulty circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, I want to underline to your audience, both in the gallery, both on the cameras and both behind their shoulders that we are so compassionate, probably too much so compassionate that we give them three times resits. I see some of us who are pedagogues in the audience and in the benches are somewhat apprehensive. Why do I give them three chances? I see the goodly headmaster, Mr. Whittaker, his brows are furrowed now. "Why are you giving them so many chances? At the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) they would have been out."

We are looking at the details and I want to caution that we should not be misled by the first brush - anyone can fail. Many students failed some of the papers. A very significant minority of high flyers passed everything. What I want to say is this: we have a private school in this country too and when we compare the results with the students from the private school and the nursing schools, they were equal. What I am saying is we have to look at this deeper.

One point that is not being brought to your attention and which Dr. Norton must know of is the fact that we had introduced a new curriculum and we were discussing if besides the other points I mentioned it could have been an issue. I want you to leave with this: the Saint Joseph Hospital

Nursing School had similar percentages of passes and failures. That has led us to decide or come to the conclusion that it might not necessarily be the students, but the process and we have discovered certain other issues.

We have already written on the very day that we got the results. Fortunately for us, for the third consecutive year, the Regional Nursing Body was having its Convention in Guyana – luckily for us. We officially invited them to have a look at the curriculum and the process. Do you know why? Because it was that regional body, through one of its consultants sponsored by Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), which created our new curriculum of which we are proud. We need to see now what went wrong. I am anxiously awaiting the second sitting results to see how things went.

I have some issues here, for example, you might find at the Georgetown School of Nursing Functional Nursing Paper I and Practical Examination, those two have a high level of persons are passing, but in between the Functional Paper II, a lower percentage; and then Clinical Nursing Paper I, a lower percentage. Obviously, there is something amiss and it is not that our kids are not bright. It is the process that we need to look at. We are doing that. I want to assure the Speaker and Members of the House that, not only have we written to the chairperson of the Regional Nursing Body, and they promised to get back to us within a few weeks, which was when we had the results, but we have intentions to do our in-house analysis. We have done some. Are we, for example, having absenteeism among the tutors? We had had a little glimmer of this from the students themselves, telling us things. We are looking at that.

I believe my Permanent Secretary, who is a man trained in human resource management and somebody who is gung-ho on discipline, has taken certain measures. The bigger report, when the investigation would have been had, will be looked at. I do know that in the past, not necessarily addressing this issue, I had discovered in the nursing schools, where some persons have put themselves on fulltime university training courses, while they were paid to be tutors. We will look at this.

Again, I am closing on this point, crunching the data, you have to recognise there were six papers and some people passed some and some failed some and a very small number failed all. We need not to bash them, but to find out what the problem is.

We are now very happy to note that in the speech by the Minister of Finance, he distinctly brought to the front burner nursing training and indicated that his ministry will be helping us with funding to review the process. That is what we must do; continuous review of our processes.

I noted some other points that were made by speakers from across the aisle. Mrs. Lawrence made some remarks regarding the delivery of services, particularly as it regards cancer, in our women and young ladies. Up to that point, I used to put Mrs. Lawrence's contributions in the category of the Late Mrs. Backer, but when I heard that contribution, I was a bit disappointed yesterday.

The impression the Hon. Member gave was that practically nothing is being done for female health, especially health, as it regards cancers in women. This is far from the truth. This is way from the truth... *[Interruption]* That is in the Hansard. The Ministry of Health has, over the past few years, especially from around 2006, launched massive campaigns in fighting certain diseases: cancer, tuberculosis. But let us come to cancer.

We discovered, and there was a study done by another patriotic woman of the country here, Ms. Irving. Yvette Irving did a study a few years back and she tended to show that cervical cancer occurred more frequently in women of Indigenous origins. That prompted certain realisations. However, the John Hopkins University was later recruited through the person of another goodly gentleman, not a Guyanese, but he should be made an honorary Guyanese, Dr. John Varallo. He came here and helped us to set up the Visual Inspection Using Acetic Acid (VIA) Clinics. It is somewhat disappointing that leaders among our women are not recognising the value and not promoting it. Not saying, "Yes!" out there. I stand from my spot here in Parliament and say: "Ladies go do it!" instead of throwing a wet blanket on it.

Since that programme started over 30,000 women, and that would be women in the suspect age, more susceptible to cancer, have been examined. I have the list here of where that service is offered.

I want to recognise some humble people who pushed this programme: Medex Ramsundar, Nurse Patricia Singh also known as Ann Rodrigues and a few others. A few others who I would like to note, for example, Ms. Nurse Luke, Patient Care Assistant (PCA) Amanda Damon, people who

not only delivered services in their clinics, but fetch their equipment all around the country quietly. They must be recognised.

I want to say ... *[Interruption]* *[Inaudible]* that is a good point Mr. Speaker, probably these humble workers need to be recognised with national awards sometime.

Mr. Speaker: On that note, can I ask that you be given a 15 minutes please.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I rise to propose that the Hon. Minister be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you Mr. Speaker for allowing the continuation. Women's health and female child health is on the front burner because if you were to check recently, only last year late, we released our strategy and that would be for the next five years period. Certain groups have been recognised as being vulnerable. First of all the Ministry of Health has recognised, as the international community has, that there are four categories of chronic diseases, which are threatening mankind, due to change in demographics, eating habits and so on and so forth. That is, hypertension, which can lead to cardiac conditions and heart attack and so on, diabetes which leads to certain things, cancers and pulmonary conditions.

Let us just invite you to peruse the strategy. Mr. Speaker you would have gotten your copy I hope. You will get my copy, Mr. Speaker and let the Members of the Assembly probably collect their copies in e-form and see what the Ministry is doing to address these chronic diseases. If one checks the statistics, our young able-bodied workforce suffers from these. Where, for example, a young man, 42 years, suddenly collapsed. He could have been saved if certain things were done and if he did certain things.

Let us look at one category, the cancers. This Ministry of Health, over the past few years has been putting that one category of chronic diseases on the front burner, especially cervical cancer, breast cancer and let me tell you this, Mr. Speaker, I see I have got your attention, prostate cancer is the number one cancer killer in Guyana, but because...

Mr. Speaker: Are you trying to scare me or something?

Dr. Ramsaran: And everyone. What I mean, Mr. Speaker, is this.... because cervical cancer and breast cancer is more spoken of we miss that vulnerable category. We men need to start being protected and taking care too.

The Ministry two years ago introduced the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine; this was a revolutionary and forward looking move. It was added to 15 or 16 other vaccines that are being given by your Ministry of Health. Do you know what a vaccination programme means? It means that you are preventing childhood diseases – vaccine preventable childhood diseases. Every mother here should want to sing praises to the Ministry of Health, even on those benches. I know they want to do so, but I am not Dr. Westford so I cannot lead the choir. She did a good job yesterday. But let me tell you, with the vaccine programme, *onward, upward will we ever go*. Guyana has as much as 98% coverage. Larger countries, more powerful economies have lower levels. The HPV vaccines - and I would like to call this particularly to the attention of the Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence - is aimed particularly at protecting our young ladies. It is given at a certain age, so that it can fight cervical cancer, which would arise when they are 39 to 50 years old.

It has taken off in this country. The Guyanese people are enlightened. But there is a small fringe element, you are saying that ... [**Dr. Anthony:** But they said that last year.] Yes, I checked the Hansard. Some Members of the Opposition benches were actually opposing that vaccine; opposing something to protect our young ladies. However, it did not get traction. As a matter of fact, it has become so in demand that older women are also asking for it, but because it is in short supply even internationally, even internationally there is now a shortage. Guyana got in first.

Regardless of any sarcasm from the Opposition benches, those things must be recognised as protecting our young women and our women folk.

Women's health is intricately linked with reproductive health. It is also linked with the health of their young children, especially up to the age of five years. There are two indicators that the Ministry of Health is proud to speak of. We would like you to bear with us as we look at the under five mortality rate in Guyana. I would like to report to you - and it is reflected in the budget, down at the back, in the relevant sections - that Guyana is not doing a bad job and that

we are on the cusp of achieving that particular goal. Unfortunately, we have notice certain trends that threaten us. I think I should warn or forewarn the House and the Nation from this level.

We note that while we are able to control vaccine preventable diseases; while we have been able to overcome the infectious diseases of childhood, diarrhoea and dysentery and so on, we are losing our children to accidents, violence and fires. Recently, in the past year or two, our figures, our statistics have been skewed in our disfavour because of losses of the under five to accidents. For example, last year, I think five died in accidents and three died in fires. In small numbers, when the crunch is done these things can make one look bad.

Although the Ministry of Health has no control over the accidents directly; has no control over the fires directly; we still bear the brunt and pain of losing these eight kids last year. Eight of 191 make a significant statistical shift. But we must work together in a multi-agency fashion, as we need to address the accidents. For example, a child should not be walking on a road, even if it is a country road, even if it is a side road, without supervision – issues like that.

As the Strategy pointed out, we are providing services across the life cycle and my goodly colleague from the Ministry of Health, Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Joseph Hamilton mentioned this. The elderly too are taken care of; the elderly, too, concern us. What we have been doing quietly? Where are these doctors? They are not only in the city. We are sending them out. I will show you how. But we have done another thing quietly, we have started to send these doctors to places where there are the indigent and weak, for example, the Dharam Shala. Every month they have doctor... for example, to the Blind Institute. We are taking care of more and more populations and of course, in other areas.

I hear some bubbling up, but these programmes will take time to grow. Remember we brought these doctors back within the past few years. They have to pass through a prescribe period of attachments at certain levels and hopefully we will then grow the programmes. But the point I want to make is that within our limited resources, we are trying to juggle the deployment and use of that valuable human resource. One can go on a particular day- and do you know what we are doing? We are planning it.

The people with impaired vision come at a particular time to the Institute to collect their pension books or whatever. We piggy back on that and send our team to look at them so that we do not

have to go all over looking for them. They come and we help them at I think it is called Saint Phillip's Green, there is a place there. Those are some of the things we are doing.

I see that in this Budget, the Minister of Finance has given us more moneys. He has given us this year, following our complaints that we could not do adequate outreaches because we had so many doctors, who were so enthusiastic to get out there that he has given us \$50 million to do exactly that. I want to congratulate him because it was a cake walk when we approached the Ministry of Finance; no opposition. Either the Ministry of Health has good talkers or I think better, the Minister of Finance is very enlightened. He will be getting more and more healthy people back in his workforce. He will be getting less people spending less time in his hospitals. In other words, he will be having a productive workforce. I want to underline that \$50 million have been given and this will be used to push health literacy and to reach to those corners where sometimes it is difficult to reach.

This is another point I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, the dynamics are changing. Many persons are going places where they have not gone before. The hinterland is opening up. There are women getting into advance stages of pregnancies in places where they would not have gone with their men before and that present challenges to the Ministry of Health. Therefore, I want to thank you Mr. Minister of Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for that additional \$50 million to do that type of work.

Communicable diseases have also been addressed. For example, let us look at vector-borne diseases. The Malaria programme is doing well, but at the same time due to the same dynamics I have just mentioned, there are challenges. More Guyanese are going more places in the hinterland. They are after the wealth that gold mining could generate. They sometimes are not as cautious with their health as they should be; this presents challenges for you Ministry. That is why I would like to recognised what I saw recently in the newspapers, only a short while back, where five Region 8 villages got vehicles - and I saw the ATVs. I know that these villages, from time to time, use them to help the health sector too. I will be remiss of me if I did not touch on another thing, the attitude of my health workers.

3.55 p.m.

Some of the workers are angels; they do well; they treat my patients and relatives of patients well. I would call your attention to a *Kaieteur News* article on Sunday, March 2, 2014, “High risk patient testifies of life saving care at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation”. Here it is that a woman testified - it was quite visible, she and her bouncing bundle of joy - that she went to that institution and in one instance... [Mr. B. Williams: What are you reading there?] I can give you it. It is Sunday, March 2, page 35, *Kaieteur News*, of this year. She said, if I can precise it, that she almost did not want to accept the services because of the attitude of one worker, but that negative impression was immediately reversed to a more positive impression because of the attitude, the positive attitude, the caring and compassionate attitude, of another worker at the said institution in the same department. Those are some of the challenges we face, managing the human resource.

I see the Public Buildings is well recognised, doctors at the ready during the budget debates.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. It is because you have adorned it with ambulances that it does not need.

Dr. Ramsaran: I would like to point out to that these young people are going more places now and the Ministry of Health has put itself in the position to deliver, as I said last year, more services to more people at more time with more specialised persons.

I would like to point out too that there is another area that we should not miss. Shortages have been capturing the attention of the Ministry of Health periodically, the issues of expiring drugs and the annual report of the Auditor General. What we do note is that my Permanent Secretary, and his team, has always been able to give explanations. I have the impression that there was an agreement that those answers are also supposed to be published in subsequent reports. I will check to see if that is so.

Indeed, there are too a large number of gift items coming in with short shelf life. These sometimes are brought in by good, well meaning organisations, which are our friends who bring good stuffs, but, at the same time, they would have brought in stuff with short shelf life. What I would like to point out to Dr. George Norton - he made some very good queries, incisive queries - that many of those items, which were accumulated over years, are also, in a similar fashion accumulated, as how sometimes we have discarded equipment which we find difficulty in getting off the inventory.

I would like to come back to the Agricola fiasco. No drugs were dumped – none! Those drugs were expired and were withdrawn from our Quamina Street property so our workforce could have used that as the Mash Camp. I will tell the Members that it was painful for a certain group of my good workers, such as Dr. Monica Odwin. She did this. She wrote pre-emptively, and there is a letter, to the Food and Drug Department telling it that she has the stuff and she needed to clear the property. What is very disappointing is that I spoke to *Kaieteur News* before it published..., when we knew it was taking pictures. What we did have was an empty room, an empty space, at the Agricola Health Centre. The medications were being correctly managed by my Director. There are two rules the Hon. Member Dr. Norton failed to tell the Assembly. What was she doing? She was separating expired drugs from current drugs. That is the law. [Dr. Norton: In the yard?] Correct. She did well. She was putting them to be stored to be destroyed by the agency he referred to and she notified that agency.

In many cases we are in a dilemma. These agencies move very slowly and we have an accumulation. One might very well find that the Ministry is hoping to destroy drugs in 2014 that have been accumulated for five to six years. Small portions gathered up. At the same time we will address the issue expiring drugs.

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

Dr. Ramsaran: I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for your indulgence. The Specialty Hospital is now, again, more visible. Piles are being driven and as I told the media recently, almost 300 piles have been driven. There are another 200 or 300 on site for inspection and in total some 1,300 piles needed to be driven. Things are happening there; moneys are being expended. The report will show that hundreds of millions are being expended.

Mr. Speaker, I want also to bring to your attention another article which shows that even in the city piles are having to be driven. Here it is, “There are blatant building violations in the city”.

Do you remember last year, Mr. Speaker, when I indicated, in particularly, to Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson that a building cannot be seen going up until the geotechnical survey is done. There is a gentleman called ‘Trini’ from the Engineer’s Department who is actually demanding that even for smaller buildings geotechnical surveys should be done. The Ministry of Health was right. Last year when I told you we spent \$446 million to do certain things – land preparation and

geotechnical survey – it was correct. The officials at City Hall are enforcing what the Ministry of Health...

Mr. Speaker: It is just by way of correction Mr. Boyce is a councillor with no engineering expertise.

Dr. Ramsaran: The point is that he is bringing to our attention a very good point which resonates with what I said. When you are seeing these pictures here, Mr. Speaker, I want you to know that it will take some time for you to see the hump.

Further, I would like to recognise another of our long-standing strategic partners. Even as we speak, there is a scientific conference going on, including the Cuban brigade in Guyana and the Cuban trained Guyanese doctors. It is for the first time that the Cuban trained Guyanese doctors are dominating in numbers. Do you see the plan? We are growing them. Previously, the Cubans would have been in the majority. This conference is now being held at the Umana Yana. I want to recognise that and I want to tell you that our young doctors have opened up the vista to present research items. The Guyanese research agenda in health is poor and this is an opening. At the same time, I would like to call to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that that scientific conference is resonating well with the speech made with our Minister of Foreign Affairs last year when she spoke to a friendship that goes back more than 40 years, when she recognised the anniversary with our relationship with Cuba. **[Mr. B. Williams:** It started under the PNC.] It started under Jagan.

I would like to tell you, Mr. Speaker, this, that the scientific conference, which we must recognise, is being held in honour or dedicated to the five brothers who are now still detained as if they were spies in the United States of America. I would like to bring this to your attention. I would like us, probably in closing, to recognise, again, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mrs. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett did last year, that Cuba is a strong partner, that we not only intend to recognise the anniversary, but to build on it, and at the same time to keep in mind the five brothers and make suasive effort to have them released and have them rejoin their compatriots in their homeland.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for allowing me to bring to you some of the concerns of the Ministry of Health while recognising the powerful foundation that the Minister of Finance

has created for us over the past few years in health and the enlightened budget that he has presented, in such a way, that we can continue growing from strength to strength, that the Ministry of Health will be able to perform a subsidiary function to support other Ministries and the administration as it rolls out its social policy. We will keep the nation healthy while the other Ministries in the country take us forward collectively.

Before I sit I must encourage everyone, including my colleague Members on the other side, to endorse this budget. It is an enlightened budget. *[Applause]*

Mrs. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, Members of this most honourable House, I am excited at the opportunity I have to add my comments to this Budget 2014 debate. I want to start by complimenting the Hon. Minister of Finance on the presentation of these estimates.

I know the Hon. Minister of Finance may find my words surprising. As possibly, he, like many, assumed that we, on this side of Opposition benches, of the House, have no other goal than to obstruct the work of Government, bringing the dreaded “scissors” to the floor of this House. I say to you, Minister, that we are so much more than that and, believe it or not, this is our country too and we therefore have the best for it at our hearts.

Budget 2014 is a good start in many areas but I want to remind us that we, in this House, are here to bring the hopes and aspirations of all Guyanese into these hallowed walls and to mould and fashion their dreams into a system that shares the wealth this nation with all Guyanese regardless political persuasion, ethnicity, religious affiliation or where they are on the social economic ladder.

My question is, how do we measure development? Is it the economic growth indicators that are shoved down our throats on the National Communications Network (NCN)? Is it the homeless, the mentally ill, street children and the many others mushrooming on our roads, the young women and men hustling to sell a bottle of water, a patty, a hot dog, clothing, shoes? Everybody, all of them, is trying to make an extra dollar to make ends meet. I ask, what this budget has done for them? The six hundred and twenty five additional dollars our pensioners will receive will not cover the cost of the grill work they now need to install in their homes to protect themselves in this new Guyana. This could not be more visible than in the recent attacks on two pensioners who unfortunately lost their lives.

Although we are happy to give credit where it is due, I would ask more of us, on the other side of this House, to drive around, maybe, with our windows down or remove the tint which possibly darkens the reality of what is Guyana today. I say a better Guyana for all Guyanese must mean a plethora of new jobs especially for our young people and not a few scattered here and there as we have seen in this budget. We acknowledge that we have had growth, but whom or what has grown? Have we had development? What is the face of development in Guyana?

Our Constitution is the foundation of Guyana's political system and speaks of creating that illusive... I quote:

“...inclusionary democracy by providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens, and their organisations in the management and decision-making processes of the State, with particular emphasis on those areas of decision-making that directly affect their well-being.”

Well, Mr. Speaker, although my party and the thousands out there, who we represent, have not been consulted on this all important financial plan I have decided not to pout, shout and pack my bags and say, “*I done play*”, but rather, I hope to present a few important suggestions from, let us say, my own AFC budget, for your consideration. I am well aware that this is your budget but I remind you this is our country too. I hope that the egos will be put aside, at least for a few days, and that all worthwhile recommendations will be given the opportunity to be heard and considered in these rooms. No one party has a monopoly on policy initiatives for the various sectors or the best recommendations to produce growth and development with a human face.

My good friend and the most Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry & Commerce, Minister Irfaan Ali, a few days ago talked of everyone being consulted and asked that we present an alternative budget. Well, I want to say that this lowly woman is more than happy to take up the challenge of this goodly gentleman, and so, Mr. Ali, here are a few of my recommendations for your Ministry – the Ministry of Tourism, Industry & Commerce.

The tourism sector in Guyana has always been dear to my heart and as a Member of this sector, for more than 20 years, I know the unrealised potential that this sector holds for truly transforming Guyana and moving into non-traditional revenue streams that can boost its economy. In fact, one of my first meetings with the Hon. Minister of Finance was in the mid-

1990s, yes, decades ago, when as President of the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana I headed a delegation of members to present, as is done every year, a case for concessions to spur the development of Guyana's tourism industry. Today, 20 years later, most of those recommendations of the private sector members of this industry have been totally ignored and meagre gains are shouted from every rooftop, totally ignoring that we should have been further along the road to truly developing this industry.

In my examination of this budget, I want to examine where we could have done better and where we can put more money in the pockets of average Guyanese.

It starts with the organisation of the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce itself. How could such a sector, with all this potential, be lumped with other major sectors such as industry and commerce? How can we expect the international marketplace to take us seriously when initiatives to move this sector forward have been put on the back-burner for decades? The need for an autonomous Ministry of Tourism is overwhelming.

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide and can provide high levels of job creation through training, which can occur in a short space of time in this industry, once there is a realistic budget and a strategic marketing plan exist to drive visitor arrivals to the country. Unfortunately, an adequate budget and the comprehensive marketing plan, which is a function that should be in the budget, do not exist.

On the point of training, I must say that the announcement finally of funding for a hospitality training institution is one which we applaud. For over two decades, stakeholders in the industry have highlighted the need for hospitality training as a means of improving standards and quality. The suggestion has always been made that the mandate of the Carnegie School of Home Economics be expanded and be given the requisite funding to play such a role. Mr. Speaker and the Hon. Minister, I hope we will build on what we have.

On this point I wish to observe that the Minister of Finance, in presenting his budget, spoke of making a US\$4 million investment for the establishment of a hospitality institute. We note that \$55 million has been included under the capital expenditures of the Ministry of Education, as I quote, "Provision for a hospitality institute and provision for institutional strengthening – CDB."

Of this amount, only \$5 million appears to be local funding and \$50 million appears to be coming from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). I hope the Minister will clarify this.

“Impact,” the word from a few days ago - yes, “impact.” The Hon. Minister of Tourism, in his usual robust manner, was absolutely correct. What is the impact of all our efforts to date when it comes to the development of a tourism industry? What has hindered more rapid growth? I propose to list a few and each of these are areas in which your Government, our Government, could have allocated more in this Budget 2014 to push the sustainable development of our tourism industry.

Mr. Speaker, you and many in this room, may be unaware that in several Caribbean Tourism destinations and elsewhere in the world governments have allowed the tourism and hospitality sector to pay a lower rate of Value Added Tax (VAT) than the standard rate. In the Bahamas, the standard VAT rate is 15% but for its tourism sector it is 10%. In Barbados, the rate is 17.5 % and is reduced in its tourism sector to 7.5 %. Similarly, in Dominica, the rate is 15% but reduced to 10% for the tourism sector. In Jamaica, it goes even further, the rate is 16.5% but it has actually created a special rate of 10% VAT for the tourism and hospitality sector plus an accommodation room tax which is dependent on the number of rooms a particular establishment has.

The private sector in Guyana lobbied hard for such a tiered approach, long before the implementation of the Value Added Tax (VAT). Today, the tourism industry is still a relatively new and emerging industry, in terms of growth, and is still heavily taxed like so many other sectors.

The challenge for us Guyanese is that other destinations have granted preferential VAT treatment to their tourism product which makes our product, now, more expensive in the marketplace and therefore we need to do the same to compete with other destinations. Hon. Minister, we in the AFC would recommend that you implement a reduced rate of VAT for the tourism sector and give the industry a jump start.

At present, in the tourism sector there are two tiers in the structure of granting incentives, with tourism businesses in the interior locations being eligible for a wider range of incentives than those in Georgetown. This has created a playing field that is no way level. I would be the first to

state that I am excited with the development, the growth and the progress made in ecotourism resorts, at lodges and community tourism programmes in places such as Surama and their commitment to improving standards and quality, but I think that it is necessary, and only, fair that these incentives be given across the board to all participants in this industry.

The plight of the small hotels is very similar. For years the incentive programme for hotels in Georgetown, where the majority of hotels can still be found, has only been available only to properties with 15 or more rooms. Although this may look reasonable on face value, it is necessary to note that of the 3,500 hotel rooms currently in existence the two largest Georgetown based hotels account for no more than 320 rooms of the total. These incentives, therefore, lock out more than 50% of those in the accommodation sector. We are all aware of special Government funded programmes to brand small hotel in markets in places such as Barbados and St. Lucia. Such an approach is necessary in Guyana.

We should be celebrating that our accommodation sector and tourism providers are, for the most part, owned and operated by proud and hard-working Guyanese committed to staying here and investing at home, but the current incentive regime discriminates against them, giving them no supporting hand to facilitate expansion. The cost of the various licences to operate a tourism related business are the same as if there is a twelve-room or one hundred-room and if the person is a foreigner that person is more than likely to receive more tax breaks than a Guyanese counterparts. In my budget, therefore, an incentive would be make available to all.

A 4x4 vehicle is a necessity for any tour operator or resort in our interior locations to do the job. It is not a luxury. In Guyana, our tourism incentive package provides duty-free concessions on pickup trucks in this sector which are wholly inadequate for transporting groups of tourists for long hours across dusty dirt roads no matter how beautiful the terrain maybe. The near 300% duty placed on 4x4 vehicles has made acquisition impossible for legitimate tourism businesses. The result is that over the years, the unavailability of suitable transportation in interior locations has been a key criticism expressed at the end of many familiarisation trips organised by the Ministry, by the private sector or even by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Guyana Trade and Investment Support (GTIS) programme. Surely, we can devise a system to assess the *bona fides* of potential applicant. This is just another concession for the tourism industry that needs to be considered.

More than 20 years ago the then Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana lobbied hard for the development of a Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA). In fact, it was this private sector organisation that initiated contact with the Organisation of American States (OAS) and with support from the former Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Minister Shree Chand, organised a consultancy to examine Guyana's tourism potential which conducted intensive discussions with stakeholders on the formulation of what would be the Guyana Tourism Authority. I know that the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce was, probably, still in primary school at that time, and, yes I am, certainly, showing my age.

The Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce has advised me that the Guyana Tourism Authority recorded 200,122 visitors in 2013. We compliment that but I want to say that, regretfully, inadequate financing, year after year, has meant that Guyana has failed to implement a comprehensive destination marketing plan which is fundamental to moving any tourism industry forward. We continue to wallow in the dream of the potential this sector can offer. This single fact can be interpreted as a failure to understand that this sector contributes, approximately, and this is according the Guyana Investment Tourism Guide, \$237 million to Guyana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while contributing \$190 million in value added tax revenues. Compare this to the funds given to the industry. May I suggest, therefore, that in this budget, we need to allocate more funds to accurately calculate the contribution of the tourism industry to the GDP.

Mr. Minister, please add, to my budget, funds for proper marketing plan and if our dear Minister of Finance would like to suggest that there is no money for this, we, in the AFC, would like to suggest that the Ministry use the funds from the departure tax to fund such a campaign as was promised many years ago to the industry. The issue here is of allocating limited resources to best use and with a few local hotels up for sale and legitimate hotels experiencing low occupancy rates I question his figure of 76% occupancy rate across the industry.

At this point I would like to reiterate that Government had no right to take funds from our national reserves to build another hotel for a team of foreigners to manage. That should have been left to the private sector. Yes, money from National Industrial & Commercial Industry Ltd. (NICIL) belongs to the people of Guyana and should be reflected in this budget as revenues.

Destination Guyana is indeed a well kept secret but that works against us. One of the biggest challenges we face is that those with the disposable income that can come and enjoy our tourism product which is slightly more expensive, do not know where we are. The \$58 million spent on the Marriott Hotel, which brought us no jobs in the construction process, could have been used to fund a more than adequate advertising campaign with spots on some of the world most popular cable networks.

We are grateful for the free coverage we get through the numerous British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and other programmes, including and documentaries, all very well produced, and series such as *Gold Rush*, but we will only be successful when we specifically examine who we are going to targeting, how and what are the best ways to target them and how we are going to get them to buy a ticket and jump on a plane and visit our most beautiful country. Instead “marketing Guyana”, for too long has been going to the same old locations and events held in the North America targeting a diaspora which need to see some damage control messages as every day stories of crime and attacks on returning Guyanese seem to be scaring away some of them away.

I applaud the efforts to clean up the City of Georgetown and that is very important for our tourism product, but I would like to say that the best long term solution for this crisis could only be the holding of Local Government Elections urgently.

Time does not allow me to focus on the need for zoning enforcement as our tourism industry competes with other extractive industries for the same space, or the issue on our streets where hotels have been invaded by parked containers, garlic and potato or scrap iron businesses next door. These are areas of concern affecting the industry.

4.25 p.m.

Equally important is the maintenance of our historical buildings, formerly a site to behold but which are now falling down, like the City Hall, which we know will not be repaired because of an ongoing political war. It is against this background that we observe that our National Trust receives a mere \$54.4 million next to the Government Information Agency’s (GINA’s) \$139 million.

The power of the arts and its value for society: art is what makes a society from an economy. It builds communities, focusing the attention on the intangible but essential and celebrates beauty. Art nurtures passion and feelings; it enhances our daily lives and it enriches our relationships and is how one can tell that building an economy is worthwhile. I know the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport will understand that.

In an effort to ensure that we value this most transformative of disciplines, I now speak to disintegration of Guyana's foremost theatrical institution and, quite possibly, the most prolific in terms of output since its resuscitation during Carifesta and most definitely the most prolific in the identification and training of new talent in Guyana. The Theatre Guild, a non-profit organisation run by volunteers, gets a paltry \$750,000 a year as a subvention. Carifesta saw the Guild being used as one of the venues for which it is still to receive payment which led to the accumulation of some \$14 million in debt to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Inc. The Guild is listed as an industrial entity and its electricity bill starts at a mandatory \$300,000 every month across the board, regardless of if a light is switched on or if energy is consumed. I use this as an example to show the realities of some of our cultural organisations.

In a recent letter to the Opposition parties, the Theatre Guild requested that this matter be brought before this august House for consideration. I am going to take this opportunity to quote some of the contents of the letter.

“To put the matter succinctly, the Playhouse has been saddled with a past due electricity bill of some \$14 million Guyana dollars most of which was essentially racked up by hosting several official events during the Carifesta period, for which the Guild was not paid by the Government.

We have been negotiating with Guyana Power & Light Inc. to honour this debt but have found the reduction of this onerous amount a drain on our meagre resources. As you know the Guild is not a for profit organisation which is run completely by a group of volunteers.

In light of the proposed allocation to the energy, power generation and supply sector of \$7.7 billion, as announced by the Hon. Minister of Finance in the budget speech on March 24th 2014, we the Executive of the Theatre Guild are asking that you support our

request that he amends that amount to include the \$14 million that has accumulated starting with the non-payment of amounts owed to the Theatre Guild during Carifesta.

We know that the powers vested in you in the Committee of Supply can be used to suggest amendments of allocations to this sector. This particular amendment would effectively remove this millstone from around the neck of this historic and most important oasis of the creative industries.”

To the Hon. Minister of Culture, I say, let us urgently find a solution to the plight of Theatre Guild. After all, it contradicts all you have said on the value given to the expansion and promotion of the arts.

In light of this, I must now respond to the Hon. Member Bibi Shadick who made the claim that the Theatre Guild charges more than the National Cultural Centre (NCC) for the use of the facility. Our information must be coming from different sources because, according to my research, this is not at all the case. By comparison, the National Cultural Centre and the Theatre Guild are two completely different spaces in terms of size, but should we compare, we would have to use the costs charged for use of the small space at the NCC which seats 500. The Theatre Guild seats 300. The National Cultural Centre charges \$110,000 for the use of the entire space which seats 1,975 and is budgeted to receive some \$45 million in the current forecast, which I have absolutely no problem with. The National Cultural Centre charges \$40,000 for the use of the 500-seat space with an additional charge of \$30,000 for technical rehearsals, effectively \$70,000 per night, and an additional 20% of the ticket sales. So, on average, should a person sell tickets for \$1,000 and sell 300 seats, the amount that he or she would pay would be an additional \$60,000 per night, bringing the total for a three-night production to \$250,000. A three-night production at the Theatre Guild inclusive of all those services would be \$157,500, definitely much less.

The Board of the Guild decided recently that unless this situation changes, it would have to consider increasing the amount it charges for its facilities. I would ask anybody to look in the newspapers and they would see the kinds of events that take place at the Theatre Guild. It is all school events and church events. A range of non-governmental organisations are benefitting from the existence of the Guild.

I want to go quickly to the Information Communication and Technology (ICT) sector. The Minister of Finance took just a few minutes short of a three-hour debate to regale this House with his Government's dreams and, in so doing, stated:

“Recognising the importance of ICT to our modernisation efforts, Government will continue to invest in the sector. The sum of \$1.1 billion is budgeted in 2014 for the completion of works under the e-Government project, which includes the completion of 13 additional LTE-A towers. The OLPF initiative will be relaunched and reinvigorated, and will benefit from a budgeted \$2 billion...”

Those are very lofty statements. They sound good. They look good on paper. But ICT is not just about running cables, putting up towers and distributing laptops. It is about making information available and we cannot help but wonder who is going to benefit from the billions of dollars ICT contracts in the absence of the Public Procurement Commission (PPC).

The 2012 Auditor General's Report, on page 28, shows that a difference of \$1.252 billion was expended under the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme for the acquisition of 27,000 laptops, which were received in 2013. At the end of the audit, 4,149 of those laptops were issued but, more remarkably, 2,649 were damaged, and 2,011 were returned to the supplier due to defects. In addition, we are yet to hear the final take of the 103 laptops that were stolen. Now, this Government is asking us to approve \$2 billion for more laptops. The Alliance For Change (AFC) fully supports every school, not only secondary schools, having additional Information Technology (IT) labs but the rate at which these laptops are being damaged, even before they get to the people, leaves a lot to be desired. And while we look at laptops for every home and every school, what is the plan for the students of the University of Guyana (UG)? We feel that consideration, too, should be given to ensure that they, too, get laptops.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I want to turn to the issue of Public Service Broadcasting. Public Service Broadcasting, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) definition is:

“Public Service Broadcasting (PBS) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public for the public. It is neither commercial nor state owned, free from political interference and pressures from commercial sources. Through PBS, citizens are

informed, educated and also entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.”

Well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that democracy only came to Guyana on 5th October, 1992 – the dawn of a new era – but somehow it escaped the operations of the National Communications Network (NCN).

Budget 2014 sets aside \$81 million for the National Communications Network and \$139 million for the Government Information Agency. That is a total of \$220 million of taxpayers’ money that this Government has set aside to promote itself.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. You will need an extension.

Mr. Ramjattan: I ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Hughes: That is a lot of tax dollars for “bare talk”. Not only is it “bare talks”, but it is “bare PPP talk”. I say this because everyone knows that the only group that can secure airtime on NCN is the Government and I have several letters in a file, as far back as 2005, to support this.

No one really knows what GINA does and how whatever it does is supposed to benefit the people of Guyana, but the people are being asked to give \$139 million to GINA. What is it to do, Mr. Speaker? Is it to write letters to the Editor and those GINA press releases?

While this Government plans to spend \$220 million tax dollars on GINA and NCN to promote itself, imagine, our main agency for attracting investment to this country – the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) – is to receive, by comparison, only \$119,781,000, approximately \$20 million less than GINA, and that is the agency tasked with promoting investment in Guyana. Therein lies the problem. How can this House be asked to approve \$220 million for NCN and GINA when we have waited patiently for two years to see some change in the mandate and focus of these entities? If they operate as public service broadcasting entities then, yes, the public and all of us on the Opposition benches will be happy to approve the use of the public’s money for this. But, if they remain propaganda agencies of the PPP/C, then we say no problem. Let the

PPP/C pay for this as none of the Opposition parties in this House have asked the Government to pay or use Guyana's tax dollars to pay for their in house public relations campaigns. No, Sir, this could never be right.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are actually walking the walk and helping abused women and children to put their lives together, centres that are helping drug addicts to get over their addiction and homes for orphans and neglected children are all receiving paltry sums. I say that 50% of this allocation the Government has put for "talk" would be better used if given to these institutions. It would have more of an impact on improving the lives of average Guyanese.

At a bare minimum, NCN does not even offer the Opposition, which does represent a section of our population, a right of reply which is recognised internationally as fundamental. Now, in addition to the \$220 million that the Government has allocated to blow its own trumpet, another \$43.2 million is to be paid as fees at the rate of \$3.6 million per month to Television Guyana (TVG) for services provided for the Learning Channel.

Let me, at this stage, compliment the Learning Channel on the role it is playing in educating Guyana's youth, especially those in the hinterland regions. But while the Government is providing \$81 million of taxpayers' money to NCN, we note that none of that money is being used to broadcast learning material. The Government plans to take an additional \$43.2 million and pay it to TVG to carry educational material. I know the Government will counter and claim that NCN lacks the capacity to carry the Learning Channel, but we want to ask: why, after spending billions of taxpayer's money over the last 22 years, does NCN not have the capacity to carry the Learning Channel? Where did the money go? Was it deposited into private accounts like the payment from the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph (GT&T) Company which seems to have been swept under the carpet and for which no charges have been brought? Then, there is that report on irregularities at NCN that the Hon. President of Guyana promised. I hope it is coming soon and not as the Jamaicans would say "soon come", which the Hon. Member Bibi Shadick so aptly defined for us yesterday. We wait patiently.

Mr. Speaker, we want you and this House to understand that we are not vengeful when it comes to NCN, but it has to do with the abuse of a public entity for partisan benefit. It is the watchdog function of this House to guard against such abuses.

On this issue, I would like to close with the statement of the most Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Clement Rohee, which appeared in the *Guyana Chronicle* of Wednesday, 12th February, 2014, on page 2, under the caption, “Rohee charges Stabroek News with biased coverage.” Therein, the Hon. Minister stated:

“...all media houses have a duty to be responsible in providing balanced coverage of the political views”.

Minister Rohee, you are absolutely correct and I would ask you to share this concept with your friends at GINA and NCN.

With all that I have said, I recognise that this Budget is the Governments’ Budget and I respect that, and, since we can only approve or disapprove, I hope that the Minister of Finance might come again with revisions, based on the suggestions we have heard in the days since we started this Budget debate, and, more importantly, in the days to come. At the end of every day, we all know that Guyana belongs to all of us and all the parties in this House are committed to her good development.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Damon: Mr. Speaker and all other Hon. Members of this House, I stand here in true earnest to support this Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance under the theme, *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*. This is a Budget, I think, that will boost the confidence of every sector in Guyana, be it agriculture, education, security, health, local government or electricity. It is indeed the Budget that Guyanese were waiting for.

In Region 2, more small businesses would benefit greatly from this Budget and new ones would come on stream, which would create employment. If we proceed in any other way to develop our country, as proposed by that side of this honourable House, it spells doom for this beautiful land of my birth.

In Region 2, our rice farmers are producing to their capacity, and I talk about rice, of course, more than one million bags per crop. It is because of this situation our millers sometimes dominate the playing field and pay low prices for paddy purchased from farmers. I propose that

from the \$500 million in the 2014 Budget, a five tonne mill must be built in Region 2 with part of that sum and I hope the Members on that side of the House do not use their cutting equipment.

I want to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Agriculture and the PPP/C Administration for making rice farmers and, of course, agriculture priority in Region 2. The PPP/C Administration stands resolute behind rice farmers throughout Guyana.

In Lima, the water purification plant is serving residents of Region 2 well. Congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Housing. In all seven housing schemes in Region 2, buildings are going up at a rapid pace. This is testimony that this PPP/C Government is here to stay. So say the people of Region 2.

The two ferries continue to do a fantastic job plying the Essequibo River from Parika to Supenaam return daily. No more speculation by truckers and businessmen about when goods and produce will reach their destinations.

The putting up of road lights on the main public road is moving apace and, as I speak, these pole lights are at Jibb village, eight miles from Charity. In this 2014 Budget, more pole lights would be mounted from Jibb to Charity. Hon. Minister of Public Works and the PPP/C Administration, thanks for a job well done. The residents of Region 2 are very proud to have pole lights along the public road. Before, it was a distant dream under the People's National Congress (PNC).

From 2012 to 2014, more auto dealers have opened their auto shops, selling all models of vehicles. This is proof that the 5% growth Guyana achieved, we, Essequibians, are part and parcel of that. Hon. Minister of Finance, we heard you and we responded so that Guyana can continue to achieve its growth.

Special kudos must be paid to the Hon. Minister of Education, Minister Priya Manickchand. The people of Region 2 continue to give you their support as some of their children continue to achieve high passes at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations, second to no other in the Caribbean.

Ms. Hack, in 2013, and Ms. Yogeeta Persaud, Ms Zamina Rasheed and Ms. Dacia Campbell of Tapakuma, an Amerindian community, in 2014 are all top students in the Caribbean, of course.

This is testimony that the best knowledge is being given to them by their teachers and the Ministry of Education.

Free school books, new desks and benches, free laptop computers, hot meals at the primary level, well established dorms and new schools can all be seen in Region 2. Minister, you have our children's education priorities right. We salute you.

The Hon. Minister of Education made her presence felt at the Anna Regina Multilateral School sometime in August of last year. The Minister did not come alone. Every head of the education department of the Ministry was present. The Minister and her team met with more than 500 teachers and reminded the teachers of their responsibilities at the schools. It was a day of good discourse between the Hon. Minister and her team and teachers present. Let it be known to this House that yours truly and the department of education, including the Hon. Minister, engineered said meeting. These are some of the arrangements Members of Parliament (MPs) on that side of the House could do to help promote their regions, instead of coming to the National Assembly and crying foul. Hats off to you, Hon. Minister of Education! Region 2 would remain very competitive.

After our Budget debate, we plan to have our Minister visit our Region once more to meet all our teachers at the same venue and the Budget in focus would also be on our agenda. Let me clearly state that other Ministers would also be invited to Region 2 to talk about the dispensation of *Budget 2014*, a caring budget for all Guyanese.

In drainage and irrigation, a huge pump would be installed at Lima to help pump excess water into the Atlantic Ocean. This is testimony that the PPP/C Government is committed to helping the farmers of Region 2.

Our Amerindian brothers and sisters were not left out of previous budgets and the 2014 Budget makes provision for all our Amerindians in Region 2 to benefit. There are the villages of Mainstay, Tapakuma, Mashabo, Bethany, Kabakaburi, St. Monica, Kawab, Wakapau and Akawini. This PPP/C Government is committed to our first people, wherever they live. In this Budget, our first people would continue to stand tall in Region 2 and throughout the length and breadth of Guyana.

The county of Essequibo continues to attract lending institutions in the form of banks. As I mentioned in 2013, these banks are six in number and continue to serve the people of Region 2 well and, under the PPP/C Administration, these banks are here to stay.

Three huge conglomerates – Banks DIH Ltd, Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL) and the Busta Company – are no exception and continue to experience large sales of their commodities in Region 2. As I speak, Busta Company is expanding in Region 2.

Our gold miners continue to be the bulwark of our gold production and the Guyana Gold Board continues to do good business at Charity. Hats off to our Minister, the Hon. Robert Persaud.

4.55 p.m.

Our roads in Region 2 are now congested with vehicles and, per chance, our Hon. Minister should pay some attention to the widening of the Region 2, which would help to avoid accidents.

Our once porous sea defence continues to receive attention. As I speak, work is ongoing in J/C, Zorg areas, Devonshire Castle, Hampton Court, Lima are completed with sturdy rip rap sea defence. Hon. Minister Benn, I salute you.

Region 2 also continues to stamp its authority by continuing to be the cleanest region in Guyana. We have learnt not to dispose of our garbage anywhere but in bins supplied.

Our hotels and our holiday resorts continue to do well.

I am shocked at the presentation by some Members on that side of this House during their 2014 Budget Presentation. I sometimes wonder if nothing good was done by this PPP/C Administration in their regions.

Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan gave this honourable House the impression that the RDC is the one which should dispense contracts. Hon. Member, you are so wrong. The REO is the accounting officer of the region and he has his regional tender board, including the Minister's representative. He is answerable for the spending in the region, not the Regional Chairman and his councillors; get that straight, Mr. Bulkan.

The Hon. Member also stated that the PPP/C Government uses regional vehicles to do campaign work. Are you out of your mind, Hon. Member?

Any Minister is entitled to be taken around...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Damon, a minute please. Mr. Bond, did you want to rise on a point of order? What are you all signalling me for? Members of the Opposition... Mr. Greenidge, go ahead please.

Mr. Greenidge: Is this acceptable parliamentary language to refer to another Member as being out of his mind?

Mr. Speaker: I have to confess that I did not hear. Mr. Damon, did you refer to a particular or a specific Member of the House? Mr. Damon, it could be seen...

Mr. Damon: Mr. Speaker, I was just asking a question. I have received an answer, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: One second, please. Mr. Damon, you posed a question which I consider to be rhetorical. Or were you really asking the question?

Mr. Damon: Rhetorical, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, does that mean that the rest of us are able to ask, "Are you an idiot?" Is that acceptable?

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Damon, I appreciate that it is a question but I would ask that we, Members, do not speak to other Members in that way because in local parlance, it really means that one is not of sound mind. That is what it means in local parlance. We know what it means. I think that you would appreciate that so I would ask that you withdraw that and let us move on.

Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, raised a matter but I sat here yesterday and, several times, I heard, with that distinct European accent, "nonsense, nonsense, nonsense".

Mr. Speaker: What I would ask you to do is bring it to my attention on the next occasion.

Mr. Damon, please proceed.

Mr. Damon: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ramayya, went at length to criticise the Police Force. Indeed, we might have a few bad policemen but I am aware that majority of the police are dedicated and hardworking and are trying their best to ensure that Guyana is a safe place and, in some instances, they lose their lives in the process. The Hon. Member further went on to call on the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs to resign - confounded nonsense.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Damon, I would ask that you withdraw that. Mr. Damon, you may have heard that reference by politicians in the past, but they used those terms outside of this House. No Member of this House speaks nonsense and we are not to refer to the presentation or the words of any other Member as being nonsense so that is withdrawn as well.

Mr. Damon: I withdraw, Hon. Member. I think this Tenth Parliament had enough of that call that the Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee, must go. Hon. Minister Rohee will never go! He will not resign! Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya, Hon. Member Rohee is here to stay as the Home Affairs Minister under the PPP/C Administration! He will not go!

I wonder if nothing good was done in any of these regions that those Members on that side of the House fail to enlighten us on.

This is not the campaign trail; it is the parliamentary debate on the 2014 Budget with the theme, *A Better Guyana for all Guyanese*.

On many occasions, the Hon. Member, Mr. Granger, called on the PPP/C Government to address the issue of unemployment. I wonder how the Opposition can say no to Amelia Falls Hydro Project and talk about jobs. How can Members of the Opposition say no to the Marriott Hotel project and talk about jobs? And may I remind you... [*Interruption*] I need some protection, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Damon: I need some protection, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: One second. Mr. Damon, please hold. Members, please note that when there is disruption, the time has stopped so one does not lose one's time.

I think that we can safely proceed, Mr. Damon.

Mr. Damon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I remind you, Hon. Member Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon, that your stay at the Marriott will very soon become a reality.

How can the Opposition oppose the Cheddi Jagan International Airport's expansion project and talk about jobs? They are also saying no to the Specialty Hospital Project and talk about jobs. All these projects would have created thousands of jobs for our Guyanese brothers and sisters.

In the first five years, if the Amelia Falls had come into being, experts predicted more than 200 huge investors would have moved to Guyana and that would have been a great achievement for Guyana. Look at jobs that you would have been having there.

Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, your allocation to Region 2 for the development of playgrounds and pavilions were well received. Our region continues to support you and your Ministry in your quest to bring the various sports disciplines to Region 2.

Hon. Member Mr. Trotman, in his 2014 budget speech asked "What is new?" Those who have eyes to see, let them see and those who have ears to hear, let them hear. I am prepared to take the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, free of cost, to let him see what is new, with my own money. Why is the Hon. Member stifling his conscience? Be man enough to give praise where praise should be.

To date, MPs on that said of the honourable House try to create the impression that nothing good is done by the PPP/C Administration.

The New Opportunity Corps (NOC) population continues to strive for excellence. Students continue to excel in various chores which would help them to find jobs or become self-employed when they leave that institution. I remember Mashramani Day 2014 in Region 2. About 40 members of the NOC population, smartly dressed in their costumes, won the first prize. Additional staff members have since been added to the NOC.

Hon. Member Mr. Jones, without the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, permission would not be given for any tint.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Damon, please begin to wrap up now.

Mr. Damon: Okay, Sir. Thank you. I am wrapping up, Sir. I vividly remember the words of our late great leader when he was leaving Guyana to seek medical attention overseas – “Don’t be worried. Everything will be alright.” His words did come to pass. Peace, progress and prosperity are everywhere in Guyana, from Springlands to Region 1.

Our cricket team, the West Indies, has just qualified for a semi-final berth at the T20 World Cup and I boast that the West Indies will retain the World Cup.

Once again, Hon. Minister of Finance, you have done a fantastic job to present such a budget to this Parliament and this country. I praise you. Hats off to you, Mr. Finance Minister.

Mr. Speaker, as lawyers do, I close my case. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Damon. We will now take a suspension and will resume at 6.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 5.09 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good evening again, everyone. Please be seated. Hon. Members, we will resume the debates with a presentation by the Hon. Member, Ms. Jennifer Wade, Regional Representative for Region 5.

Ms. Wade: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tabled before this National Assembly is the 2014 Budget, presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance on the 24th March, under the theme, *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*. The budgeted amount for 2014 is \$220 billion and it is once again the largest ever.

Every year, hundreds of millions are spent through poor Government policies, waste, bad planning and poor execution and, to date, there has not been any significant improvement in the standard of living of Guyanese.

A country's budget must be a financial plan of what is to be done to point the economy in the right direction of transformation that will overcome the challenges and bring comfort and happiness to all Guyanese.

Prior to this Budget, the APNU embarked on a series of consultations with several stakeholders and we visited various communities in the regions to solicit their views on issues that they see as important in their lives, what their needs and concerns are and what they feel should be done to address these.

I can recall that during the 2013 Budget Debate, I spoke about some critical problems affecting the people of Region 5. To date, the situation remains the same, although persons are being paid large sums of money by this Government to do a house-to-house campaign to find out people's problems. Mr. Speaker, the problems are before us. So what is the purpose of this exercise?

I will again remind the Government of a few of these problems that still exist and are of great concern to the people of the region: the exorbitant toll to cross the Berbice Bridge; unavailability of jobs; drainage and irrigation, daily threats to human safety such as robberies, murders, abuse, suicides; lack of proper health care facilities; irregular supply of potable water in some areas; lack of electricity; bad or nonexistent roads; flooding; lack of access roads to farmlands and poverty. Unemployment has created an army of beggars, drug addicts, destitute people, wandering boys and girls and street children. University graduates, talented teachers, nurses, and thousands of ordinary citizens race to migrate from their homeland. I can go on and on with the problems, but these are some of the problems that need urgent attention. Yet the Government ignores the needs of the people and place people house-to-house to seek problems.

The words of the National Assembly's Prayer speak of dealing justly with the many causes that come before us, laying aside all private interests, and it is my sincere hope that in 2014 the words of the prayer are remembered.

I now turn to Rice. In section 4.16 of the Budget, the Minister made mention of Government's excellent performance in the rice industry in recent years, the investments in improved drainage and irrigation, infrastructure and the improved access to affordable fertilizer, but all is not well in the rice industry; there is a crisis. Rice farmers across Guyana are suffering. It is time, therefore, for Government to recognise the plight of the farmers. There is need for the implementation of a programme to aggressively market Guyana's rice. Guyana has, presently on hand, approximately 100,000 tonnes of rice yet to be sold. Why is Government not looking to increase rice export? We are having a backlog of rice at the mills that are yet to be shipped and this is causing the

slowdown in the process. Millers do not want to get into problems of buying paddy that they cannot pay for. This is causing a strain on millers too. Rice farmers are owed in excess of \$300 million by millers for 2013. Where is the payment plan? The Government cannot be saying to farmers, crop after crop, that payments will be made and then there is none forthcoming. The Government has heard this before. Rice farmers need a timely plan. They must be paid in a timely manner. It is all about timing once one is a farmer.

The rice market is flooded with rice and the price is less this year. There is no proper controlled rice price. How can this be? There are some farmers who are paid as low as \$3,000 per bag and the cost of production is very high. The farmer has to buy seed paddy, chemicals, fertiliser and fuel. There is also the high cost of transportation, labour and harvesting. How will these farmers survive, especially the small farmers who see farming at this time as digging one hole to fill another hole right now?

The Government needs to engage all stakeholders in the rice industry. They need to engage farmers, millers, exporters and providers of support services to formulate strategies to ensure long term profitability and growth. Constructive discourse is urgently needed to take the rice industry forward.

Despite claims of higher paddy yield and increase in production, the rice industry is on shaky ground. The Government has an obligation to assist, to stabilise the process, to benefit farmers and to ensure that the necessary systems are put in place to protect their livelihoods from loss due to floods, diseases and infestations.

Farmers need protection and this should be a priority. Floods are a horrible manifestation of the Government's management style and supposed commitment to the improvement of drainage and irrigation in this country. There must be a flood prevention plan suitable for every area for no two areas are the same. Maintenance procedures and management have caused most of the problems that farmers face today and this is affecting all farmers in Guyana.

In the area of research, the Burma Rice Research Station has been realising new lines of new varieties and farmers are being encouraged to make full use of this because these new varieties will ensure that they harvest more bags per acre and they can withstand any harsh climate conditions. This encouragement to farmers for a number of years is not only words, but farmers

are saying that they are unable to access these new varieties at the Burma Rice Research Station. Hon. Minister, they are often told that they do not have enough. Even the common seed plant is difficult for the farmers to access through the Rice Research Station. Yet some groups, special group of farmers, are benefitting from this service. The Hon. Minister needs to correct the situation immediately.

Agriculture is our business in Region 5 and we are looking forward to achieving an appropriate level of food security through a sustainable approach in addressing the key obstacles faced by farmers and stakeholders. No amount of relief from Government can compensate the farmers when they lose millions of dollars.

The Government needs to tell the farmers why they are not considering the establishment of an agricultural development bank. In light of this requests, several farmers have been pleading, year after year, crop after crop. The small farmers are challenged because rice is all about timings and they cannot afford the land preparation service.

There is constant flooding in Region 5, especially south of the main canal, Hon. Minister. There are quite a number of small farmers who are indebted to the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) and the only choice for them to survive is to sublet their lands because they do not have the means to work the land. The current trend of repossession that the scheme has adopted is not the solution. These farmers have to put food on their families' tables and agriculture is their only means of survival. That is what they have been doing all their lives. I trust that in 2014, we will see farmers overcoming the various barriers that are currently existing, management having more consultations with the farmers.

The farmers of Strath Campbell and Wash Clothes, in the Mahaicony area, are still awaiting the continuation of the Perth/Baiabu Canal to link to the Butenabu Creek to ease their drainage problems in the area. The mouth of the Abary River needs to be desilted urgently to assist farmers south of the main canal. The season is right. It is dry right now and I am saying to the Hon. Minister that this is the appropriate time for such an exercise.

Marketing: we visited regions, as I said earlier. The Leader and I went to Barakara, which is up the Berbice River, and there are farmers there who are planting all kinds of crops - corn, pumpkin, bora, ochro and I can go on and on. It is amazing that these farmers down that River

have nothing to market their crops. They are cutting their pumpkins by the hundreds, laying them in the fields and after then, they have to dump all down the River because there is no way they could market them. The Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, is saying that we need solutions and I am saying to the honourable House that we need means of marketing. Each region should have a Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) so that one can take one's produce there and the Government will take it from there and do what they have to do and make sure that farmers live comfortably.

I now turn my attention to housing and water. It grieves me to speak about things over and over. Nobody is listening. It is time the Government Ministers come from a hearing place to a listening place, so I will continue to do so until these concerns are addressed. The residents of Number 22, Bel Air, on the West Coast Berbice, who are squatting there, have been clamouring for years to be regularised in order to access electricity and potable water in their homes. These are concerns of the people. These are the problems that we are speaking about so I do not know why the Government is paying people to go and solicit concerns. I am bringing the concerns here into this National Assembly.

The deplorable state of Government houses in the MMA/ADA Compound and the police houses in the Fort Wellington Compound are an eyesores - waste of taxpayers' money. People need homes. Why can these buildings not be repaired so that people could get them to live in? Let the Government listen to the problems and the concerns of the people of Region 5. There is need for Government to put in place a system where persons, who have lands and do not have documentation to access potable water, can go to the various ministries or agencies and say, "This land is my land." And the Government needs to say, "Yes, I can see that this land is your land but you do not have the source documents so I could assist to give consideration to this important source of live." Residents of Burma have serious problems accessing potable water. Most cross streets in Region 5 have problems accessing potable water.

6.15 p.m.

On page 42, paragraph 4.85 of the Budget, it mentioned a vision for better living conditions for Guyanese. I hope that I do not have to repeat this come next budget debate.

Youth, Sports & Culture

The unresponsiveness in which issues are being handled indicates that Government is not ready to work constructively for the good of all Guyanese. Guyana needs a business competitive environment to create jobs for our jobless young people; and sports and culture must be Government's concern as part of the effort to create a healthy and happy lifestyle for all; that we give them the opportunities to keep them fit, focused and active in an organised way and this will help us to regain our national pride. The Government needs to take sports off the streets; every region must have adequate recreational facilities. The Villages of Perth, Strath Campbell, Lichfield, Yeovil and No.28 in Region 5 are without such facilities. There is also the need to develop and upgrade existing facilities. The youths of Region 5 need a platform for Music, for Drama and for Arts. Our special needs children need proper care and designed facilities to assist them in their growth. I hope that Region 5 will benefit from the \$300 million that has been mentioned on page 47, paragraphs 4.101 for the enhancement of grounds countrywide.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you have five minutes within which to wrap up.

Ms. Wade: Energy - Power Generation & Supply - this is getting nowhere in Region 5. This Government has included the allocation of \$3.7 billion to support the company and that amount is to benefit 170,000 of Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL)'s customers and their families. Sir, 18,000 laptops are also to be distributed in 2014. I will like to know of the families of Ithaca, the 40 homes of No. 30 Cross Street, No.9, No.8, No.22, Bel Air, Catherine and Calcutta, all these cross streets which are without electricity, how will they benefit from the One Laptop per Family? Is our Government saying to the people you are not qualified? It is disappointing that in this information and technology age some of our citizens are still using lamps; they cannot view and enjoy a simple television programme. The amount is \$238,000 to request a pole for electricity for one person in a cross street. How will the poor people access such?

You can recall I spoke about road lights. We need these lights from the Villages of Chester to my village Yeovil; Rising Sun, Perth, Abary and other areas are still without lights. The Hon. Member Mr. Robeson Benn promised me the last time that 'he is going to light me up.' Sir, I am still waiting; I am still waiting. Is this a better way of dealing with Government?

Vulnerable Groups

Mr. Speaker, there are young girls in Region 5 who are leaving their homes in search of jobs in the interior. They are often promised by dredge owners that they are going to become cooks who are referred to as *BUY-AIRS*, but instead they fall victims to the Trafficking In Persons syndrome. The Government is saying this does not exist. This is a clear indication of authority's unwillingness to seriously address trafficking in persons but this needs urgent attention. The Child Protection Division in the region needs a complete overhaul. I said it before and I am saying it again, the Region needs help. The Officers are not working in the interest of the region's children; they are not responding positively to reports. Very often we have to depend on the Probation and Welfare Services Officers to rescue children in distress. Urgent attention need to be given to the Child Protection Division in Region 5 so that we can get what is best for our children. Let us not forget that a Government that governs best is a government that respects the people and takes on board their legitimate interests and desires.

The Hugo Chavez centre was commissioned in 2013 and was supposed to accommodate 100 males and 80 females. However, there is nothing happening and there are so many homeless round and about, even in front of the Parliament Building. Will this be another 'White Elephant' is the concern of the people in Region 5. This issue is long outstanding and Government needs to address this issue immediately so the poor people can get what they are due.

Health is another problem. I have pleaded for a Malaria Centre in Region 5 and it is not forthcoming. For sanitation we had three land filling sites identified, but the residents objected because there was no proper consultation with them. I hope the Hon. Minister will revisit the situation and find a solution.

Sea & River Defence continues to be a very alarming situation in Region 5, especially from Profit/Foulis going right onto the No. 37 area where the Atlantic Ocean is coming in. I am saying this year the Minister needs to spend more money and undertake these kinds of solutions.

Roads & Bridges

While the Government boasts about their accomplishment of roads and bridges, I want to highlight the poor quality of work for large sums of money. In some areas, the quality of work is highly questionable. If Chip Seal or Bitumen is being used in Village A then the same must be used in Village B. Let there be a level playing field. There are some areas that need urgent

attention like Burma, No. 28 Carmichael Street, the cross streets in No. 30, North and South of the Public Road, Calcutta Cross Streets, Rosignol and the list goes on and on. Here again the budgetary allocation for Region 5 continues to be in adequate hence the affairs of the region are not properly administered and is hindering development in all sectors.

In concluding, the National Budget of 2014 is before the House and the debate is ongoing while the Nation follows with keen interest. The APNU will ensure that the Government is put on the path where it governs in the interest of the people of Guyana. Guyana cannot continue in its present state of poverty, conflict and stagnation. If we allow this to happen none of us, or the generation to come will enjoy a good life. The majority of us will remain poor, dissatisfied and deprived. Sir, no one will be able to realise and fulfil their hopes. Guyanese have a right to know how their monies are being spent. The APNU's aim is to make this Parliament meaningful. An area to take note is that during 2013 we denied spending in some areas and the Government went ahead and withdrew from the Consolidated Fund, a deliberate violation of the laws and contempt for the National Assembly. Nowhere in this universe have these things happened. Where are we going? If this will be a 'Better Guyana' I would not want to be around for the worse. I always believe in getting my roses while I am alive so that I can smell the fragrance.

This is the main forum to make inputs and shape decisions especially those that affect us directly. Therefore, in closing, I say Region 5 awaits a 'Better Guyana for all Guyanese.'

I am a religious person and I want to close by saying this, Proverbs Chapter 3 Verses 27-28 reminds us, "do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in your power to act; do not say to your neighbour come back later, I will give you tomorrow when you can give them today".

I hope the Government will give to Region 5 today what is due.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. I now invite the Minister of Local Government.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Whittaker]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into the meat of my presentation, I just wish to draw to the attention of the Hon. Member Mrs. Wade that she ought to recheck her records and she would

find contrary to what she just said that using funds made available from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports a total of thirty grounds have either been rehabilitated or upgraded in the Region No. 5 area; ten of these grounds were done in 2012 and 20 in 2013. I invite you to check with the regional officials and you will be able to confirm the information I just provided.

I wish firstly to congratulate in absentia the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and his team for once again putting together a Budget for those who have eyes to see, and those who can understand; for putting together a budget that focuses on the poor, that focuses on working class, that focuses on the young and the elderly; and indeed, as most Guyanese have grown perennially to expect, a Budget that has something in it for everybody. One just has to look and one will see.

The Peoples Progressive Party has always viewed the Budget as an important planning tool which must set out a vision for development of our communities and our country, with clearly set out goals; and this must emanate out of a process of consultation; yes, consultation. Because there is a view on that side that consultation for the purpose of budget preparation is a one-off exercise that happens weeks before the statutory budget date. For us consultation takes place 365 days in a year. When we reach out to people in the communities, in the churches, in the schools, wherever people are gathered together, we discuss developmental issues, we provide people with an opportunity to air their concerns, to offer their views, to offer their recommendations on developmental issues. That for us is consultation and if we accept that, and we should, then yours truly along with all on our side have been having consultation every day of the year. And I invite you to do similarly. So I can confidently say that Budget 2014 was developed out of a process of consultation, and I use this opportunity to thank all who have offered their support at the level of the private sector, at the level of the union Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG), youth groups and church groups. We say thanks for seeing development as something that we should all be involved in.

We of the PPP and the People's Progressive Party/Civic have always committed to consultation for it is only then that we are able to appreciate the needs of our people, the developmental challenges they face in their communities. We see consultation with the people as providing a platform for the strengthening of the relation between them and Government and that is why we have such a strong relation that they have been continuously electing this PPP/Civic Government since 1992.

It has become predictable for the Opposition to posit that the Budget is empty, that it has nothing in it. For me it is probably their way of reminiscing on the Budgets of the 70s and 80s. The Budgets to which Guyanese listened only to ascertain what additional hardships were being heaped on them at that point in time.

But I am happy and proud to stand in this National Assembly and to say that PPP/C Budgets, which represent the work plan of the Government, have been working for all of us; PPP/Civic Budgets have brought positive results for us. And that is why a significant majority of the Guyanese people always look forward to our annual Budget presentation and what it has to offer.

Indeed, they will tell you that Guyana has moved from the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere to the status of a developing country whose social and physical infrastructure, and whose economy has become vibrant and has transformed our country to one whose respectability has been restored, and whose people enjoy a far, far better standard of living than they did in the 70s and 80s.

For eight straight years Guyana's economy has registered positive growth even as many of our Caribbean and South American neighbours have been recording sluggish growth. Does this not paint a picture to you? Does this not tell you a story that some things have to be working? And the improvements to which I am about to allude are in spite of the challenges in the sugar industry, and the determined and continuous efforts of the Opposition to make our country ungovernable; to make sizeable cuts to the Budget and to disturb the momentum of our development. That is their strategy; that is what they set out to do. These improvements my friend have to be attributed to sound, wise decisions with respect to the allocation and use of resources.

How else can we explain the consistency? How else can we explain the continual growth of our economy? The continual rise in our external reserves is it magic? I am advised it is now equivalent to 3.9 months of imports. There is the continual reduction in our external debts. How do you reduce external debts? Do you not ask yourself that question? Our control of the inflation rate - we should stand with the PPP as proud Guyanese - 0.9% is the present inflation rate and the stability of our exchange rate. There an improving manufacturing sector, construction sector, information sector and our increasing ability to own our own homes. For the average Guyanese

living in the 70s and 80s that was a dream they died and left. Today, look at the number of young people who own their own homes; a lot of public servants. How is that possible?

It is possible because confidence was restored in the economy, the banking system was back on its feet; it was possible also because of interest rates dropping making it affordable for people to borrow money so they can have their own homes. And you sit here and say the Budget has nothing. Where did the resources come from to transfer this economy? A few days ago I stood for about five minutes in a section of this city, and for not more than about two minutes I counted about 25 cars that passed with young people driving. In the 70s and 80s, they could not even afford a bicycle, and you tell us that the Budget has nothing. By what authority do you say these things my friends?

We are able under the PPP/Civic Government, with the budgets you condemn, to have a better quality education, education across 83,000 square miles of this country; building schools where there were none; extending schools where the yearning for learning, and the increase in the enrolment, caused people to turn out in larger numbers. Those on that side who live in the hinterland must rise up and tell them; open their minds. They are accessing a better quality of education. My Friends, I want to say to you better quality healthcare, better infrastructure including roads, bridges, potable water, how else are we able to pay the increased pensions we talk about?

How else are we able to pay the increased emoluments we pay annually? How else are we able to provide uniforms, to provide meals, to provide textbooks, to pay teachers a reasonable salary? How else are we able to do these things if the economy was not doing well and if the proposals set out in the Budget were not working? How else are we able to provide transportation assistance to parents? In the first instance I heard many of you condemning the amount; \$10,000 is what you say. You do not do the multiplication. I do not know if you know how to do it. If you did you will see it is a heavy investment. I forgive you because you did not have the schools in those days.

When we look at what is happening in the health sector... The Hon. Minister of Health just spoke and I was happy to read this documentation that records the drop in maternal deaths. So quite apart from what you alluded to earlier on... *[Interruption]*... that is the word, the impact. My

friends we have the education results of the past 10 years. Not only does this reflect an increase in enrolment in the hinterland areas, it reflects improvement in performance. At the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) level in 2003 for example the percentage of candidates gaining 50% or more in mathematics was 28.3% and in 2013 it was 43.9%. The percentage of children gaining passes science... *[Interruption]* ...my friends you might feel offended with my referring to these data but the quality of life of a people is a function not only of the material things we possess but the quality of our education, the access to that education; the quality of our healthcare and the access to that healthcare, all those are indicators that tell us whether we are doing well or we are doing badly.

Budget 2014 aims to ensure that the benefits of this growth, this improvement are multiplied. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, can I ask that they pay rapt attention.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Minister, how can I deny such a request? Hon. Members you are required to pay rapt attention and let us have some order. Let us hear from Mr. Whittaker.

Mr. Whittaker: Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 aims to ensure that the benefits of the growth and development to which I just referred are multiplied and reach across the ten administrative regions of our country so we can all enjoy it. More than this Budget 2014 aims to create more economic benefits, more economic opportunities for all Guyanese, from the young to the middle aged to the elderly, more growth and more jobs as we continue to invest in the expansion. If you look at all the regional budgets and the sector budgets, you will see very much evidence that we continue to invest in the expansion of our social services and physical infrastructure, because we believe in so doing we are able to realize, among other things, the commitments this Government made and that is reflected in our Manifesto, that is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals.

I wish to draw attention to the fact that, quite recently, UNICEF Representative for Guyana and Suriname, Marianne Flach, commented at the launch of a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey – Dr. Ramcharran was there - that Guyana had achieved several of the Millennium Development Goals and is well on its way to achieving several more. She noted – not Whittaker - that Guyana had achieved the Millennium Development Goals relating to hunger, to primary education, and she noted our movement in the direction of universal secondary education, gender equality and

environmental sustainability. If the Hon. Member so wishes, this information from the UNICEF representative for Guyana and Suriname can be made available. In fact, I can make several copies for that side.

I ask the Opposition to do nothing to derail the plans for development that we have. Do not do that. Something that works do not try to fix it; you are not good at that. This 2014 Budget will bring positive benefits for all and that includes you Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge; you also will benefit. This Budget contains a menu of measures to create a “Better Guyana for all Guyanese.” Do nothing to impede the progress of this Nation. The Guyanese people will not forgive you; history will never absolve you - Fidel Castro.

I wish to examine the role, the responsibility and the work of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development as we support the work of our sector ministries in the areas of social sector development and infrastructure development to which I just alluded. But just before I do that, I wish to draw attention and bring correction to the several inaccurate comments offered by Mr. Keith Scott and Mr. Ronald Bulkan, as they ill-advisedly ventured comments on several matter without the benefit of an authentication and verification of those comments.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Scott questions the adequacy of the \$1 billion provided in the Budget for the city clean up. He questions the adequacy and the way the funds are being channelled. It is obvious that the Hon. Member feels that the responsibility of the Municipality to keep the city clean has been taken away from the Municipality as a result of this monetary intervention. No my friends it is not. The responsibility still remains with the Municipality. This must be seen as support for the Guyanese people and that is why we do it.

May I say that we have already started to discuss at the level of the Ministers and very shortly, we shall also involve the technical people, even at the level of the Council, in discussing and agreeing on the menu of measures and the nature of those measures.

Further than that, Mr. Scott accuses the Government of starving the Council of funds and micro-managing the city; incredible. I have information here that alludes to the kind of revenue that the

Council has been collecting. I did not worry to go too far back. I was beginning to get a feeling of nausea.

In 2012, I am going to the nearest million ladies and gentlemen; the Council should have collected \$1.7 billion, the Council collected \$1.3 billion; that is about \$400 million less. Is it that we should take this money that we have earmarked to make the city a cleaner place and give them to fill this void or should they get out there and try to collect what is owed to them.

More than this, out of this \$1.3 billion that they collected, do you know what? The Council spent a total of \$429 million on Solid waste... **[Mr. B. Williams: Who? It was not the Mayor and City Council.]** It is the Council. The Council is the corporate body. I am talking about the Council. This is 2012. They did worst than this in 2013. The point is they are not collecting what they should be collecting.

Secondly, whatever they collect, it is not being used to provide the core services that the citizens of this country asked for. **[Interruption]** And you want us to put \$1 billion in the hands of the Council. Sorry, that will not happen.

The Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan saunter into a tirade of what can only be described as reckless comments. He firstly questioned the role of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in local democracy. Quotes repetitively from the Constitution of Guyana, Articles 75 and 77 and he deduces that our Constitution provides full autonomy to all Councils and Government is suffocated and subvert the authority of these Councils to exercise this autonomy, and we do that through the Town Clerks, the Overseers and Regional Executive Officers (REOs). These are the Chief Administrative Officers of these bodies. **[Mr. Nandlall: The Chief Executive Officers.]** These are the Chief Executive Officers of these Councils. Who must we deal with when we are talking about administrative issues? Who must we deal with? **[Interruption]**

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, has responsibility for monitoring, providing guidance and oversight and we do this. We work, utilising the resources made available by Government. These are public funds, whether they get it by way of annual subvention or they get it by way rates and taxes, market fees, *et cetera*, these are public funds for which there must be accountability.

May I say to this body that very early in this year, the staff of Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, at a retreat, examined the way we delivered services; examined the work of the various Local Government bodies across Guyana, whether they be Municipalities or Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). We identified some areas of weaknesses and we determined that it was in the interest of the Guyanese populace they served that these weaknesses be addressed. Foremost among them had to do with the issue of accountability and we needed to address that. Included also, was the need for further training; included also was the need for more aggressive oversight. So if when we are going all these things you see it as interference, so be it.

It is not expected that the Ministry or the Minister can provide the oversight, guidance, etcetera. It is not expected that this will be a passive move, it has to be something active and that is what we do.

I want now to let us look at what these Local Government bodies have been doing in 2013 and what is planned for 2014, so that we can have a better picture of what it is... *[Interruption]*

The existing legislation provides that the Municipalities will consult in the preparation of its annual estimates, all except the City Council, and will make these submissions available for scrutiny. The legislation also provides that in respect of our subventions that we provide, this has the approval of the Minister. That is reason why we examine these. Our focus is to see that an increasing amount of resources that they take from the public, goes not into travelling, stipend and snacks, but goes into providing core services to the people. They have a problem with that. They have a problem with putting more resources into drainage, into Solid Waste, rehabilitation and servicing of kokers, pumps, etcetera. A significant amount of the resources goes into meeting the employment costs of people, many of whom do very little or nothing.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need an extension of 15 minutes to continue.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I propose that the Hon. Minister be granted 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Minister Whittaker I will urge you not to allow yourself to get into a dialogue and Mr. B. Williams please refrain from trying to engage the Minister in a dialogue.

Mr. Whittaker: Mr. Speaker, you and I are communicating and they are just getting in between. The six Municipalities received a total of \$65 million during 2013 – this is subvention. This is quite apart from the estimates, the rates and taxes and other revenues that they receive from the public. The Municipality of Rose Hall received \$8 million. This is quite apart from what they get from the rate payers. Eight million dollars, most of which was spent on roads, drains, back filling and replacing tubes. I say these things so we can see the effectiveness of what the resources are used for. Anna Regina, \$9 million and they used most of it for the construction of concrete box culverts and again also for doing roads and desilting of drains.

Corriverton, \$8 million, most of it used for the maintenance of streets and the streets are identified here; the maintenance of their landfill site; the maintenance of their culverts; and the rehabilitation of drains. New Amsterdam, which got \$10, used most of it for the cleaning and clearing of drains, the rehabilitation of roads. What was important is that they were also able to acquire a tractor with some of that. Linden got \$10 million; they spent most of it patching roads, cleaning filling and compacting, rehabilitation of equipment drains and culverts. They acquired a fogging machine, motor blowing and they purchased lights. Georgetown, they acquired two used 10 tonnes trucks... [**Mr. B. Williams:** How much did you give Georgetown?] Twenty million dollars; twice what anybody else got and they are spending that.

The proposed works to be completed for 2014; for 2014 what is expected to happen is that additional resources will be made available in 2014, providing that you do not trim it. In respect to the NDCs, 65 of them, \$195 million: They spent \$101 million on roads; \$15.5 million on bridges; \$8.2 million on culverts; \$4 million on machinery; one of them spent \$1.5 billion on a bus shed and the excavation of trenches took \$27.7 million.

I am trying to talk about the range of activities; this is the Ministry of Local Government, making available \$195... [**Mr. B. Williams:** Could we have that list?] Yes, Sir, you can get that; the list of all 65 NDCs, to which this was made available. That is why we have oversight; that is why we guide; that is why our people are very active there.

For 2014, the NDCs that have prepared their own budget estimates have determined that they want to spend over \$125 million on roads; they want to spend approximately \$17 million on bridges; they want to spend \$7 million on four community centres within their neighbourhood;

they want to spend \$31 million on excavation of trenches. This is resources that we make available to them, but I say again that the NDCs and the Municipalities also have access to other resources and they do additional work using those resources.

Mr. Speaker, there is a view among some that the work we do at the level of the Ministry is restricted or limited to the areas that I just mentioned... [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] No, it is more than that. Indeed the Ministry is involved in a number of projects, for example, we are involved in a project called the Caribbean Local Economic Development Programme (CARILEP). This is a six years programme and it is funded by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development. It focuses on promoting local economic development through partnership with Local Government Authorities, Regional and Municipal. The programme is being implemented in four regions; Regions 2, 3, 4, and 6 – that is in Phase One. In the next phase we expect to embrace the six other regions of this country. The Mara Agriculture Enhancement Programme (MAEP) on the East Bank of Berbice in Region 6, that is one of the project that has been approved and is being implemented, US\$94,000. Other areas identified for demonstration project includes, Tapakuma Women Agricultural Diversification Project, that is in Region 2 and it costs US\$42,000. We have the Canal's Polder Green Initiative Project - that has not been approved yet. It is awaiting approval, but it is envisaged to cost about US\$40,000. There is the Friendship Swine Development Project in Friendship in the East Bank of Demerara in Region 4 and that is estimated to cost approximately US\$42,000.

The three approved demonstration projects and the regions have already benefited from training in the areas of Local Economic Development. Various institutional strengthening activities, increased capacity, traditional staffing and local area economic profiles for effective planning. This is one of the economic activities. The focus is not only on infrastructure. Though that is the core of our activities, and supporting the work of the sector Ministry in developing and improving social services, the focus is also issues to do with livelihoods.

We have also benefitted from the Community Roads Improvement Programme (CRIP), which had two components and our Ministry was responsible for the institutional development and capacity building aspect of that project. A number of senior staff were trained and coached in areas such as management development and community education in the areas such as road maintenance training and monitoring and evaluation because we consider, in our traverse across

the various communities across this countries, that the NDCs do road, they rehabilitate and maintain roads, but we recognise very early the need for training in that particular area.

So the NDCs identify the persons who should access this training and we are happy to say that among persons who have benefitted during 2013, 35 staff from our ministry and the RDC, 58 staff from the NDC, 83 councillors and we have 12 small scale contractors who have also benefited. All programmes of NDCs were provided with computer systems and accessories, including all in one printers, external back-ups stores devices and digital cameras. This was the first time many of these NDCs own such equipment. This will definitely enhance their record keeping. Not to mention also community education and awareness, which ensured that other persons from the community benefited also.

Another area in which the Ministry has participated with good results is the Youth Empowerment Inclusion and Reconciliation Project (YEIRP). That is the project that had started in May, 2012 and came to an end a few days ago. The main objective of that project was to work to improve the capacity of youth leaders. These are people identified by the NDCs in the respective communities. This project aimed to work with them to improve their capacity as youth leaders.

The project had several components, but I want to mention four of them.

- There was the use of social media.
- An ICT platform to facilitate youth interaction with policy makers.
- Insertion of participants in institutions and local structure. That is on the job training.
- Development of community projects.

These young people went back into their communities and they were able to work with the people and identify projects. The total budget for this project the YEIRP, is US\$150,000. As of December, 2013, a total of US\$83,500 had already been spent.

The projects that they have identified: Region 2 – A waiting area the Supenaam Stelling; this is the young people, that the NDCs chose that benefited from this training. Rehabilitation of the children's ward at the Lenora Cottage Hospital; Development of a Learning Resource Centre and

Information Communication Technology (ICT) Hub at Triumph; a learning Resource Centre at Bushlot, that is in Region 5; Voluntary Counselling and Testing Site at the New Amsterdam Market, that is six and in Region 10, rehabilitation of the Kara Kara Playfield. These are young people in these specific regions, who interacted with their peers and came up with these projects that were accepted and will be implemented, using the funds available under this project.

There was also the literacy enhancement awareness aspect of the project – the RDC building Triumph, on the East Coast. That is where that project was concluded. Bushlot Community Centre, the RDC building at Whim, the RDC Annex, rehabilitation of the Kara Kara Playfield off the streets and into the playfield, etcetera.

I want to mention one more project because I want to get across clearly that what we do at Local Government goes beyond merely looking at infrastructure. This is a Georgetown Solid Waste Management Programme. During 2013, we acquired 825 collection containers of varying sizes – 240 litres, 660 litres, 1100 litres. These bins, 458 of them, were distributed to NDCs in Region No. 4 and in public spaces, which include health centres, schools and community centres. Three hundred and sixty seven, we are in the process of distributing those in public spaces in the Georgetown Municipality. We have asked the Ministry of Public Works to help us to identify those spaces and the City Council and those will be distributed there. We also have some collection trucks that were purchased; 221 cubic metres, rare compactor and 28 cubic metre rare compactor. These trucks are intended to surface the collection bins, which were distributed to the NDCs.

Also, some clean up was done on the East Coast and the East Bank; that is in respect of several satellite dumpsites within NDC areas. Public awareness – that is part of the project. During 2014, we will procure a landfill procure laboratory equipment to perform environmental testing. That is Haags Bosch Landfill site. We procure a hook lift truck. There will be the closure of lower Le Repentir Landfill site; the partial closure of the Lusignan Dumpsite; the closure of the Groove Dumpsite, a lot of work. My friends, at the Ministry of Local Georgetown and Regional Development, we keep reaching out.

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

Mr. Whittaker: I want to use those five minutes to deal with two things. I want to say and this has to do with the Local Government Elections to which several speakers have alluded. I do not think anyone wants Local Georgetown Elections more than the People's Progressive Party.

Talks about free and fair elections would be empty, unless adequate preparations, including the statutory requirements of the law, relative to these elections are met. That is the first statement.

Demarcation of boundaries for some constituencies is still a work in progress; acquisition of election material; advertising, training which have been ongoing; only a few days ago I was part of another training; Hiring elections day workers, public education, claims, objection. Due to housing expansion in many communities established boundaries have to be revisited. Boundaries are not static. They ever keep shifting, education awareness. How many of us know that the 71 districts now have 585 constituencies whose boundaries must be demarcated. Each of these constituencies must be targeted for voters' education. This is not merely about election, but about what happens after elections. It is about all of that. Therefore, I thought that I should use this opportunity to tell you also that there is no ... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Whittaker: There could be no Commencement Order for a Local Government Commission when there is no such commission. There is no such commission in place. I call on the Opposition to examine the statement that I just made. **[Ms. Ally:** You took the man's work?] Yes I did. You were not listening.

I want to close by offering these comments: our citizens look forward to the annual budget presentation and the goodies it brings for them.

7.15 p.m.

We must be reminded that there was a time when the thought of the budget, being eminent, was a nightmare for most of us. The Opposition appears to want to take us back there but we refuse to go back there.

Our resources of land, labour and capital are strictly limited but we work to optimise the use of these resources and in so doing to bring improvement in the living standards of our people by

providing opportunities for them to enjoy more goods and services. There can be no denying that we have been able to successfully rise above many of the challenges of development and in so doing to accelerate our gains.

The Guyanese people are wondering what the Opposition will cut; it is not why. The Opposition political parties do not have to have an audible reason or a laudable reason. Indeed, they have none. I challenge the Opposition to put Guyana first. Progress and development must not be stymied by personal vendetta. The PPP/C Government has created the conditions for more rapid social and economic development of our country. Did you read it? The projected growth rate of 5.6 % is the highest for our country for over a decade. I ask myself the question - I will frankly tell you that this is my view - is it that the combined AFC and APNU are embarrassed by the pace of development of our country? Envy, jealousy, embarrassment, and that is why they seek to downplay this development but I say to you, my friends, Budget 2014 will positively impact the economy of Guyana and by extension the well-being of every Guyanese and that includes you. You will get a bite.

This budget represents an investment in our people. Vote “yes” for Budget 2014. It is the best thing that you would ever do for your country. If you cut you might cut yourself.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Ms. Ferguson: I rise this evening to make my presentation in relation to the motion for the approval of estimates to the tune of \$220 billion for the financial year 2014 which stands in the name of the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh.

Prior to me discussing my presentation, Mr. Speaker, kindly permit me to express my appreciation to the Hon. Member, Minister of Finance, and his support team who worked, tirelessly, in the preparation of Budget 2014 under the theme *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*, a phrase which is almost synonymous to the APNU’s campaign theme of 2011, *A good life for all Guyanese*.

In discussing my presentation, I will do so in a twofold category.

Firstly, I will critically examine the Hon. Member's budget speech, subsequently narrowing my arguments to physical infrastructure for transformation, specifically addressing bridges and roads.

A brief examination of Volume 2 of the Estimates speaks directly to revenue and expenditure and programme performance statements. The question to ask, Sir, is whether the returns received after expenditure truly reflects programme performance statements. I ask this, since each year, when we are provided with these huge volumes, there is no major changes in the areas of objectives, strategies, impacts and indicators. The only changes contained therein are in figures. I would like to make a recommendation to the Government or the Hon. Minister of Finance that there is urgent need for the review to be done in these areas to determine whether we are receiving desired outcomes.

I now turn my attention to the motion before this honourable House and categorically state that the Hon. Member, in his deliberations, reported to this House, and by extension to the citizens of this nation, that in the previous financial year 2013 the Government expended the sum of \$11.3 billion to continue construction of the East Bank Demerara and East Coast Demerara four-lane highways, *inter alia*. What is of major concern here is that the Minister has failed to identify the amount of moneys expended thus far in areas alluded to above.

Under roads, the Hon. Minister reported that the sum of \$13.7 billion has been budgeted to improve roads and bridges in which \$12.9 billion will go towards roads and \$844.2 million for bridges, making a comparative analysis of what was actually budgeted and spent in 2013. Since the sum of \$12.6 billion was approved, in which \$11.2 billion went towards roads and \$1.4 billion on bridges, the question to ask: Is the proposed allocation for road works adequate? I can only guess the answer to be no.

Hon. Members, at paragraph 4.51 on page 33 of the Hon. Member's presentation, he reported that in 2014 there will be a financial feasibility study for the construction of a bypass road from Ogle to Eccles. The A Partnership for National Unity welcomes this, since we believe that the time has come for the construction of new roads which will aid in the reduction of heavy traffic that our people experiences on a daily basis, whilst travelling on the East Coast and East Bank roads. My thoughts on this, and I anticipate the Hon. Member would be in a position to provide

the information on this, is that, could not another area, further, on the East Coast be identified to conduct such a study?

In the Hon. Minister's 2013... he made mention at paragraph 4.44, page 27 that:

“...the completion of the designs and commencement of works on the Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue roadway”.

Could the Hon. Member provide a status up date, since there is no further reporting, regarding works that was expected to be done in the Parika/Ruby *backdam* road in 2013. The Hon. Member did not indicate the reason for the works not done. I do look forward to him providing an update.

I turn my attention to examine bridges and roads. These areas remain a major challenge for our people on a daily basis. In 2013, we saw and read of citizens taking actions into their hands, that is, by way of protesting and blocking of roads in their respective communities, just to get the attention of the relevant authorities to address their problems. In paraphrasing what my fellow colleague, Hon. Member Mr. Harmon recorded at an APNU's press conference on March 14, 2014, “We are of the view that public infrastructure must serve the people and the people must be the centre of it and it is not that the people must serve the public infrastructure, which is currently happening”.

I turn my attention to a photograph which was taken in Sophia. As we said, infrastructure is supposed to be serving the people and not the people serving infrastructure. This picture tells it all. The residents in Sophia are longing for the roads to be constructed. While I was on the ground, some weeks ago, I witnessed residents paying \$5,000 just to get the potholes filled in that community. The APNU's view is that the only change to this is through Local Government Elections, hence, its continuous call for it to be held by 1st August, 2014.

Permit me to remind the honourable House that the sum of \$11.2 billion was spent in 2012 on roads, while for the financial year 2013 a total of \$11.3 billion was spent. Giving a total of some \$22.5 billion spent, thus far, for the past two years since the commencement of the Tenth Parliament. Yet, there has been no significant improvement in the rehabilitating, reconstruction and repairing of our roads. As my predecessors, in the previous Parliaments, recorded their

dissatisfaction and disgust in the approach Government continues to handle infrastructure in this country. We continue to see what is happening, that is, the waste of taxpayers' moneys on capital projects such as the Marriott Hotel, specialty hospital and the Amaila Fall Hydropower Project as our citizens continue to bemoan. The audited reports, laid before this Assembly, speak volume on the amount of irregularities, that is, the overpayment to contractors *inter alia*.

I had the privilege of visiting the Sophia area, as I alluded to earlier, and I empathise with those who reside in that community. Whilst there, the residents voiced their frustration on the state of their roads and the challenges they face especially when it rains. Most referred to the roads as the "abortion roads", as I would have illustrated earlier. In some cases they are forced to pay extra in transportation cost, mostly at nights.

Another community, which continues to be neglected by the administration and there is no provision in this year's budget to address residents concern, is the Kaneville area. I am quoting from *Kaieteur News*, dated September 8th, 2011 and this is what one resident said:

"President Bharrat Jagdeo, during a community meeting in 2004, challenged the residents there to hold the Government to task as \$250 million has been earmarked to spend on drains and roads, electricity and water".

We are now in 2014. In 2013 there was another article carried by the very newspapers, dated June 9th. This is what was told to persons:

"Persons who can afford transportation and self help will be given crusher run, stones and tar to repair their streets. The focus will be on Kaneville, Diamond New Housing Scheme and Cinema Road. One resident..."

Can I call her name, Mr. Speaker? Am I allowed to?

Mr. Speaker: Did she give you permission to do that?

Ms. Ferguson: I am quoting from the newspapers.

Mr. Speaker: Well go ahead.

“...one resident Shareeza Kumar said that her husband’s vehicle would frequently land in the potholes in her street and would end up in the workshop constantly.”

Now, as I said, this is 2014. I can recall asking the Honourable Member Mr. Robeson Benn, last year, when his Ministry would have done the repairs in Kaneville and some promises were made. The people in Kaneville are still waiting to be relieved of their disgust. The people there are of the view that the Government continues to fail them and not to yield to their demands of ensuring that relief is given to them, that is good roads. Recently, we heard the outcries from residents in Vryheid’s Lust, Better Hope and Plaisance denouncing the state of the roads in their communities. When this was done the residents, of themselves, made comparisons with other streets in areas that are heavily supported by this Government.

I represent the citizens in constituency 13, East/West Ruimveldt, including Riverview. An outreach was conducted in these areas and it revealed that the community roads in East Ruimveldt are in reasonable condition. In West Ruimveldt a few roads are in reasonable condition with the exception of Gill House square. There the residents reported that the road has been in that state for some time now and whenever minor works are being done in the area, no attention is given. It is just as other areas, Riverview has bad roads.

There should be a cessation in frequent “road patching” and “pothole filling”. In the 21st century Guyana, as many of my comrades on the opposite side alluded to, the solution to road repairing is “capping of the entire stretch”. With this, our roadways would last longer and minimise wasteful spending.

I turn my attention to bridges. The Government is seeking an allocation of some \$844.2M towards the construction and the rehabilitation of bridges. Under this head, the Honourable Member in his speech failed to itemise the amount expended on bridges in 2013, rather than a single figure was given to cover both roads and bridges. The sum of \$43M was spent on the bridge Moruka. To date, our brothers and sisters in that subregion cannot use it as a result of the substandard works done. Regarding revetment works in the Kumaka area, an initial sum of \$62M was spent and due to the substandard nature in the work the sum of \$35.2M was spent to redo the works, giving a sum total of \$97.2M.

I alluded to earlier that moneys are wasted. In this case, we see wanton waste of taxpayers' money. A close examination of the estimates was done to ascertain the amount of bridges including roads to be done...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Member, you have five minutes with in which to conclude.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay.

...in financial year 2014, despite the information not being detailed, a few areas have been identified.

The Hon. Member Dr. Westford called on both sides to cooperate. Let me inform the Honourable Member of the common saying *charity begins at home* and the Government frequently boasts of being a caring Government, a working class Government and a Government for all. I ask, does it have the will and courage to practice what it preaches? In order to find common ground to cooperate and move Guyana forward, as the Budget theme promulgate for 2014, we need to rise above party politics and act with maturity. My colleagues and I, on this side of the House, promised Guyanese a good life, hence, the reason for the call by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Member Mr. Ramjattan for the establishment of the tripartite committee. In 2012, it was felt then that both the APNU and AFC sides were willing to cooperate with the executive branch of Government in propelling Guyana towards the theme for Budget 2014, *A Good Guyana for All Guyanese*.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Government must devise a policy for the proper operation of our country's infrastructure, since it is noted with concerns that the following Ministries are involved in infrastructure: Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Housing and Water, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. We, in the APNU, have the experts and expertise in developing such a plan or policy. Recently, the APNU at one of its weekly press conferences called for the establishment of such. I trust that the Government yields to this call.

In summing up, I want to echo the sentiments raised by my colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Bulkan and to say to the Hon. Minister of Finance that a thorough scrutiny will be done on the estimates and if there is no provision to bring relief to the residents of West Ruimveldt,

Riverview, Sophia, Kaneville and others, he will have to go and come again, since those people pay their fair share in taxes, they deserve proper roads and linking bridges in their communities. The time for empty promises by the Government is long overdue. There is need for immediate action now.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude by referring to Budget 2014, as not a people centred budget.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully submit.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. G. Persaud: I rise to make my contributions to Budget 2014. I wish to offer my commendation to the Hon... [*Interruption from the Opposition Members.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, could you allow Mr. Persaud to make his presentation, please?

Mr. G. Persaud: ...Minister of Finance, all in the PPP and PPP/C Government, those stakeholders in the public and private sectors who accepted the invitations and participated in the budget consultation processes, as well as the competent and efficient officials at the Ministry of Finance for:

1. Presenting another budget within the constitutional deadline;
2. Presenting the largest budget ever in the history of our country; and
3. Presenting a budget which speaks to the well being of every category of Guyanese in this beautiful country of ours, thereby continuing with the PPP/C Government's mission and vision to ensure greater joy, happiness and comfort being a part of the living experience of each resident in this beautiful country of ours.

Just before I continue, let me correct a bit of information shared by the Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, who just spoke, with regard to expenditure on the San José bridge. I think she said that the expenditure was in the sum of \$90 million. If the Hon. Member was careful she would have researched the response given to that very question when asked in this honourable House a couple of months ago by the Hon. Member Mrs. Garrido-Lowe. That response was given in

writing. The total expenditure on the San José bridge, revetment and renovation repairs work, amounted to \$40 million.

Over the past two days, and some of today, I listened to the Hon. Members of this House making their contributions to the debate on Budget 2014. I must admit that I have learnt quite a lot. Having said that, I cannot avoid pondering on the question of whether the Hon. Members, on the opposite side of this House, were actually referring to, and discussing and debating, Budget 2014, because the discourse seemed to be empty and far removed from the contents of Budget 2014. [Ms. Ally: Are you negotiating to come back?] Maybe.

I think that the Hon. Members, on the opposite side of this House, who would have spoken thus far, in all fairness to them, time may have eluded them and they did not get to go into the meat of Budget 2014 and so they could not have contributed to the budget in itself. I am hopeful that those who will come after this, will certainly deal with the issues in Budget 2014. If my good friends on the opposite side of this House had accepted the many invitations issued by the Hon. Minister of Finance to have dialogue, to sit and talk through the preparation stages of Budget 2014, I think, we could have avoided this pitfall coming from the other side of the House, because there were so many competent and qualified persons who would have contributed towards fixing, making and presenting Budget 2014.

Another issue, which has emerged, is whether the Hon. Members on the Opposition side of this House have kept in tune with the reality on the ground. Many statements would have been made here and a quick check on the ground would show that statements made here conflicts seriously with the reality that is there, presently existing in many of our communities and regions. A bit later I will focus on some of these statements which were made.

Budget 2014 has, without any shadow of a doubt, responded to the needs, requests and demands of every section of our society. Giving our financial space and developmental thrust, it is inconceivable to contemplate a budget different from this one, at this juncture in our country's history.

I believe that it is the desire of every country to have all the financial and other resources needed to fix, resolve and solve every problem, every issue affecting the citizens in that country. Guyana and the PPP/C Government is no exception to this desire but the reality has consistently caused

such a desire to remain permanently elusive. Certainly, the Hon. Members of the opposite side of this House are fully aware of this reality.

Sir, if the PPP/C Government had all the financial resources and other resources required to fix and resolve all of Guyana's problems then certainly it would have been a pleasure to so do. That having been said, in such a scenario, I am doubtful whether we would have needed the Members who are seated on the opposite side of this House because it seems as if, all that we are getting are nit-picking and searching for problems - no problems then no need.

Development is a never-ending process. [Mrs. Baveghems: That is why you had to resign.] This is a dress down world and we all have to do so some day. I am happy that I did mine now. [Ms: Ally: You had to.] Whatever it is, it has happened. I have no regrets.

Building society, however, and development is a never-ending process. We have to continue building, maintaining, expanding, renovating, repairing, fixing, servicing, all as a continuous part of man's infrastructural environment or now described by modern management theorists as man's physical environment.

7.45 p.m.

The PPP/C is always conscious of this reality and so *Budget 2014* has made provisions for several billions of dollars to be expended in enhancing and maintain our infrastructure environment, be it buildings, roads, sea and river defences, drainage and irrigation structures, airports, just name it and it is reflected in *Budget 2014*. Yet, if the question is asked as to whether all the difficulties, problems and issues affecting us as a people, as a nation, as a country, will be resolved by inputs from *Budget 2014*, obviously, the answer would be a resounding "no" because life's problems and issues will continue.

We must recall the \$14 per day or hydro – that was a take or leave position that was put to us. Certainly, the Hon. Member, Mr. Scott, my Colleague, is not oblivious to that early 1980s position and what the nation's workers got in return for the wage freeze and, as some would have said, "Yea, we got hydro but what kind of hydro!"

The Hon. Member, Mr. Scott, stated that the Government should cease investing in infrastructure and that it should use the financial resources to increase wages and salaries. We recall that when

the PNC was in Government, it took us down that road and we all know the result. We ended up with a crumbling, dilapidated, unsafe infrastructure environment which inflicted untold sufferings and embarrassment on all of us as Guyanese. A lack of road networks cut off so many communities and forced them to operate in isolation. Fairy bulb settings as part of our existence in those days were as a result of that kind of policy advocated by the Hon. Member, Mr. Scott.

A quick look at our financial resources from 1992 to present would reflect sound, effective and efficient management practices. Obviously, I can understand the embarrassment this has caused persons, in and out of the House, who were or are part of the PNC and or PNC Government since that period was the worst in financial management. Moreover, it was the worst type of management our country and citizens would have experienced, so much so that our country was declared as not credit worthy.

Eight years of continuous growth at a time during a period when there are serious economic difficulties and economies are contracting all over the world, is an achievement which all of us, as patriotic Guyanese, should beat our drums and be proud of. While I know that this kind of success sounds like some miracle coming from those who are managing our financial resources in this country, it is also a known fact that it is a situation that has been verified by many persons. So, it is mind-boggling to comprehend why some of the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House are seeking to deny this reality and are insinuating that the figures are manipulated. If learnt, experienced, qualified and certified economists, financial analysts, both at the local and international levels, have found every evidence to support and no evidence to dispute these figures submitted by the Hon. Minister of Finance on behalf of the PPP/C Government, then I am certain this nation will request evidence from the opposite side of this House as they continue to banter that statement that the figures were manipulated.

I heard one Hon. Member state that the AFC government will invest large sums of money into various sectors. Certainly, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramayya, sounded very good but what he did not say to us was where the money will come from, how such expenditures would be sustained and what his government would remove or cut – their famous styling – so as to redirect the resources. Having said that, I am hesitant to dismiss the Hon. Member's statements as wishful thinking but I cannot find a better way in describing such subjective statements which are not construed in today's reality or in the future reality - an AFC government.

After a glance at *Budget 2014* and how it responds to human resource growth and development, it is abundantly clear that *Budget 2014* has maintained the pro- poor approach of the PPP/C Government. As is customary, the Budget has made adequate provisions for all other categories of citizens in our country - and I must repeat all category of human resource in our country - including our senior citizens, differently-abled, single parents, workers, children, the poor, not so poor, well-to-do as well as the rich, those who are in the public sector and private sector, those who are in urban as well as those who are in rural and hinterland communities.

The PPP/C Government has consistently, over the years, provided annual wages and salaries increases to officials in the public, teaching as well as the disciplined services. Scholarships, both local and international, are made available to our public officers across the country. Duty free concessions, house lots and soft loans are all part of the benefits which are made available by the PPP/C Government to certain categories of public officials in the employ of the various branches of the State. Deliberate programmes aimed at training, retraining and retooling our human resources are all measures evident in *Budget 2014*. Separation and periodic benefits such as gratuity, severance and pensions are all honoured by this Government.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Persaud, you have five minutes within which to conclude.

Mr. G. Persaud: I will ask for your concession, Mr. Speaker. We have listened to much talk about the elderly and senior citizens in our country, but what are the facts, Sir? First, this category of Guyanese has constantly engaged the attention of the PPP/C Government. Apart from the old age pension, which is increased annually, a significant number of our elderly also receive an employment pension which is paid from age 55 in the public service and a National Insurance Scheme (NIS) pension if they had contributed to the Scheme and this is paid at age 60. Hence, there are a significant number of our senior citizens who are benefiting from financial support from these three sources. In addition, every elderly citizen who has a meter with Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) gets their water grant annual subsidy from that entity. Similarly, elderly citizens who have a meter with the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Company for electricity charges are granted an annual subsidy of \$20,000, which *Budget 2014* has increased by 50%, taking that to \$30,000 for this year. This must be viewed, too, in conjunction with free medical care and an additional 5% increase in old age pension with effect from 1st May, 2014.

There are some of us in this honourable House who take umbrage when reference is made to periods before 1992 but, Sir, our memories cannot be that bad to cause us to forget what benefits were available to our senior citizens and the rigid conditions, such as means test, which surrounded accessing the limited and insignificant benefits then when compared to what the PPP/C Government has and is offering our elderly.

Our children continue to benefit from several support systems by the PPP/C Government from 1992 to present. They include: free text and exercise books, school uniforms, school feeding including hot meal programmes, subsidies for Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) students and scholarships for hinterland students, to name a few.

Budget 2014 has brought on board additional measures to enhance the teaching/learning environment across all levels in the education sector as well as providing direct financial support of \$10,000 per child who is registered in the public education system. Yet, we have heard from the other side of the honourable House statements which seek to suggest that *Budget 2014* has nothing of substance for our people. The beneficiaries across this country will certainly rebut such baseless statements when they will turn up in their numbers and smile when they receive the subsidy for their children.

I now move to the final resource and that is informational. *Budget 2014* has made a significant sum of money – \$1.1 billion – available to enhance Information and Communication Technology (ICT) across Guyana, the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF), the ICT towers and installation of the fibre optic cable are all measures in the final stages of implementation, thereby moving our Government's vision of e-governance closer to realisation. Right here in the National Assembly, we are seeking to use ICT services now available through the deliberate vision and focus of the PPP/C Government to reduce our dependency on paper – hard copies – communication in sharing and transferring information.

The Hinterland Electrification Programme as well as the Solar Panels Project was successfully completed in many communities by the PPP/C Government. This Programme has lent support to the Government's ICT programme by providing much needed electricity in the hinterland communities. Many communities are now benefitting and are part of the national and international communication network for the first time in the history of our country, while others

continue to benefit from the improved and enhanced communication network. More of our citizens are participating and using the social media to stay in touch with their relatives and friends, to do business, to conduct research and to enhance their studies, among other things.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Desmond Trotman, shared with us some statistical data on the percentage of investments made by local governments in several countries. However, the Hon. Member fell short of telling this honourable House what percentage of projected revenue those local government bodies collected in their respective countries and what kinds of services those local government bodies are responsible for providing in those countries. The attempted comparison, to say the least, was a complete misfit but, like everything else, we have had and I am certain we will have to listen to many more examples which are irrelevant and not in sync with our special circumstance as a nation.

The Hon. Members, Mr. Bulkan and Mr. Trotman, sought to lament that Region 8 is starved for financial resources by the PPP/C Government because it is controlled by the AFC. I wish to categorically state that such statements are baseless, mischievous and gross misrepresentation of the facts. Rather, they are just rhetoric seeking to garner political sympathy for a council which, at its best, is incapable of understanding and executing its roles and functions as prescribed in law. The council is being led and misled into taking on tasks which are purely administrative and, in the process, neglecting its duties and responsibilities to the citizens of that Region.

The regional administration must be commended, in my humble judgment, for maintaining and enhancing its provision of services to the citizens of that Region and not being distracted by the antics and the immature behaviour of the RDC led by no other than its Chairman. It may be for this and other reasons best known to both the Hon. Members that in seeking to make comparisons, they failed to highlight several key variables, which will guide anyone in resources allocation, such as population density, geographic mass, projects and justifications, among others, placed in the draft budget by the RDC.

The Hon. Member, Mrs. Volda Lawrence, sought to highlight certain social ills such as domestic violence, suicide, substance abuse, *et cetera*. In her presentation, she sought to lay the blame at the feet of the Government for the state of affairs. In no country of the world would such blame be justified and I want to believe that the Hon. Member is conscious of that, but is constrained by

the politics in the environment. The issues are real and need more than Government's attention. All faith-based organisations, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which are in receipt of constant financial and other support from local as well as international organisations, youth organisations, other clubs and associations, political parties, schools, homes and communities must all play their respective roles in seeking to be part of the solution to these issues. Maybe the time has come when all funding to treat with such issues, as identified by the Hon. Member, must be properly and adequately scrutinised and a result-based mechanism should be sought to determine future funding and support for some of the benefitting organisations and institutions. The importance of effective parenting cannot be de-emphasised.

In conclusion, I wish to urge all of us in this honourable House to move ourselves from being on the side of the problem and position ourselves on the side of the solution. Guyana's continued development requires positive contributions from all of us and so I wish to be with the optimists and embrace the thought that *Budget 2014*, as presented, will receive this House's full support. I, therefore, wish to join with the Hon. Minister of Finance in urging my Colleagues to let us see *Budget 2014* as the Assembly's Budget and let us all give our support.

I thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will take a short recess of 20 minutes and return at 8.20 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 8.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.23 p.m.

Mrs. Hastings-Williams: I rise to make my contribution to the motion for the approval of the 2014 Budget Estimates presented on the 24th March under the theme, *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*.

Hon. Members on both sides of this House, I must remind you that it was the hinterland that brought people to Guyana in the search for El Dorado, besides the sugar and rice. It is the hinterland that continues to bring tourists to Guyana; it is the golden frog, the mighty Kaieteur, the gold rush and, yes, Dr Frank Anthony, the giant arapaima and all the flora and fauna found in our hinterland that keep the revenues flowing into Guyana. Therefore, it is our duty to ensure that

the government of the day takes care of the needs of our people in the hinterland region; these are Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9.

But what we continue to experience as the years come and go and as the national budget gets bigger year after year is that the young in the hinterland continue to be denied equal access to education. I say this knowing that over 20 years as a government, the PPP/C has failed to deliver quality education to our hinterland children. I was hoping that this Budget would have sought to improve this situation.

If my Colleagues over there boast so much about building a number of schools in our hinterland region, why is it that the results of the National Grade Six, National Grade Four Literacy and the CSEC results coming from the hinterland continue to be very poor as against those of Region 10 and other regions? I hope that the new strategic plan for education that has not been completed but is on its way to being completed works towards reversing these poor results in our hinterland. Then I can agree with you, my Colleagues on the other side of the House, that the children in the hinterland are being delivered quality education.

It was stated last year by the Hon. Minister of Finance that the 2013 Budget was bigger and better, but let us take some time to reminisce a little on some of the reflections of that said Budget. Has it really improved the quality of the lives of our brothers and sisters living in our interior locations? If I am wrong and misinforming this House, I stand corrected. Tell me, Hon. Members on the other of this House – and I will borrow the words from my colleague Dr. Ramayya - what direct impact had it on the hinterland residents?

One of the cries is that there are still limited job opportunities for our young people and I believe that it is time for the youths to have access to technical or vocational centres in Regions 1, 7 and 8, whereby they can be empowered with appropriate skills to contribute meaningfully to the communities in which they live. What is happening, however, is that youths from Bartica and youths from as far as Chinowieng have to travel all the way to Georgetown or to Essequibo to acquire a trade or skill at a very high cost which their parents could hardly afford. The majority of the children who leave the Waramadong Secondary School return home year after year, having been successful at one subject or none, in most cases, and having no second chance to

equip themselves with technical or vocational skills, find themselves in the gold and diamond fields at a very tender age. These and more are the reflections of the past budgets.

National School Feeding: whilst we are happy that the Government could have continued the hot meal programme in our hinterland schools, a study done by the World Bank titled, “Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Net, Child Development and the Education Sector” established that it is a valuable exercise that captures the most vulnerable in many countries. However, the question that comes to my mind is: are the moneys allocated for this venture adequate? Tell me what kind of balanced meal can be provided with \$175 in these times to nourish the brain of a child who we expect to become literate and numerate in the end. That is what is being offered for a child. Not only that; there are cooks who are being paid \$1,000 a day for their cooking and would receive \$20,000 - \$25,000 for the month out of the same allocations given for the School Feeding Programme. Tell me, Comrades, what kind of new Mathematics is this? These are all the testimonies that testify to the continuous neglect of our children in the hinterland. Stop neglecting our young people. I say stop making them want to run away from this beautiful Guyana in search of a better place to stay.

Like my Colleague, Mr. Damon, I would have been proudly saying to this House how many times the Minister of Education has visited the Upper Mazaruni, but so sad to say we are still awaiting our first visit.

We may continue to approve large sums of moneys year after year, but I believe it is time we, as representatives of our people, begin to evaluate and examine to see if development is really taking place in our hinterlands. Is it not time for Bartica to become a township with better roads, adequate water supply, improved street lighting and better banking services? Is it not time for a child in Phillipai, Arrau, Paruima and Kako to be doing his or her research on the internet? When exactly would this Government become serious about developing our children in the rich hinterland?

In 2013, \$287.7 million was expended to procure solar systems for ICT hubs and I see there are plans to construct 100 hubs in 100 Amerindian communities this year. Will our teachers and nurses in the hinterland schools and nurses be given laptops so that they can use same to improve their methodologies and strategies to teach our young children? I hope so, Mr. Speaker.

Let me touch a little on agriculture, not because it is less important in anyway but because I have been saying to this House repeatedly that there is an agricultural potential in the Cuyuni-Mazaruni Region. We can have cheap and abundant supply of healthy foods and a rich and diverse regional economy.

Culture, youth and sport: while you may have heard my Colleague, Mr. Trevor Williams, mention that Region 7 has been without a youth and sports officer for quite some time now, I would like to add by saying that there has been no regional camp held for the past three years or more. This was an annual event which used to be funded by the Ministry and one which the young people always looked forward to attending. This activity was eventually phased out. I ask the women on the other side to challenge me in playing football.

Upper Mazaruni and Region 7 has young men and young women who have basic skills, but are awaiting the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport to deliver training sessions, coaching sessions and refereeing session. We do not have a problem with sports grounds. We have a lot of big football fields. All we need is that the Ministry provides materials like football and gears so that our young people can improve on their sport activities. We all know that sport is good for our health. Come this year, when Digicel is having its school competition, Waramadong Secondary School will be out here again. I invite you to come and be entertained by very good football.

8.35 p.m.

This Budget, which my Colleagues on the other side refer to as a visionary budget, seems to be suffering from a cataract. To my mind, it lacks a clear vision for the development of this country as a whole. It cannot be a better Guyana for all Guyanese when our brothers and sisters in the remote areas continue to moan about the high cost of living, lack of proper medical and other social services, for example, the people at Kamarang, who have been suffering without power supply since July of last year. Our Prime Minister and his team were there lately but perhaps they did not notice because they were staying a guest house that was given supply. Since July of last year, without potable water supply for many years, it leaves me to wonder what exactly was done with the \$2.4 billion expended last year for this sector and what will be done with the \$2.5 billion estimated for this year. I am hoping that for our brothers and sisters in Kamarang, this problem will soon be solved and even this year.

We all know that there is a joint agreement between Guyana and Brazil and that information sharing had begun in the Upper Mazaruni sometime last week. I am hoping that the residents do not have to wait until the hydro project is materialised before they are given power supply. I hope not. I do not know how many of us would live comfortable in such a place.

I agree with the Hon. Minister of Finance that indeed we have challenges that confront us as a developing country, but let us be real my Comrades. Let us set realistic goals that we can achieve and, if you wish, you can begin to take pattern from the APNU with a manifesto entitled, *A Good Life for all Guyanese*. That is a realistic goal and, when given the opportunity by the populace of this country, come next elections, we, on this side, will work towards a better life for all Guyanese and we will not stop until we attain the best life for all Guyanese.

Before I finally take my seat, I must join my Colleague, Ms. Volda Lawrence, in congratulating my fellow women, Ms. Karen D'souza and the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, for the awards given to them and, last but not least, I pay homage to the late Mrs. Deborah Backer, a fighter who fought to the end. I do this on behalf of myself and the people of Region 7.

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

Minister in the Ministry of Finance [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Guyana is a good example of a country that has done some of the right things. "They have come a very, very long distance in terms of their fiscal situation", Caribbean Development Bank, 24th February. It is a fact that cannot be refuted. It is a reality; Guyana has become the envy of our CARICOM brothers and sisters.

The inconvertible evidence is visible to all and sundry. For eight consecutive years, Guyana has recorded and enjoyed uninterrupted economic growth. This phenomenon could best be described as a democracy dividend. This is not a result of a fluke or happenstance, as I would put it. This was realised as a result of prudent physical management, responsible decision making, visionary thinking, innovative action and bold initiative. This confirms the saying 'with the right approach, any challenge can be overcome'. I would like to remind this honourable House that the future comes one day at a time.

This Budget of 2014 provides another building block towards ensuring that we secure Guyana's future. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate my Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, and our team at the Ministry of Finance for a job well done in crafting *Budget 2014*. It was Eleanor Roosevelt who said, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." We know the potential that lies in our people and we are prepared to unlock that potential. This Budget is designed to unlock the potential of our people.

The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, when he presented the Budget, at 4.4, page 17, said:

"Mr. Speaker, when we strive to achieve the lofty ideals which we hold dear for a better Guyana we must pay equal head to the details that often bedevil the achievement of the higher goal. As a responsible Government we make policy and allocate resources across all sectors to meet the national objectives but Government policy and budgetary allocations alone will not take us to the desired destination. Of equal importance are the efforts of the teacher who ensures that he or she is in the classroom on time and delivers the right material to ensure a well educated child. The efforts of the doctor and the nurse who are attentive to the standards of quality care will meet or exceed the patient's expectation, the efforts of the public servant who is focused on results and improving the way we deliver services across Government, the efforts of the employee who goes the extra mile to be productive at work, recognising, as he should that the profitability of his employ will determine the security of his job, the efforts of the citizens who take care not to litter but instead to maintain his or her surroundings."

Quite nicely put, it emphasises the importance that there is a role for Government and there is a role for the citizens, and what Government is seeking to do is to ensure that there is partnership at all sectors to ensure that the beauty of our dreams are realised.

In this Budget, we focus on three things: creation of employment, creating business opportunities and, thirdly, equipping our citizens to take advantage of those opportunities. This pro-poor, pro-people, pro-growth budget ensures personal prosperity of our citizens and it ensures our collective wellbeing.

Let me provide the evidence to prove that this Budget caters for the personal prosperity of our citizens. Let us look at the Government's Housing Programme. We heard from the Hon. Minister

of Housing and Water about the tens of thousands of Guyanese who are now living in their own homes. Guyanese are no longer looking for a bottom house to rent. They are looking for a mortgage to build their own homes. That shows that attention is being paid to their personal wellbeing.

Let us look at what is happening on our streets and while I am very concerned about the spate of accidents that we have been having, the reality is that we have more people driving today. We have more vehicles on our streets than we have ever had in the history of this country. Last year alone, 15,793 vehicles were registered; for personal use were 6,800.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak to the personal prosperity, I would like to draw your attention to what a number of my Colleagues have already alluded to with what is happening in education. We must not sit quietly in this House when we talk about the fact that we have achieved 100% universal primary education in Guyana. We must not sit quietly. We must not sit quietly in this House. We must blow our trumpet and let the world know that we are well on the way to achieving 100% universal secondary education. Our Technical and Vocational (Tec-Voc) Programmes are spread throughout the county. We have technical institutes, not just in Georgetown, but in Berbice and in Essequibo. We must be careful that we do not miss, very importantly, what is happening at the University of Guyana. While some will only want to talk about the problems, there are expanding programmes that are taking place at the University of Guyana, including, very soon, online courses being offered from the University of Guyana.

I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings, remark about the Schools Feeding Programme. Let me remind this honourable House that when this Programme was started, it was funded by the World Bank and, when the funding dried up, this Government was bold enough, this Government was strong enough, to face it and to provide the moneys that were needed to ensure that that Programme continues. We are doing it today - not with donor money - with our own resources and this Budget continues to provide for that in 2014.

Apart from the Schools Feeding Programme, we are providing the text books. We are building the ICT labs across the country and, in addition to all that we have already done in education, *Budget 2014* provides for a new initiative in the education sector to ensure the personal prosperity of our people. Mr. Speaker, I learned something very early. I grew up like any other

person in this country, poor and humble, but my mother told me do not pay attention to what is in the refrigerator; pay attention to the bookshelf because education is your way to the future. This Government continues to provide education to the people of Guyana and what we are doing this year is providing a grant of \$10,000 to every school child who is attending nursery, primary or secondary schools. One hundred and eighty-eight thousand plus children will benefit from a total allotment of \$2 billion and that is what *Budget 2014* has to offer.

I have heard people talk about impact. Maybe we have to have a new definition of impact because it would appear that when people get benefits from the Government, it is not impact. It is only an impact when they are starved of benefits because of budget cuts. That is how it appears.

In the area of health, we are ensuring the prosperity of our citizens. There are health huts, health centres, poly clinics, regional hospitals staffed with medics, nurses, health workers, and community health workers, and we are lifting the bar. That is why we are now building the Specialty Hospital; it is to bring specialised care and services to the people of Guyana. Where people had to travel to foreign countries, they would be able to do it here.

That is why it baffles me - and I do not really understand the rationale here - why people have a difficulty with this. Some of the same Hon. Members of this House who are having a difficulty with such a project could afford the luxury of travelling overseas to go and get their medical attention, they could afford to do it, but this Government is ensuring that the ordinary man, whether he is from Crabwood Creek, Charity, Jawalla or some part of Georgetown, could access these services right here in Guyana. If for no other reason, *Budget 2014* must be supported because of these initiatives.

We are continuing and we are paying attention to what is happening in our environment. I think every Guyanese, despite of the high-rise buildings that we are seeing, the development that is taking place across the coast and in the interior, we are concerned about one thing – the way our people litter and dispose of garbage, the way our communities look. *Budget 2014* was bold enough to address this issue by allocating \$1 billion for a “cleanup my country” campaign. I want to take this opportunity tonight to make a call to all the faith based organisations (FBOs), the community service organisations, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including the

political parties to come together and ensure that Georgetown is cleaned up, every municipality is cleaned up, and every village is cleaned up, and we must do it in such a manner that we will never return to the place where we are today. Where we are is because of our own making. Collectively, we must take responsibility for that and collectively we must work to improve it and we must sustain it so that Guyana will be deemed that beautiful country we all want it to be.

As it relates to our Amerindians, I heard the Hon. Ms. Hastings refer to what the Government is doing for Amerindians. What is the Government doing for Amerindians? We cannot be myopic. We cannot always be narrow in our thinking. There is a familiar story in sacred text about a woman by the name of Hagar. When she got a child for Abraham and she was mocking Sarah and she was put out of the house and she went into the desert, there came a time when she and the child needed sustenance and she started to complain about her lot and her situation and that she had no water and the rest of it, she had a divine visitation. That visitation told her to go back home and submit, but, in that very same instance, she opened her eyes and the water was right there. The water did not come because of a miracle... [*Singing Interruption*]

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of ‘church singing’ in the House right now. Every time the Bishop gets up to speak, the Opposition seems unable to restrain themselves. I do not know if this is recognition of how important this man is. They are recognising the power of this man but it does not stoke the rest of us trying to listen to him speaking, so I will seek your intervention.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: ...especially when the former Commissioner of Police joins in signing too.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Teixeira. Members, let us hear the Minister. Go ahead.

Bishop Edghill: I want to make the point in this House that bitterness blinds. Bitterness blinds. Bitterness blinds. I said it three times for emphasis, Sir, because when one is bitter, what one needs for one’s own survival could be right there but one cannot see it because one is bitter. I would urge the Hon. Members of this House that we be objective. Everything is not hunky-dory; everything is not perfect, but we have enough that we can see that significant development is being made in this country.

When it comes to our senior citizens, it is a known fact that we all care about them. We want them to be better. The Government has been doing everything within its power, over the years, to ensure that there are proper allocations and support for senior citizens, including a non-contributory pension. This year, the total pension bill will be \$6.6 billion and, apart from that, my colleague, the Hon. Ganga Persaud, not so long ago, spoke about this. That is not a stand alone. That includes the water subsidy. That includes the electricity subsidy. That includes free healthcare. *Budget 2014* also caters for the psychosocial needs of the elderly. In this year's Budget, there is a provision for the opening of centres for senior citizens where their mental and physical health can be catered for. We are continuing to work with our senior citizens.

I think we have a lot of people across this country who are smiling and waiting for the implementation - and I would hope that every Member of the Opposition supports this initiative - of the Rural Enterprise Development Fund. One billion dollars has been allocated to that. This will lend to business development and, ultimately, to community development. When we talk about ensuring the collective wellbeing of our people, we ensure that our infrastructure is being repaired... [Ms. Ally: Look, your boss has come now.] We ensure... I am extremely proud to have him as my boss. I am extremely proud to have the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh as my boss. [Dr. Singh: As am I proud to have you as [inaudible]...] Thank you very much, sir.

When we make allocations in a budget to ensure that our sea defences and our roads are taken care of, when we make allocations in our budget to ensure that \$1 billion is provided for the building of hinterland roads, it is because we want to ensure the collective wellbeing of our people.

We are providing, through this Budget, support for the traditional sectors, and much has been said already about sugar. I thought about this long and hard. There was a time when sugar contributed towards the upkeep and support of other sectors in this country and I was thinking about...

I would share with this honourable House a situation that I came across. A family had not father but one of the brothers was able to make his way in life and he bought a bus and he was working that bus. From that bus, he took care of his brothers and sisters to go to school and one, in particular, made it all the way to the University of Guyana. There came a time when the bus had

a problem and the engine of the bus collapsed and the brother who owned the bus, who took care of mother and other siblings, went to his mother and said, “I will like for the family to help me to get the money to buy a new bus by us using the transport to put it at the bank to get a mortgage.” It was the same brother who benefited all the way to university who, despite of the income that came from that bus, objected to the use of the transport - that same brother. There was a time when sugar was that brother with the bus and now that sugar is having a problem, look who is objecting - the same people who sugar helped to put on their feet. We have to be careful about this.

We are continuing to support the traditional sectors – sugar and rice. We are continuing to diversify the economy. It is a known fact that if one of the industries could properly get on the road that could create jobs that we are talking about in this country is the tourism sector. It is a known fact that one of the largest providers of jobs in any economy, when one looks at it, is the tourism sector. Guyana is bold enough, in this Budget, *Budget 2014*, to continue to lend support to the tourism sector by making a provision of \$800 million for a hospitality institute. That is one of the reasons why we must support *Budget 2014*.

Mr. Speaker, permit me a few minutes to talk about the transformational projects that we are having in this country. While we are looking after the personal wellbeing of our citizens, we are securing our collective by these projects, whether it be the Amaila Falls Hydro Project, whether it be the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) project, whether it be the Specialty Hospital, whether it is the Marriott Hotel, whether it is the Linden to Lethem Road, whether it is the new bridge across the Demerara River, whether it is linking Guyana with Suriname with a new bridge across the Corentyne River, whether it is the One Laptop Per Family Programme and the Government’s E-Governance Programme. I heard a criticism tonight, and rightfully so, constructive criticism is good. It came from the Hon. Members Mrs. Catherine Hughes, but the act is that 30,004 families in Guyana already have a laptop that they would not have owned if it were not for this Programme – 30,004. Out of 30,004 laptops, 514 had some problems during the warrantee period and under the warrantee had to be fixed. Look at the difference.

9.05 p.m.

Are we going to complain about 514 that had problems or are we going to celebrate the 30,004 that are already distributed? And while we celebrate the 30,004 I want to give hope to the people of Guyana that in this year alone another 17,000 will be distributed. That is something that we need to celebrate.

I hear a lot of talk about the Minister comes every year and say a bigger budget, but that is the fact; the Budget is a bigger budget. But do you know why I am touching on this? Because we need to know what causes a bigger budget; what drives us into having a bigger budget. You cannot have a bigger budget if you do not have more income coming in. We are doing well in revenue collections; inflation has been kept to a moderate low. And we heard it from the Hon. Minister Whittaker tonight – 0.9%. There is more disposable income; our consumption levels are remarkable; and because of the quality of the initiatives that have been put in place more money is in the hand of ordinary men and women. And Budget 2014 caters for more money in the hands of ordinary men.

Mr. Speaker, I will like to bring to your attention a press release that was issued from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Executive Board – Press Release No. 13/534, 19th December, 2013. Listen to what it says:

“During the last decade Guyana’s strong macro-economic performance has contributed to the reduction in public debt levels and sustained poverty reduction. The economy has experienced seven years of uninterrupted growth averaging about 4% annually.”

This is not the Minister saying that; it is coming from the IMF. Listen to what it says as well in the press release:

“The key pillars of macroeconomic resurgence have been sustained reforms, in particular the implementation of Value Added Tax (VAT), favourable commodity prices, significant inflows of foreign direct investment and debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative and the multilateral debt relief initiative.

Real economic activity expanded by 4.8% in 2012 on the back of a broad-based growth in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction and other services. The twelve month inflation rate remained low at 3.4% notwithstanding higher energy and food prices.”

So even though there was higher energy and food prices inflation rate remained low. That is the performance of our economy. This is what the press release is saying:

“The banking soundness indicators have remained strong with capital adequacy ratios well above the regulatory minimum requirement, non-performing loans between five and six percent over the last three years, and provisioning for bad loans at comfortable levels.”

We are seeing bigger budgets because we are doing better - in 2011, \$161,430 billion; in 2012, \$192,781; in 2013, \$208,840; in 2014, \$220,046,661. What are we talking about? We are not talking about robbing people from benefits; we are talking about bringing benefits to people. We must be very mindful about the achievements in 2013, and why we could have such a sound budget in 2014. The economy recorded its 8th year of consecutive growth. I am saying this slowly for the people of Guyana to understand because sometimes we come here and read fancy papers and the people do not really get it clear. So for eight years Guyana has experienced uninterrupted growth despite all that is happening around the world. When last did that happen in Guyana? I think while my colleague is conscious that his job as a Minister is doing national service he should be congratulated by the people of Guyana for managing the economy in such a way.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you will require an extension of 15 minutes to continue.

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

Question put and agreed to

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I want to turn to some other things. I want to deal with this whole issue of public procurement. There is a lot that is being said about this matter. As a matter of fact some people speak about the Public Procurement Commission as if it would be that divine institution to correct all the wrongs that exist in Guyana. Let me bring to your attention that for last year along with the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board processed 3,800 plus contracts. Of that number 466 were above the \$15 million mark that had to go to Cabinet for no objection. Only on five occasions the Cabinet withheld its no

objection. Only twenty-four bidders complained. And this is mainly at the regional level. Do you know what I am here to tell you, Sir? If we had a Public Procurement Commission – and we are on record of wanting a public procurement commission; the PPP/Civic administration wants a public procurement commission and we are on record of saying that.

We just simply need to ensure that the Cabinet's right to no objection remain. Out of that 3,800 plus contracts 24 people complained. This would have been the work of the Public Procurement Commission, a high price entity, to deal with 24 complaints, which were all or if they were not resolved they would have been resolved anyhow administratively. This is the nature. Let me remind us that when it comes to public procurement bids are opened in the presence of bidders or their representatives, and the media. This is no secret thing. But we recognise that we need to strengthen public procurement because people need to have value for their money; we need to ensure there is greater confidence so we are continuing to do training; we are continuing to work with evaluators; we are continuing to work with the tender boards at the various regional levels to ensure that we have a more aggressive system.

I want to move from procurement and go to dealing with contractors. There are four things that must be highlighted when we debate this bill, because people are talking about the impact of contractors and how the works are being done. But there are four non-negotiables - contractors must have the technical competence; contractors must have the financial resources to get the job done; contractors must have the human resources including the proper engineering skills to get the job done; and contractors must have the necessary equipment to get the job done. We have to continue to work in an environment to ensure that contractors perform. When a contract is awarded whether it is for the repair of a school, the building of a road, the fixing of a health centre, the fixing of sea defences, the building of a bridge or culvert, or the expansion of a road, or the roads in the hinterland the Government has one thing in mind, and that is the people of Guyana must benefit from that award. And we want to ensure that contractors are seen as partners for national development. That is why we will continue to work with them; we will continue to encourage them. For the ones that incur cost and time overruns there are clauses in the contracts to deal with such and we will be dealing with them like we have dealt in the past.

I want to move onto two other topical issues I know from this budget that will find a lot of heat in this House and that has to do with National Communication Network Inc. (NCN) and Guyana

Information News Agency (GINA). I will speak about GINA and NCN. Over the year GINA has come in for a lot criticism, but I have done the research. In Jamaica, in Fiji, in Malaysia, in the Netherlands, in Canada, in the United States, all of these places have an outfit in the kind of GINA; GINA is the Government information service; GINA's job is to present the views, programmes and projects of the Government. It has always been so. I heard someone say that GINA is just about press releases and Government features. But all the persons who have threatened to cut GINA or to reject the appropriations for GINA must know there are 40 persons employed. If you are talking about jobs you are not supposed to be putting people out of jobs. To cut GINA and shut it down will result in thousands of Guyanese, both locally and overseas, being deprived of their constitutional right to be provided with the pertinent information with regard to Government's programmes, policies and related to development. To cut GINA would be considered suppressing the press or curbing press freedom; GINA addresses the needs and directives of central government. The budget cut can only be interpreted as an attempt to silence government's information arm. May I remind us that GINA's provision comes under the office of the President. It is the President's right to communicate to the people of Guyana and to let them know of government programme that is being attacked here.

Let me talk about NCN because we also have difficulties with some of the people talking about NCN being a public entity doing political work. I am advised by the General Secretary of the PPP that the PPP has an official publication which is called "*The Thunder*". And I am advised as well by the General Secretary of the PPP that very soon they will be launching a radio station. So GINA and NCN operate for the Government; the PPP has its own apparatus. But it would appear that some people cannot separate Party from Government because that is the way they operated when they were in Government. When we have paramountcy of the party there was no separation between Party and Government, but the PPP/C has a Government; GINA is an outfit of the Government. The PPP/C as a party does not need to the Government to represent them. The PPP has the capacity to defend and represent themselves and have been doing so.

I will like to ask all of us that we should pay attention to the fact that we have equal access and equal opportunity. The Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings a little while ago was asking why the children of the interior are not having access like the other children in the other regions. If the Hon.

Member reads Budget 2014 she will discover that is exactly what the Government is seeking to do. We are writing the wrongs that have been there for decades. We are bringing to the people of the hinterland what they should have had decades ago. It is being done in a phased manner. Through the Office of the Prime Minister we ensure that our brothers and sisters in the hinterland could have electricity in their homes through the solar panels. While I was visiting Region 7 in one of the villages one of the ladies in the meeting said to me: "I want you to tell the President I want a bigger solar panel because I come to Georgetown and I see dem ladies get the thing spinning round hotting the food." She wanted a solar panel that could power a microwave. And you know what, she deserves it. But development is incremental. We started small and we have to continue. Last year \$500 million was allocated for Information Communication Technology (ICT) hubs, and we have an allocation again this year to ensure that ICT comes to the people of the hinterland – 100 communities will have ICT hubs. I am sure the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs will deal with that.

As I begin to close up my presentation, I want to make an appeal to the Hon. Members of this House despite the chorus and the singing. I am accustomed to it. I want to make this point. Whenever we are finished acting here we have to live with our consciences. This is more than just grandstanding; this is more than just might is right; this is about having to face the people of Guyana. On the 24th when Minister Ashni Singh stood up at that podium and read this Budget he gave hope to the people of Guyana. Do not take the hope away from the people. From 24th March the people of Guyana have been dreaming. They cannot wait to hear the time has come and the vote is a big resounding yes in support of Budget 2014. Ask your supporters and they will tell you they want the education grant; ask your supporters and they will tell you they do not want to have electricity bills climb; ask your supporters and they will tell you they want to see the investment in rice; ask your supporters, they want to see the expansion in ICT; ask your supporters, they want to ensure that their facilities are adequately maintained; ask your supporters, they want to ensure schools have teachers, hospitals have doctors and they are paid. Ask the supporters and they will tell you that. I do not need to come here to tell you; you know it. And you owe it to the people of Guyana to do what is right. We owe it to the people of Guyana to do what is right.

Mr. Speaker, we are here as legislators; we are here as representatives of the people; we are here as the people who have to ultimately in this House decide on the way Guyana will go. The PPP/C has come through this Budget, the third one in this Tenth Parliament, indicating these are the things we want to do to secure the future of Guyana. A responsible Opposition is to support the things that are good, criticise it to make it stronger and better, but not to dash the hope of the people to the floor. When we are finished dashing people's hopes we still have to go back to them and build it again. I will like to commend Budget 2014 to this House and I will like to ask that we all support it. Let us be magnanimous, let us rise to the occasion, let us do what the people of Guyana expect of us, and let us do what is right – support Budget 2014.

I thank you very much, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I invite the Hon. Member Mr. Jaffarally, the final speaker for this evening, representing Region 6, East Berbice/Corentyne.

Mr. Jafarally: Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my colleagues in this House and the people of Region 6 in commending Dr. Ashni Singh and his technical team for presenting yet another budget which is people oriented.

Budget 2014, being the largest budget, has given to us no new taxes or increase in taxation. This Budget was crafted after a process of consultation with business, labour and even people at the grass root level who were given an opportunity to be consulted. It is important to note after the presentation of the 2014 Budget the business community came out and supported the budget measures; labour supported the budget measures; even the rice farmers at Mibicuri and Yakusari in Black Bush Polder are heartened to know that their recommendations for a bridge to get to their rice fields is provided for in the 2014 Budget. The residents of Orealla and Siparuta who made recommendations for revetment in their community it is provided for in the 2014 Budget. The sugar workers at Edinburgh on the East Bank of Berbice who wanted a street to be rehabilitated, it is provided for in the 2014 budget. The students at Canje Secondary School who want the school to be extended so they can be more comfortable it is provided in the 2014 Budget.

It is important to note that the political opposition of this parliament refused to come to the process of consultation for the 2014 Budget despite the many pleas of the Minister of Finance.

Listening to the presentation by Members of the Opposition they have not demonstrated anything new; they have not brought any new measures from those presented by the Minister of Finance. It demonstrates that the rumblings they are making is like a barrel that is empty; they have nothing to offer. It seems to me that the political Opposition in this Parliament is not interested in consultation. They want to prepare the National Budget but let me remind them that it is the responsibility of the Executive to prepare the National Budget and the Executive is on this side of the House.

In Region 6 we have seen tremendous success and progress in every facet of our lives. In housing for example, more than 10,500 Berbicians, Guyanese, are able to acquire their own home in the 14 housing schemes and 24 squatter settlements across Region 6 – sugar workers, nurses, policemen, market vendors, and hire care drivers were able to acquire their own homes under the PPP/Civic Government. The Ministry of Housing, under the dynamic leadership of Hon. Irfaan Ali, young progressive man, in 2013 \$1.4 billion was spent for infrastructure rehabilitation of streets, laying of pipe lines, drains, and in areas such as Kilcoy, Chesney, No. 76 and No.77 Housing Schemes; Bloomfield, Tain, No. 79; some 13,530 residents benefitted under that infrastructure development.

In 2014, the Ministry of Housing will spend \$310 million in areas such as Bloomfield, No. 77, Cumberland, Adelphi, Williamsburg; another 14,350 residents will benefit. That is progress under the PPP/C Government. What did we see under the People's National congress (PNC)? Nothing; absolutely nothing under the PNC.

The Hon. Mister of finance Dr. Ashni Singh has presented the 8th consecutive budget, and every single year we have seen a sustained or increased growth in our economy. What do we see... well the Hon. Carl Greenidge is not there so I will not mention anything; it is unfair. Housing has seen tremendous success in Region 6.

Mr. Speaker, whether you permit the Hon. Minister of Education to speak or not that is your right as Speaker of this National Assembly but that will not prevent the success story of education in our country. Government has recognised the importance of education unlike the PNC Government in the past. The importance of growth and the development in our country over the years has seen increased budgetary allocation in the education system. Living by a

mission to realise equity and increased access to quality education the Department of Education implemented a three-pronged approach to management this year. Heavy emphasis was placed in health service training of teachers of all levels; supervision of instruction programmes; monitoring of resources utilisation for efficient school management and curriculum delivery, and greater effectiveness in the education system.

For the performance of our students at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) level in 2013 the percentage in Region 6 was 80.3%; in 2013 it is 81.93%, a total of 11,452 students wrote the CSEC examination.

9.35 p.m.

Out of the 2,305 students who wrote the National Grade Six Examination, 93% were awarded secondary school places in Region 6. That is what the education sector is doing in Region 6.

All of our secondary schools in Region 6 and more than 40% of our primary schools are equipped with Information Technology (IT) Labs. The 1500 teachers of Region 6 should be commended. I, as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Region 6, would like to take this opportunity to commend the 1500 teachers of Region 6 who have done a significant job over the years and we recognise their contribution towards the education sector.

The Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya, in his presentation said that he has not seen any sports ground rehabilitated in Region 6. Just a stone throw away from him, the Whim Sports Club, in your backyard Hon. Member, they have new fence, land filling, rehabilitation of the pavilion and a new pitch was laid. *[Interruption]*

Burnham Park in New Amsterdam – a new pavilion, washroom facilities; Bermine Cricket Ground on the East Bank of Berbice – new pavilion; Young Warriors Cricketer Club. Thirty nine grounds were rehabilitated across Region 6 at a cost of \$68.9 million. That is what this Government is doing to ensure that our young people use their energies in an efficient way, by involving sporting activities. The Hon. Minister of Sport spoke about lighting at the Albion Sport Complex, where we can play football and cricket at nights. That is what we are doing for the young people of Region 6.

The Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya also mentioned that he has no confidence in the Minister of Home Affairs. Let me say this Dr. Ramayya, whether you have confidence in the Minister or not, it is your business. The people of Guyana have absolute confidence in Minister Rohee; the leadership of the People's Progressive Party has confidence in Minister Rohee; the Cabinet of Guyana has confidence in Minister Rohee; and the President of Guyana has confidence in Minister Rohee.

Let me say this also, it was the personal intervention of the Hon. Member Clement Rohee, Minister of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Home Affairs that has changed the lives of 500 young people in Berbice, in a area such as Angoy's Avenue, Gibraltar - Fryrish, Glasgow - Edinburg, *[Inaudible]* Port Mourant, who were given a second chance in life by being given skilled training programmes in carpentry, masonry, computer science and hairdressing. That is what Minister Rohee has done.

Only a few days ago I had the opportunity to visit some of these young people. A young woman who benefitted from this programme used to be selling cakes on a donkey cart. Today, she has a parlour and she employs seven persons. That is progress. A young woman in Angoy's Avenue who was trained as a hair dresser, today she has a salon and she is training 15 people. A young man who was trained as a mason in Gibraltar and another young man who was trained as a carpenter in Fryrish have come together and employed seven persons building furniture. That is progress and that is the difference Minister Rohee has made in the lives of the young people.

The Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya spoke about sugar. First of all let us examine what you are saying Dr. Ramayya, Hon. Member and what your leader, the Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan is saying. We recall the statement was made by the former, whether it is PNC or APNU, Member of Parliament; it is difficult to understand, Anthony Vieira, who called for the closure of the sugar industry – “Stop growing cane and mind tilapia.” The very day the Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan said he supported that closure of the sugar industry. Khemraj Ramjattan, the Hon. Member said that; the closure of the industry, you supported that. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Okay Members, let us get through this final speech.

Mr. Jafarally: During the 2013 Debates, the Hon. Member Carl Greenidge said that, “The sugar workers is *ayo* business.” Mr. Speaker, we have no apology; we in the PPP/C have no apology.

The sugar workers concern will always be the concern of the PPP/Civic Government. We are concern about their welfare and the well-being and we will continue to be concerned about them. We heard about plan to close the sugar industry if ever the APNU comes to office, but that will never happen. The people of Guyana will never...

Mr. Speaker: One second. Mr. Jafarally, can you wait a minute? Hon. Members there is equal noise coming from both sides. I think in fairness to the Member...

Hon. Member: We can hear him.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, if you can hear him and you all like what is happening. Hon. Member please proceed, you have about seven minutes more to conclude.

Mr. Jafarally: Yes Mr. Speaker. We heard about plans to close the sugar industry if the Opposition should ever gain the range of powers. But the people of Guyana would never allow that, so the sugar workers can feel secure that the PPP will remain in Government and their jobs will be secure because the PPP/C Government is concerned about their welfare.

Drainage and irrigation – we have seen through the Minister of Agriculture and the National Drainage and Irrigation Board, the installation of three brand new pumps at Black Bush Polder, New Forest and Rose Hall. Some 30,000 residents will benefit from the operation of those three pumps. In addition, we were able to acquire 12 mini excavators to work in the residential area across Region 6. My good friend Dr. Ramayya is worried because when it rains water is no longer accumulated on the land, so he has nothing to go on television to talk about. He is worried –my good friend. We have seen immense growth and development in our country.

[Interruption]

The Hon. Member Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon, during the Budget Presentation did not know where Belvidere was. Could you imagine that? **[Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: [Inaudible]** Hon. Member you said that, but let me remind you ... **[Interruption]** Belvidere is about 11 miles from New Amsterdam and 90% of the workers there are employed by the Guyana Sugar Corporation. Let me remind you where is Benab. Benab is a community at Number 63 Village. I am certain when I called the area Number 63 Village a lot of the Members of the Opposition are already shaking because that is a area that is predominantly a rice producing area. It was in that

community the lives of two young men was stuffed out in 1973, protecting their right to vote and their vote to count at the place of poll. The Guyanese people know very well whose hands are stained with the blood. All the Guyanese know the role the army played.

Mr. Speaker: One second please, Mr. Jafarally. That was a justice of the High Court, a Commission of inquiry was conducted, it was attended to, it made a ruling, it made report and so I ask that you withdraw that statement. It is also to be stricken from the records.

Mr. Jafarally: Very well, Sir. Mr. Speaker, the point I am trying to make...

Mr. Speaker: You can make your point in other words; make your point, but just change your words.

Mr. Jafarally: Mr. Speaker, the point I am trying to make is that he made his ruling and those who were involved are happy to say, "It was not me." But when there was the Commission of Inquiry into the Linden shooting with eminent Caribbean jurists who said the Hon. Member Clement Rohee was cleared of any wrong doing – he was not there – they could not have accepted it. Mr. Speaker that is the point I want to make. Yet, another Commission of Inquiry is coming up looking into the assassination of this great Guyanese Dr. Walter Rodney. Then we start hearing I am not taking part – the APNU – and their sidekicks the Alliance for Change (AFC) saying, "We are not taking part." The Guyanese people have a right to know who were responsible for the assassination of Dr. Walter Rodney. What are we afraid of? Let us go before the Commissioner of Inquiry. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Jafarally, two minutes to wind up please. Thank you. One second, Mr. Jafarally. I recognise Mr. T. Williams.

Mr. T. Williams: Mr. Speaker, what does the AFC has to do with Dr. Rodney's assassination?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order Mr. T. Williams. Go ahead please, Mr. Jafarally.

Mr. Jafarally: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Ramayya, the Hon. Member spoke about the crime, but Mr. Speaker, I ask the Hon. Member to take a closer look. Who were associated with the "fine man" gang? Who? *[Interruption]* I did not call any names.

Let Dr. Ramayya tell us defended the criminals that killed the people at Lusignan. Those are the things the Guyanese people want to know.

Mr. Speaker: One minute to wrap up and conclude, Mr. Jafarally. *[Interruption]*

Ms. Teixeira: I have noticed today and in the last two days that when the Opposition persons are speaking, the majority are given some accord. That is not happening with the Government speakers on a number of occasions. Once Government members seemed to be stepping on some people's corns, it becomes a big noise arrangement. Mr. Speaker, I am asking, can you please protect some of the Government speakers, particularly, our young backbenchers who are making their points, as some Members may be unhappy with them, but nevertheless we have to listen to each other.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Jafarally, you have one minute to conclude your presentation.

Mr. Jafarally: Mr. Speaker, this PPP Government has brought Guyana to the point where there is absolute; freedom to speak when you want it Dr. Ramayya and how you want; freedom even to come to Parliament and pander to the whims of the naysayers. In exercising this freedom, we need to be guided by our conscious and should do so with what is accurate and what is right.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to part of the 2014 Budget Presentation by the honourable and distinguish Minister of Finance, Budget 2014 seeks to continue the work of this PPP/Civic Government to build a more modern and prosperous Guyana. It seeks to promote both the creation of employment and business opportunity. We do not deny the business community to come and be heard in Parliament, like when they were denied when they were trying to come through the Hon. Member Manzoor Nadir and they were prevented by the Opposition. We encourage the business community.

We seek to expand our physical infrastructure and improve linkages with our neighbours. We seek to improve the quality of life, the social service and address the concerns of our citizens and about the cleanliness of our physical surroundings. It seeks to further improve the competitiveness of our business environment and strengthen our institution.

I call on my Colleagues on the Opposition side of this House; let your conscious be your guide. Do not attempt to cut the budget because doomsday is going to befall you.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Okay Hon. Members, I have always held the view that the Regional Members of Parliament give us the most illustrious presentations. We have come to the end of our business for today. Before we adjourn, I was given a wrist band or bracelet that someone may have dropped. It has a prominent pink in it. There are two persons wearing pink in the House, one of whom may step forward to claim it. No name no warrant. Hon. Prime Minister you may.

Mr. Hinds: Yes Mr. Speaker, I propose that the House be adjourned unto tomorrow at 2 O'clock.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs or Mr. Bond, you may claim the bracelet at the back. Thank you very much.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.52 p.m.