

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

77TH Sitting

Monday, 7TH April, 2014

The Assembly convened at 2.03 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just a few short announcements.

Adjournment of the Sitting on 4th April, 2014

Mr. Speaker: I would like to make some comments about the manner in which we ended last Friday evening. I would just like to say that my allowing the Hon. Minister, Ms. Priya Manickchand, to speak was as a result of a contact meeting held between A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) representatives in my office on Wednesday last at which Ms. Manickchand was also present. It was believed and, perhaps, mistakenly so, that at that meeting we arrived at an understanding which included the statement made by Ms. Manickchand at the commencement of last Wednesday's Sitting as well.

The events which followed continued to cause not only me but all of us, I am sure, some pain and anguish as it was never envisaged that the actions which followed, including, of course, the resignation of our dear Member, Mr. Jaipaul Sharma, would have occurred. I am firmly of the belief that notwithstanding all that has transpired, within the parties exist more than an ample

share of decency and sense of responsibility to do what is right, just and necessary in all of the circumstances.

Resignation of Hon. Member Mr. Jaipaul Sharma

Mr. Speaker: With that said, I formally wish to announce that, as stated before, I have received from Mr. Jaipaul Sharma a letter dated 3rd April, 2014, resigning his seat as a Member of Parliament (MP) with effect from that date. With Mr. Sharma's resignation, a seat in the National Assembly has become vacant and I hereby formally declare his seat as vacant. The vacancy is in accordance with section 99 (a) of the Representation of the People Act Chapter 1:03 to be filled by a person whose name is to be extracted from the list of candidates from which Mr. Sharma's name was previously extracted. As Mr. Sharma's name was extracted from A Partnership for National Unity's list of candidates, I have in accordance with section 99 (a) of the said Act called upon a representative of that list to further extract from that list the name of a person who is willing to become a Member of the National Assembly to fill the vacancy in the Assembly.

Designated smoking area

Mr. Speaker: I have received several concerns, Hon. Members, about both Members of the House and members of the public, who come to listen to debates, smoking. There is a designated smoking area to the west of the corridor and we ask you to do that down to the west because those who are non-smokers are being affected.

Visit by Students and Teachers of the Camille's Institute for Business and Science Studies

Mr. Speaker: It is with pleasure I announce that in our presence this afternoon are 25 students and three teachers from the Camille's Institute for Business and Science Studies. I would ask them to stand so that they could be properly recognised by us. Thank you very much for coming.
[Applause]

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Opposition's Disruption of Ms. Manickchand's Address to the House

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I want to express on behalf of the Government side our surprise and astonishment on

the developments of last Friday when our Hon. Minister of Education rose to speak in her turn nearing the end of the day.

The Members of APNU repeatedly drowned our Minister out by striking their tables and the Members of the Alliance For Change (AFC) seemed to be going and coming, absenting themselves and then returning whenever it seemed that we were about to proceed with our business.

Mr. Speaker, we would recall that whilst at the moment on Tuesday you declared that you would not recognise the Hon. Minister for the duration of the budget, there was subsequently a meeting in your office the following day, to which you have just referred, at which the Hon. Member, Joseph Harmon, was present, and at which a set of words were drawn up for Hon. Member Priya Manickchand to say in recompense...

Lt Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know that it is unusual for that to happen, but I want to ensure that the Hon. Prime Minister does not go down that road. We did not have any agreed set of words in the meeting which was held in your office. This is something that has been repeated over and over during the entire weekend.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would give you an opportunity to speak after the Prime Minister has spoken so that the Prime Minister may make his statement uninterrupted and you would have a full opportunity to respond thereafter, if necessary.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Hinds: A set of words were drawn up for Hon. Priya Manickchand to say, which she honourably and dutifully did, when so indicated by you at the start of our ordinary business on Wednesday afternoon. On Thursday, you made a ruling at the start of business. The matter was finished; it was closed. We proceeded with our business on both Wednesday and Thursday with the clear understanding that the matter had been settled. So, the Government side was taken by surprise and truly astonished by the action of APNU and AFC last Friday. A settlement was reached, which the Hon. Minister of Education adhered to and complied with, a settlement which we all in this National Assembly should adhere to and comply with. I thank you.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to bring some clarity to this matter. Mr. Speaker, you would recall that on the day in question, Ms. Anna Ally, who is our Chief Whip, was not present and I was acting in that capacity for the first session of the Sitting of the National Assembly. As Speaker of the House, you called the Whips to your office in the presence of Hon. Minister Manickchand to deal with what you considered to be a way forward in this matter.

It would be recalled that there was a discussion on it and, at the end of that discussion, the decision was that there will be a form of words used by the Minister which will give the impression that she is issuing an apology to this National Assembly. I want to make it very clear that we did not sit there and agree on any form of words before the end of that meeting. Whatever form of words was used was done after the meeting and I suppose it was given to the Hon. Minister to read and, in fact, she did speak it on the Floor of the National Assembly.

I want to make it very clear because it has been the subject of several press statements, the subject of debates and the subject of reports in the press over the weekend that we sat there and agreed on a form of words which the Minister would use and, therefore, we should not have acted separate and apart from what was said. I want to make it very clear. We did not agree to any specific form of words which the Minister would use and that it was at your invitation that we came to find a way forward in this matter and I trust we have actually found a way forward today. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you for your comments. Ms. Teixeira, do you wish to be recognised?

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Meeting held to Discuss Ms. Manickchand Addressing the House

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I want to speak under Personal Explanations. It is true that you invited us to your room. The words that Minister Manickchand used on Wednesday, 2nd April, 2014, were the following:

“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.”

The meeting took place in your office. We discussed the wording verbally. We discussed that the apology was not an issue because of what was actually said in the House and what the Minutes and Verbatim record showed. There was a lot of discussion. I do not want to go into it. Some rather very personal things were discussed in that meeting. However, at the end of it, the phrasing was repeated and the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, was asked three times by you – if I am lying, please correct me – “Do you find this acceptable?” The answer was “Yes”. “Do you find this acceptable?” The answer was “Yes”. “Do you find this acceptable?” The answer was “Yes”. This was the phrasing. Minister Manickchand said these words to us in the meeting and we found that it was acceptable. If the Hon. Member is having amnesia now or he is under pressure, he has my greatest sympathy, but this is what happened, Sir. Thank you.

Lt Col (Ret’d) Harmon: Sir, I do not wish to prolong this matter beyond its useful life, but I would just that it was clear that no form of words were written. There was discussion, as I said. In fact, there was even more than what the Hon. Member said discussed in there. There were matters which, of course, we would not want to repeat publicly were discussed. There were a lot of discussions but there was no clear direction with respect to what form of words the apology would take.

The issue of repeating once, twice and three times is unnecessary. It did not happen in that way. This is what I am saying. Mr. Speaker, you were the arbiter and I would basically regard or respect whatever your recollection of what took place is.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have allowed what is, obviously, an unorthodox and extraordinary discussion to take place because I believe the situation we face is an extraordinary one. I think it was Minister Benn who said last week that within this room we are supposed to have the best minds in the country. Of course, the citizenry, perhaps, feels otherwise. Certainly, we are entitled to believe that within the bosom of the National Assembly we have not just the intellect but the levels of duty, responsibility and patriotism and a high sense of what is right to be able to get past this hurdle. I, certainly, did have the impression that the words that were said by Minister Manickchand were acceptable.

What is important is not what necessarily I felt but if at the end of the day those words were not acceptable, I still believe that Minister Manickchand can find a set of words... *[Interruption]* Some Members may be offended by what I am saying, but I am still entitled to say what I am saying. I still believe that Minister Manickchand can find a set of words that can have this matter go away. We are also adults. We are all responsible persons and I do believe that it is within us to bring this to an end. With that said, I believe that I have discharged my duties, so to speak, but I believe it can be resolved quite easily.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

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.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we resume the debate on the Estimates and Budget for 2014. I invite the Hon. Minister, Ms. Priya Manickchand to address the House.

Members of the Opposition withdrew from the Chamber.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: May it please you, Your Honour. I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak this afternoon.

I wish to begin by congratulating the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh for presenting a budget to this nation that is holistic, that is comprehensive, that addresses, as far as our country's economy would allow us, the needs of almost every sector in this country. I recall a very experienced Mr. Komal Chand, Hon. Member, speaking of Dr. Ashni Singh presiding over this sector – the Ministry of Finance – for eight years and stating that he is the longest sitting Minister of Finance in this sector. I want to say congratulations for that too.

Dr. Singh sat, presided and managed the Ministry of Finance and the country's economy for eight years in a period when the world saw, for the last century, the worst financial crisis that has ever been experienced. In an atmosphere where persons were losing jobs, entire countries were crashing, economies were going down and citizens were losing their homes and their dignities, we, in Guyana, held our own and grew. We did not only hold our own; we grew. And for the last eight years, we have had consecutive growth in this country with last year seeing positive growth at 5.2%. The last time we saw this was sometime between 1964 and 1971. There was some growth between 1991 and 1997. Then, there came the interventions and consequences of the “slow fire” and “more fire” kind of destructive politics we see hampering our development and that stymied our growth. So, when we should have been able to boast in 1998 that we had eight years of consecutive growth, we could not. When growth is interrupted and progress is interrupted, a country takes a while before it can catch itself again. We saw this country, our dear land, catching itself, holding and sustaining that growth for the last eight years. To Dr. Singh, the Hon. Minister of Finance, we are proud of you. We are grateful to you for the efforts you have made over the years and we stand with you on this Budget that is going to see goodness brought to the people of Guyana.

A frontbencher on the Opposition side called the staff of the Ministry of Finance “tired” and said that they should go home. I think that was one of the most unfortunate things we heard in this

House for the duration of the budget debate. Professional staff can vote however they want but they should be allowed to work in peace without being targeted and their professionalism should be respected. Entire conferences are organised and arranged around this world to have more women involved in the budgetary process of states. Here in Guyana, we have a young, bright, hardworking, articulate person and she is a woman. She is Sonia Roopnauth. She is our Director of Budget. We should be proud as a nation that we have done what conferences are organised to call on nations to do. Regardless of which side of the House one sits on, that is a matter to celebrate. So, to the staff of the Ministry of Finance, we thank you. We thank you for your hard work; we thank you for the work you do tirelessly; we thank you for the weekends you give up so that you can serve us. We thank you for working on the holidays. On behalf of the people of Guyana –the many PPP/C supporters and the few Opposition supporters – I say to the Ministry staff, thank you. We are deeply grateful.

I spoke just now of the growth that Guyana has experienced. Growth does not come easily and it does not come by magic. There has to be careful stewardship. There has to be prudent management. There has to be a vision and a relentless pursuit of that vision to give Guyana what is good for Guyana and to treat Guyanese with love, with care and with affection, to hold the hands of the vulnerable and walk them through, to hold the hands of those who are not so vulnerable and help them build. This is the kind of stewardship and the kind of leadership we have seen come out of the Ministry of Finance, supported by a PPP/C Cabinet and PPP/C Government. That is the kind of vision, the desire to pursue that vision and relentless pursuit of that vision that has seen us as a people and nation celebrating eight years of consecutive growth.

For those who would stand up or sit and heckle and say, “well, I am not too sure if there was growth” without saying more, apart from that being extremely insipid, we have so much around us, Sir, by which we can measure this growth. We are planting the most hectares of rice we have ever planted. We are getting more production. We are getting more private sector involvement in the rice industry. We are seeing visibly more buildings going up, more homes being owned by our Guyanese people, more expansion in the gold sector. These are things that can visibly be seen even if one were not very good with numbers - and I am not. I am no expert on growth of economies, but these are things we can see. These are things we can visibly identify as to whether or not our country has grown.

When I speak to people I always say, “Look, things might not be great right now or they might not be where you want them to be, but is your life better than it was the last ten years? Do you have a home or are you renting somewhere as opposed to living with your parents? Do you have a job? Are your children accessing school? Are they doing better? Can you go to the supermarket and buy things that were once, first of all, banned and when they were not, too expensive for you to afford? Is your life better than it was five, ten and 20 years ago?” Those are ways we can measure growth tangibly. All around us is evidence of the growth that Minister Singh spoke about in his Budget Speech.

The theme of the Budget is *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*. It could not have been a more apt theme. How do we get this better Guyana for all Guyanese? We are living in a place and standing in a room where, whether we agree with each other or not, I would have great difficulty believing that people in the Opposition do not truly care about making Guyana a better place. I would have difficulty with believing that. I believe they want to make Guyana a better place. I believe that they now have a little bit of a gap to fill in making sure that desire matches their actions. That is a gap they would have to fill, but I would have difficulty standing here and saying that these people who work...we heard from Ms. Joan Baveghems who was the last person who spoke on Friday night. This is a woman who has given her life in service. She is a grass root woman who has given her life in service. People in this House claim they want to see a better Guyana but a better Guyana for all Guyanese has to begin with an understanding that all Guyanese means every single sector and every single Guyanese in this country. You cannot say that because most of the sugar workers did not vote for me, I will spite them by cutting the \$6 billion. They are Guyanese too and they are entitled to a better Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: One second, Minister. I do not think I have heard a single Member of the House say that during the debate.

Ms. Manickchand: I heard Mr. Ramjattan – I am sure he would be happy to clarify if he wants to come back into the House...

Mr. Speaker: I just thought that in their absence I should state that.

Ms. Manickchand: I did not tell him to be absent, Sir. He has said that he is cutting with his scissors hand the \$6 billion.

Mr. Speaker: You gave a reason. You said that the Member said that because the people are the sugar workers, he will cut. I have no doubt that statements have been made about cutting but the reason that you gave...

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, my constituents have suggested to me that they believe they are being discriminated against because they did not vote for the Opposition; they voted for the PPP/C and they believe they are being punished. Is that acceptable, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Very much.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you. A better Guyana for all Guyanese includes all Guyanese. We cannot say we love our children. We are not going to cut the amount for the education sector... We are going to hear that. We are not going to interfere with education. That is important for our children. They would not cut the education budget and they will give us in the Ministry of Education the ability to provide a meal for the children but they take away from their parents the ability to provide the further two meals that they need. The cut will take away the ability from their parents to provide a rent, clothes and other things children need to be able to grow and be whole and live their dreams. That is what is going to happen when they chop up this Budget.

If we are going to have a better Guyana for all Guyanese, then the phrase “all Guyanese” has to include the people who democratically exercised their right to choose a government. The days of stealing votes and days and ignoring the views and desires of people must be put behind us if we are to continue as a civilised democratic State.

I plead with the Opposition in all the deliberations in this House to put Guyana first and do what is right for Guyana. There will be opportunities, perhaps sooner than later, for the Opposition parties to go to the people of Guyana and persuade them that their policies and vision, if they have any, are better for Guyana and, maybe, the people of Guyana will put them on this side of the House, in which case they can pursue that. Until then, the Government has a responsibility to fulfil the promises that the PPP/C made in its manifesto and on the campaign trail and that is to bring goodness to all Guyanese.

If the People's National Congress' A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) is saying its theme was *A Good Life for All Guyanese*, then it can have no difficulty with a better Guyana for all Guyanese so this is the Budget to support.

There can be no sector better than the education sector that could demonstrate tangibly the growth over the years during which the PPP/C has been in office. There is absolutely no other sector. We know that last year 40% of the national Budget was allocated and spent in the social sector – education, housing, health, human services. It was spent on people, our people, and the people we love. That is the kind of allocation that went to the people of Guyana last year through the Budget. Some 15.9% of that alone was spent on educating our nation's children and giving them the highest quality of education we have been able to give so far, on providing meals, on helping their parents outfit them for school, on providing trained teachers to put in front of the classrooms, on providing textbooks and exercise books and the other things that are necessary for our children.

The PPP/C has the ideology, which has been evident in every single policy and every single budget from 1992 to now, that education is the one thing that will see us alleviate poverty surely. We can be sure that if we invest in our people through education, it will be an investment in Guyana. We have matched our commitment by tangible budgetary allocations.

2.33 p.m.

I would like to demonstrate for this honourable House and for you, Sir, the growth that we have had over the years.

In 1992, there was 5% of the national budget, a much smaller budget and I am not talking about a nominal value, was allocated towards education. Last year, I said that we spent 15.9% of our budget on education.

Let us talk about how results have come over the years. In 1990 – which is the overall pass rate with students getting five or more subjects, grades 1 to 2 and then later on 3 – we had 21% of the population passing generally at CXC. In 1995, with a commitment of the people of this country and the necessary allocation in the budget, we had seen a 9% increase and 29% of our children had passed, generally. By 2000, it had moved to 46%. By 2005, CSEC results moved to 60%. By

2010, it was 66%. I gave you a five-year growth. With money comes growth. Growth means our children are doing better. It means that our children are more prepared for the world tomorrow. It means that our children are more prepared not only to develop Guyana, but to contribute to this earth in different sectors wherever they may find themselves in this small global village we live in.

Mathematics: In 1990, we had 16.8% of the population passing. In 2000, it had moved, because we invested in the sector and in our people, to 24% and, by 2010, it moved to 34%. With investment comes growth. With our love for people comes their better preparation to meet the challenges of the world.

English: In 1990, we had 13.36% of our children passing. By 2000, it was 25.8% and, by 2010, it was 59.16% - growth. If one gives people goodness and invests in the people of this country, then one will see them and their children do better. Before one can invest, one has to have first a vision of where one wants to see Guyana go and then careful management, plotting and planning to get us there. We, on this side of the House, have shown that we are capable of doing that. We have shown how results have changed over the years.

We were talking about the impact of the Budget and impact, as Bishop Edghill said, it appears that the definition has been skewed to mean only if something bad is happening. But 'impact' means 'good'; there is positive growth. It does not mean only good. We would be the first on this side of the House to tell you that we are not happy with a 59% pass in English. We are not happy with that. We want to see 100% of our children that we enrol and we sign up for exams pass English and we will get there because we can. We can plan for it; we can strategise for it; and we will fund it.

If the population was wondering, it is we who can be trusted to take the nation's children forward. We have shown how we can do that. Every CSEC time, the Ministry of Education tells this nation what we have done in Mathematics and English. We tell the nation how unhappy we are with some of these grades. Do you know why we did not know that only 13% of our children were passing English in 1990? It was because we did not have that information. There was no transparency at that time.

We know last year that out of eight awards granted by the Caribbean Examinations Council, our Guyanese children, were given five; we won five. Which are the five we won? We won the best overall student. That person was Yogeeta Persaud from Anna Regina Multilateral. We won the best performer in sciences, Cecil Cox from Queen's College. We won the best performer in business education, Sasha Woodruff from Queen's College. We won the best performer in technical vocational education, Zimeena Rasheed from Essequibo. This student also wrote, for the first time in the history of this CARICOM Region, not the country, 20 subjects. She got 18 Grade 1s and two Grade 2s. We got the best performer in humanities, a young lady going to school in Region 3; her name is Ravina Mustapha.

From 2006, the only things that we did not get were the short story, the best performers in visual arts (two dimensional) and the best performer in visual arts (three dimensional) and we are going for it. We are going for it and we are going to get all eight of these awards before the next five years are over. From 2006 to 2013, except for 2010, Guyana has brought home, through our children, because of the investment we have been making in them, the best overall performer for the region - from 2006 to 2013 consecutively except for 2010!

When we talk about these things, what they mean could get lost in the numbers, in the applause, in the celebration of these children. When we could graduate from Anna Regina Multilateral over 90% of our children who attend there, graduate them as passing CSEC, we have just placed them in a position where they are competitive in this country and in this world. We have just made them better than their parents were. We have just prepared them to give their families better than they have had. We have just prepared them to help lead this country from now into the future. That is what happens when our children do well. To do anything to take away from the ability of our children to do well would be to rob this country and would be to rob those children themselves and their families of a good life. It would go against the very themes and promises that Opposition parties have been making towards people about having good lives and so on for all Guyana.

This Budget comes at a great time when we are just concluding our strategic plan. We are just finishing a five-year period where we saw, in most areas, we exceeded what we had projected. We have some work to do in some areas; we have recognised that. We have reviewed this very carefully and we know where we want to go for the next five years, so we are in the process of

collating what all of our stakeholders have said would be best for Guyana's children, best for Guyana as a country, and we will be publishing our strategic plan shortly. This Budget allows us to implement the first year of the strategic plan.

Some of the things we want to do is have 80% of teaches by the end of this planned period. We want to see at least 50% of our children reading at the Grade 4 level. We want to see universal secondary education achieved in Guyana. These are some of the things that we have planned so it is a great time, a good budget, a very relevant budget. Most people could not wait until the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, finished reading the Budget. We wanted to know what was in it and how much of year one we would be able to do.

We also are in the process of finalising the Education Bill which we will lay before this National Assembly shortly. The last Education Act was passed in 1876 and, as far as we have been able to discern, it was last amended in 1976 so, as one may be able to imagine, it does not meet the needs of modern 2014 Guyana. So we are in the process of finalising that. For the first time, we will have the pleasure also of reading the final draft along with regulations under the Bill that would guide the implementation of the Act. We also would be shortly laying or making effective regulations under the National Accreditation Council and that is something that we are working feverishly on right now.

Whatever I will tell you shortly about how we are going to achieve quality education in our country is based on consultations that we have frequently across this country. Whatever is contained in this Budget is as a result of frequent consultations with the people of Guyana, the people who matter. Even though there was a refusal by the AFC and the APNU to come to Dr. Ashni Singh to make their views known, to have their input in the Budget, our people, including the supporters of these two delinquent parties which did not turn up to these consultations, have said what they wanted in this Budget. *[Inaudible]* a week goes by without me and very senior officers in this Ministry going all over this country, talking to our students, our parents, our teachers, other stakeholders about what we want.

Presently, I see the CPCE Head/Principal, Ms. Viola Row, who was not here on Friday because she had to go to Berbice to conduct a consultation on the draft professional standards for teachers. Mr. Hudson, the Assistance Chief Education Officer (ACEO) Primary, was in Region 1

two days prior to that. We are out every day hearing from our teachers, our students and our parents what it is that they want. We have implemented a new policy that every time we are going to expand infrastructure, build new schools, we are going to go out, take all of our documents with us – all of the BOQs and the drawings and so on – have a community meeting with all who would come but specifically we invite Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs), staff, parents, students, religious groups, RDCs, NDCs and so on in the area and we describe what we are going to do and then we leave with them documents so that they could keep a close eye on what is happening in the schools so that we could get quality work because we recognise and we are very unhappy with the fact that sometimes we get shoddy work; that does not mean all contractors give us shoddy work, but we have been robbed; the country has been robbed a couple of times. We want to make sure that when we do things, we get value for money, and that is how we do it.

We are also going to launch, shortly, a website that is going to be interactive. It is going to have all our documents – policies, text books and past exam papers - and it is going to have a feature that would allow children to answer exam questions and then we send them an e-mail with what results they got and what was right and what was wrong: children from grades 1 to 6. We are working on secondary soon. There was also going to be a feature where every Thursday between 7.30 a.m. and 9.00 a.m., members of the public could chat with the Minister and senior officers in the Ministry on scheduled topics. We have a Facebook page that is very active.

These are all things that we have done to make sure that we can hear from the people we serve so that we can serve them better. These are things we have done to make sure that we can get our messages out, get our information out when we have information to get out.

It is very important, it is hugely important, that we tighten and fine tune our relationships, our partnerships with parents and with other stakeholders. We are absolutely sure that a student in our care will not have as much and will not be as much as they can be except there is parental or home involvement. For all of the children who have done well, we can trace it back to a good school system; sound investment in the education sector; and involvement of their families, not necessarily wealthy families, but families who stay up and work ‘foot to foot’, in common parlance, with their children, families who get up at night to make sure their children are eating, not necessarily fancy meals, but parents who are involved in their children’s lives.

We just did research which is limited because of the numbers. We have about 710 students who are now coming into nursery school, so they were not in the formal education system before. Some of them went to daycares, and we found that the things children should know at three years and six months, like basic shapes and numbers and recognising and being able to recite their ABCs and counting and basic biographical information – what is your name, where do you live, how old are you – only 32% of our children know this and that, for us, is a bit worrying. We believe that with partnership, if we could get parents to do the supportive work at home, we could better prepare our children. We know that at the Ministry of Education, we have to do two things:

1. Tell parents in a mass way what it is their children need to know; and
2. Tell them how it is they can use their natural environments, not buying charts and gadgets, to teach the things children need to learn.

For example, if one has to teach colours, the grass is green and the sky is blue, one does not have to buy a chart for that. Bring the red bucket. Here is mommy's orange dress. That is a responsibility we have at the Ministry of Education, but I use this opportunity to make a plea to parents of this country that going forward, even if they cannot read, even if they cannot write... I know parents spend their lives trying to make their children's lives better; good parents do that. Make a pledge today, parents, that, going forward, you are going to partner with the Ministry - listen to us, hear what we are saying and do the things that we are asking you to do - to make sure your children are best prepared.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will require an extension.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, this year, we want to get a couple of things right. How do we get the basics right? The Budget provides for us to be able to collaborate with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to provide adequate furniture for every single child in this country. The Budget is going to allow us. We have written our own nursery reader

and the Budget is going to allow us to print this and give it to every single child in nursery so that they could be better prepared.

This year's Budget will ensure that every child in the primary school system gets the very basic texts – Mathematics, English, Social Studies, Science. We have just written our own, led by Mr. Marcel Hudson, ACEO Primary, and our nursery readers was written by a team led by Ingrid Trotman, the Assistant Chief Education Officer Nursery and they are called the 'Roraima Readers'. The primary readers that we are writing now, we have to write because we cannot afford to buy books that are published. When we buy those books, we cannot give them to every child so we want to make sure that we, in Guyana, use our skill and expertise, which we have in abundance, to give our children the tools they need to make them prepared. We are presently writing our own readers from grades 1 to 6 and work books. They are going to be called 'Atlantic Readers'. This is a draft of where we are. We believe that this is going to be the envy of the Caribbean. They are closely aligned to international literacy standards and guidelines so working with this, perfecting this, mastering the work in here, would make sure that we have children who can read by the time they are in Grade 4.

This Budget is going to allow us, in secondary schools, to offer to every child Mathematics books, English books, text books in the single sciences and we are going to be able to continue to deliver, in a timely way, exercise books to all of our children. Every secondary school, by the end of 2014, will be equipped with a computer laboratory that would allow our children to learn online, learn through technology and to make them better prepared for the world that uses information technology now as a matter of necessity.

We will be improving how we address special education needs. Mrs. Volda Lawrence had said, during her presentation, that it was a group of persons that we were leaving behind. I am assuming - although I am probably wrong - that she was speaking about the nation leaving that group of persons behind and the Hon. Member did mention that we have the Blind Unit at St. Roses. Those students moved since the 2nd September and they have been in another far friendlier environment since then. It would be good if Members of this House, as a matter of being responsible, could inform themselves before they come in here and make statements.

Sir, we would be the first to tell you that we are not happy with the way the education sector has been catering for our students with special education needs. We are not happy with that and we are recognising that we are not doing what we are supposed to do and that we are not preparing our children with special education needs as best as we can and making them capable of reaching their maximum potential. We embarked on a consultation across this country which informed what we are going to do for the next five years. People have told us what they want. They want us to make sure we look at how we are preparing our teachers and so one of the things that is going to be done as a matter of priority over the next five years is to make sure all of the teachers coming out of the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) are prepared for integrating special education needs children into the classroom. We are going to be looking at making sure our buildings are friendlier and that we can prepare or that we can cater for children with disabilities that do not make them...visual and other disabilities that do not affect their ability to learn. We are committed and we are making sure that every new building we build complies with the Persons Living with Disability Act; that is, we have ramps and we have other toilet facilities and so on that are appropriate.

Teacher training: last year, we continued the upgrading programme in the hinterland communities in Regions 1, 8 and 9, permitting more persons to be eligible to access the Trained Teacher Certificate Programme. One hundred and fifty-nine teachers were certified as completed in 2013. For the first time, we did something that was painful for us but was very necessary and students in the CPCE who failed three or more subjects were asked to apply again to come back into the school. We also are designing, for the first time, a teacher appraisal document. Our teachers, our lecturers at CPCE - I believe there are 23 lectures between CPCE and UG - are doing Masters and PhDs so that they can be better prepared to train our teachers.

I heard Mrs. Volda Lawrence, I think it was, who said that teachers are leaving in hundreds and droves. That is not according to our record - again misinformed. In fact, we have a different problem. Our problem is that our teachers are now returning - I would not say in hundreds and droves because I want to be honest - when they broke their contracts so we now have a problem. These teachers broke their contracts and went away. The policy is, when one comes back, one has to pay off what one owes before one starts, but we want them. These are Guyanese; we do not want to put them out. So we are trying to work out how we could get around the breaking of

the contracts, but we do not have a record of teachers migrating in droves or hundreds or whatever other ill-informed message was sent to us.

We intend to, in this year's Budget, achieve universal secondary education in many regions. That is that every child of secondary age could access a general secondary education. We will be limited because of our geography. I believe that it was the Hon. Member, Mr. Sydney Allicock, who said that children do not want to go to the dorms so we have to put down high schools in every village. I would advise him to get information from Ms. Ally and other people who understand that we cannot build a school in every village. Assuming that we were to find oil and we had all the money in the world, it still would not be in the best interest of those children. What this year's Budget will allow us to do is to achieve universal secondary education in Region 5... Let us go through the regions:

Region 1: we have some transportation, boats and engines, because sometimes it is not about building a school but it is getting children to the school that is already built.

Region 2: we pretty much already have universal secondary education. We need about eight classrooms.

Region 3: we are building back the Zeeburg Secondary School which will accommodate the students from Zeeburg Secondary and St. John's Secondary Schools, and we intend to build a thousand-person secondary school at Parfait Harmony.

Region 4: we are building a secondary school at Soesdyke and one at Lusignan to take off the children who are in Primary Tops because that is not the most conducive learning place for them.

Region 5: we are extending the Mahaicony Secondary School and doing some other things across the region that would see Region 5, this year, having universal secondary education.

Region 6: there is some construction work going on at Tutorial Academy and some other places that would see, except for some transportation needs, Region 6 having universal secondary education.

Region 7 needs another school. We need to build a secondary school somewhere up the Mazaruni River. There is talk about whether it should be Jawalla or whether we should expand

Waramadong. We are looking at it. Because of where that school is, it is going to cost our country somewhere about \$600 million or \$700 million so that is not something that we are doing this year. We are looking at how best we can do that, but we know that those children need another school and we commit, in this Government, to building that other school.

Region 8: we are expanding the Mahdia Secondary School. Region 8 would almost have universal secondary education after that. Kato Secondary School is being built and will be completed this year or next year.

Region 9: we have some work to do on schools like St. Ignatius and that will begin shortly.

Region 10: we have pretty much achieved universal secondary education.

This year, we will be able to, with the allocations in the Budget, bring in many of the regions and be able to better prepare our children for Guyana tomorrow.

The University of Guyana is where our children attend to get their tertiary education. There are many courses that are being written there, many students who are being prepared there. In fact, I would like to think that many of us in this House, at some point, attended the University of Guyana and we offer quality service in our various fields. There is an important project, the US\$10 million project, that is happening right now that is seeing the reform of 15 curricula and 14 buildings being refurbished completely. We also have – which, for me, is extremely exciting – a grant that we are giving to lecturers, academic staff, that would see 40 different types of research done that directly contribute to our Low Carbon Development Strategy. One of them being done right now is the relationship between corila and cancer. In fact, I can say specifically that the effects of *Momordica Charantia*, which is corila, on secondary and primary cancer cell lines... This is something that could benefit the world. This is what we are doing at the University of Guyana presently – cutting edge research.

We are also doing four feasibility studies which are expected to be completed, and I think that this is what is important for the nation. We will be looking at the human resources management and then we are doing a feasibility study and this, for me, is exciting and it is for the establishment of a centre for excellence for the study of biodiversity and that would be a centre that would serve the planet, the people of this world, so I am looking forward to that.

Another very important area that we will begin looking at this year, and the Budget is funding it, is a Hinterland Education Improvement Project. We are at the best place in the hinterland regions than we have ever been before. Over the last five years alone, we have created 400 new places for students in dormitories and that is allowing 400 new students every single year to access an education that they would not have been able to access before. We do know, though, that while we are at the best place we have ever been, we can do better in certain areas. What are we doing?

3.03 p.m.

We are studying with the people of the hinterland. We will be going village to village talking to parents, teachers and students about the gaps; you have a school but does your school have trained teachers. If the answer is no, do we have housing to put trained teachers in. If the answer is no then how do we build the house? Do you have text books? Do you have exercise books? Is your school feeding working? Do you have space in the dormitories to accommodate the students coming from far flung areas? We will begin that shortly. It will be implemented as soon as we have completed that study. It will make for great headline for us to say we are ready right now because we have a significant portion of the information we need, but it would be undemocratic if we did not hear first from the people of those villages as to what they would want to see happen too. That is going to begin shortly.

Essentially, this Budget allows us in the National Assembly, gives us an opportunity, to treat Guyanese well. It gives us an opportunity to help prepare Guyana's tomorrow today. It gives us an opportunity as a House, not as the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) because we will do it alone if we have to, but we really do want the support of the Opposition as parties because their people, their supporters, would expect they would do what is right for their children. So while we would do it alone if we have to, as we have been doing for the last twenty years, we would really appreciate the support of the Members of the Opposition. And I say here without reservation, that I can never know all that Hon. Member Anna Ally knows, she has been a Head Teacher for many years, she has experience that I do not have, and I want to hear from her. But wanting to hear from her is a contribution to what the Government programme is; it cannot be to take over the Government. I would like to hear from other teachers and parents in the Opposition and that is why when the Opposition as leaders do not work with us we work with their constituents anyway because we want to hear from them.

Nelson Mandela said...

Mr. Speaker: You have five minutes to wrap up please, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: Nelson Mandela, a wise man, said that education is the most powerful weapon in which you can change the world. And Malcolm X, another very wise man, said that education is our passport to the future for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today. These are two people who are world renowned and whose wisdom no sensible person would question. These are people clearly telling us if you want to prepare a country tomorrow for next year or the next twenty years invest in education. These are people who are telling us clearly that the most powerful weapon to change this Guyana would be education. And here is a Government that understands that and invests its money most in the sector of education. Our philosophy and ideology in the PPP/Civic matches wisdom of the world, yet you hear from no lesser a person than the Opposition Leader, Retired Brigadier Granger, that this Budget has nothing. It has to mean that the Opposition is incapable of seeing how important education is to the Nation. So I commit these quotations to these Members so they can understand the fact that we have continuously invested in education means that we are preparing Guyana for twenty years down the line. The fact that we have continuously invested education means that we want to change Guyana from the place it is to the place we would like to see it be; higher up. It is because we have invested in education that we have moved from a low income developing country which could get aid from all over to a medium income country. So we in the PPP/Civic understand how important education is. The failure of the Opposition to understand how important this huge allocation is really speaks to their lack of vision. And I ask them to come on board with us.

I am the geographical Member of Parliament for Region 5 and would like to tell you briefly in my three minutes remaining. Region 5 is a rice farming and cattle farming community. As the daughter of a rice farmer I can tell you the life of a rice farmer is not easy. If it is not a paddy bug one day it is a drought, or it is heavy rainfall, or bad irrigation, or being below sea level and that is why we have bad irrigation. It is a hard life but these are people who last year alone contributed \$28 billion to the economy. These are people we must say thank you to. These are people whose families we must support and celebrate. So this thing of how we will take away

\$500 million and that there is no giving with a pleased heart of the \$500 million is really spiteful and selfish. These are the people who are keeping this country.

Region 5 is also the region which rears the largest amount of cattle in the Caribbean. So we celebrate the cattle farmers of Region 5 too, as well as cattle farmers across this country. Mr. Speaker he is not here, he got away, but I wanted to pass a message on publicly to Mr. Greenidge. The people had a meeting at Cotton Tree last two weeks Thursday. The sugar workers asked me if I can tell him they want to see him. They want him to tell them that he is not going to support the sugar industry, their lives and their children's livelihood, and not hide behind a camera when he is saying it. I am just the messenger, Sir. They asked me to deliver that message to Mr. Greenidge. So they will hear me deliver it publicly.

Because we have farmers we want to support in Region 5, and because we have so much of our economy benefitting, the whole country benefitting from Region 5, there is a significant amount of resources plugged into this year's Budget to support those farmers and their families. There is going to be major rehabilitation to the Burma Branch Road at the cost of almost \$15 million. Burma Sir, you would know, really is a farm to market road for residents. More than 3,000 residents and farmers would benefit from the rehabilitation of this road. There is going to be construction of the street of East Side Line Dam at D'Edward, at the cost of almost \$10 million.

We are going to be upgrading the street from Main Road to Fourth Cross Street at Bush Lot at the cost of almost \$4 million. This would benefit about 1,500 residents. There is going to be rehabilitation of the Sideline Dam at New Scheme, Bush Lot that will benefit more than 1,000 residents at a cost of almost \$8 million. There is going to be the construction of a structure at Blairmont, No. 1 settlement, at the cost of \$3 million and a structure at the D'Edward, West Bank Demerara where about 150 residents and fishermen will benefit at the cost of almost \$2 million.

There is going to be the construction of a timber bridge also at Bush Lot. There is going to be the rehabilitation of streets in the areas of Experiment, West Coast Berbice, at more than \$5 million; Hope, West Coat Berbice at more than \$3.3 million; and Waterloo, West Coast Berbice, at \$3.4 million. There is going to be general rehabilitation to the Cococabana Street, Belladrum, at \$4 million; Middle Walk, Bath Settlement, at \$2 million; and Paris Street, Bel Air, at \$4.4 million.

\$there is going to be general rehabilitation to the timber bridge at Good Faith Mahaicony at more than \$4.3 million. And like I said this year Region 5 is going to have the extension of the Fort Wellington Secondary School. We are going to see the provision of a bus. We are going to see Region 5 achieving universal secondary education except for some transportation needs.

Mr. Speaker: Please wrap up Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: I am wrapping up. We know in the Ministry of Education that while we are at the best place we have ever been we are not happy with where we are. We promise you, Sir, and we promised the people of this Nation, that we will work every day, very hard, tirelessly, to fulfil our commitment to Guyana, that we will deliver to your children what is best for them. We require the partnership of parents and, indeed, of everybody in this National Assembly and all stakeholders in this Nation. So in this examination of where we are now and where we want to be there will be as some, as Dr. Luncheon calls “unfrocking”. We will have to undress ourselves, check to see where we are and then get clothed again and get back on the road. We have no problem with that self appraisal; we have no problems with checking to see where we are, because we know in the PPP/Civic that education is the best place it has been in the history of this country.

I thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Members I invite Ms. Amna Ally, shadow Minister of Education to give here presentation to the House. Ms. Ally, allow the House to settle down.

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members of this House I rise to make my contribution on this highly politicised document referred to as the Budget. I see that this document is crafted under the theme “*A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*”. For a moment I was considering what action the APNU might take for acute plagiarism but we allow it to pass. Listening, reading and assessing Budget Speech of 2014 by Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, one cannot help but describe it as a repair and maintenance schedule for it is not a developmental plan nor is it something to aid solving problems for the masses but only for some. You see Mr. Speaker the Government comes to this House and shouts about largest budget ever, over \$200 billion, but the greatest

worry is despite the larger input we are not getting value for money. In some cases we cannot see where the money is going and the sufferers are only the nation's children.

Budget 2014 is a spend-and-hope Budget. There is no certainty about the effectiveness of the education programme. This is evident having looked at what was supposed to have been done in 2013 and its preceding years. We hope the Government can get serious. I shall elaborate on the various aspects as I proceed with my presentation. A lot of money is spent on infrastructure in this Ministry, yet the outcome and outlook is dismal. I will come to that later on. If we were to do an assessment of what we got from the large sum that was budgeted in the 2013 Budget we will see that the real beneficiaries are not the Nation's children. *[Interruption]* You are talking about a few I am talking about the masses.

The Education Sector

Page 38 paragraph 4.70 of the Budget Speech speaks to the new Education Strategic Plan for 2014-2018. Strategic plans are nothing new, so do not let it sound like an innovation Mdm. Minister. It is the outcome from what you put in. Let me ask two questions on enriching our young people. One, with the establishment of technical schools in Regions 3 and 5, for example, why have they not been adequately staffed and programmes worked out. Development in education is not to provide buildings alone. Your programmes and resources must complement each other so that you can measure your input. To come to this Hon. House and speak of a few achievements is not good enough Mdm. Minister. Second, of what benefit is graduating from the Tech Voc schools in the world of work? The students of Leonora School for example are getting the royal run round to get their certificates after they graduate. When we look at the programme performance statements for education delivery on page 208 of Volume 2 under Impacts it says, I quote:

“Ensure that the education system within the region produce human resources with the appropriate knowledge skills and attitudes to meet their own personal development and the social, economic and technological needs.”

Oh, Mr. Speaker, words with no reality. How appropriate has that training been to the graduates? Did it actually satisfy our hospitality industries? A careful look must be taken, an analysis done and corrective action must be taken.

Infrastructure of Schools

Today in this Hon. House there can be no vacillation by any Minister. Today no Minister can say I am dealing with policy and it is somebody else's job to deal with infrastructure. Again, on page 38 paragraph 4.71, the Hon. Minister of Finance wrote and I quote:

“A sum of \$2.7 billion was spent on the infrastructure of schools and other facilities.”

In 2014, \$2.9 billion is allocated for this purpose. Sir, what did we get in 2013? In 2013 we had the pupils of Santa Rosa Primary, for example, fetching water for daily use, cleaning school and spending a lot of time out of the formal learning situation. We had fetching wood in Kato and spending a lot of time out of the formal learning situation.

In Region 8 over \$438 million was budgeted for education for 2013 and Chenapau, Tuseneng among other schools do not have proper furniture. The teachers' quarters have two VSOs from the United Kingdom but who do not have any furniture; the toilet and bathroom are not working. We are dealing with infrastructure of these schools. There is no light because they do not have batteries; the solar is dysfunctional. Can somebody tell me what has happened to the \$438 million for education in Region 8? Sir, Ministers Manickchand, Whittaker and former Minister Ganga Persaud must tell us where the money has gone. Can this PPP/C Government tell me whether discrimination is at work? Can this Government tell this National Assembly whether it is because Region 8 is under the political leadership of the AFC that they are stifling the people of that Region?

Well, I have news for the PPP/C they will not get back the leadership of Region 8, rather they have more to lose than to gain. We have the children of the North West Secondary School all over the place for extended periods as their secondary school should have been completed within a given timeframe. Hence children are spending a lot of time outside of the formal education system. A few days ago an officer of the Central Ministry was rushed in from Georgetown to Mabaruma to settle issues of electricity before the Budget, to get the school board of the school and to get the children to go into the building. But I hope than an accurate report has come back because the board has rejected it. They are demanding proper completion before the children can occupy the school. We had protest action in Port Kaituma for non-functional toilet facilities, and hence children were out of their classrooms for long periods.

There is total neglect of the Liberty Primary School in the Pomeroon River causing non-delivery of education for long periods. Education in the Lower Pomeroon is totally neglected. Why should this be so? How do we expect the children in those communities to perform well in the education sector when their school time is utilised doing chores? I do not wish on to chronicle more examples from other regions but to tell the Government that the \$2.7 billion you took to do the very projects you named in 2013, some of which I named a few moments ago, the moneys apparently went into thin air, or further I say not. As the lawyers would say, I rest my case.

In 2014 you asked for more. We do not know if it will suffer the same faith, but I believe so. But the underlying fact is how does the Government intend to ensure equal access to quality education? Equal access, I repeat, to quality education for all children and young people of the region when it is normal for this Government to neglect and not monitor certain communities. I listened to the Hon. Minister a short while ago outlining projects in Region 5. I come from Region 5, from a village called D'Edward, next door to Cotton Tree Hon. Minister, and if you hear yourself naming those areas in which developmental works will be taken care of, it is a ratio of ten to one. I believe that the Hon. Minister should examine those areas and see how well this Government is doing with discrimination.

Universal Secondary Education

The initiative of achieving universal secondary education is a welcoming one. Giving a political commentary on universal secondary education is not achieving it. The programme must be minutely worked out and monitored. This is not only about buildings, Mdm. Minister, but also about what we put in the buildings. What resources do we make for these secondary schools to be functional? Mr. Speaker, Hon. Juan Edghill, my good friend, says this Government has achieved 100% universal secondary education. Well if that is not laughable what is. Take IT labs, for example, being spoken about. How useful will it be to have these labs and no teachers? When I speak I like to give references. Who will not welcome IT labs? The Opposition certainly welcomes IT labs. Who will not welcome being computer literate?

3.33 p.m.

Who would not welcome advanced technology? But we of the APNU cannot sit idly by and allow the incompetencies of this Government to prevail.

Right across in Region 3, at the Parika Salem Secondary School, the IT Lab is not functional. I would only give a few examples, right across in Region 3 and here we are not going far in the interior you know, at Patentia, the computers for the IT Lab have been declared obsolete. There is defective electricity. How could the obsolete computers and defective electricity make the IT labs functional? A Partnership for National Unity demands functional computers... [Ms. **Teixeira:** A solution?] You are in Government, you find it. ...and the services therewith, to be useful, especially when hard earned cash is involved.

The Budget says that in 2014 they will train 2,500 teachers. I ask the questions, where and what are the numbers for each entity? Sir, this is not about plucking figures out of thin air, but one must work towards achieving their objectives. The end results matter. We spend and we must achieve, and the beneficiaries must be the Nation's children.

I now turn to Tertiary Education. At page 40, paragraph 4.76, the Hon. Minister wrote that \$1.4 billion is allocated towards the operation of both university campuses. Mr. Speaker, is that not ridiculous? The University of Guyana cannot pay their electricity bills; they do not have proper chalk boards, they have poor toilet facilities and inadequate furniture. [Ms. **Teixeira:** Amaila.] You will open a university at Amaila. What a shame, in our only major tertiary facility in the capital, the Government cannot provide proper facilities, but finds the money to spend on unimportant projects Mdm. Teixeira, Hon. Member.

The 2013 Budget gave an allocation of \$1.7 billion for the University of Guyana and a river of woes flooded that institution. Sir, now the 2014 Budget further reduced it to \$1.4 billion. It behoves me to question; why this Government wants to stifle our young people? We saw a glaring example of what happened to the Critchlow Labour College. As a matter of fact, what this Government is doing to the Critchlow Labour College is only for political gains. But let me warn that there can be no gain when the desperate effort is made to stifle our young people, an asset which we should be proud of to invest in. [Mr. **Benn:** Mr. B. Williams bring some water please.] I do not need it Mr. Benn. It is because this Government is unwilling to make valuable investment in young people and that caused us not to have the kind of human resources necessary to cope with our education system. I call on this PPP/C minority Government to value the worth of our young people and step up to the plate.

Starving the University of Guyana of funds is so evident. Could you imagine the announcement that applications for the University of Guyana will have to be made online? But those of us, who keep our feet on the ground, Bishop Edghill, Hon. Member, can tell you better. One senior lecturer, for example, who has to monitor applications from applicants from five schools in Region No.6, has found it very impracticable on the Corentyne, since four out of the five schools do not have internet facilities or access to the internet.

I would like to propose to the Government that things of this nature are done in phases. While you introduce online applications – and that is a good thing - and programmes, the original facilities must still prevail, so that those who do not have internet access will not be deprived of that opportunity.

I cry shame on the Education Sector of this Government, for if that situation is so dismal in the Coastal Regions, what would it be in the hinterland, riverine and other remote communities?

Following on from the Government's neglect for our young people, I wish to now turn my attention to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). **[Mr. Neendkumar:** Do you know those officers are listening to you?]

That is a good thing. Mr. Speaker, at page 39 paragraph 4.75, referred to TVET skills linked with entrepreneurship, training is an assured option for enabling their ability.

Sir, on this score, I wish to point out the following:

Right here in this honourable House I spoke of preparing our young people on the TVET programme to deliver in the hospitality and manufacturing industries. I would think that this call is falling on deaf ears or that this Government has no care for the applicability of the type of training for our young people.

Take for example the technical school, again, at Leonora - this school offers only one year programmes, but the Ministry has not taken time off to do an assessment of the programme content. It has not considered whether or not the skills of the young people of that institution are marketable and can subscribe to the industries established in the country. This Government likes to say they have put buildings up and oh they gloat about that, but never works out the purpose, suitability and how they can aid development of this country.

Let me take you again right across to Region 3, where Minister Irfaan Ali lives and Member of Parliament (MP) Ganga Persaud – *Well boy you know you lose the wuk as Minister. Whey he deh? So you aint got minister before ya name, how sad.* At Den Amstel, where there is a plot of land earmarked for Agricultural Science, a building is on that land... [Ms. Teixeira: You forgot Kumar....] I only want to name a few I cannot call all of their names you know. Someone is paid as head of that centre and seconded to the Stewartville Secondary School, but nothing goes on at that Agricultural Practical Instruction Centre. Is it wasting money or lack of the necessary managerial skills? Tell me.

Secondly, earlier I alluded to what has been referred to in the Budget Speech about Universal Secondary Education. This is a clear case of “*monkey see monkey do*” by this Government. We have people with varying abilities; we hear announcements of no more Primary tops; we hear no more Community high schools; we hear of all schools being made Secondary or High Schools to achieve this Universal Secondary Education. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was a classic politician, educated... [Mr. Neendkumar: Bring him back.] Not like you you know....

Ms. Teixeira: I really find the inference to a Member of the House as being uneducated really unacceptable. Please can it be withdrawn?

Mr. Speaker: I heard the statement, “Not like you”, but I did not hear a name following it.

Ms. Teixeira: We saw where she looked.

Mr. Speaker: I must confess that I thought it might have been referring to me because the debate is addressed to the Speaker - so I thought that she was referring to me. But I did not feel slighted actually. I do not think I could have stood in Mr. Burnham’s shoes. I am alright.

Ms. Teixeira: Oh well, if she is referring to you it is alright.

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker, but you know if the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira does not get up maybe she wanted a little bit of relaxation. But I repeat Sir, that Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was a classic politician; educated, innovative and had his ears to the ground. He had the ability to fulfil the needs of his people. During the PNC era we did not have Community High Schools because we wanted show - we knew that it was necessary because of the varying

abilities and attitudes and we took that into consideration. I call on this PPP/C Government to shake off the disease and put on clean clothes.

Finally, on TVET, there are only TVET facilities in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. What is wrong with youths of regions 1, 7, 8 and 9?

Mr. Speaker: Technical Vocational I think is what TVET is.

Ms. Ally: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: On that note Hon. Member your time is up. You will need an extension of 15 minutes please to continue.

Deputy Speaker [Mr. B. Williams]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

Question put and carried

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker. APNU has called for the establishment of technical schools in those regions, but it is not happening. Only last Sunday I was in Region 7 and the people there are calling for technical schools in their region. They believe that their young people too must be given equal opportunities and rightly so. I again call on this Government to recognise the importance of the development of our treasured resources - the young people of Guyana.

I now turn my attention to the \$10,000 Per Child Programme. Mr. Speaker, I was entertained when the Hon. Minister of Education referred to the gross in Guyana. But, she asked a very pertinent question; is your life better than before? Well Mr. Speaker, the people living in this country stands as testimony... [Mr. Hinds: Of the better life.] Better life because you have more homeless people, the beneficiaries, our farmers who cannot be paid for their paddy in a timely fashion, the inability of this Government to adequately provide the hot meal for our children, particularly for schools in the interior location. My Colleague, Mrs. Dawn Hastings-Williams, since the 2013 Budget, made reference to it – it continues, providing the uniforms and payments to those women who prepared those uniforms. Those are testimonies of the better life that the Guyanese people are enjoying in this country.

As one writer puts it – that is the \$10,000 Per Child Grant - “This is an attempt to hoodwink the general population.” – Ludicrous, Mr. Speaker.

We all like money and the PPP knows that liking money story more than us. Surely the parents of our children would welcome this money. But Sir, let me point out the following:

1. This Government has gotten this country into such a depressing situation that any little pittance parents will use to fill a hole for survival.
2. The budget says under Education Grants at page 75 paragraph 6.21 that this money will be provided for this year. A child travelling from West Coast Berbice to a school in New Amsterdam via the Berbice River Bridge must pay no less than \$1,000 per child. So this \$10,000 is for two weeks. What happens to the other 50 weeks in the year and how does it in aid raising attendance rates? We want continuity.
3. APNU considers this a blatant example of electioneering, as opposed to sustainable development and worse yet in the education sector.

Does this Government not consider the disposable income of teachers and parents or workers generally? Sir, the Government has been trumpeting the record of economic growth and sound fiscal management. Then I ask, why is it the disposable income of teachers cannot be significantly upgraded and why is it VAT cannot be reduced to ease the economic squeeze of the very parents of school age children? Our parents of the school-aged children need more than the \$10,000 per year. It cannot suffice.

Finally on this matter, a one-off input cannot work. I urge the Government to not only embrace the C word, as in corruption, but to do so as in continuity. Finally, on this Sir, we of APNU believe that providing boats for our riverine children and buses for the coastlanders would be more helpful to the children of our community.

Sir, I now turn to Access to Education – the Learning Channel, at page 74, paragraph 6.20, “Education Grants”.

“Government has already made significant investments in the education sector, seeking to ensure universal access, and to raise both quality delivery and attainment rates.”

Of concern to APNU is the access to education and education for all Guyanese. Sir, this House is aware that exorbitant sums of moneys are spent on the Learning Channel. Did somebody say \$3 million per month? When money is invested we expect to get the returns from it. But here is what the practical situation is for the Learning Channel regarding some regions and this is a report from the regions:

Region 1 – Only Mabaruma gets the channel and it is not seen clearly.

Region 7 – The Learning Channel has been available for over the year. When it was functional, only one community received the channel.

Region 8 – No access to the Learning Channel and where there might be, it is really not accessible because there is no electricity in the days, only in the nights. Shame Cde. Prime Minister.

Region 9 – Annai, Aranaputa and Quatamang are the only receivers but Annai receives for only pre-school or early childhood ones. Eleven areas in the North Savannahs do not receive because of some reason or the other, television antennas, electricity, *et cetera*.

The Lethem Station is the same as in the North and Central Savannahs. I am sure that my Colleague, Mr. Sydney Allicock, who made reference to the Learning Channel, will attest to it.

What access is there therefore for the so-called delivery of education via the Learning Channel? Are we not entitled to be the beneficiaries of Taxpayers' dollars? Or is it that friends and families of the Government are entitled to construct their pants with long pockets. Mr. Speaker, this Government must answer for this.

Mr. Speaker, via Notice Paper 203, I recall the Opposition Chief Whip Anna Ally asking the Minister of Education some questions on the Learning Channel, that is, areas in Region Nos. 1, 7, 8 and 9 that are reached by the Learning Channel, as well as the programme guide. I did not want to question the Minister's ability to monitor, but I want to let this National Assembly know that by your own actions you demonstrate your capabilities. Sir, the answer tendered for the programme guide was turbulently rude. I asked for the guide to be furnished to the National Assembly and the Minister told me that it is on the channel 35 - 50 times per day. Mr. Speaker, I

am sorry you cannot blame me if the Minister is deeply challenged in her Ministry and cannot give proper answers which this House is entitled to get.

Finally, on the question of this Learning Channel, the Minister must also tell the National Assembly why a transmitter is in Karasabai, but the materials for the construction of the tower are still at Annai for a year and over, since the 2013 Budget. I wish to urge the Government to embrace the C word as in Commitment and discard the C word as in Corruption.

Improving Literacy Rates - Teacher Training. Improving literacy rates is hinged to a crucial factor on investments in our people. To invest in our people there is need to have a direct input in our school system. Opportunities must be created so that our teachers can be upgraded. Our teachers must be exposed to the upgraded measures in our school system; careful thought is not exercised in the programme content and the time allotment to implement the programme. In my last budget presentation, I forewarned about numbers or how many were trained, but the quality of training, the exposure to learning resources and constant upgrading, they are vital components of investment in our people for enhanced production.

In terms of improving literacy rates which has a link to the quality of our teachers. I wish to posit the following:

1. For teachers training the academic requirements for the intake of teachers for training should not be reduced. If there is a shortage, relevant upgrading courses must precede the actual training programme.
2. In many of our schools and the general improvement in Maths and Science programme, a heavy financial input was made in 2013. Compact Discs (CDs) were provided as aids to work along, but these CDs have incorrect answers. Hence, it can be of no help to the students. Sir, I have an example right here and if the Hon. Minister is savvy in Maths, she can listen to them or ask Ms. Shadick for help. As a result, both the teachers and students are rejecting them. I charge that the Education Sector has falling standards and careless monitoring. Managing and management is crucial.

I, being always a teacher wish to advise the Hon. Minister that pumping moneys in a fifth (5th) Form cannot work. Repeatedly, I advise fix the foundation or the top will collapse and that is

what is happening. Spend the money in the Primary Section improving our teacher's skills, programme content, provide materials and human resources and make the education system worth the investment that is being put in.

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

Ms. Ally: Yes, thank you Mr. Speaker. Feel the impact.

Finally, the Education Strategic Plan 2008- 2013. In 2013, \$28.5 million was expended towards the final year of the 2008- 2013 Strategic Plan. Now \$32.3 billion has been allocated towards the implementation of the first year of our new Education Strategic Plan. **[Mr. Neendkumar: [Inaudible]** I will explain to you what a Strategic Plan is Mr. Neendkumar.

The paper of the 2008 - 2013 Framework and intent of this Strategic Plan has been well put theoretically. I wish to posit that on examining the mission statements of this plan - eliminating illiteracy, modernising education and strengthening tolerance, we have to question the implementation of that plan.

Yes, we have a printed document called the Strategic Plan 2008- 2013, but how do we expect that this National Assembly can properly do an assessment of what is achieved and the extent of its successes. An important document called the Education Digest, which should consist of reports and evaluation; its latest edition, to my knowledge, was 2011. How could you? Or what could be used, to justify the amount of money spent for the final year of 2013 of the Strategic Plan? How often is this digest expected to be produced and why has it not been produced up to date, to 2013? The last edition was produced in 2011, two years ago, including 2013, nothing.

4.03 p.m.

Let us take a look at what should have been achieved in the National Strategic Plan, and because of time I will earmark a few examples. I have already mentioned some of the areas earlier.

Where is the link between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports when continuously it is reported about 30 sports ground in a whole country with over 1,000 schools? Some schools do not even have yard space for the children to play. What is the quality of the remediation programme...? **[Mr. Neendkumar:** Who tell you that there are only

30 grounds?]) You think that sports ground means killing goats at the stadium. ...to improve the literacy rate in the education sector and what is the outcome of the resources ploughed in for this programme.

The Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) outlined in this plan speaks of enhancing literacy, but where are the libraries and librarians? Why is it that there are not adequate workbooks yet? Well, the latest thing is a text book was recently redone and it was not clear to the Ministry if it was new or revised.

Sir, the 2014-2018 strategic plan is hibernating. Months ago, Opposition Members Ms. Amna Ally and Mrs. Cathy Hughes were promised it but the budget came and will go and that strategic plan, which money is budgeted for in this Budget 2014, is still hibernating.

As I said in my earlier remarks, we want value for our money. We support any meaningful project; we support development and we want our nation's children to have a better life, hence, this Government must utilise the requisite resources, human and material to let the people enjoy a better life. I trust that my colleagues on the other side of the House can recognise the importance of consultation and advice and work towards making Guyana a better place for all.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Nadir: First, I join with all my colleagues on this side of the House to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for once again giving us an excellent budget that will continue the expansion of the economy as we have seen over the past eight years.

I also want to offer congratulations to a Minister, a woman, I have great admiration for and that is the Minister of Education, the Hon. Priya Manickchand. In spite of the monsoon of criticisms and heckling she stood like a woman passionate about progress and passionate about the largest sector of this country, a sector that she is leading. We offer, once again, to the Minister, she and her staff, our admiration and congratulations.

I want to talk about Region 7, strange. I am not going to talk about the economy now. I want to talk about Region 7 and this is the state it is in:

- Construction is currently ongoing on two new schools in Region 7 at 72 miles and Itaballi while several others have been given a facelift. As a result of the inclement weather work was delayed, but will be completed early this year, not soon, but early this year.
- We continue to strive for improvement in education.
- We hope to achieve even more this year once our budget is approved.
- Rehabilitation of roads has been completed at Bamford point, West Indian Housing Scheme, Agatash, Caribisi Hill.
- In terms of health care delivery, extension works were carried out at the Kamarang Hospital and the new nurses' hostel was constructed.

Speaking of Region 7, the region has developed a mechanism to facilitate residents who are in need of surgery especially those in the outlying communities to do those surgeries in Bartica. Yes, in this regard, health workers are deployed to various communities to make house calls and diagnose patients. Those who are recommended for surgery are transported to Bartica where the medical procedures are done. After post surgery treatment patients are transported back to their respective communities. This is done on a monthly basis.

There is a shortage of teachers in some remote areas such as Kurupung. This is as a result of teachers not wanting to be posted in those areas. Efforts being made to train more teachers are recognised. The region will be making efforts to provide furnished living quarters for teachers and health staff which will hopefully be an incentive for them to take up jobs in these areas.

Over the last 20 years Guyana has moved from a place where 30% of teachers were trained. Today it is 70%.

I expected some noise and some heckling, especially from the Hon. Member Ms. Amna Ally, but I did not get this from the Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand. I got this quote from *Kaieteur News* of March 17, 2014. These are the words, which *Kaieteur News* quoted, coming from the mouth of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) Regional Chairman. I raised this because every single thing that we have done, which is good, they, on the other side, have said that it was bad. If you listen to them we had the worst budget ever. Nothing good has happened if we look

at this budget and the performance of this Government through the eyes of the Oppositions, except what we saw as an assault on the hard-working people of this country. The hard-working rice farmers and other staff of Leguan were called grass cutters.

Mr. Speaker: With respect, one second Mr. Nadir, I have seen the transcript. When Minister Irfaan Ali said that they will be giving money the retort was “to do what, cut grass?” I have the transcript and I am very firm on this. At no time did the Member say that they are grass cutters. He said, “to do what, cut grass?”, so be careful. I will supply you with a copy of the transcript if you wish, but you may proceed.

Mr. Nadir: With due respect, I never said any particular person. I never named anyone. I never called a Hon. Member of this House as uttering those words. I said... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, we have heard that there are 130,000 vehicles in this country and there is climate change and there are some of the hottest periods today. Enterprising people, especially single parent women, have found it as good honest hard work to sell a bottle of cold water on the roadside and that honest hard work, which has built this country, has been denigrated by the other side.

The 4,000 honest hard-working families last year that built homes were accused of laundering drug money, because you, yourself, Mr. Speaker, said that you have seen many reports which states that in the construction sector there is money laundering; there is the proceeds of drug money. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, and tell the House, about the information that I have, that is, that last year 4,000 people built homes in the construction sector that today accounts for 10% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), \$80 billion in construction. **[Dr. Norton: *[Inaudible]*... like that.]** I will come to you just now Dr. Norton. You just hold tight. I will come to you. Let me quote you the figures before... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Before you quote the figures, and your time will not be taken away, what I said was that the narco trade has permeated every sector. I did not single out the housing sector to say that “it is only”... I said that it has permeated every sector. I did not say that it was only and every investment in housing is from that. Just let me qualify that. I said every sector has been affected across the board in the country including... That is what my statement was. Please go ahead with your...

Mr. Nadir: I can list every single sector in this economy which we monitor and you did say every sector and the second largest sector in our economy is construction and the construction sector was specifically mentioned by one Member of Parliament. Let me get back to the facts. The construction sector today has \$80 billion of hard-working Guyanese investment and people who are taking risk, and I will come to the Member too. One financial institution, and I will quote “the New Building Society”, is one of a number of financial institutions which funds construction in our country.

The year 2009, mortgages approved, 1,103 totalling \$4 billion and 173 persons had a \$170 million to expand; in 2010, there was a lull, 633 mortgages at \$2.4 billion. Let us come to 2012. The year 2011 was remarkable; there were 1,100 mortgages at \$5 billion and that was remarkable. There were 1,607 mortgages to the value of \$7.2 billion... **[Dr. Singh:** Those are not figures; they are real people.] There are real people and it is not drug money. The year 2013, 1,754 persons had mortgages which value \$8 billion and in January of this year alone over \$1 billion were disbursed.

All of this here represents facts. We do not need this, we could deal with all of the innuendos and all of the wrong information that a hippopotamusly critical Opposition has been levelling at us. I heard the former Minister Carl Greenidge “mouthing” when he heard these fantastic numbers which this economy is generating. We have heard all of the quotes from the Hon. Member Dr. George Norton quoting *Hamlet* and quoting the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, but let me tell the Member about the albatross which was put around the necks of the people of Guyana by the PNC regime of the past, especially of the past 1980s. Let me tell you about that Mr. Speaker, because we are still today suffering from it.

We are being lectured that we cannot manage anything but the PNC regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s signed an agreement to divest the Guyana Telephone & Telegraph (GT&T) Company, 15%... That was a Cabinet decision. Every Member of the PNC Cabinet would have been guilty - very guilty.

I will tell you about this albatross. Hon. Dr. Norton, where were you? You had your say in Cabinet in the 1980s and you screwed it up. **[Interruption]**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nadir, I am asking you to monitor your emotionalism and your words.

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, I would withdraw the words “screw up”, but I can say the word “mess up.”

Mr. Speaker: I am asking you to stick to your presentation and not allow yourself to be sidetracked. That is what I am asking.

Mr. Nadir: I am sticking to it. That albatross, which is around our necks today, is by the people who claim that they know better than us. You know what they did... *[Interruption from Members of the Opposition.]*

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

Mr. Nadir: They signed an agreement that gave GT&T a twenty-year monopoly over landlines and a twenty-year monopoly over international data and voice, and we must let the people of this country know this. It could have been automatically renewed solely by the company, not with negotiations with the Government. For all of the children, today, who have to pay extra for GT&T internet service, we are suffering from this albatross which the PNC regime put around our necks.

Today, we are trying to privatise the telecommunications sector and you know what we are going through. Any business with a guaranteed rate of return of 15% would recover its investment in about six years, not twenty. This country is being saddled by the albatross of GT&T and we may end up having to pay it 100 times more than it pays for the company just because we want the children to have affordable access to internet.

When we hear the pontificating from the other side about the mismanagement of this Government we have to get passionate about it. We are accused of plagiarism, instead of saying we quoted from people... The budget speech cover, we were accused of plagiarising when we quote it. We are even accused of plagiarising the PNC manifesto title which had something like a good life for all. We are not talking about good life; we are talking about a better life for all Guyanese, not a good one - a better one.

The one thing that really banged in my ears was when the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge mentioned the issue of how he manipulated exchange rate so that the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) could show a paper profit. He was giving us a lesson in economics.

Mr. Speaker: You have five minutes within which to wrap up.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I do not recall making any mention of the word “manipulation.” I would like the Member to stick to what I said. I spoke of exchange rate policies and what I spoke of is quite acceptable monetary policy. I do not know what he is talking about manipulation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nadir, indeed when you use the word “manipulation” I was, at the time that Mr. Greenidge rose, searching my mind to try to recall whether that particular word was ever used. I ask you to proceed. I personally do not recall the word being used but I am asking the Clerk to have the transcript provided on that.

Mr. Nadir: “Manipulation” is not a word that is...

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but it does have a certain connotation attached to it. It does have a certain negative...

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, if you allow me one minute on it but...

Mr. Speaker: Hear me. If it is that the word itself was not used...

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to withdraw the word “manipulation” and use his exact words.

Mr. Speaker: Right, but the word “manipulation” does have a negative connotation attached.

Mr. Nadir: I hope I will get back my ten minutes.

Mr. Speaker: No, you are paused.

Mr. Nadir: The Hon. Member said that devaluation was a means of ensuring that the largest foreign exchange earning shows a profit. I also interpret that because all of us who do mathematics can massage numbers.

Mr. Speaker: We are going to get the transcript, but proceed.

Mr. Nadir: I have it.

Mr. Speaker: I have to get the official transcript which is produced by the National Assembly. No, the official transcript of these proceedings is produced by the Hansard Department. Any other document purporting to be a transcript is not a transcript, permissible and admissible for these purposes, so the Clerk to be advised about that.

Mr. Greenidge: I had risen to...

Mr. B. Williams: Mr. Nadir, sit. It is a Point of Order.

Mr. Nadir: I do not have to give... You do not know the Standing Order. You are a bluff.

Mr. B. Williams: You do not have to give...

Mr. Nadir: The Speaker has to tell me to take my seat.

Mr. Speaker: I can take a Point of Order but if it is a Point of Clarification the speaker has to give way. If the speaker does not agree to give way it cannot... but if it is a Point of Order I will take it.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, it is not a Point of Clarification. I have a Point of Order. The Member is claiming that I explained that we devalued in order to give the largest foreign exchange earner profits in Guyana dollars. He does not understand the economics. It had nothing to do with the largest foreign exchange earner. I specifically made mention not simply to the largest foreign exchange earner. If you want the exact formulation I will give you but that was not what I said. He must not be making up things as he goes along.

Mr. Speaker: I will get the transcript. *[Interruption]* Hon. Member a Point of Order is that a Member had violated one of the Standing Orders of the House. A clarification, Mr. Greenidge, is an explanation or a misinterpretation. A Member has to agree to give way if it is a clarification based on a misinterpretation, but unless there is a specific Standing Order that has been violated a Point of Order will not be upheld. I will be getting the transcript and I cannot, therefore, in those circumstances, unless Mr. Nadir agrees to give way, allow the clarification.

Do you agree, Sir, to give way?

Mr. Nadir: Mr. Speaker, I stand on firm ground with what I quoted and I am not giving an inch.

Mr. Speaker: We will have the transcript at the earliest available point. Mr. Clerk, please take note. Proceed please. You have five minutes within which to wrap up.

Mr. Nadir: We were told that this devaluation...We do not understand economics. This is the economics I understand that when that devaluation came from \$4.80 officially to \$45 every person who had a dollar in the bank the money was zapped by devalued amount by how much per cent. Ms. Shadick is a maths teacher. That is what I understand. It is just to show... [**Mr. Greenidge:** When was it?] It was 1987, I think, January. I understand that albatross. Professor Clive Thomas has likened that devaluation to say that this country owes the worker a social debt and that is slashing the hard earned earnings that they were saving to build their homes.

We are here today listening to the Members of the Opposition promising to cut the billions of dollars we have earmarked for GuySuCo. Let us go back to the history of the budget cuts. In 2012 the Hon. Finance Minister produced a \$192 billion budget and they cut it to \$171 billion. In 2013 the Hon. Minister produced a budget of \$208 billion and they cut it to \$177 billion. We hear of a \$220 billion what they are really going to be cutting is the serious investment in developing the physical and social infrastructure. Why would they want to do that? We agree that this is a maintenance budget, but we also know that it is an expansion budget because what they will be cutting is the investment that will propel us into double digit growth. We do not want to be seeing single digit growth again. We want Guyana to experience double digit growth. Why I support this budget even more than the last one is that for the first time real wage increases outnumbered inflation by 400% in 2013.

With this Budget 2014, I am confident that the Hon. Minister of Finance has produced another wonderful one-year plan as part of our multi-year programme for the development of this country so that every single Guyanese will enjoy not a good but a better life.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

4.33 p.m.

Mr. Bond: Before I begin, I wish to point out that on hearing the barrage of criticisms from my learned friend, Hon. Mr. Nadir, I am reminded from my historical readings that he presided over

a party that was once a force to be reckoned with in 1964 and he could not even keep his own party together. His party has disintegrated left, right and centre. This gentleman wants to criticise Mr. Carl Greenidge and the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R). I would have none of it. You have to keep your own house together before you can criticise our house. He is presiding over a broken house.

Mr. Speaker: One second, Mr. Bond.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member is deviating greatly from our standard practice, speaking about our Member and his party in such terms. I think it is quite a deviation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, thank you. In my 16 years in this House, this has not been the worst of debates. I think that Hon. Member Ms. Shadick put it best when she said a few evenings ago, "When you come to crab dance..." This is the House and things have gone back and forth. Mr. Bond, I think your point has been made and you should move on.

Mr. Bond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

"Judiciaries serve and hold the Executive Branch accountable and they help the contract and the corporate system work in a fair and impartial manner, providing a necessary element of predictability for investors. Judicial reforms thus should be, and are, a key component of poverty reduction and growth strategies in an increasing number of countries around the world."

This quote was taken from the essay, "Judiciaries, Growth and Poverty Reduction: Linkages and Lessons Learned" penned by Mr. Vinay Bhargava, a former Director of International Affairs at the World Bank.

My presentation today has three core thrusts. Firstly, I believe that the allocation to the sector is minuscule. Secondly, I will challenge the Minister's claim of access to justice by looking at the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic. And finally, I will end with a demand for the introduction of a judicial research assistant's programme.

However, before I get into my presentation proper, I wish to say that Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh is one of our good sons. I believe that if he establishes a good working relationship with APNU's

chief spokesperson on finance, Mr. Carl Barrington Greenidge, Guyana would be all the better for it. Mr. Greenidge's institutional memory must not be taken for granted; his intellectual prowess cannot be ignored. It is time to bring an end to one-upmanship and grandstanding, practiced by both sides.

As a Guyanese, I am happy that GDP increased by 5%. As a practicing attorney, I am unhappy that a pittance would be spent on the justice sector of which I am a member for 12 years.

Budget 2014 allocates \$111,655,000 to the Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecutions; \$1.4 billion is allocated to the Supreme Court of Judicature; and \$288 million is allocated to the Ministry of Legal Affairs. In total, it amounts to \$1.8 billion or 0.8% of the total \$220 billion national budgetary pot bake.

Paltry sums are to be spent on infrastructure and equipment. A total of \$11,300,000 is allotted to the Ministry of Legal Affairs and such funds are for the rehabilitation of a driveway, purchasing of vehicle and purchasing of furniture and equipment.

The Supreme Court will be allocated \$216,270,000 and it is proposed to be spent on the construction of a Land Court, rehabilitation of courtrooms and payment of retention, purchasing of a vehicle, completion and construction of Magistrates Courts and purchasing of furniture and equipment. Do expect, however, courts with sewage seeping through the floors. Do expect courts that are not soundproof. Do expect courts with no robing rooms and adequate seating.

To the Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecutions the sum of \$5 million is proposed to be spent on the purchasing of furniture and equipment.

These allocations in totality have the collective effect of strangulating the sector and pegging back little gains achieved by the Justice Improvement Programme, referred to as the Modernisation of the Justice Administration System Project or referred to as a component of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy, which has seen US\$25 million pumped into the sector continuously since 2006. As a matter of fact, \$418,592,000 was injected in 2013.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic, if it were progressive, would have had another phase of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy in place for 2014, to commence as soon as the 2013 phase has concluded. If we look at the Budget, there is zero budgeted under this head. Why? Simply

because the improvement of the delivery of justice to the Guyanese people ought to be a priority for any caring administration and the continuity of such delivery would always be as a matter of course. It takes a long campaign and not a brief offensive to achieve this victory. The Justice Improvement Programme must be an annual diet for the justice sector. With its absence, it takes me to the logical conclusion, therefore, that the budgetary design for the judicial sector for 2014, as adumbrated by the subject Minister, is palpably flawed in effect and principle.

It is clear, therefore, that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration has little interest in curing the ills plaguing the sector, ills it has created and allowed to fester unchecked for two decades.

I am not surprised that my friend, Mr. Nadir, is disagreeing with the Members of this other side. I can remember when I was in law school he was Minister of Tourism. I recited a poem while at law school in which I painted a picture of Guyana going down the drain. Mr. Nadir came up as a guest and he objected to what I said. I was in law school at the time and I had no political ambitions. But, it has always been the style of the Government to paint a glorious picture of what Guyana is, ignoring the realities of the day. We, on this side, could admit readily that some has been done; much, has however, not been done. We refuse to be divorced from reality, Mr. Speaker.

That the Chambers of the Attorney General, headed by my Colleague, the Hon. Anil Nandlall, accepts this offering shows one of three things. First, it shows that the Chambers may not have been involved in the budgetary process. Secondly, it shows that the Chambers and, as a matter of fact, the managers of the sector cannot craft a justice sector budget. It may not be unimaginable. Or thirdly, it shows that our litigious Attorney General intends to donate to the justice sector his gains from the numerous libel lawsuits he has filed, if he wins, of course, to improving and enhancing the sector.

There is a deafening silence on the following:

1. Enhancing the quality of judicial decisions;
2. Optimisation of the use of human material and financial resources;
3. Protection of the young and vulnerable when they become enveloped by the sector;

4. Focused financial investment and management of the Legal Aid programme;
5. Expansion of Legal Aid programme to new areas;
6. Improving the quota of attorneys and capacity building within the Legal Aid programme;
7. Drastically reducing the time it takes for victims to be compensated;
8. Curbing repetition of criminality by offenders;
9. Introduction of information technology (IT) and e-protocols throughout the sector;
10. Introduction of the judicial research assistant's programme; and
11. Absence of any incentives for performance in the sector.

These are the things that are missing, Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall. You would not understand. I will email you my brief, sir.

These are the things APNU would have spent an additional \$1 billion on to ensure that the system is truly accessible and strong.

Might I remind this honourable House that in 2013 I called the Minister of Finance's bluff and here again in 2014 I have proven him a bad poker player. He bets big with a weak hand. He comes as a bearer of false promises and sautéed phrases and I will prove it to you, Your Honour. Hear what Dr. Ashni Singh stated:

“Our Government continues to place the highest priority on ensuring that our citizens have access to the justice system and that the system is strong and effective.”

That is stated on page 52, paragraph 4.119 of his Budget Speech.

As I have mentioned above, we cannot speak of access to justice without mentioning Legal Aid in the same breath. I must say that I have had a chance to talk to the Hon. Member, Ms. Webster, and she clarified certain things with regards to the Legal Aid.

Legal Aid will receive a paltry \$44,087,000 in 2014. Do you know, Hon. Members, that in 2013 the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic was forced to reduce its complement of attorneys by two? What is incredible is that the casualties of this Administration's lack of forward thinking were Ms. Thandiwe Benn, top student at the Hugh Wooding Law School (HWLS) for her year, Ms. Maritha Halley, who also won multiple prizes at Hugh Wooding Law School, and Justice Burch-Smith, who is respected by Bench and Bar throughout the Caribbean, were the casualties of not planning ahead.

Legal Aid submits a budget. Do you think it gets the actual amount? No. Its budget is reduced. How could we speak about getting justice for the poor – I see that Mr. Sharma has gone – when the progress, work and expansion of Legal Aid is stymied? The Government must be a caring government.

Ladies and gentlemen, do you know why sons and daughters of this great and bountiful paradise were let go? It was because *pisa na bin deh ya*. Every year, the same thing happens.

Noble brothers of this Tenth Parliament, the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic is the agency that was engineered to cater for the poor, but how can it care for the poor when the People Progressive Party/Civic refuses to cater for it and it, in turn, cannot cater for itself? It is no wonder that in our poorer circles, the PPP stands for “Punish Poor People” and if we were to add the C, the C would stand for “Continually”. [Ms. Manickchand: We started the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic.] I am glad Ms. Manickchand raised the point. Indeed, the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic was started by the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Listen to the point I am making. It makes no sense to start something and cut it off half way. They have abandoned their own child. They have abandoned the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic. There is no claim now to say, “We did this and we did that.”

In 2013, the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic in Region 2 had a clientele of 376 persons – I am awaking you to realities, Mr. Minister. These are the realities. I am not making this up. Region 2 had 376 persons of which 205 were women and 171 were men. Further, 262 persons were advised and afforded representation. In 2013, the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic in Region 4 had a clientele of 1,985 persons of which 1,325 were women. In 2013, in Region 5 the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic had a clientele of 65 persons. In 2013, in Region 6 the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic had a clientele of 216 persons of which 148 were women and 68 were men. Between 1994 and 2014, the

Guyana Legal Aid Clinic has seen a clientele of 27,909 persons of which 19,599 were women and 8,310 were men. This shows that our women benefit most from this facility.

The cases covered by the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic include adoption, custody and access of minors, division of property, divorce, domestic violence, personal injury, just to name a few. It is our women who attract these services and an APNU Government would ensure greater subventions. You are giving nothing. We would ensure they get a greater subvention. We would ensure a deeper partnership to ensure that the Legal Aid clinics are countrywide and their doors are kept open to the poor and vulnerable.

With your permission, may I remind this House that the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic is the bedrock upon which the noble ideal of access to justice rests and when the APNU is elected to Government, the Clinic in Georgetown would have its own building and similar clinics would extend to the other regions, whether or not there are regular sittings of the court in those regions.

Additionally, the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic will be made an organ of the Ministry of Legal Affairs, which my Colleague, Mr. Basil Williams, will head.

I come now to the third thrust of my presentation. Your Honour and Hon. Members, how can the Minister speak of a strong and effective system when judges are left without legal support staff? He is bluffing. Let me draw a comparison. Since 1996, Trinidad and Tobago started the Judges' Research Assistants Programme. It is now called the Judicial Research Assistants Programme. It started with six such persons in the Supreme Court. In 2004, the service was extended to the Magistracy. If I may quote extensively from the project paper for its upgrade:

“With the proliferation of new legislation, the complexity and of modern litigation, and the attention of the public to their rights and obligation, judges critically need the help of well qualified persons to assist in the delivery of services. In the same way that a Senior Counsel in private chambers or the Director of Public Prosecutions utilizes services of Junior Counsel, in like manner Judges Research Assistants are critical to the work of the Judges and Magistrates. Whether it be the organization of case files and material, the researching of key legal arguments or legislation, the drafting of opinions, the preparations of Orders, or assistance during court sittings, the Judges Research Assistants sit at the Judges right hand, rendering invaluable service.”

We cannot speak of an increase in the complement of judges to reduce backlog without equipping them with the support staff they need to churn out decisions in a timely manner. This Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Administration is forever guilty of pouring new wine in old bottles. The Government can add 20 more judges to the 20 it has added to this derelict system and the system will still be bogged down by the problems that beset it initially. As a matter of fact, it would get worse. Twenty judges cannot service a population of 750,000. That is a mere three judges for every 100,000 Guyanese. A more feasible quota would be 5 judges per 100,000 Guyanese and that is my demand. It is that the quota of judges be increased to 35 judges to efficiently serve the three counties. I demand, on behalf of our judges and magistrates, research assistants. I demand that a study be undertaken and completed within six months and its implementation immediately thereafter. I demand for these assistants comparative salaries with other Caribbean jurisdictions. In Trinidad, they are paid a salary of TT\$10,000 plus TT\$2,000 transportation allowance – that is TT\$12,000 per month – and they are also given duty free concession. These are the steps to be taken if the Government is really interested in helping our judges and reforming our sector.

Mr. Speaker: You have five minutes within which to wrap up, Mr. Bond.

Mr. Bond: Thank you, Sir. These are the concessions which any caring administration and which the APNU, when it gets into government, will certainly make for our judges and magistrates.

I also demand that our judges and magistrates be allowed to take notes on their laptops whilst they wait, I do hope not in vain, for the day when the voice recognition system will be the order of the day, which is by far a speedier process than note taking and problems such as legibility are eradicated. I have heard complaints from judges that they were told they cannot use their laptops. They still have to write notes. They are forbidden from using their laptops. It is so backward!

Mr. Speaker: With respect though, Mr. Bond, the law is that they must write.

Mr. Bond: The law could be changed, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I know, but I need to defend the judges because they are not here. The law mandates them to take the notes in written form.

Mr. Bond: It is a law that is archaic.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed, you have made that point, but the way it came over is as if they are not complying with some modern technology. Go ahead.

Mr. Bond: Yet, with all we have said, Hon. Member Dr. Persaud asked, “What is wrong with you?” Mr. Damon asked, “Are you out of your mind?” Dr. Ramsaran asked, “What is wrong with you people?” Nothing is wrong with us. We are not out of our minds. But if we were to leave you to your own devices and allow you to run this country like your own cake shop, a lot will go wrong with us. We would definitely go stark raving mad.

Last year, the Government overwhelmed us with their Guyana dream; now they have graduated to a vision. I tell you this much, to quote a 16th Century English Proverb, *if wishes were horses, beggars would ride*.

I consider strange the words spewed by the Junior Minister of Finance:, “I am proud that he, (Dr. Singh) is my boss.” He was rightly corrected by Dr. Singh, who said that they are colleagues. That is commendable of you, Dr. Singh, because “yes boss” and “yes massa” are for a time when Africans were slaves and oppressed. The rambunctious “Junior” would do well to reserve his pride for the day when his Ministry delivers a budget that truly delivers a better Guyana. To assist in redesigning this Member’s psyche, I propose that that his title be changed from Junior Minister of Finance to Minister within the Ministry of Finance. He would not be able to call him his boss. The Hon. Member was right to correct him. He is a good man.

I also consider flippant the oft used lines of the PPP: “we know what the problems are”. Some Members used the word “challenges” instead of “problems”. This line is a favourite of Mr. Hamilton, Dr. Webster, Dr. Westford, Dr. Ramsaran, Mrs. Sukhai, Bishop Edghill and Dr. Ramsammy. They all have said it. “We know what the problems are”; “we know what the challenges are.” What we need is not your knowledge of the problems; what we need is the truth. We do not need you to patronise the plight. What we need is a thorough investigation of the problems and challenges you say you know exist. What we also need for you to do is to fix those problems and challenges and put mechanisms and policies in place to prevent their recurrence.

This is my conclusion, Mr. Speaker. I am always slow to criticise but I will tell the Guyanese people in all honesty that Budget 2014's vision for the justice sector is primitive. It is crustacean. Laced with *ad hoc* policies and goals, it deceives the naked eye but on closer inspection it is found wanting. This sector is too important to be toyed with and that is exactly what this Budget does. Last year, the Budget was \$2.1 billion. This year, it is \$1.8 billion. In 2012, it was \$2 billion. This year, it is \$1.8 billion. How could you say you love the sector and give it less money in 2014?

A good budget for the judicial service sector must be measured by one thing and that is performance. There are absolutely no incentives today for judges and magistrates to perform above and beyond the call of duty. By not addressing the output and inputs of the justice sector, the PPP/C Administration cannot address the needs of the sector. It cannot address wages and salaries. It cannot address effective delivery of a professional service at the registries and sub registries. It cannot address a penetrable system where missing files are the order of the day - 850 went missing in 2010. It cannot address speedy delivery of justice and cannot make justice more accessible.

The performance indicators listed in Volume 2 of the Estimates are vacuous and, further, I posit that some of the indicators are not compatible with strategies employed nor the overarching goal of quality efficient service delivery.

If I may conclude with the words from the English poet, historian and politician, Thomas Babington Macaulay, he states:

“Turn where we may, within, around, the voice of great events is proclaiming to us, Reform, that you may preserve!”

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we would take a recess for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 4.58 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.53 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is resumed. Please be seated. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs to address us. I am sure that we all are anxious to hear what is to be said.

Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett]: Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, since this is the first time I am speaking in this National Assembly since her passing, allow me to extend my deepest condolence to the family, friends and party of the late Deborah Jan Osman-Backer. As the shadow MP responsible for foreign affairs, up to the time of her resignation and indeed as an MP in general, I certainly miss her. She probably would have been speaking today before me or some time after me and we enjoyed a cordial relationship. May her soul rest in peace.

Mr. Speaker, allow me, at the outset, to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and his staff at the Ministry of Finance who did not fail to provide us once again with a budget that is inclusive as it is forward looking for considering the vulnerable as it did the major pillars of development – education, health, infrastructure and agriculture. We, on this side of the House, are understandably proud of this Budget as it continues on the path the PPP/Civic has set.

I have listened to the critiques of the Budget provided by various Members of the Opposition and, yes, a few were constructive while others were not and lacked context. Indeed, in the latter category, one Member, Hon. Keith Scott, quoted from a 2012 World Bank Report and he said that Guyana is the third poorest country in Latin America and the poorest in South America. In that same Report, if he went down a little bit, he would have seen:

“Guyana weathered the effects of the recent global financial crisis very well compared to other Caribbean countries or the rest of the Latin American and Caribbean region.

While most economies in the Region contracted during the crisis years (2008-2009), the Guyanese economy recorded an average of 4 percent.”

I do not want to look back. It is not a very nice sight and that chapter, I would say, is closed and we are writing a new chapter, a better chapter, for this country but I would just give one example because there was a period in our history when Caribbean countries moved forward as Guyana moved in the opposite direction - backward. When we look at the period, for example, the tenure 1981 to 1990, Guyana had seven of 10 years of negative growth, as low as -11.4%. During that

same time, Antigua and Barbuda had positive growth for nine of those ten years as high as 9.8%. What the Hon. Member, Mr. Scott, I think, should be doing is congratulating the PPP/Civic for reversing this downhill journey on which this dear land was taken and congratulating us because of the 21 years we have managed this country, 18 of them were recorded as having positive growth.

Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh is very envied in the Caribbean for presiding over the longest period of uninterrupted growth. The record would show how many Ministers of Finance have been changed during that time.

As I said last year, Guyana does not exist in a vacuum and, consequently, we are affected by international realities. The Hon. Minister of Finance spoke modestly about some of these and Hon. Minister Irfaan Ali also outlined some of these, but I want to add to this a bit because, as I said, we must look at our domestic situation as well as we must look at how we fared in comparison with the Latin American and the Caribbean region as well. What are some of the statistics that are publicly available? According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Guyana was poised – this was just before the year ended – to lead CARICOM with a growth rate 5.2% and in terms of the wider Latin American Region, it was only behind Paraguay, Panama and Peru. Guyana was forth in the entire Latin American and the Caribbean regions. Regardless of which angle you look at these figures, our country has done well. Even if some would want to argue, because there is an argument that growth does not necessarily mean that there is equity and there is a reduction of poverty, we have lots of evidence to show and the first one I would like to point to is what Mr. Ramsammy said.

Last year, the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Samuel Hinds, travelled to Rome to uplift the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) award for achieving Millennium development Goal (MDG) 1 two years in advance. We also received an award for halving the proportion of hungry people and meeting the more stringent World Food Summit goal of reducing by half the absolute number of malnourished people. This is what the United Nations (UN) had to say about Guyana:

“Guyana’s outstanding achievement in meeting these targets has been, in no small measure, due to its commitment to investment in the agriculture sector as well as to regional security.”

The FAO representative with Guyana said:

“FAO is pleased to have partnered with the Government in its efforts and will continue to work closely with them, and other development partners, to eradicate hunger and promote food and nutrition security, not only in the country but also the wider Caribbean.”

This is not what the PPP/Civic has said. This is what the FAO of the UN has said. Mind you, they did not say that this was because of drug dealing.

If we have any doubts that we have progressed, just look around us. Look at the many homes that are being built, creating that sense of independence and achievement for our people. Look at the private sector and its contributions. People would not invest if they do not feel confident.

In 2004, our local airlines had a fleet of about 27 aircrafts and they had 658 flights per month. Today, the statistics are, as of March, a fleet of 45 aircrafts with 1,494 flights per month. This is out of the Ogle Airport. I do not believe that all of these people in the airline industry are involved in drugs either.

Let us look at the places today with cellular phone coverage, from Imbaimadai to Aishalton to Moruca to Lethem to Port Kaituma. These are all positive developments for our country. We have continuously increased wages and salaries and pensions. We have provided increases in public assistance and provided our children with school uniforms. In some places, we provided school feeding programmes. Guyana is no basket case. The great majority of our people are hard working people.

There will be, in any country, a minority of citizens who would live on the other side of the law, but I think that we have a responsibility in this House to be responsible for what we say and I was disturbed when the Hon. Member, Mr. Winston Felix... I made sure that I went back to the record to see if what I heard him say was what I heard him say and this is what he said: “Mr. Speaker, every item leaving Guyana, every conceivable item exported from Guyana is tainted with cocaine.” It was this same Hon. Member who complained some time ago that our Guyanese people receive treatment that is less than good in some Caribbean territories. These kinds of statements would not help the law abiding exports of this country. It is like outing fire with gasoline and we have to avoid these kinds of statements because these debates are running live.

Whatever we say here will go out into the international community, whether we want it or not, so we have to be careful. Yes, we have our problems; we have many problems but I believe that in this House, among the 65 Members of this House, we have a duty to not engage in negative branding of our entire nation.

I have listened to many submissions and I have listened keenly to my colleagues, especially from the interior regions outlining the needs. Of course, we have a lot to do in all communities in Guyana but we must be aware that development demands more development and sometimes faster development. For example, in some villages – I would give the village where I was born, like Moruca – people, I think, are moving to another level of personal development. And many villages are like this. In my childhood, we had one tractor and half of another vehicle. We had the San Jose Bridge, which was a footpath, a wooden bridge. It was not a vehicular bridge and we had one bicycle. That is why I do not even know to ride a bicycle because we had none in the village. People want better these days and in that village now, I am advised that we have over 100 private vehicles. The people, of course, would demand more roads. They would demand better roads. They would demand a San Jose Bridge that vehicles can traverse on both sides of the river and this is why... [Ms. Ally: *[Inaudible]* about the bridge.] I agree; we have to complete this bridge. We have to do it very well and we will do that. The PPP/Civic will do that.

It is, with many places, as I said with Georgetown, a challenge to keep up with building roads as fast as people are bringing vehicles, but that is development. The question is: how do we create a conducive environment to expand our economy, to meet the ever growing needs of our population since, as I said, development is a dynamic process and the population today demands more and faster development? This is why this Budget addresses the short-term, medium-term and long-term needs of our country.

How do we, as I said, expand our economy? There is US\$4 million for the Hospitality Institute, for example. It is something that I think is very important because we all know - and I think the Hon. Member, Mrs. Katherine Hughes, spoke passionately about tourism – that tourism is one of the sectors that benefit many other sectors.

The Amaila Falls Hydropower Plant: let me say, Mr. Speaker, that there is no way, at this point in time, that we would be able to compete with our immediate neighbours, continental and some

of our island neighbours because if one looks around us, and I have said this before, Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname all have hydropower and oil. We look at Trinidad; it has oil. Guyana sits in between and does not have any of these. Part of it is because we have not put aside some of our political differences and work to ensure that we build this hydropower plant so that we would have cheap and reliable energy so that we can expand our manufacturing sector.

This is very important: the Linden/Lethem road that Mr. Allicock spoke about, and he made a suggestion that we should use the yearly allocations and pave parts of the road. Mr. Allicock, I would like to inform you that that would take approximately 300 years because to pave one kilometre of road costs approximately, I have been advised, US\$3 million and this is why we have included money in this Budget to do some upgrading on the road while, at the same time, we are working with the Brazilian Government to do a design study.

Who could quarrel with the expansion of the Airport? If we are talking tourism and if we are talking about better transport, we have to look at that.

Much has been said about the Marriott Hotel but I am going to tell you this, Mr. Speaker: as Foreign Minister of this country, we had to refuse hosting several meetings because we did not meet the standard required in terms of numbers of rooms in some cases, and this is true. So we have a lot of our local hotels that are doing very well but we have to up the numbers. We have to have facilities that can cater for quite a lot of people and this is why... [Mr. B. Williams: Princess Hotel does not *[inaudible]*] Yes, I can tell you that one Head of State, who was visiting Guyana, the advanced party ruled out... [Mr. B. Williams: Pegasus?] Yes, they ruled it out.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just be careful. Sorry Minister, but these are established entities. I would not want a list of who was ruled out and who could not stay where. I do not think that it would help their businesses at all. Go ahead please, Minister.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: I am informing this National Assembly that we have to ensure that we move forward in terms of our facilities. I am saying that our people are doing very well, but we have to move to another level in our country.

I want to talk a little bit also about the pension and the increase and the operative word, of course, is ‘increase’ in the pension. Every year, we work to increase the pension of our elderly and this, I think, we must commit to do, not only in this Budget but in future budgets. We must not look at this measure in isolation from other measures and we must look at this old age pension in comparison with Latin America and the Caribbean as well. The comparisons must not only be done where we lag behind. It must be done where we lead as well. What are the statistics publicly available? Firstly, four out of five older people in the world have no access to pension – period. Secondly, in countries such as Barbados, Mexico and Panama, the old age pension is not given to persons who receive pension, let us say, from a contributory scheme. It is not given to them. In the other countries of the region, countries like Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica, St. Vincent, Trinidad, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela and Brazil, all apply a means test and, of course, some of these countries, one can argue, are better off than Guyana from a financial standpoint.

I do not know how many people are aware of this but Guyana is one out of only three countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that apply a universal pension - to everyone. The other two countries are Bolivia and Suriname. Suriname started some time ago. Of course, we know that Guyana did so in 1993 and Bolivia in 2000. Suriname pays approximately US\$150, Bolivia about US\$35 and Guyana’s would be about US\$64 or so. As we criticise and we speak about need for more increases and so on, we must be aware that we have set a standard that others are being called to follow. In fact, there is an Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Report calling on others in the Region in order to reduce inequity to follow what Guyana has done. In all of this that has happened, I think that our country has done well. We are paying the second highest. It is a universal pension so regardless of what our elderly own, regardless of whether they are having pensions from other places, regardless of what their assets are, we provide that pension to them.

As I turn to our neighbourly relations, our relations with Brazil, of course, every year, we work to strengthen that relationship and the major focus of our work right now is the Joint Commission on Infrastructure projects looking at the three areas of the Linden/Lethem Road, possible hydropower development in the Middle and Upper Mazaruni and port development in Georgetown. I will continue to update this National Assembly.

Let me say that the Hon. Member, Dr. Roopnarine, asked that the Assembly be updated on a regular basis. The Prime Minister, the Hon. Member, invited all of the political parties in Parliament to a briefing session which was held at the Guyana International Conference Centre (GICC) as we did with the private sector, the National Toshias Council (NTC) and several others. I was very concerned that except for your good self and the Hon. Member, Mrs. Katherine Hughes, no other Member of Parliament... Of course, Members of the PPP/Civic attended, but no other Member of Parliament from the Opposition attended. A representative of APNU was there but not a Member of Parliament. Let me say this: this is too important to quarrel about. We are ready, the Prime Minister and his team, to conduct another session with Members if they so wish because this is very important for Guyana's development.

We travelled to the Upper Mazaruni and we met with the communities there and the communities were very concerned that their villages would be flooded. Obviously, there were some rumours in the villages that we would be flooding the entire Upper Mazaruni, but we assured them. I want to reiterate this again – I know the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings, was at one of those briefing sessions in Jawalla – that we are not going to support and project that would flood the entire Upper Mazaruni. The technology of the 1970s has been improved significantly and the area that would have been required for the reservoir back then has been reduced by about more than 90% and there is a good chance that we would not even need to have a reservoir based on the designs, but we are waiting on the pre-feasibility study to be completed and we would have more information. We would be updating this House and the communities.

In terms of the relationship with Suriname, we, again, continue to work diligently with that country. Our two countries are contiguous. We are members of CARICOM. We are associate members of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR). We are members of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). So it goes without saying that we should try to forge our energies and work together. It is in that context that we view, not only our diplomatic, political and trade links with the rest of South America but also the infrastructure initiatives that are being pursued and key among those is the Corentyne Bridge. I think one Member spoke about not releasing any funds aimed at that if we are not open with information and I just want to inform this honourable House that the plan on the table right now is for the Corentyne River Bridge to be funded by the Government of Suriname with resources from a third party, possibly China

which is very interested. What Guyana has to do is the approach to the bridge and other facilities on our side.

The Border Commission has met last year on three occasions. Those meetings are proceeding very well. At the appropriate time, we would be happy, in a different setting, to speak more about that but let me just say that Guyana remains respectful and fully supportive of the agreements that were arrived at between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands between 1929 and 1939 and we believe that those agreements were made in good faith. Of course, we know, because of the World War, they were not signed. The work of the Commission will continue this year. I have noted, with some disappointment, certain statements purportedly emanating from some Members in this House and I want to say that it is statements like these made in the past that are thrown in our faces from time to time by the other side, so I think that we all in this National Assembly know what the unresolved issues are, but we are very sure about one thing. We are very sure about the shape and size of Guyana and, at all times, we must defend that.

In terms of Venezuela, the House was updated on that very unfortunate incident where a ship was intercepted in our waters. We had agreed to meet. Unfortunately, events in that country conspired for us not meeting. Recently, just a few weeks ago, I met with the Foreign Minister and he has assured me that they are working towards a date within the next two months or so, but we, on the Guyana side, are prepared for this first meeting which would be between our technical teams and we will continue as we do with all of our immediate neighbours. We will continue to analyse the overall situation of our relationship as we go along.

We continue to supply rice to Venezuela as we continue to purchase oil under the PetroCaribe Agreement and I have heard calls about looking at other markets and I think no country wants to be in a situation where one only has one or a huge market. It could be not in the best interest. But Venezuela has remained a very good trade partner and we want to preserve that relationship even as we look to other countries to sell our rice and, indeed, to purchase fuel because our needs are expanding in terms of the fuel we need. With the development in Guyana, we need more oil, and, even as we explore for oil, we have to look at other partners for us to purchase oil from as well.

As I turn my attention to the region in terms of CARICOM, let me say that we remain committed to the integration movement. Guyana presently chairs the Inter-Governmental Task Force on

Contingent Rights. Our Ambassador, Mrs. Elizabeth Harper, who is in the House, chairs that committee. Mr. Speaker, this is very important for CARICOM but even as I am saying this, I am aware of what is in the newspapers today and what was in the past few days, concerning one of our citizens who died in Trinidad and Tobago because he did not receive emergency care that he should have received. Let me say this: there is no question about emergency care as far as CARICOM countries are concerned. They are supposed to do it.

6.23 p.m.

In Guyana, I do not even believe any healthcare worker ask anyone what their nationality is before administering healthcare. So we must applaud ourselves for that.

I have spoken to the Minister of Foreign Affairs within the last hour and he has promised he would provide me with a report, but he has not said to me that what was in the newspapers is not accurate. So, it is a fact, that the gentleman did not receive the care he should have received. But, there is another article in today's *Stabroek News* headlined "T&T's Faud: Health card to clamp down on non-nationals." The last paragraph of that article is very worrying if it is true. This is what it says the Minister of Health, Dr. Khan said, and I quote:

"Maybe we should set up a policy that before you come into the country let us see your medical insurance. Medical insurance is not expensive."

That is very, very worrying. It is even more worrying coming from the country with the most resources, which benefits more from the CSME, than any other country in CARICOM. So we will formally request this be clarified. Because this has serious implications not only for Guyanese citizens, but for others and for the single market and economy as well.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will be chairing the Council on Foreign Relations. In fact, in May Guyana will take over the Chairmanship of that Council. I want to say that one of the things we will certainly be discussing again, is how do we maximise the fourteen voices of CARICOM. We have seen when we work together that we can achieve certain things. You would have read, Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, that the United Kingdom has altered its policy on the advance passenger duty which was charged on every ticket for persons coming to the region, and which

was very discriminatory to the Caribbean. In other words, one can go to Hawaii, which is much further, and pay less tax than if coming to the Caribbean.

Because of our constant lobbying as a region we have seen that policy has now been amended. Too many times when we go it alone we see that the region loses. Of course, there are going to be times when we would have to go our separate ways, as has been seen in recent times. But, more and more we are coming together to see how we can benefit as a region. One measure that we would like to consider is sharing diplomatic missions. It is not something new, but was on the table for a long time. If countries like Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Chile have come together to do this – countries with much more resources than us – then we as small countries have to look at this very seriously.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member your time has expired and you will require an extension.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would just like to say those are some of the issues we would focus on. But in terms of UNASUR, we are also working on something that is called South American Citizenship. It is, maybe, akin to free movement where one can move freely in South America. Already we have agreement with some countries, but this is being worked on as something for the entire South America. I think, this will certainly aid in bringing our countries closer together. In the Defence Council we will be establishing UNASUR - a South American Defence School. And, again, Guyana would stand to benefit in this area.

I would like to say too as we look down South and work more with our South American neighbours, and Latin America in general, it is now an imperative for us to learn to speak Spanish. We must be bilingual; we do not have a choice. I know we do Spanish in some of our schools, but we have to do this more aggressively now at all levels. Perhaps, we can even arrange a session for Members of Parliament because right now we are cooperating with Columbia.

We have already completed some training programmes and are doing additional training programmes which should be starting in a few weeks. We now have Copa Airlines flying to

Guyana. If they are going to hire flight attendants - and we hope they will - we will have to ensure they are bilingual. So our customs, immigration, and all these officers I think would have to be involved. We are working on this. But, at the same time, we have had approaches from countries in South America wanting to send their nationals to learn English. This is an excellent opportunity for business because they want to pay for this. So I think we need to look at this very seriously.

I just want to say in terms of trade, that last year, 2013, we doubled our exports to CARICOM. I think this is very significant – from \$10.3 billion to \$22.3 billion. It is more than double mostly in rice, sugar, molasses, sea-foods, lumber and, of course, rum. This year we will be focusing on our WTO review. Every six years we have to do a review. We would be focusing on that. We will also be looking at the five year agreement of the IIPA (International Intellectual Property Alliance) and would be updating the House on that as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak briefly about the Diaspora. As you know, I had indicated last year we were working on a survey. That survey is now completed. We have now moved to another stage with the international organisation for migration, where we are working on a comprehensive Diaspora Policy Strategy as part of our foreign policy objective. We will, at the appropriate time, of course, be having a Diaspora Conference. And in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs we are creating a one-stop-shop to deal with all Diaspora matters.

I would also like to say in terms of the Foreign Service Institute - I know the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is very interested in the institute and how we can improve the Foreign Service Institute – that it continues to provide a very valuable service to our young diplomats. But, of course, we want to ensure that not only our young diplomats, but others as well benefit – members of our armed forces and other academics. We have done quite a lot but we have more to do. This year, we will be focusing on ensuring that a curriculum is completed in that respect.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot end without speaking to some of the issues that were raised by some of the Hon. Members. As you know, I also have parliamentary responsibility as MP for Region 9. I want to speak to some of the issues raised by Hon. Member Mr. Allicock. Dr. Leslie Ramsammy, the Hon. Member, dealt with the issue of the chemicals being used on the Santa Fe Farm. But I want to say that we are engaged right now as a country in trying to attract investors

to our country. Countries are paying millions to advertise on CNN and BBC as to why one should go there – Peru, Ecuador and Indonesia. We do not have those resources to pay on those kinds of international networks, but we can send out positive messages from here. One of the things that worried a lot of people who are interested, is this issue of “what some consider smearing one of the Caribbean’s major businessmen - Sir Kippen Simpson - as far as it relates to Santa Fe”. So I think we have to be careful how we make statements. We have to be careful what we are trying to find out. This is probably the premier Caribbean investment in Guyana. I wanted to mention that.

I also want to say to the Hon. Member, Mr. Allicock, that I happened to be Minister of Amerindian Affairs before I became Foreign Affairs Minister. On the issue of the school that was built at Sand Creek, there was a decision by everyone - I was there with the Former President - that the school will be built at Sand Creek. Why it was not at Shulinab is because Shulinab is the closest village to Lethem – Parikwarinau is the smallest village. Sand Creek is the centre of south central and it has the facilities we can use to make our children happy. It was not anything about a promise to build at Shulinab and then we went to Sand Creek. No, it was not that. But let me also say, that the Hon. Member, Mr. Allicock, mentioned that children from Region 8 are attending school in Region 9. Well, we have children from Regions 1 to 10 attending schools in Georgetown.

One of the good things about this PPP/Civic administration, is that with the work we have done in education, which the Hon. Member, Minister Manickchand outlined, we have increased numbers at our schools. So the school at Paramakatoi has reached its maximum and that is why we are building a school at Kato. But, in the meantime, we wanted to make the children that pass their exams are in a school and that is why they have been placed at Sand Creek. If at any point in time there is a problem with a child not getting to go home at Christmas, I do not think we should wait for the budget debate. I think that should be dealt with on a one-to-one basis.

Also Mr. Allicock spoke about the Santa Rosa land boundary. I am from Santa Rosa, so you would imagine, I have an interest. Let me say through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Hon. Member that the issue is this: When Santa Rosa was given a land grant first in 1976 it was in the Act and then in 1991 it was through a land grant, but the land grant excluded the first and second depth. It was not the PPP/Civic that did that. The community has been advised to apply for that land but I

do not know if they have done so as yet. But I am sure that once that is done, the Hon. Member, Minister Sukhai, would be able to look at this. Let me also say, it was mentioned that we go around demarcating Amerindian lands without consultation. This Government has not demarcated one single Amerindian village without consultation. We have not extended, not granted any title without agreement. I just wanted to mention that.

Finally, in terms of what Mr. Allicock mentioned about having access to loans from the Banks, this is something that is a kind of Catch-22. When we did the consultation for the Amerindian Act, the Amerindian people said to us, listen, we want communal title; we do not want several titles, we want one title, because in that way the land cannot be sold. So the PPP/Civic said, fine, no problem. In fact communal or collective ownership is what Amerindian communities are built on.

But because we know communities like Surama and Santa Aratak are involved in tourism and agriculture there is a part in that Act that gives the community and the village council, the authority to lease lands up to not more than 10% of the territory for up to 50 years. If that can work for the Banks - I am told it has worked in some cases - then that is something the community might want to consider. But let me say this was not something that we, the Government of Guyana put in place. It is something that you might want to look at. In terms of the collective ownership that is what the community asked for.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say in terms of Region 9, and what has been mentioned by Mr. Allicock, there is some merit in some of what he said. But I think it is important that we recognise too what has been done and what will be done. The Budget of 2014, for example, provides for the upgrading of the Lethem abattoir. We know this is something that was asked for a long time and is very, very important.

There will be furniture for the staff quarters; bridges at Paipang, Bashaidran and Awaruwaunau. We are also looking at internal roads from Lethem to Potarinau, to Katunarib and Sawariwau, Aishalton to Awaruwaunau; solar systems for some of the schools - we have done some but we are doing more. The teachers' quarters at Sand Creek and the extension of the Saint Ignatius and Yukupari Primary Schools will be done. Importantly, we are looking at a Maternity Waiting Home at Lethem because some of the mothers would come out there from time to time.

On the issue of referrals to Brazil, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say through you, to the Hon. Allicock, in some cases because of the time to Medevac someone from Lethem to Georgetown, it is shorter to take them to Boa Vista. What we are trying to do is make the system much easier and we are working with the Brazilian Government on this. And, yes, I agree we should have less referrals, but there are some cases we have to send to Brazil or bring to Georgetown.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end this afternoon and to say to this Hon. House that I believe this is a good Budget. However one looks at it this is a very comprehensive Budget which I think caters for all of the major things we should be looking at. It caters for some of the small things we should be looking at.

On the \$10,000 that was criticised, let me say when we, the PPP/Civic, started the school uniform programme it was started for some schools in the hinterland. The next year we moved to all schools in the hinterland. Then the next year we moved to all schools in Guyana. My dear sister from Moruca, the Hon. Rennita Williams, spoke about the high cost of transportation, for example, in Moruca. We had a lot of proposals on the table, one was put school busses there and another was put some boats here. That would take time to analyse. Some places there are no busses. So the fastest and easiest thing to do, to ensure that every child benefits, was to say \$10,000 across the board. It boggles the mind why anyone would have a problem with that. I heard the Hon. Member, Amna Ally said she hopes it continues. Let me tell you, based on our tract record Hon. Amna Ally, we always continue good things.

I think you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Ms. Selman: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to offer my contribution to Budget 2014 as presented by the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. I wish to remind the House that I had recommended last year, in my budget presentation, that the Minister of Education review the schools curricula to include Spanish and Portuguese as core subjects in our school.

This year's Budget theme is "*A Better Guyana for all Guyanese.*" The theme presupposes that with the passage of this Budget, all Guyanese will experience a positive transformation in their way of life. No one will doubt that such a transformation would be a wonderful ideal that every Guyanese would welcome.

What is a better Guyana? In my view, a better Guyana would be, a Guyana where the conditions are conducive to attracting and retaining foreign direct investment; a Guyana where there is proper infrastructure in place; a Guyana where all Guyanese perceive that our resources are allocated in an equitable manner; a Guyana whose foreign policy ensures that all Guyanese are treated fairly by our continental and Caribbean neighbours. I am convinced that if the programmes and policies outlined in Budget 2014 were supportive of those ideals, Guyana would be well on its way to securing a better Guyana for all Guyanese. Regrettably, an examination of the budgetary allocation reveals quite the opposite.

Let us take for example, the budgetary provisions for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade which is approximately \$3.5 billion. We in A Partnership for National Unity consider this monetary allocation inadequate. We believe that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade has an important role to play in creating a safe and better Guyana for all Guyanese and, therefore, must be given the financial resources to enable it to perform its functions in achieving these lofty objectives. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs can and must contribute to our country's development. Foreign policy is an extension of our domestic policy.

I wish to turn my attention to the issue of protecting our political sovereignty and territorial integrity. The formulation and implementation of a country's foreign policy is primarily based on a country's desire and obligation to foster and protect its national interest, national security, independent sovereignty and economic prosperity. Guyana's foreign policy objectives are grounded in safeguarding the country's political sovereignty and territorial integrity as outlined by the Minister of Finance in his presentation at page 54 paragraph 4.125 where he states, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, the preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity remains central to the policies of the Government.”

A fundamental feature of sovereignty is that, it is a claim that must be recognised by others if it is to have any meaning. Therefore, the Budget has to provide the resources so we can be able to put the mechanisms in place, that would ensure maintenance of political sovereignty and territorial integrity, especially in relation to incidents like the one that took place in October, 2013, which involved the research vessel RV Tenik Perdana. This is the second such occasion

that such an expulsion from our Exclusive Economic Zone has occurred. The first was the driving away of the CGX drilling platform by the Suriname Navy. To all appearances, Suriname and Venezuela are saying to Guyana that we lack the capacity to take care of our sovereignty and to protect our territorial waters. Because they are given this impression, they are treating Guyana however they please. The onus is on the Government to ensure it has the support of all of the people and their organisations in signalling to both of those countries that these occurrences will not be countenanced.

A GINA release dated 16th January, 2014, quoted the Minister of Foreign Affairs as saying, and I quote:

“The Government has opted to pursue a course of reasoned dialogue to preserve the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Mr. Speaker, reasoned dialogue cannot undo the damage this action had, on the commercial initiatives we have undertaken. At least one of the firms which had expressed interest in undertaking off-shore explorations, has indicated it is reconsidering its options and reflecting on the implications of the action. Are we satisfied, that as a result of this development, diplomatic engagement as currently undertaken by the PPP Government, is enough to prevent a recurrence and resolve the situation? Diplomatic engagement is surely an important element of such activities. But, other courses of action must be pursued to ensure that our territorial integrity is protected. I submit here that it is unsatisfactory for the Government to have held only one meeting to deal with such a significant matter. That meeting was held in October, 2013. Is the Government saying that in spite of the tremendous significance of this matter, additional resources could not be found to ensure the protection of our territorial integrity?

The Guyanese public needs to be told of the status of the current relationship with Guyana and the new regime in Venezuela. While it is true we have had a cordial relationship with Venezuela over a relatively long and sustained period, it is absolutely necessary in light of the events of October, 2013, that maintaining our territorial integrity must be given priority. The Guyanese people need the vision and mission of our foreign policy to catch on at every level, from the man on the street to the executive in the office. This would lend itself to a greater feeling of security

by all Guyanese, thereby signalling to foreigners that Guyana is united and on that basis, we will be strong to resist their high handed behaviour.

We in APNU believe that in order to be in a position to lend maximum support to our country's fight to protect its sovereignty, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade should reinforce its institutional capacity at two levels. First, it must establish at its headquarters, a team which draws on the skills from a range of entities such as the University of Guyana, the Department of Lands and Mines and related agencies. Second, at the level of the Mission, there should be a variety of skills such as geography mapping, law, history and local language speakers along with those skills normally retained. These must be recruited in sufficient numbers so as to enable the Mission to be able to service standing bodies such as joint commissions, which call on a range of skills complementary to those at headquarters.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to turn my attention to the promotion of Guyana's Foreign Policy through Economic Diplomacy. Economic Diplomacy refers to the use of trade, economic strategies and influence to consolidate the right political climate to facilitate peace and security, promote international trade and investments, develop international telecommunications, energy and transport networks to name a few. It was reported in the *Guyana Chronicle Newspaper* on 3rd March, 2014, that "*High level Suriname meeting examines enhancing exports to Brazil*". It was reported that with Brazil having become an economic powerhouse in Latin America, Caribbean Export which is the regional trade promotion and facilitation agency, commissioned a study which detailed an immediate set of actions, aimed at addressing the less than stellar performance of firms based in Guyana and Suriname in the Brazilian market. The report noted that Guyana and Suriname are not adequately exploiting trade opportunities either between themselves or with Brazil.

The report found that the partial scope agreements between Brazil and the two countries do not cover most of the country's most competitive exports. The report also found that infrastructure limitations, such as energy cost and road networks, inhibit trade. Some of the recommendations of the Trade Assessment Plan include the establishment of trade desks in the Suriname business forum, the Private Sector Commission of Guyana to provide training for export ready firms, trade and market intelligence and trade show support, including the subsidising of air fare and accommodation for export ready firms. Mr. Speaker, APNU endorses these recommendations in

Guyana's context and calls upon the Minister of Finance to make the budgetary provision to implement those recommendations so as to create the capacity to utilise the natural market created by our links with Brazil.

The APNU believes that Economic Diplomacy is the vehicle by which we can effectively collaborate with our continental and regional neighbours to achieve our domestic developmental policies. Economic Diplomacy should therefore be a policy priority in order to support Guyana's economic development. The Budget should demonstrate Guyana's capacity to invest in Economic Diplomacy so as to boost its economy. The APNU wishes to recommend the establishment within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of an Economic Diplomacy Department. It should have responsibility for interfacing with Guyana's diplomatic missions abroad, the business entities and the other institutions with economic or commercial duties. There is urgent need for economic attaches to be appointed in our embassies in Suriname, Venezuela and Brazil immediately. This recommendation is intended to realise better coordination between our Ambassadors in those countries and the Foreign Trade Department representatives stationed therein.

Mr. Speaker, given the importance of the opening up of our borders through cooperation with our continental neighbours and through regional integration, the action plans of our embassies in those countries must include an increased and intensified economic trust with adequate skilled personnel. A Partnership for National Unity believes that in order to perform their functions properly, each overseas mission should be staffed with competent and skilled personnel. The purpose of this recommendation is to ensure that wherever they exist staff shortage will be addressed and filled as a matter of urgency.

6.53 p.m.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mission Statement on page 29 of the 2014 Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 2, states:

“To foster and further strengthen relations with foreign countries and attract trade and investment in Guyana and provide consulate services to Guyanese and foreign nationals.”

I believe that in order to achieve these objectives, the staffing of our embassies and the budgetary allocations would need to be adjusted appropriately.

The Government says that it recognises the importance of deepening relations with our Brazilian neighbour. This is outlined in the presentation by the Minister of Finance in his speech on page 54, paragraph 4.126, where he states that:

“During the past year, we embarked on an expanded programme of cooperation with Brazil and continued to enjoy good relations with Suriname.”

Therefore, our relationship with Brazil must be taken into account in our domestic policy. Brazil’s economy, as have been said by the Foreign Affairs Minister, is one of the largest of the Latin American countries and the second largest in the western hemisphere. According to the World’s Economic Forum, Brazil was the top country in upward evolution of competitiveness in 2009, gaining eight positions, among other countries, overcoming Russia for the first time and partially enclosing the competitiveness gap with India and China among the Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) Economies. Guyana should seek to ensure that we exploit all avenues of trade with Brazil.

I wish to turn my attention to Regional Integration. Permit me to remind this August body that the People’s National Congress Government, under the leadership of our late Executive President, Forbes Burnham, was instrumental in the founding of CARICOM. He is one of the founding fathers of CARICOM.

Caribbean integration is therefore important to the members of the People’s National Congress (PNC) and by extension, A Partnership for National Unity. APNU wholeheartedly supports Caribbean Integration. Mr. Speaker, the 21st century is and will continue to be of a different complexion from that of the proceeding eras. This epoch is one of highly competitive global markets, increasing trade liberalisation, new and improved information and technology, as well as enormous challenges with respect to national and global economies, as defined by the 2008/2009 Global Financial and Economic Crisis.

The small size and open nature of Caribbean economies, as well as their susceptibility to external shocks render them vulnerable to the various challenges and developments of the 21st Century, as

separate and disjointed entities. The Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), if operated properly, can provide a solid platform for member states to act in concert, to address issues at the national, regional and international levels, especially at a time when the lines separating what is national, regional and international are increasingly becoming blurred. The CSME also promises to be of tremendous benefit to people and businesses throughout CARICOM.

The free movement of people creates avenues for the region to share skills, while simultaneously facilitating those seeking improved standards of living and better employment prospects, away from their domestic spheres. Businesses also have access to a much bigger market than their national markets and would allow, therefore, the potential to generate additional revenue and increased profits.

The region can share its expertise, technology and resources to greater effect. It is in this context that A Partnership for National Unity believes the budget should have made provision to strengthen our capacity to compete or cooperate within CARICOM. We believe that Guyana is not exploiting our Caribbean markets sufficiently, though we recognise the agreements between Guyana and Barbados in the areas of agriculture, fisheries, education, tourism and security and investments and civil aviation. These are commendable, but greater collaboration should be pursued with more of our Caribbean neighbours.

The West Indian Commission Reports of 1992 notes that a single market and economy is supposed to be structured and functioning, as if it were within the borders of a single country. We support this report in its entirety and urge the Government to give more meaning to the CSME.

While we supported the passage of the legislation to strengthen the CSME, we believe that the Caribbean Single Market and Economy is about people and if there is no public 'buy in', effort and resources expended thus far towards the implementation of the CSME, could very well prove to be futile.

CARICOM is capable of advancing our territorial interest. This is set out in Article 4 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas:

“Coordination of foreign policies and that is, presenting a united front in its relations with countries outside the grouping.”

The issue is whether countries, including Guyana, have the political will to give meaning to Article 4. Through coordination of regional foreign policy, we can increase our influence in international affairs. It should be noted that meetings and discussions are not to be confused with operationalising this critical function of Regional Integration. A Partnership for National Unity recognises that with the inter-dependent nature of world politics, sovereignty means little without capacity to influence and enhance external events. Such influence can only be achieved by joint action in the international forum. It is our submission that, when nations are linked economically, socially and culturally, through gradual development of a common market, providing movements of goods, services, capital and people, this could well prove to be a great deterrent to conflict from countries outside of the grouping. Today, the European Union (EU) is a unique example of this. The APNU believes that there is urgent need to rethink and to establish coordinated foreign policies. Perhaps it is time for the CARICOM Secretariat, the Department of Government and International Affairs at the University of Guyana and the Institute for International Cooperation to begin collaborating on a conceptual template for a sustained coordinated regional foreign policy.

In concluding, I wish to reiterate the following:

1. The budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is inadequate. As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will not be able to pull its own weight in terms of foreign trade.
2. Advancing Guyana’s interest is not a task for the Government alone, let alone the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is a task that requires a new inclusionary approach, an approach which requires dialogue and understanding among Government, business and the rest of the community.
3. At every stage of our dialogue, the public, not only Members of the National Assembly, needs to be informed.

4. If Guyana's foreign policy is to succeed it must aim to mobilise the understanding and support of all Guyanese.
5. Finally, if there is to be a better Guyana, we have to institute policies that will ensure that we build a strong economy through robust international economic relations.

Budget 2014 fails to do that. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, thank you. I think you would be pleased to know, Hon. Member, Ms. Selman, that you spoke in less time than was provided for, contrary to the belief among some. Very well thank you. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Clement Rohee, to address the House.

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]: Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to express the deepest and sincerest appreciation to my colleague, Minister Ashni Singh, for presenting once again, a budget that I believe will bring tremendous benefits to all the Guyanese people.

In fact, just a few minutes after the Minister's Budget Presentation, as I was proceeding to party headquarters, I stopped by the traffic lights at the corners of Avenue of the Republic and Robb Streets. A gentleman flagged me down; he wanted to say something. I stopped to listen to what he had to say. It was amazing how a common citizen on the streets, in a matter of minutes, was able to understand what this budget meant for him. He told me that he was pleased that the Government was allocating an increase in the sum of money granted to pensioners. He was pleased about that and further more he was pleased about the fact that he had three grandchildren who were going to benefit from the money that has been allocated to our school children.

As I listen to the Members on the opposite side of the House, or on that side of the House, make their presentations, I was trying to figure out what the common line was that the party, the APNU, had adopted in relations to this budget. It must have been a gathering of the Members of Parliament (MPs) to determine a common approach to this Budget Presentation. In seeking to understand this psychological phenomenon, I recall just a few years after the tragic events with the attack on 9/11, on the Twin Towers in the United States. On the first anniversary of that attack, a sculptor unveiled a piece of sculpture, which showed a woman falling in the air, so to speak, with her hands and feet flailing in such a way to demonstrate the extent to which she was

fall and the height from which she was falling. At the bottom of that piece of art were the words, “We watch, disbelieving and helpless on that savage day, people we loved began falling.” That piece of art gave rise to a big controversy in the United States.

Within a matter of days the sculpture had to be covered and then it was cleaned off and then eventually removed. When the artist was asked about his reaction to this action, he said that all he was trying to do was to demonstrate to humanity the extent to which the attack on 9/11 was reflective of how humanity felt about so many hundreds of people dying.

So the morale behind this story was what I would describe as the phenomenon of repression, motivated forgetting. That is how I would like to capture the collective presentation by the Opposition on this budget of one in which there was motivated, forgetting of the realities in which they live; the repressing of realities in this country, in all the sectors of social, political and economic life.

What did they say? They said, for example: the Hon. Member Dr. Ramayya said that this is a pre-elections budget and cannot be accepted in its present form. The Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition Brigadier (Ret`d) David Granger, said in the media that the budget was not forward looking, nor developmental oriented and cannot be accepted in its present form. He went on further to say that the budget has no plan for poverty reduction, employment or social protection, etcetera and it was divorced from reality. Then Mr. Jones, the Hon. Member, spoke about a “Series of unfortunate events” that cannot be accepted in its present form. Dr. Cummings, the new Member in this House, described the budget as a lacklustre budget and cannot be accepted in its present form. The common lines in these statements and I suppose in others to come, is that the budget is unacceptable, in its present form and the Minister must go and come again.

Sometime earlier this year, on 3rd Friday, the APNU issued a press statement in which they proposed what they described as a new social contract. In that new social contract they articulated certain philosophical views. Common among which was that this must be a vehicle to bring together persons from various constituents to work together for the common good of Guyana. It must promote national unity, ensure human safety and foster economic development. That statement struck a positive note at the beginning of the year, but lo and behold, in or on 5th

September, Brigadier (Ret`d) David Granger, the Hon. Member, made another statement where he said that he was tired of the political stalemate in the country and that he is interested in the “New political culture” that would encourage cordial relations and civilised dialogues among parties, meaning the parties in the Parliament. He said when he spoke of a new political culture he speaks about creating a relationship among the three parties in the National Assembly. Mr. Speaker, we were surprised however, on 1st September, the Opposition Leader stated on another occasion and this is what he said, quoting from the *Stabroek News* of Sunday, 1st September:

“We feel that the Government is taking a big political risk if it continues to defy the will of the majority. We cannot go on like this for the next five years. They will have to accept the consequences. Sooner or later people will reach their breaking point.”

What surprised me is the quantum leap from talk about reconciliation and a consensus building mechanism, *vis-a-vis* the social contract, to what appeared to be confrontational talk.

As though this was not enough, as time went on in the middle of March, Mr. Greenidge in an interview with the *Kaieteur News* said, speaking about the budget:

“If not, then it may have very well be a nasty or a bloody war when it is presented in the Parliament.”

Mr. Greenidge threatens nasty and bloody war. Sounded as though we were in for a process and period of bloodletting in this Parliament; a radical shift from the talk about dialogue and cooperation to a season characterised by bloodletting in the Parliament and in this country.

Another quotation from the Opposition Leader, in the *Kaieteur News* of the 18th March, as though not to be left out from the rhetoric, spoke about: “Jump high or jump low, we are going to exercise our right to approve and disapprove of the budget.”

In the course of the debate in this House, I sat puzzled to the extent of some Members on both sides of the Opposition benches referring to Dr. Jagan; Government’s neglect of Region 10 is a betrayal of Jagan’s principles. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to sound disrespectful to anyone, but I believe that apart from doing research on people, historical figures in this country, one must also have a personal relationship with that person. When the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) came to Government in 1992 the Hon. Member Ms. Vanessa Kissoon was 14 years of age. She was

born on the 26th February, 1978 – 14 years of age. It is quite possible and I do not want to underestimate her ability to do research, but to speak about Dr. Jagan in this manner, when the PPP came to Government in 1992, not even knowing the history of the individual, I believe is paying a great disservice to a man, an icon, in our history in this country. *[Interruption]* You can say what you want to say. *[Interruption]*

Instead of pontificating and criticising, the Opposition should tell us, in very clear and uncertain terms, what concrete and specific contribution they are prepared to make to the national development in this country. All of the Ministers who spoke on this side of the House have invited you to be part of the exciting journey of nation building, but you prefer to sit and pontificate, make a whole host of criticisms, not even of a constructive nature and a host of proposals that have no water whatsoever.

What has happened with the Opposition? Not only in the context of this Budget Debate, but even historical antecedents in respect of other issues, it is that they have pursued a policy of isolationism; they have found themselves isolated. The Private Sector Commission, many of the stakeholders who have a stake in this budget have come out supporting it, save and except the Opposition. The same experience has been demonstrated in respect of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Bill. They end up on the side of isolation. They have dug themselves into holes so often it is now difficult for them to extricate themselves from these holes.

Dr. Roopnarine, the Hon. Member, when he spoke engaged in a whole host of what to do and what not to do – dos and don'ts - in the agriculture or environmental sector. I want to quote from a letter that was written by one Mrs. Whitman, in a correspondence sent to Mr. Edgar Allan Poe. This is what was said:

“I have absolutely no pleasure in the stimulants in which I sometimes so madly indulge. It has not been in pursuit of pleasure that I have peril, life, reputation and reason. It has been into desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories, the memories of wrongs and injustice and imputed dishonour from a sense of unsupportable loneliness and a dread of some strange impending doom.”

What was the situation that existed in those days when the PPP/Civic was in the Opposition, together with the Working People's Alliance, who now sits in close embrace and harmony with the PNC called the APNU? We have to make comparative analysis if we want to understand how we are today and where we came from.

I want to quote from a booklet entitled, "Try new ways –economic moves for a people in crisis" published by the Working People's Alliance in 1982. This is what it says,

"Nowhere..."

My friend Mr. Felix spoke about a deadening hand well let me give you another deadening hand. He says:

"Nowhere has deadening hand of the regime and its incompetence been so keenly felt as in the area of public transport and other public utilities. Many authoritarian regimes have seen it fit and seen to it that these things at least function. In our case the utilities are seen and treated by the regime, not as a service to the people, but as a public nuisance."

7.23 p.m.

For these reasons, and because of the deep-seated chronic corruption, no major investment, such as reconstruction of a railway system, has been attempted in Guyana. It goes on to state:

"Corruption has been encouraged so that it has become routine. The gains of corruption have become part of the normal expectations of office holders and part of the cost of the majority of projects."

This is what transpired in those days. Many Members on that side of the House quoted from Mr. Burnham, the virtues of former President Burnham, but I would like to refer to another publication put out by the then Working People's Alliance (WPA) because it is not the same WPA today. This is what Mr. Burnham had to say about democracy:

"But democracy is a concept which depends on where you put your emphasis, whether you prefer the formality of periodic elections, which means nothing or produces nothing, or you prefer the reality of social democracy which needs an approval of the society and greater participation given to the masses."

What a description of democracy! The economic crisis that obtained at that time in Guyana as compared to what it is now... I have heard many of the persons on that side, the Hon. Members, spoke about a crisis in our country today in almost every sector. They spoke about crisis obtaining in health, education, transport and where ever they may want to cast their imagination... [Mr. Bond: Security.] It is security also. It is quite easy to talk about public safety and security, but in talking about public safety and security today we must cast our minds back and recall, for those of you who do not know, you were too young to know, what transpired in those days.

We have releases from the Working People's Alliance (WPA) which spoke about Joshua Ramsammy being denied the freedom to leave the country; Eusi Kwayana not being allowed to leave the country, a constitutional right which all of the Members enjoy today and in those days we could not have left the country.

This is a quotation from a letter to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretary General in March of 1980. This is what it states, and it was signed by the WPA:

“Minutes after Bonita Bourne, or Harris, boarded the plane, policemen entered the BWIA aircraft, took her bodily off of the plane, dragged her across the tarmac, in a manner usually associated with countries like South Africa and Chile. Eventually, after much communication between the airport and Georgetown, and after protest by the Leader of the Opposition,...”

It is not this Leader of the Opposition; it was the then Leader of the Opposition - Dr. Jagan.

“...who was travelling on the same flight, she was allowed to leave the country.”

This was the type of police state we had in this country. When you come to talk about public safety and security now talk also about what existed then. There are many, which I can quote from, but I will leave them for another occasion which is coming.

There is an interesting piece of information which, I believe, is important for the public to know about. There is information which reveals that firearms were sent from the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) in June 1979 to the People's National Congress (PNC) – 19 G3 rifles, 19 G3 Bayonet sniper rifles, 15,000 rounds of 7.62 ammunitions, 10 Browning pistols, 500 9mm lens.

The transference of firearms from the GDF armoury then to Congress Place... [Ms. Ally: Your eyes pass Congress Place. Provide the evidence.] Look, the evidence is here. Do you want it? I can give it to you. As if that was not enough, after the party congress of the then ruling People's National Congress, orders were issued for the military to participate in civilian uniforms or civilian clothing...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Rohee, I want some clarifications. Are you reading from documents that are publicly available or from classified information?

Mr. Rohee: It is publicly available.

Mr. Speaker: To which?

Mr. Rohee: This is a press release issued by the WPA on August 28, 1981, signed by Andiaye, to which this document is attached. This is what it states; it is a restricted document:

“Year of Energy, Part 1. Orders by Colonel D. A. Granger, M.S.M, Commander of the Guyana Defence Force, from Camp Ayanganna, general and training in administration and manning.”

The order was issued for ranks of the Guyana Defence Force to join a march, after the rally or to join in the march after the Fourth Biennial Congress of the PNC, ending at the 1763 Monument.

Mr. B. Williams: I rise on a Point of Order. I am standing on Standing Order 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Rohee, you may be seated please, it is a Point of Order.

Mr. B. Williams: I am referring to a breach of Standing Order 41 (1). I have risen on Standing Order 40 (a) and that is in relation to the breach of Standing Order 41 (1).

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, read it.

Mr. B. Williams: Standing Order 41 (1) reads, “Subject to these Standing Orders, debate upon any motion, Bill or amendment shall be relevant...” I am enquiring about the relevance of this excursion that the Hon. Member has proceeded on.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me quote Standing Order 71 which deals with financial procedures. This Standing Order 71(2) and it states:

“The debate, when resumed, shall be confined to the financial and economic state of the country and the general principles of Government policy and administration as indicated by the Budget Speech and the Estimate.”

We have, all of us, taken latitudes but we must at least confine ourselves, or cribbed and confined - to use one of Mr. Ramjattan’s favourite terms - within Standing Order 71(2). I would urge you Hon. Member not to make your budget speech about the Leader of the Opposition. I do understand and appreciate the context of national security but Standing Order 71 (2) is quite clear about the nature of the budget speech. I will monitor you as you proceed.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I fully accept your ruling.

Mr. Speaker: I have not ruled. I am saying that you may proceed but I will monitor you, giving you guidance. Standing Order 71 (2) is what guides all of us.

Mr. Rohee: I think the nation is fully aware that the Opposition, in budget debates and out of budget debates, in the National Assembly and out of National Assembly, has always placed a tremendous amount of emphasis on the security sector, particularly the Leader of the Opposition. My contribution Mr. Speaker, with due respect to your guidance, is to make the comparative analysis between what obtains today and what obtained then.

Never in the history of our country has the security sector gone through so many reforms that it is going through now. It was not under the previous Government prior to 1992. The previous Commissioners of Police, including the Hon. Member Mr. Felix, must tell us the nature of the reforms they initiated in the security sector when they were there, save and except,...The fact of the matter is that in a police state, which existed in those days, the entire question of public safety and security was greatly emphasised in respect of the Opposition parties. That is where the emphasis lied, in maintaining total control and decapitation of the Opposition parties with respect to their leaders.

When we talk about public safety and security today we must recognise that it is taking place in the context of a democracy and that it did not take place in those days in that context - freedom

of the press, freedom of the movement. Context is what is important here, the socio-economic context in which this debate is taking place. In those days, as it is now, the degree, and scale, of issues, such as money laundering, was virtually nonexistent; drug trafficking was virtually nonexistent. Gun running, piracy, human trafficking and domestic violence, if existed in those days, were minuscule and did not warrant the attention... That is why we have to be careful when we are speaking about public safety and security we do not only focus on crime because it is only one aspect of public safety and security. There is the question of interpersonal violence and we need to take a holistic approach to it. Fighting drug trafficking, fighting human trafficking, fighting money laundering, fighting gun running, fighting all those issues together is what constitutes the entire and the holistic approach to public safety and security. Those who wish only to focus on crime, because that is where their strength is, may be missing boat.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, you will require 15 minutes for the extension.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Rohee: The challenges, which exist today, are not similar to the challenges that existed in those days. If the Members want to talk, in order to embarrass the administration for the sake of embarrassing the administration politically, it is easy to do. That is nothing difficult to do but we have to look at public safety and security in the present day context and realities and address it from that perspective.

To hear Members from the Opposition benches opposing the establishment of a Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) team. People who came from the very security sector opposing the establishment of a SWAT team. I think they are upset about the fact that it did not happen under them. That is why they are upset, that in hindsight they realised that they are the ones that should have done that. We cannot help people who have failed in their responsibilities. They have failed in their responsibilities and they must accept failure because when one accepts failure one can learn from what one has failed on.

The Opposition takes pride in painting a bad picture of our country, and the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke about that, but notwithstanding the fact that it might be painting the

country in a bad light, thousands of people are still arriving in our country. It was pointed out that in 2013, 200,022 persons arrived in our country, either as visitors, tourists or so forth.

Turning to the security sector, this sector is going through tremendous changes. While it might not be possible to elaborate on all of the changes that are taking place in the security sector, the fact is that the Guyana Police Force, being the foremost law enforcement agency in this country, notwithstanding all of the unnecessary and uncalled for bashing, which takes place in respect of the Guyana Police Force - this force, which is a Guyanese force, which was nurtured and built up since 1966 when we achieved independence to today - is free from political control as it used to be in the past. We did not call on the police to march after and behind PPP rallies after congress. We do not do that, but the changes that are taking place are manifest.

As we come to the end, in a few days time, of the Citizens Security Programme, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), we are now preparing to enter into negotiations with the IDB for a successor programme of the Citizens Security Programme. We are soon, this year, to engage the Capita Symonds group from England in the formulation...In fact, we have already settled on the plan for implementing four aspects that are very much needed in the police force – successor planning, probity and integrity, recruitment and detention and public relations and communications. These are reforms that are vitally needed within the police force and the fact of the matter is that the force has accepted these reforms.

Today, more than 47 police stations are linked through a wide area network where data collected at police stations are sent to force headquarters for immediate action on an operational basis. This has never happened in the past. There is an integrated crime information system which helps to advance the investigative capacity of the Guyana Police Force.

We are now working to upgrade the passport security systems and in this respect within a few months time we are going to be releasing a new machine readable passport with increased security features. This is important because already we have noticed that the extant machine readable passport is being tampered with by people who wish to steal the identity of persons in order to use it for criminal intent. We are improving the marine wing of the Guyana Police Force.

The Guyana Prison Service is also going through changes, notwithstanding the fact that the Opposition opposed the name change of the Guyana Prison Service to the Guyana Prison and Correctional Service.

There are changes that are taking place also in the Guyana Fire Service. Incidentally the Hon. Member Mr. Felix spoke about the Guyana Fire Service. Let me inform Mr. Felix, in case he does not know, that when we came into Government in 1992 there was one fire tender and a half of a land rover pickup and three functioning fire stations. Look at what we have now, and then he should ask himself how far we have got with the firefighting capacity of the Guyana Fire Service.

At General Register Office, we are moving speedily to eventually issue birth certificates that are computerised. We will eventually, in the not too distant future, issue such type of birth certificates that are electronically generated.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, compared to what it was before, where it was degouted by the previous administration, all it had were five members of staff, check and see what it has now. When you come to discuss the estimates and we will see the tremendous capacity which the Ministry has built up year after year owing to the appropriations made by the Ministry of Finance.

We are moving to expand neighbourhood police and community policing. It was said by Mr. Felix that we ought not to give so much to community policing, that \$413 million is too much for community policing. How could a Member, who was once a Commissioner of Police, argued against increased allocation to community policing groups when it is the community that has to work hand in hand with the police? You, yourself, know that Mr. Speaker. It is an established fact that without the cooperation of the community the police will not succeed to the extent that we would like for them to succeed. We know that, but yet for the sake of politicking the Hon. Member Mr. Felix opposes \$413 million for community policing. I want that word to get out so that the community members would know that the once Commissioner of Police is opposing the increase in allocation to community policing. The Hon. Member must know that we have 282 community policing groups across the country with a membership of 4,542, and growing. Mr. Speaker, I believe that we must respect these people, and do you know why? It is because they

are giving voluntary time to their communities and they are in the community. If there is not enough regular ranks to police the community, which the Hon. Member knows, then obviously we have to tap into the communities to assist us with that respect.

I would like to make reference to resources. We hear talk about lack of resources and vehicles, but let me refer to these figures. The year 2006 is the year I went to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Between 2006 and 2013, 374 new and additional land and water transport means were provided to the Guyana Police Force. Those included 31 motor cars, 24 trucks, 56 double cap pickups, 101 motorcycles, 21 boats and *ballahoos*. Five hundred and seventy-four pieces of equipment were provided to the Guyana Police Force.

When we got into Government in 1992 the salary of a commissioner was \$43,374. Do you know what the salary is now, Mr. Speaker? Under the PPP/C, the salary of a commissioner is now \$470, 625. This is where we have moved from \$43,000 for a commissioner to \$472,000. A constable under the PNC Government received \$6,518. Today a constable receives \$38,479. I believe we must give recognition to this vast improvement that has taken place, \$4,600 under the PNC administration to \$38,479.

I want to say that in a few days time we will be commissioning the forensic laboratory that has taken quiet some time to be completed. It is true that it was supposed to be commissioned late last year but owing to a number of technical snafu we are now set to commission this forensic laboratory by the end of this month.

7.53 p.m.

Increasing the capacity of the police and other law enforcement agencies with respect to polygraph testing, which is aimed at enhancing the integrity of the Police Force. Two weeks ago, 62 ranks of the Joint Services were given polygraph tests and we are now awaiting the results of those examinations. Polygraph examination, fortunately, did not begin under Mr. Felix's time because apart from having the infamous tape of the conversation, which is called "hook-up time", I am sure that if this polygraph test was administered during the time he was Commissioner of Police (CoP), much more would have been revealed.

Reference was made to the interdiction of drugs. There is a headline in the 31st March newspaper which states, “More money for GINA than for war against illicit drugs”. I have a publication here. Dr. Roopnarine, Hon. Member, do you remember this? I would like to read what this publication states about the media under the previous dispensation.

Mr. Speaker: What document is it? It seems that Dr. Roopnarine knows it, but we do not know what it is.

Mr. Rohee: It is called, “Redemption, Reconstruction and Rebirth”.

Mr. Speaker: Authored by whom?

Mr. Rohee: It is authored by the Working People’s Alliance (WPA).

Mr. Speaker: What year?

Mr. Rohee: It was in the year 1985. This is what is said about the media in those days.

“Another area which requires reform is the media...”

[**Mr. Felix:** *[inaudible]* special branch.] This is not special branch; this is the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) branch. [**An Hon. Member:** Where did that come from?] It came from the WPA.

“Another area which requires reform is the media. The state-owned media are devoted almost entirely to the service of the ruling party on the argument that it represents the nation and, therefore, are not simply a party, but the nation in politics.”

Pinochet, Duvalier and Zia Ul-Haq have used this argument to justify their paramouncy.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have to begin to wrap up.

Mr. Rohee: I am beginning to wrap up.

Mr. Speaker, I have with me the latest Report, the 2013 Report of the United Nation’s Organisation on Drug Control. This is the Organisation that speaks authoritatively on the question of drugs and interdiction of drugs in all countries of the world. Mr. Speaker, if you read this document carefully, the section dealing with Latin America and the Caribbean, you will see

that it states nothing negative about Guyana. In fact, it speaks positively about the country in respect of fighting drugs.

Both Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) and the police narcotics branch have recently been detecting and interdicting persons caught at CJIA with drugs. I will say this: rather than referring mockingly to CANU and the narcotics branch of the Guyana Police Force (GPF), we should give credit to the fact that they continue to detect and interdict persons in respect of drug trafficking.

I continue to say: wherever they hide it, we will find it. That is the mantra that I have given to both CANU and the police narcotics branch. Wherever they hide it, we will find it. In the same way, wherever they hide the guns, we will find the guns.

I want to conclude by saying that we would soon be engaging in some new initiatives and I will speak about them more expansively on another occasion. But just to give a sneak preview, law enforcement and public safety and security continue to be and will always be a work in progress. If there is anyone on that side of the House who believes he or she has a silver bullet and can revert to the days when there was a police state to deal with public safety and security, then he or she is sleep/walking in his or her dreams. I am saying that public safety and security is a work in progress. The criminals will always try to be a step ahead of law enforcement. That is why we always have to be more than a step ahead of them and that is precisely why, under the PPP/C Administration, we are dedicated to ensuring that the citizens of this country can sleep, live, work and have leisure in an atmosphere of peace, security and good order in this country.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is 8.00 p.m. Are you mindful to take a 15 minutes suspension or do you want us to work through?

Members of the House: Work through.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Nagamootoo, are you in a position to proceed?

Mr. Nagamootoo: I am at your command, Your Honour.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a command. I am asking.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Yes, I am.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. Members, there are refreshments in the Members of Parliament Lounge. Members may wish, at their leisure, to go into the Lounge and refresh themselves.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I have listened very carefully to several of the speakers on the 2014 Budget. I was impressed with the presentation by the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs who spoke succinctly and attempted to project Guyana, as a foreign affairs minister ought to do, as a preferred destination for investment, for tourism and, indeed, for development funds. I was, however, taken aback by her expression that there were Members in the House – I suppose elected Members of the House – who were branding Guyana in a negative way.

When I listened to the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs taking us into an excursion or a flight of fancy into history and comparing what Guyana is today to what it was before as a police state, I was not sure if he was not, himself, attempting to brand Guyana in a negative way because today this State is a criminal State. One cannot compare the branding where a Minister was denied a visa by the world's most powerful country – the United States of America...

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I have heard this matter... [Ms. Ally: What is your point of order?] I did not rise on a point of order. Mr. Speaker, I have heard this matter being raised time and again in this House and outside of this House. None of the persons, including the Hon. Member, Mr. Nagamootoo, have evidence to show, and I suspect that the Minister he is speaking about is the sitting Minister of Home Affairs. Mr. Nagamootoo, if he is referring to me, must provide incontrovertible evidence that Minister Clement James Rohee, born on 16th March, 1950, was denied an American visa. [Members of the Opposition: Bring your passport.] I do not have to bring my evidence; he has to bring it! Mr. Speaker, the burden of proof is not on me. I am not saying anything. He is making the allegation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo, you have made a statement and I would advise that you leave it alone or prove it with any evidence that you may have.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of public record that the two Ministers had their visas revoked.

Mr. Speaker: Those matters were reported in the press indeed, but I believe that something as strong as that being said in this House requires a higher level of evidence than just what was reported in the press. I would say that you may say that it has been reported in the press and move ahead.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Is the Minister denying the allegation?

Mr. Speaker: We are not going to have an inquisition or an exchange here. You cannot make it a statement of fact, unless you are in a position to verify that fact, because you have been challenged on it. You have been challenged on it. As you have been challenged on it, unless you have evidence, you cannot proceed on it. You may say that it has been reported, but you cannot state it has a statement of fact without more because you have been challenged on it.

Mr. Nagamootoo: It has been reported, Your Honour. There are some encounters I had on this matter at a certain level of a political party to which I was associated but I believe that because this has now been a very important disclosure – the denial. Speaking of branding...

Mr. Rohee: I respectfully insist that the Hon. Member withdraws the comment. I am insisting that he either withdraws it or provides the evidence that I was denied a visa by the United States Embassy. He must do it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Nagamootoo did not name any Minister. The Minister of Home Affairs believed... In fact, the same accusation had been made against another Minister of Home Affairs and so unless Mr. Nagamootoo names the sitting, extant Minister, there is another Minister of Home Affairs who the same accusation was levelled against. With respect, I cannot ask him to withdraw against you because no accusation was levelled against you particularly, even though you felt aggrieved. He said there were two and, in fact, it was reported in the press.

He said it was reported in the press and that is what, in law, we would call a notorious fact for which judges take what is known as judicial notice that it was reported in the press that, and I do not believe that I can, in any way, prevent Mr. Nagamootoo from saying this. I do not need to see what the press said. These are things that were reported in the press and it is open to a Member to state that. If the Member wants, he can rely on a date but we cannot move away from the fact

that this has been reported. The Member did not name any person tonight, so there is nothing to withdraw.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, this matter is of grave concern to me and my credibility as a Member of Parliament, as Minister of Government and as a citizen of this country. It is very important to me and my credibility. I did not hear the Hon. Member say that it was reported in the press. I did not hear him say that. I heard you suggest to him that he should say that to get over it.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nagamootoo, I invite you to withdraw your original comment and you may substitute it. I hereby strike from the record the reference to a visa being refused, if it is not being withdrawn. It is open to you to replace it with words "as reported". For the record, it is removed that a visa was refused.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I did say, Sir, that it was reported.

Mr. Speaker: You may say it was reported and that is acceptable to the Chair.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I have an electronic copy of it and I will move on. Let me say this: the many victims of violence, banditry and brigandage in Guyana have not been comforted by anything that the Hon. Minister said. We cannot go and tell the relatives of the old women who re-migrated here, those relatives who have lost their loved ones, that things were worst off 35 years ago. We cannot tell the people in Berbice, the fishermen who were plundered and pillaged by pirates and the businessmen who were robbed and killed routinely, that their fortune depended on what happened 35 years ago. We cannot tell the world that we are in the mode of self denial and that we do not have horrible incidents of criminal acts, even alleged criminal acts of baton rape and a child's genitalia's being burnt with cigarettes. [Mr. Ramjattan: Not alleged; that has been proven.] The latter was proven.

Mr. Speaker left the Chair.

[*Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair.*]

I welcome the Deputy Speaker to the Chair. We cannot say that torture is a feature of our life and we cannot say that things are what they are today – that an entire police station had to be degutted, to use the Minister's word, over several acts of banditry in which citizens in Berbice

reasonably believed that policemen were involved... We cannot tell people who came out in protest at Albion and were tear-gassed and Shamshudeen, one of the protestors who were killed when they suspected that police ranks were involved in banditry and rape, that although those things happened, it could have been worse if we went back 35 years ago.

I fought the police repression – and I was a victim of it – and I fought the fair battles against rigged elections in Guyana for that long journey of 28 years, but I did not fight and place my life and limb on the line to see a warped doctrine in place by the Government I created and helped to form choose to have a policy that no elections are better than rigged elections. What comfort do we have branding ourselves as revolutionaries who fought against a police state when we hold captive our people and do not hold local government elections, grass root elections, due since 1994? What credentials do we speak of in this august House that we are better than those who ruled or misruled us in the past if we do exactly and worse than those who we claim to have defeated? What do we say when independent voices are gagged and silenced, when there is paramountcy of the party over the state media and critics are routinely silenced? What do we say that we have sacrificed and struggled in the past against? For what?

It had not been my intention to speak to this Budget in this way. I was warning my good Friend, the Hon. Christopher Jones, the other day when he spoke about the slaughter of goats in the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall. I had warned him not to do so because I had sensed that the ghost of one of those goats would have come back to haunt us. I can hear the distant bleating.

This year marks the centenary of the birth of my late father, Nagamootoo Ramsammy, known as “Bright Steel”. The eldest son of Indian immigrants, he was also a sugar worker, rice farmer, fisherman, butcher, shop keeper, village leader and, socially, a cricketer and horse racing turfite. Permit me, Your Honour, in his memory, to salute all of our hardworking people whose struggles, sacrifices and contributions have brought us this far as a Guyanese nation.

I wish also to remember Mrs. Deborah Backer, our late sister and parliamentary colleague, and I hope that we can emulate the quality of her aggressive advocacy without compromising our responsibility to fearlessly represent our constituents and to defend the integrity of this National Assembly.

The 2014 Budget debate is not unlike those of 2012 and 2013. It is, sadly, characterised by a sharp and noisy division of views and we seem to be going nowhere. The arguments always begin with charges and counter charges over consultation. In boycotting the reading of the Budget Speech on 24th March, 2014, the Alliance For Change (AFC) protested that Government did not hold timely and meaningful consultation with us on budget proposals.

We pointed out that article 13 of the Guyana Constitution provides for an inclusionary democracy and we felt that Government and Opposition consultation would be in Guyana's national interest. But consultation seems to be a bad word because after three hours of it with the Ministry of Finance, the Guyana Tourism and Hospitality Association (THAG) of Guyana complained that its proposals to reduce Value Added Tax (VAT) for the tourism sector and concessions for our locally owned national aviation industry were not reflected in the 2014 Budget.

Our AFC parliamentarian, Hon. Cathy Hughes, articulated the needs and priorities of the tourism industry but her excellent and constructive speech was banned on the State television and radio and made a prohibited item by this Administration which is increasingly becoming intolerant of alternative views.

Even proposals from the pro-government Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITUG) got shafted. FITUG wanted an increase in personal income tax allowance to \$720,000, progressive tax rates to ease burden on medium earners, increase in old age pension to \$15,000, unemployment benefits and wage increases for lowest paid employees. We fully support FITUG's proposals and, at first, the Minister must have seen merit in them since he promised to examine them positively, as was reported. But the fact is that FITUG's reasonable proposals were all ignored. The elected politicians were not consulted and labour and business bodies which took the trouble to consult got nothing. It is a case of being damned if you don't and damned if you do.

The leading private sector body – the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) – was disappointed that the Government did not further reduce Pay As You Earn (PAYE) by three and a half per cent and bring down tariffs on imported meat like chicken, pork and beef. Past president Clinton Urling was quoted in the 29th March, 2014 edition of the *Kaieteur News* as

saying that GCCI is still awaiting a comprehensive tax reform to enhance business and improve consumer spending.

Apart from the vital consultation, we raise, as a primary national concern, the exclusion of large revenue streams from the Consolidated Fund, as mandated by the Guyana Constitution, which makes the budget account incomplete. We specifically pointed to funds held by the National Industrial & Commercial Investment Limited (NICIL), Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), National Frequency Management Unit (NFMU), and those in several “dead” bank accounts.

Those are some of the backdrop issues we have with this 2014 Budget. Government seems to ignore content and instead emphasise the size of the Budget - \$220 billion. I wish to say that this Budget has allocations for sectors with which we identify and, indeed, support. We do not hold a negative view of the Budget as a whole, and views contrary to this are self-serving and misleading, Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

For us, as a patriotic and national movement, we have a vested interest in the standard of living and standard of life of all of our people, which is why we support increased allocations for the social sector, including education, health, housing, water, environment, and security. We support the allocation for water because we know this is the water that Guyanese have to live with and drink in some areas of this country. This is water from Ithaca and from the Number 3 Village, West Coast Berbice.

Mr. Nagamootoo displayed bottles of water in the House.

This is not pepper sauce. This is water, potable water. We have a vested interest in the health of our citizens and we support these sectors.

We also wish more could be done in job-creating sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. We also continue to demand more for wages, pensions, social assistance, and for organisations that promote assistance to the vulnerable in the society.

8.23 p.m.

It is this principled and patriotic position – I want this to be heard carefully – that informed our support in 2012 and 2013 for the use of billions of taxpayers’ moneys to bail out the sugar industry and the electricity sector, which are gasping for survival due to the incompetence of this post-Jagan minority Government. Our stand has been that sugar workers and electricity consumers must not suffer for the failure and bungling of this Government.

As regards sugar, instead of giving us an account of what they did with the \$44 billion spent on the Skeldon factory and the \$11 billion in bailout money, they came here with a new, cheap, blackmail trick that the Opposition would be guilty of ethnic cleansing of Indian sugar workers if we did not dole out more billions in subsidies.

Words have power and as the world observes the 20th year after the ethnic cleansing, the genocide in Rwanda, we must not even use those words to drive fear subliminally in this ethnically divided land.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Lumumba, spoke and no matter how he tried to extricate himself from it, I believe it was one of the darkest moments in this House that we could have gone back and use language that would have sent fears because no one in this country looking at history and placing themselves physically and emotionally... Once, when we visited the Buchenwald Prison where six million Jews were exterminated in an act of genocide and ethnic cleansing... would use words loosely to intimidate this House, to blackmail this House, to give money to an ailing sugar industry that had been badly mishandled and mismanaged.

The issue here is not the sugar workers. The issue has always been the incompetence and the refusal of this Government to upturn the board and bring better leadership into the sugar industry, even to try as best to save it from demise and I will show that there were a lot of opinions that the sugar industry, in fact, is facing a bleak future.

It is regrettable that there has emerged so much friction and fraction over this Budget. We cannot deny the Government its right to praise the Budget, but we abhor condemnation of our criticisms as being negative. Ours is not the job of the loyal choir, but we have a duty as elected representatives of the House to guard the public purse. It must be the duty of this National Assembly, not the Opposition but as a whole, to lower unjustified spending, to lower our national debt and to lower our fiscal deficit.

In most countries, the watchful critics use as benchmarks of good budget and good governance when they see health and education expenditures increase and conversely when they see expenditure on security and military decrease. That is the standard in the world.

This Government deserves our unbiased commendation that it has continued to keep afloat social services expenditures, but the AFC proposes that these must be deemed mandatory expenditure and as people's entitlements which have a fixed percentage of the National Budget.

We propose that old age pensions must be linked to the cost of living index to make it, not a wage, but a living entitlement. It is demeaning to our senior citizens to haggle every year over their needs and over what they justly deserve.

I wish to return to what I said earlier, that the duty of the National Assembly is to protect the national purse.

This is another important backdrop to this year's Budget, as alluded to by several speakers from this side and by the Minister of Finance, himself, when he referred to the "gravely debilitating consequences of legislative stalemate" occasioned partly by certain "judicial interpretations" rendered in the now famous or infamous budget cut case.

AFC believes that Government must not be paranoid over the role of this Assembly to interrogate and reduce unnecessary or unexplained spending.

It is true that history is replete with examples where Government's defeat on financial proposals ended in resignation or dissolution of Parliament, but AFC has indicated that this minority Government could, itself, listen to all the just criticisms and reduce the Estimates accordingly without suffering any loss of face or without forcing its own unwilling self to face the polls again. We know what the polls will determine. The polls will never determine a PPP/C victory. We know that. At most, it could be another minority Government so we would be back to square one.

We exhorted the Hon. Minister, in a statement that we have made public, to look at the specific criticisms that we have made and to look at a possibility of, without the Opposition having to use the scissors on this occasion, yielding to wiser council and reducing the Estimates if satisfactory answers are not given for particular items.

Like my father's racehorse, our supporters are chomping at the bits to face the poll again, sooner rather than later, and I have had the unenviable task of patting the heads of the many youthful and exuberant fighters, telling them: "steady, boy; steady!" as my father would tell our racehorse, Bright Steel, whenever he smelt victory...and this is a case where all the boast and the bluster about calling elections, as the Leader of the AFC has said once, "call am" because we are not going to be intimidated by the possibility of snap elections. We are politicians and our vigour comes from the renewed confidence of the people and the only way one renews that confidence is to go back to that spring of energy that is election or else one is irrelevant if one does not go back there.

A sensible Government would always feel impelled to accept amendments to the Estimates, either because it realised that the criticism of the items concerned was well-founded or because it was anxious to avoid a defeat either of a single line item or the whole Estimates.

Frankly, I have no hope that this post-Jagan PPP/C Government would accept amendments or avoid defeat. We have seen the contours of its arrogance emerging in almost all spheres of political endeavour:

1. The Executive's refusal to give assent to Bills approved by this National Assembly;
2. Refusal to make the Judiciary and Parliament independent constitutional agencies for the purpose of getting lump sum financial allocations;
3. Restoration of allocations cut in defiance of decisions of the National Assembly;
4. Party paramountcy over the state media and state corporations;
5. Refusal to establish the Public Procurement Commission or appoint the Chairman to the Integrity Commission or fill vacancies on Judicial and Police Service Commissions; and
6. Refusal to hold Local Government Elections last held in 1994.

This is its behaviour. This is the type of arrogance we have seen so that we have no hope almost, if I may say so... Maybe I need to be shocked into believing otherwise that the Government would, on this occasion, voluntarily and by its own promptings, amend sections of the Estimates that are deemed to be unacceptable in their present form.

This PPP/C minority Government has stultified the National Assembly, distorted the process of grassroots democracy, gifted out radio and cable spectrum to “cronies” and used the state media for partisan propaganda purposes. Daily critics are attacked and vilified and political opponents are gagged and banned on the state airwaves and newspapers and growingly libel suits are used as a weapon of political struggle and intimidation by frightened state operatives, so much so that “Dem Boys” refer to this regime as a “*sue-sue*” government. They could sue for everything. Anything you do, anything you say, you could be sued.

This minority Government, ‘Susie’, has replaced rational discourse with partisan propaganda, and the worst self-delusion and deception that could happen is happening: the regime believes itself.

I believe Mark Twain popularised the phrase that he attributed to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli: “there are three kinds of lies – lies, damned lies and statistics”. This Budget is a mass of statistics. The Government says that Guyana has had steady growth and it rolled out statistics. No one doubts this, but we have jobless growth. In the whole three-hour Budget Speech, the word “job” was mentioned thrice, as a reference, not as a viable reality.

Last year I asked, and I ask again, what is Guyana’s jobless statistics? This is the best kept national secret. It is better kept than what is written on the cover of the Budget.

We boast that we have the best economic growth in the Caribbean. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Hon. Minister Irfaan Ali regaled us to the greatness of what we do in Guyana but we do not envy anyone for thinking that we are doing well. We wish that, in fact, we were doing well. What is the reality?

Allocation for education and health declined. We were told about all of this money for health and education, but it declined as a percentage of the Budget and that was what we were talking about; these social services allocations must be a percentage of the Budget. Education slumped from 15.7% in 2009 to 13.6% and health from 9.9% to 8.5% in 2013. That is the statistics. That is the truth. That is not juggling with it.

Serious crime: for all of the money that we say we are spending on anti-crime efforts and that we are better off now in terms of our security architecture, serious crimes in Guyana in just one year increased by 11%.

Wages, however, remain depressed. Only 5% was paid to public servants from the \$4.4 billion allocated last year for revision of wages and salaries, which was, when we voted for it meant to be a 13% increase in the wages of public servants; but they got 5%.

Real GDP in 2013 declined from the high 7% between 1990 and 1997, and even from what it was in 2011. Look at the figures; our GDP compared to 2011 is lower but we have statistics to say that for the past eight years, we have had an unparalleled growth in economic growth. But we have to see how these statistics pan out in reality.

Overall balance of payment deficit stands at US\$119.5 million. Current account deficit increased from US\$366.7 million to US\$425.3 million. Overall fiscal deficit of \$27 billion in 2012 worsened to \$29.1 billion last year and is projected to grow in 2014 to \$32.4 billion.

Mr. Speaker: One second, Hon. Member. You will require an extension of 15 minutes to continue.

Mr. Ramjattan: May I ask, Mr. Speaker, for the Member to be given 15 minutes to continue his address?

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I was hoping that I will get time back, Your Honour, for the various interruptions...

Mr. Speaker: The clock is always stopped when there is an interruption. Go ahead, again.

Mr. Nagamootoo: These figures, of course, the Hon. Minister of Finance would know, are not mine. They are his figures and I will make references to the sources.

External reserves fell from US\$862.3 million to US\$776.9 million. These are our external reserves, the money that we have always been putting aside for bad times in case. We heard from the Government's spokesperson about this economic and financial tsunami that may hit Guyana.

We have run it down. We need explanation as to why we are worse off last year than we have been before.

State sector deficit jumped from \$31 billion to \$37 billion; that is the Government Business. Remittances, of course - the loss of confidence in back home from relatives in the Diaspora - even that pittance we would get from overseas, dropped from US\$405 million in 2011 to US\$328 million in 2013.

Exchange rate is sliding. When we got into Government in 1992, it was \$125 to the US\$1. Sir, I know my time is running, the clock is ticking. But when I came in Georgetown to work in 1970 or thereabout, I was working for \$114 per month. Do you see this thing here?

[Mr. Nagamootoo displayed the Guyana dollar bill.]

It is a Guyana dollar. It has Black Bush Polder and rice harvesting here. This meant something then. Today, what can one do with \$1? This is the kind of history we have to go back to, to compare where we were and where we are and where we ought to be today. That is the kind of comparative statistics we would like to see so that when we begin to see our dollar sliding from \$125 to last year's \$203...then it went up to \$205 and I am told that it is climbing and trending to \$207 to US\$1. We know that our fiscal management is not, as we are told, prudent and efficient.

Our external debt - I am not going into the Guyana figures this time but sticking with the United States figures - was US\$1.246 billion. But where was this debt in 2007? It was US\$719 million. Look where we have gone.

These, at face value, would indicate poor management of our economy, failed stewardship, not this bombast and boast that we had here about how we are the best country in the world and in the Caribbean. Simply put, for several years our leaders have failed to spend within our means, which is what a balanced budget is all about.

Not being able to balance the budget has led us deeper into the vicious debt cycle. We learned that there are three ways to get money: steal, beg or borrow. In Guyana, our prudent Government has been doing all three. By restraining wages and pensions, we virtually steal from the workers and pensioners. We beg for grants and we continue to borrow.

We could help redeem the nation's self-esteem and integrity if we were to adopt prudent fiscal management of our limited resources. We could rake in all revenue streams, as I said before. We could demand a fair price for national assets like land, radio frequencies and mineral rights. We could combat corrupt practices that allow good moneys to be squandered in poorly executed projects or for expired drugs that we routinely dump or fritter away in private purses through bribery and graft, instead of brushing these under the table. We could cut down on sinecure employment for party faithful and plumb contracts for favourites - extravaganza, foreign trips with perks, waste and pork barrel projects. These are the hallmarks of prudent and fiscal responsibility, Your Honour.

The Government choir is, today, fond of quoting from ECLAC, World Bank and IMF. The Government behaves as if it is still locked into structural adjustment programme and assigns a supervisory role of these once maligned "imperialist agencies" over economic performance.

The Minister of Finance owes us full disclosure on the exact relationship that exists between Guyana and the IMF. Do we have a programme with the IMF, Sir? This is not to repudiate the usefulness of figures by these agencies. For example, the Country Report of the Economist Intelligence Unit generated on 31st March, 2014 shows that whilst Guyana's GDP growth stood at 4.7% for 2013, it was below 2012 by 0.01 % and lower than 2011 when it was 5.4%. We are not even consistent with our own growth, but we rely on these foreign reports to give us acclaim, to give us applause, and we use that as validation that we are doing a good job. No, you cannot pull that one on us anymore.

I have since checked ranking of Caribbean GDP per capita as at 10th October, 2013, and I have looked at all of the reports of the Bahamas... The Caribbean rating is here - ranking the Caribbean by GDP per capita; this is the World Bank, 2014. It is the Bahamas, the country that is ranked the highest per capita with \$21,280 - per capita, per person in the population. We were told that Guyana is leading and the others are following. The Bahamas is followed by Puerto Rico which has a GDP... GDP growth is not a complete picture if you do not know how the people in the country fare from that growth. What you do with GDP growth is take the growth and divide it by the population and then you have how much... [Dr. Singh: Repeat that.] Yes. I am repeating it. Do you want to be edified about it? Let me tell you. How does one calculate GDP growth? One takes one's population and put the growth; one divides that. One has

a per capita, how much each person... Your per capita - how much of the GDP goes to each person in the population. That is it. Trinidad and Tobago is next at – this will hurt a little – \$14,400, followed by St. Kitts and Nevis which, despite being the smallest country in the region, has a per capita of about \$13,300. Look at this. Guyana is \$3,410, according to this Report that they are trying to rely on.

While we are making the boast here that we are better off in the Caribbean, we have to also look at what the quality of life is for each person in the population, not what you are giving in percentage growth. After the Hon. Minister Irfaan Ali spoke yesterday, I called my brother Abel who is a naturalised Trinidadian...

Mr. Speaker: One second. Hon. Members, there seems to be about four or five sub-debates taking place. Let us hear from Mr. Nagamootoo, please. Go ahead, Mr. Nagamootoo.

Mr. Nagamootoo: My brother in Trinidad is a naturalised Trinidadian. He is retired. He is 71 years old. I called him and he told me that he is receiving US\$3,000 pension every month. This works out to over \$100,000 monthly. He said that a person who is out of a job, for some reason, receives TT\$1,000, which is \$33,000 almost. In Trinidad and Tobago, old age pension and social assistance are far below our living wage in Guyana. That is how one measures GDP when one talks about leading the Caribbean because this... I ask the Government now to chill and shelve the “we are better off” boast as it further makes us look ridiculous in the region.

This Government must know that we may not all be auditors or accountants, good at juggling statistics, but a layman would tell us that our GDP is going up only because our population is going down.

Over recent years, our population declined by 13% - less people sharing the pie. Guyana’s GDP per capita for 2012 was, as I said, just over US\$3,000 when our population was 748,000. Now I have seen new statistics that show that the population is 746,000 people so when they say that we have a bigger per capita, they are basically saying that our population is growing less all of the time.

All the reports indicate that whilst economic growth is forecast to remain in 2014 and 2015 at 4.3% and 4.2%, respectively, we face grim realities for “prospects for a recovery in the sugar

industry have receded” and “the agriculture sector will remain exposed to flooding”. This is according to the, as I have said before, World Bank and the Economist Intelligence Unit Report.

My good Friend, Mr. Komal Chand, has spoken out against neo-liberal policies but, at the first signs of pressure on economic performance, well we know who would suffer. There would be wage freeze to check the inflation and to anchor the exchange rate. There is a real danger that higher oil prices and fall in markets for rice due to volatility of the situation in Venezuela could see use of our foreign reserves to keep the exchange rate in check. So there again we would have the possibility of us drawing down on our foreign reserves. This could have deep-seated effects on already poor status as regards social wellbeing of our people, especially vulnerable groups. Again, I refer to a report that I have seen in today’s *Stabroek News*:

“Guyana ranked 82 out of 132 on social index.”

These are some of the statistics that we need to look at when we deal with the quality of life.

Again, I say that we need to look at employment because it is no use we talk about growth and boast about this economic growth and consistency of growth and we cannot create jobs. The Government provides no statistics, but on 5th April, 2014, Trading Economics, at tradingeconomics.com, stated that the unemployment rate in Guyana remained unchanged at 21 percent in 2011, since 1980. If this is true, it is a damning indictment on this Government and a betrayal of our working people, especially the educated, jobless young people, and the Minister, if he disputes my statistics, should give the figures.

The AFC wishes to place on record our deepest appreciation for the hard work and dedication of our gold miners and our rice farmers. Gold miners took a knock from falling prices, but they are bouncing back.

8.53p.m.

Last year and, again, this year Essequibo paddy producers have earned our admiration for protesting for affordable fertiliser and for fair and prompt prices for their paddy. I told them and I repeat: only the squeaky wheel will get the grease. And that is why struggle pays out.

There is no doubt that the hands of rice farmers feed us all and they give life to our economy. But Government must not take the kudos and the farmers get the *cus-cus*, just the left over. I was hoping that the Finance Minister in his reply, would focus on issues concerning rice farmers and tell us how much per metric ton do we receive for rice or paddy sold to Venezuela; the amount paid for shipping and to whom; the amounts discounted by GRDB to process export papers and where this has gone; the amount going into a so-called social fund and who benefitted to date; the quantity of fertilisers received through and under the PetroCaribe deal and whether any proceeds have gone to RPA and in what amount?

Mr. Speaker, we agree that it would not be possible for the annual Budget to deal with every aspect of Government activities, and that we could in these general debates critically evaluate them.

The AFC feels that there could be a rational reformulation of government policies and its legislative agenda, and that even before the budget is presented, ways should be found to find agreement or consensus on this, so that it would be easier to agree on expenditures before-hand.

I cite two examples: firstly, Government laments about the garbage situation, but it has yet to lay before this House, the promised Solid Waste law that could deal comprehensively with this nuisance. It is also afraid to hold Local Government Elections. Secondly, it bemoans the fact that the fishing industry is facing challenges, but has not brought before this House, much promised regulations that would set standards for our fishing industry.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nagamootoo, slow down.

Mr. Nagamootoo: I am wrapping up, Sir. Towards this end AFC offers partnership. I will read that again; towards this end, AFC offers partnership so that we are not caught in time-wasting, interminable rancour and confrontation, but we can labour for a win-win-situation.

Mr. Speaker, over the past days of our Budget engagement, I tried to grapple with the notion of how the future would look at this Tenth Parliament of Guyana. Some jokes were traded earlier... *[Interruption]* Politicians have as their core concern how to make compromise and to make it possible. Some jokes were traded earlier about two ambulances on standby and I thought some people might nick-name us the “Sick Parliament”. And, as the debate raged as to whether or not

we could cut the Estimates, some may see us as the “Lame Duck Parliament” not being able to do anything. Then, my good friend and brother, Hon. Minister Robeson Benn, inadvertently referred to this National Assembly as the “Star Chamber”, which transported me back to texts in English history to the period of the Plantagenets and Tudors.

The “Star Chamber” was a symbol of misuse and abuse of power – I do not think he meant this - by the English monarchy. I would not hold it against him. Proceedings in the “Star Chamber” were arbitrary and oppressive. It had resorted to criminal libel and sedition to silence dissenters. During the reign of Charles 1, who lost his head, for example, dissenters were branded on both cheeks for seditious libel.

Though parliaments were nicknamed “Short Parliament” and “Long Parliament”, because of the period over which they met, there also existed the “Mad Parliament”, “Happy Parliament” and during the reign of King James 1, the “Addled or Sabotaged Parliament”, which lasted no more than eight weeks. James had complained - that is the King - that the House:

“...encroached on many of our privileges and plagued our purses with their delays”.

I will read that again, the King complained that the Parliament had “encroached on many of our privileges and plagues our purses with their delays”, which ran counter to his motto that the King should:

“Spend and God will send”.

Mr. Speaker: You have five minutes within which to wrap up.

Mr. Nagamootoo: But in spite of our seeming, political division, the people for the first time in our history made a difference and wanted that Government should be held accountable. Not like King James or King Charles. To do this, they gave the PPP/C, which was in Government since 1992, a minority of votes in Parliament, so that it could not have an automatic control over the Nation’s purse. So they could not spend and God will send. Only the people know why. In this sense, I see this Parliament as the “Good Parliament”, charged by the people to protect the Treasury from those who would plunder it or pilfer from it, or waste it, or spend too much of it for too little results. The challenge is before us to either explore the potential of this Good Parliament, or bring it down in fresh elections.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude, we have come a long way. And though some of us may feel battle fatigued, we must not lose patience or will. We just cannot opt for the bad choices that may appear appealing. And I am looking at the Hon. Prime Minister Samuel Hinds.

We have tried all kinds of financial medicines, but Guyana is still limping. We need a new political and social profile. We must give reconciliation and political unity a chance, as hard and formidable as that may appear to be at this time.

We can re-invent ourselves and re-wind the tape to 1953 when there was racial and political unity in our land. As Antonio Gramsci has said in his *Prison Notebook*, the old is dying - and that is meant to be literal - but the new is yet to be born. The new is a government of national unity and this Good Parliament could be its midwife.

I thank you for listening to me Members and Hon. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my presentation to the 2014 Budget debates. I will promise that I will stick within matters of my competence and not speak on matters over which I have very little knowledge.

I want to begin by adding my voice of congratulations, to the many expressed, to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his hardworking staff, in respect of the preparation and presentation of Budget 2014.

Long before its presentation in this House on the 24th March, Budget 2014 has invoked great public commentary and titillated tremendous public interest and, one may remark, quite properly so.

It is the first Budget delivered after the final ruling of the Hon. Chief Justice rendered on January 29th, 2014, where the Hon. Chief Justice confirmed his earlier edict that the Opposition has no power at law or under the Constitution to cut the National Estimates presented by the Minister of Finance.

Recall that the Opposition had cut the 2013 Budget although the Chief Justice had rendered a preliminary ruling that they had no power to do so, and accordingly the Budget cuts were in

effect declared to be unconstitutional. The reason advanced by the Opposition then, was that they are not bound by the Ruling since it was preliminary; quite an ingenious contention.

When the final ruling came, however, both Opposition parties signalled publicly their intentions to cut the Budget, clearly disregarding the ruling of the Court. Right here in this House, repeated references have been made of an intention to cut the Budget. Implements of choice have already been indicated - an axe, a scissors and a hatchet – all in clear disregard of the Chief Justice's Order and a violation of the Ruling. Therefore, the majority of the National Assembly is essentially, by their words and their conduct, declaring a clear and unequivocal intention to disobey, ignore and defy Rulings emanating from the Judiciary.

As Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, I say that this is legally and constitutionally reprehensible. It is a most calculated and callous abrogation of the Rule of Law and an assault on our constitutional democracy.

I am aware that an appeal has been filed, Your Honour. However, it is the common law of this land, that unless and until an Order of a Court is set aside or overruled by a Court of competent jurisdiction, that Order must be obeyed, irrespective of how wrong we may feel it is. We expect the ordinary man to obey the laws of the land. We expect the ordinary man to obey the Orders of Court. As leaders and lawmakers in this House, we are held by an even greater standard.

Mr. Speaker, I dare say, that one day we will regret our conduct in this House, of trampling upon the Rule of Law and the Constitution of this land, which we swore allegiance to uphold in this House. The Rule of Law is that fulcrum that maintains that pivotal balance between civility and anarchy in any society. When we flout the Rule of Law, we are undermining the integrity of that crucial equilibrium and can cause this society to slip into that abyss of lawlessness where the laws of the jungle shall prevail.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard budget speeches of every type. I have heard compliments from the Government's side and criticism from the Opposition. I have heard from the Opposition that the Budget is deficient for a million and one reasons. In trying to make their points, Hon. Members on the other side have cited every conceivable problem facing the Guyanese people, some imaginary and some real, and they fault the budget for failing to provide a measure or measures to deal with these myriad of problems. It is my honest view that even if the Gods were to

descend from heaven they would not have been able to craft a budget which would have found the approval of the Opposition. I was forced to contemplate what kind of document would be able to address every conceivable economic problem and social ill confronting the people of this country and advance a solution for them. It certainly cannot be the National Budget and if the Opposition is looking there they are simply looking in the wrong place.

I said to you Mr. Speaker in a private conversation, that it is important that I find a definition of what is a national budget. And I went to the library and borrowed from the Clerk of the National Assembly a beautiful book. The title of the book is “*The Budget Process – A Parliamentary Imperative*”. It is written by David McGee, Queens Council and, importantly, it is a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association publication. At page 3 the author of that book gives a definition of what a budget is. He says and I quote:

“A budget is a means of setting out a blueprint of a nation’s economic and fiscal development for a defined future period of at least a year ahead. This involves an explanation of revenue-raising measures that the government intends to pursue in the period ahead, and disclosure of the government’s proposals for public expenditure. A budget in this sense is a statement of financial intentions. But increasingly absorbed into these projections are announcements with wider socio-economic significance.”

The budget of a country is a policy document. It will not deal with the mode of transportation, for example, of the Region 8 Chairman – apparently he uses a motor cycle and a Member of this Assembly wants a *strip* limousine for him. The answer to that is not in the Budget but in some other document.

Mr. Speaker, the criticisms made against the Budget were not confined to the Budget itself, but some predated the presentation of the Budget. In this regard, we heard that there was no consultation. The truth is that both political parties in the Opposition were invited more than once by the Hon. Minister of Finance for consultation. They rejected the invitation or at least they never turned up. Similar invitations were issued to the Private Sector Commission and organised labour, including the GPSU.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, the Minister alleges...

Mr. Speaker: I am listening to the Standing Order.

Mr. Nandlall: What Standing Order?

Mr. Greenidge: Standing Order 40(a).

Mr. Nandlall: What does Standing order 40(a) say?

Mr. Greenidge: I am challenging an assertion. It is untrue to say that both parties were invited to meetings with the Government and neither of them attended any meetings. It is just false and the Minister should not engage in that here. It is not true.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, my information is...

Mr. Greenidge: You cannot have such information.

Mr. Nandlall: My information is and I will stick to my information...

Mr. B. Williams: You will have to support it.

Mr. Speaker: One second please gentlemen.

Mr. Nandlall: He saying it is inaccurate does not mean that it is inaccurate.

Mr. Greenidge: Ask your Minister.

Mr. Speaker: One second gentlemen. A Member rising on Standing Order 40(b) has to show that he or she rises in the course to elucidate or give an explanation provided that the Member speaking is willing to give way and resumes his or her seat and that the Member is wishing to interrupt the call by the Chair. I believe that the observation of Mr. Greenidge is noted. Mr. Nandlall what is your response?

Mr. Nandlall: My response to what question, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: To the observation raised by Mr. Greenidge.

Mr. Nandlall: I am saying to this National Assembly that my information is that both political parties in this House were invited by the Hon. Minister of Finance for consultation and they did not turn up or rejected the information.

Mr. Speaker: Very well; proceed.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, the Minister himself reported, and it is reported in the press the events that took place including a meeting. We had a meeting on this side; the Prime Minister is here. Ministers must not come here and lie. The Prime Minister chaired that meeting; he was there; he and Mr. Roger Luncheon.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge, please. If a Member says it is his information that is his information. That is his right. There is nothing we can do about that.

Please continue the debate Mr. Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: Both the Private Sector Commission and the Labour Movement made public pronouncements that their engagements with the Minister were fruitful. In fact, they said that some of their inputs were incorporated into the Budget. The Opposition could have done the same, but they chose not to. Yet, they come to this House and contend that they were not consulted. We on this side, not only believe and preach Consultative Democracy but practice it as well. When we were in the majority we engaged in the same consultative process, because we believe that it is important to democracy and it is an indispensable part of good governance. It is for the same reason that we reformed this entire Parliament and rejuvenated the Committee system. It is for the same reason that we permitted the Opposition to take the Deputy Speaker position when we held the Speakership position. It is for the same reason that we sent almost every major Bill to Select Committees, including the Principal Anti-Money Laundering Act and on occasions, facilitated public hearings. Of course, I can go on to cite a thousand more examples. All of this, of course, occurred when we had a majority. But I think the point is made.

However, I want to return to the question of consultation in relation to Budget 2014. Article 13 of the Constitution was ceremonially invoked as a basis for this consultation. I want to remind those who have made this invocation, to bear in mind, that it is under the PPP/Civic Administration that Article 13 was inserted in the Constitution in the first place. However, a mere peripheral reading of it will establish that it mentions neither the word budget nor consultation. It simply states what the aspiration of our political system should strive to achieve. I hastened to say, however, that long before it was placed in the Constitution, we embraced the concept of democracy in all its facets. The historical record will show that it is the PPP that stood

tall in the struggle for democracy against the colonialist, the imperialist and the PNC dictatorship. No one and nothing can change that.

On the question of consultation and in particular in relation to budget presentation, I want to return to this book, "*The Budget Process – A Parliamentary Imperative*", a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association publication. I emphasise that because we are a constituent member of that Association.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nandlall the book was ordered after Mr. Ramjattan asked for it to be ordered since last year. So we are familiar with the book.

Mr. Nandlall: I thank Mr. Ramjattan for encouraging you to order it, Sir. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** And I invite you to read it.] Yes, I am reading from it Mr. Ramjattan. On page 7, Chapter 2 is titled *Budget Preparation*. This is what it says, and I want Members kindly to listen as I quote:

“Preparing a budget is regarded, without exception, as a function of the executive. In parliamentary systems only the executive is seen as having the capacity to undertake the complex process of putting a budget together. Indeed, this function may be explicitly conferred on the executive by the Constitution or other law of the state concerned. In Uganda, for example, the Constitution vests the preparation of the budget in the President, who normally delegates the task to the Minister of Finance.”

The identical position obtains in Guyana.

“But the primacy of the executive in budget preparation does not depend on such provisions. Rather they reflect the reality that budget preparation is inherently an executive function. It is therefore appropriate that the executive should take the lead in performing this duty.”

I say that because what Members of this House interpret as consultation, is that they must take charge of the budgetary process and they must dictate to the Minister of Finance what the budget should and should not contain.

Mr. Speaker, a Bill was laid in this House for which the President withheld his assent, that sought to transfer powers from the Minister of Finance for the preparation of budget for certain

agencies, to hijack that power from the Minister of Finance and that is why I am reading this book so that we understand the principle.

I am now going to deal with legislative involvement, because the author deals with what is the role of the legislature in the budgetary process.

“Direct legislative involvement in the budget preparation phase is uncommon.

Legislatures generally lack the capacity to participate effectively in making a budget. Even in a legislative system with considerable budgetary capacity, such as the United States of America, the Executive still takes the initiative in preparing and submitting a national budget.

For an executive to surrender responsibility for preparing the budget to the legislature would be to abdicate its responsibility for governing.”

The reality is that the Opposition passed a Bill in this House seeking to take away this power from the Executive. It is for that reason the President withheld his assent to that Bill.

Another issue that I would like to speak on, is an issue that has occupied public attention, public commentary both in this House and without this House. It is about the President’s withholding assent to Bills. It has come up several times during this debate and it has occupied a lot of political discussion outside of this Assembly as well as here, outside of the budgetary process.

I want to begin by highlighting Article 170 (2) of the Constitution. The Hon. Member, Mr. Nagamootoo, in his presentation criticised the President for rejecting the will of the majority in this House by withholding his assent to Bills. So I want to put the President’s power in the proper constitutional context. Article 170 (2) of the Constitution provides:

“When a Bill is presented to the President for assent, he shall signify that he assents or that he withholds his assent.”

So the power of withholding assent is in the Constitution and a legal constitutional and proper power for the President to exercise. To level the allegation that the President is rejecting the will of a majority is a constitutional wrong and we must stop saying that. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker,

the Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge is telling me that I am saying nonsense. I am making my presentation.

Mr. Speaker: In these debates we have had everything. We have had rubbish, we have had rape and everything that goes... You press on with your presentation Mr. Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: Article 170 (3) provides:

“Where the President withholds his assent to a Bill, he shall return it to the Speaker within twenty-one days of the date when it was presented to him for assent with a message stating the reasons why he has withheld the assent.”

Mr. Speaker, on every occasion that the President has withheld his assent he has complied with this requirement.

Mr. Speaker: I have to correct you on that Mr. Nandlall. It has not been so. Bills have been returned well beyond the twenty-one day period.

Mr. Greenidge: And there are still two outstanding according to the Clerk.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, the question is when he receives it. That is the issue. *[Noisy Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Mr. Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that the President has an undoubted and an undoubted freedom to withhold his assent from Bills presented to him. In the case of the latter, he is constitutionally mandated to proffer reasons for so doing. The notion, therefore, that the President is obliged, robotically, to render his assent to every Bill passed by the National Assembly is manifestly misconceived. The Constitution does not contemplate it neither does legal logic support it. The quicker we rid our minds of it the better. In this regard, the Presidential power of withholding assent to Bills is not peculiar to Guyana. It owes its genesis to the Royal Prerogative and has been retained by many great democracies of the world including the United States of America, the Union of India and the Republic of South Africa. Those are only three countries.

I just want to read briefly from a text I have here from South Africa, explaining precisely one of the grounds upon which a President can withhold his assent. As I said, the language of the South African Constitution is very close to the Guyana Constitution. The text to which I make reference is the *New Constitutional and Administrative Law Volume 1*. This is what the learned author has to say:

“In terms of section 79 the President must assent to and sign a Bill that has been passed in accordance with the manner and form of provisions prescribed above. If the President has reservations about the constitutionality of the Bill, he or she may refer it back to the Assembly to reconsider.”

9.23 a.m.

That is the position in South Africa and obviously that is the position in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, the contention therefore, that the President cannot withhold his assent to Bills on the ground that, in his opinion, the Bill is unconstitutional or based upon the advice he receives, the Bill is unconstitutional, is a contention that is palpably wrong. To place such a restriction upon the President’s power to withhold his assent from Bills is simply *ultra-vires*, the express language of the Constitution.

I want to refer to the position in the United States of America where it is even clearer and I want to make reference to an Indian constitutional text. The name of it is “*Commentary on the Constitution of India, 8th Edition 2008, Vol. 4*”, it is written by constitutional expert, Durga Das Basu and the author says this, speaking of the United States (US) Constitution:

“The veto power given to the President by the American Constitution has, however, proved to be a real and effective check upon the Legislature. According to Hamilton (Federalist) one of the objects of the veto power was to ‘increase the chances in favour of the community against the passing of bad laws, through haste, inadvertence or design.’”

And we have had bad Bills coming from here.

“The power may be exercised to veto not only laws which are apprehended to be unconstitutional or defective in form, but those which seem to be objectionable to the

President on merits. Sometimes, it is used according to the President's view about expediency or policy as well. In the latter case, it is a substantive legislative power in the hands of a President, even though negative in form.

As Woodrow Wilson said:

“In the exercise of the power of veto, the President acts not as the executive, but as third branch of the Legislature.”

That is how our Constitution must be read and understood because that is what the authorities out there say.

The other argument advanced is this; the President or the Attorney General has no power and authority to opine that a Bill is unconstitutional. I reject that notion absolutely. Everyday lawyers interpret the law and the Constitution and advise their clients. Sir, you know that. Indeed, every legal system will break down and civilisation will come to a halt, if every time someone needs legal advice, they are required to approach a court for interpretation and advice. The arguments advanced are predicated upon the misconception that by expressing his opinion, the Bills are unconstitutional, the President has somehow displaced the functions of the court as being the sole arbiter of unconstitutionality; a patently absurd assumption.

Its irrationality can vividly be illustrated by examining the converse situation, and this is the converse situation, which is, if the President assents to the Bill, can it then, in that circumstance be intelligently argued that the President has determined the constitutionality of the Bill and, therefore, has ousted, permanently, the court's jurisdiction from ever entertaining a challenge to its constitutionality? Certainly not. The legal truth is the Court's jurisdiction to question the constitutionality of Bills and actions by the State and its various organs, can never be dismantled by the President or any other agency. That is the law of this land, Mr. Speaker.

I want to speak a little on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill because many speakers in this Parliament made reference to it. It is trite knowledge; it is public knowledge that the President withheld his assent and I want to speak a little on the reasons why the President withheld his assent from that Bill.

The majority in the Select Committee made several deletions of clauses which were in the Bill tabled by the Minister of Local Government and in most of the instances where these deletions were made, no amendments were inserted to fill the deficiencies created by these deletions. In consequence, if the Bill is properly examined, one will quickly identify several structural and institutional deficiencies in the architecture of the Local Government structure, which the Bill purports to create. For example, many of the functions which the Regional Executive Officer (REO) is to perform, including oversight, approval of financial transfers to Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) from Central Government and a whole host of other financial and executive responsibilities are the subject of a particular clause in the Bill. This clause has simply been deleted, but nothing is substituted therefore. So, currently, there is no one in this Bill to perform these functional responsibilities.

There is a clause of the Bill which allows for certain officers such as the Environmental Health Officer, Environmental Health Assistants and other public health officials and public officers, to institute legal proceedings or effect prosecutions in the Courts in respect of violation of the laws and by laws; that has been completely deleted. Again, there is no substitute. So a whole regime of bylaws and municipal related laws cannot be enforced by way of a legal process.

Another set of legal amendments made in the Committee, relate to simply transferring executive powers from the Minister to the Local Government Commission, by simply cutting out the word “Minister” and pasting in its stead, the word “Commission” without appreciating the impact that it will have on the Constitution and the Bill itself. The effect is you have a transferral of Executive power from the executive Minister to a non-executive Local Government Commission.

The Commission by its very nature is not an executive agency, but it is a constitutional autonomous body like the other Constitutional Commissions and cannot be charged with executive responsibilities. In fact, the powers of the Commission are set out in Article 78(A) of the Constitution, it says this:

”Parliament shall establish a Local Government Commission, the composition and rules of which empower the commission to deal with it as it deems fit, all matters related to the

regulation and staffing of local government organs and with dispute resolution within and between local Government organs.”

That is all it said.

Clearly, it can be easily discerned that the Commission has the following functions to perform:

1. Regulation and staffing of local government organs;
2. Dispute resolutions within and between local Government organs.

It has no other function. Therefore, the whole regime of functions which has been taken from the Minister and given to the Local Government Commission is simply *ultra vires*. Article 78A of the Constitution. How can a President assent to this travesty?

That is the truth. Examine the Bill and the people of Guyana must understand why the President withheld his assent. The Bill was deguttled carelessly, inadvertently, negligently and recklessly in the Select Committee. **[Interruption]**

The PPP/Civic Administration wishes, once again, to renew and restate its commitment to continue to work to create a society where the rule of law prevails, the constitutional rights of our people are protected and respected, the Judiciary is independent and efficient and where all of our people, irrespective of where they are located or their social and financial standing, have equal rights to justice. We are of the unshakable view that these are indispensable prerequisites to the economic development and social progress, which our people aspire to enjoy.

For these reasons, we continue to invest heavily in the Justice Sector. We recognise that while this sector does not contribute directly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the other productive sectors, this is the sector that is largely responsible for law and order, adherence to the rule of law, constitutional democratic governance and, indeed, the glue that keeps society and civilisation as we know it, together. Without it, neither production will take place nor will civility as we know it, exist.

Since my last budgetary presentation, significant strides have been made in this sector. I will take this opportunity to mention only a few, along with what is expected to be accomplished in the year 2014.

Mr. Speaker, the landmark achievement that we have made since the last time I spoke in relation to budget was the breaking of the 34 year *hiatus* in relation to the Revised Laws. We have presented publicly, after 34 years, the Revised Laws of Guyana. And as it is customary and traditionally, it is referred to in the name of the Attorney General, under whose tenure it was promulgated. **[Interruption]**

The conclusion of this historic exercise was preceded by another historic achievement. I refer to the completion and launch of ten years of Law Reports from 1977 to 2007. This came after another gap of some 34 years.

With these signal achievements accomplished, work will now begin in the year 2014 to continue these exercises, in order to avoid the protracted lapses to which I have made reference. Work will begin on compiling another set of Law Reports from 2008 to date. Updating and continuous revising of the Laws of Guyana have already begun. Within the Attorney General's (AG's) Chambers, a Law Revision Officer has been appointed and duly trained within that discipline. She will undertake this most important continuous exercise.

Most of the Law Reports have still not yet been purchased. I want to take this opportunity to appeal to the practicing bar to purchase these reports. Both the Law Revision and the Law Report Projects are intended to be self-financing. Therefore, their future will depend upon the income they generate.

As Members are aware, the *Official Gazette* has been placed online. This venture is being managed from the AG Chambers in collaboration with the National Printers. The response to this initiative has been remarkable. The website has had over a million hits. Persons from as far as Australia, Fiji, India, Africa and of course, Europe and North America, have been accessing the website with encouraging frequency. Two officers at the AG Chambers, specially trained, are manning this site.

Mr. Speaker: One second Hon. Member. Hon Prime Minister, could you move for an extension of 15 minutes, as well as, the motion immediately thereafter for us to go beyond 10 o'clock, so that we do not have a second interruption? Thank you.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 10(1)

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I first move that Standing Order 10 be amended so that we can continue and conclude the business with the listed Members making their presentations this evening; Mr. Basil Williams and Ms. Teixeira still to present.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Hinds: I also move that the Hon. Attorney General be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much. The rehabilitation and refurbishing works have been completed to the building at Main and King Streets, New Amsterdam, Berbice. The upper flat of this building, as I have previously disclosed, will house the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the lower flat, the Land Registry. The Land Registry will therefore be removed from its cramped location in a part of the Registry of the High Court at New Amsterdam and will now be housed in the entire bottom flat of this comparatively large building, along with vault facilities for storage. This is expected to improve the efficiency of that important organisation. The upper flat, which will be used to house the office of the DPP, has already been furnished and electricity installed in the building. Shortly after these debates, the building will be handed over to the DPP and the Registrar of Lands.

The automatic voice recording equipment for the court system will be installed within a matter of days. In fact, the contractor came to the country only today to commence the operation. As I have stated earlier, this initiative is expected to make a transformational change to the speed of litigation in this country. While this equipment will only be installed in the Court of Appeal, the Courts of the Chief Justice and the Commercial Court of the High Court, the intention is to replicate it in every superior court of record in the country.

We believe that accountability and people's participation are important cornerstones of good governance. We believe that no institution, funded by public moneys, is exempt from scrutiny -

not even the Judiciary. In this regard, the Judiciary itself has recognised the need to make itself transparent and accountable and has established two committees, the Civil and Criminal Justice Committees, under the now concluded Modernisation of the Justice Administration Sector Project. These Committees are established and managed by those in charge of the Judiciary.

Three Criminal Committees have been established, one in each of the three counties. There is one National Civil Justice Committee, which caters for the needs of the three counties. This Committee meets at a Secretariat, which is established in the Court of Appeal building. The Committees meet quarterly. Their function is to monitor the work of the Magistrates court and the High court with a view of improving the quality and efficiency of the delivery of service.

These Committees are specifically tasked to assist and make recommendations for the reduction of the backlog of both civil and criminal cases, reduction in the management and adjudication of cases and receiving complaints from court users, in relation to the problems they are encountering in the system. The members of the Committee are appointed by the Chancellor and comprise of court users, attorneys at law, retired judges and members of civil society. These members were all trained in their respective tasks by a consulting firm from Jamaica. The Committee reports to the Secretariat of which the Chancellor is the Chairman.

Over the last two years, a number of Courts were either completely refurbished or new buildings were constructed. These include the High Courts of Georgetown and New Amsterdam, the Court of Appeal, and Magistrates' Courts at Whim, New Amsterdam, Sisters Village, Reliance, Mibicuri, Georgetown Magistrates' Court - a complex comprising of twelve courts - Leonora, and Wales. Almost every court in the High Court, both in Georgetown and New Amsterdam, are now fully air conditioned for the first time in our history. Almost every Magistrate's Court, to which I have made reference, is now fully air conditioned as well; another first in the history of this sector.

Within a few weeks, the Magistrates' Courts at Christianburg, Wismar and Lethem will be completed. These are brand new buildings with residential quarters for the Magistrates. In relation to the Court at Wismar, a new Magistrate Clerk's office will be established so that persons within this newly created Magisterial District of Region 10 do not have to travel all the way to Vreed-en-Hoop Magistrate's Court to transact their business. Historically, that court fell

under the Magisterial District of West Demerara. That will now change; another monumental accomplishment.

Eighteen laptops were purchased and distributed to the judges of the Court of Appeal and the High Court with the expectation that it will assist in the speedy writing up of decisions.

The long wait for the coming into operation of the Family Court will come to an end within a few weeks. The last set of furniture purchased from Fibre Tech Industries - these are Fibre Glass bucket chairs - will be installed within a few days. The Family Court Rules have already been completed and are with the Chancellor to be brought into operation. It is important that I disclose that the long wait, which we endured in respect of the acquisition of furniture for the Court, was not without a benefit to the people of this country. The original cost submitted for those furniture was \$32 million. Cabinet withheld its "no objection" to this award and the Court was eventually furnished at a cost of about \$12 million, saving the taxpayers nearly \$20 million.

Earlier this year, His Excellency, President Donald Ramotar issued an order increasing the statutory complement of High Court Judges from 12 to 20. The last time the complement was increased was sometime in the mid 70's. Litigation has increased, perhaps, tenfold since. Twelve judges have clearly proven to be inadequate to handle the workload. While we may not have the physical capability to accommodate more judges currently, this is yet another demonstration of the Executive's commitment to resource the Judiciary in order to deliver to our people a better quality of justice. With the coming into operation of the Family Court, it is expected that judges of the High Court will migrate to that building, creating the physical space for the new appointments to be made. Currently, there is no physical space to accommodate a new judge in the Supreme Court. Mr. Bond is calling for the appointment of 35; we intend to appoint much more than 35, but we cannot put them to sit and preside under trees, we have to get buildings for them. It is a work in progress, it will take time.

This year also, His Excellency, the President filled the constitutional vacancy of the Office of the Ombudsman and retired High Court Judge, Mr. Winston Moore, was appointed to that office. The position was vacant for several years. The Government's contention was, with the establishment of the Constitutional and Administrative Court, most of the complaints, which would have attracted the attention of the Ombudsman, are now taken to that Court. However, the

Opposition insisted on filling this vacancy. Well, the appointment has been made and as far as I am aware, there is no great avalanche of complaints to that office.

This year, moneys have been allocated to construct a building in the compound of the Supreme Court, which will house the Land Court of Demerara, a Registry and storage facilities for the Supreme Court. The edifice will house a minimum of two courtrooms and chambers for the judges. The possibility therefore exists for one of those courtrooms to be used as an additional Court of the High Court.

This year also will see the completion of a new Magistrate Court building at No 51 Village, Corentyne. On or around June of this year, construction will commence at Sparendam in respect of a brand new, fully air conditioned building, along with parking facilities for Magistrates - to house a new Sparendam Magistrates Court. This building is expected to accommodate two courtrooms along with chambers for the Magistrates. So, for the first time we will have two courts operating at that location. Again, another effort to bring greater speed to the Justice Sector.

Moneys have also been allocated this year, for the installation of air conditioning units at the Vreed-en-Hoop and Whim Magistrates' Court. Moneys have also been allocated to effect minor repairs and maintenance works to court buildings throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, over the last year or so, a number of important Bills were laid by me and piloted on behalf of the Government of Guyana in this Assembly. I believe I have been successful in all, except perhaps the most important one, the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2013. Unfortunately, that Bill is still languishing in a Select Committee. I want to call upon the Leader of the Opposition to issue an order to his troops. I want to call on Mr. Ramjattan to cooperate and act in the National interest. Let ego yield to reason and let us pass that Bill.

A number of Bills were passed through the House; the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, the Deeds Registry and Commercial Authority Bill, Supreme Court of Judicature (Appeal) (Amendment) Bill, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2014 and I can read on, but I will move beyond them.

One of the important issues that we have to look at, that I intend to look at this year, is an examination of the Jury System. This integral component of the Criminal Justice System has virtually remained untouched since its introduction to our legal system some 100 years ago. By the sheer passage of time, it requires some examination with a view of effecting modern changes to it, which have already been done in almost all Commonwealth jurisdictions that have retained the institution of the judiciary. The administration of criminal justice is a two way street.

The State and, by extension, the victims of crime and their relatives are equally entitled to a fair trial as is the accused person. That delicate balance must always remain intact. The jury system is an integral factor in this equation. The Director of Public Prosecutions and the Constitutional Commission on Women and Gender Equality have met with me and many important civil society organisations. They have reported that from their consultations, the wider society has lost, or is rapidly losing confidence in the jury system in its present construct, especially in sexual offences matters. This very important issue was raised by the Hon. Mrs. Volda Lawrence in her presentation and of course, it has had tumultuous consequences in this House.

I want to take this opportunity to recognise and salute Minister Manickchand for laying before this House, and getting the unanimous approval of this House of that very historic and revolutionary piece of legislation. Of course, I refer to the Sexual Offence Act.

Mr. Speaker, the consultations to which I have made reference, lay blame at the Jury System, as well as other factors. The statistics are indeed staggering. I think it is important that I share them with this House. They reveal another factor also, the refusal of victims of these types of crimes to testify in the courts.

In the year 2011, 16 Sexual Offences cases and this was not under the new law but the old law – were completed. There were three guilty pleas; three cases were *nolle prosequed* because the Virtual Complainant gave statements expressing a desire not to proceed with prosecution. There were seven not guilty verdicts by the jury. In 2012, 10 sexual offences cases were completed. In 2 cases there was a formal verdict of not guilty because again the Virtual Complainants did not attend court to testify. Eight cases went to trial; in all eight cases the jury returned a not guilty verdict.

In 2013, 12 sexual offences cases were completed. In eight of those cases the Virtual Complainants went to court and indicated that they are not willing to proceed with the cases. Those cases had to be discontinued by the DPP. And in one case, the Virtual Complainant could not be located. Three cases therefore went to trial. In one case there was a unanimous verdict of not guilty and in two cases, there were hung juries. Therefore, in 2012 and 2013, there was not a single conviction for sexual offences in a total of 22 cases. The position is not much different in non-sexual cases.

In an examination of the jury system, care will be exercised to ensure that there is no erosion of its principal objective, that is, affording the accused a trial by his peers. The changes will include a review of the current jury pool with the objective of expanding it. Currently, the pool is quite limited and it has been historically confined to just a few entities from which jurors are drawn. In England, for example, the jury pool is the electoral register. So expansive is the jury pool in England, while in Guyana, we have a few companies that the Registrar regularly draws from. The qualifications of jurors will also be reviewed. Currently, they are linked to ownership of property, or earning capacity.

9.53 p.m.

Both of these qualifications in today's society are archaic and irrelevant. In the process the unanimity verdict, in relation to capital, and the majority verdict, in relation to non-capital offences of the jury, which currently obtains, will also be reviewed. Statutory protection against jury tampering and jury manipulation will be strengthened. The nation witnessed the travesty of what transpired in the Lusignan massacre/murder case. Brazen manipulation of the jury system must end now.

I move quickly to the Deeds Registry. The Deeds Registry falls under the administration of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. In the year 2013, the Deeds and Commercial Registry Authority Bill was assented to. The current budget reflects the authority being deemed a statutory body and that it is self-sustaining not receiving a subvention from the Government of Guyana. In 2013, the Deeds Registry earned G\$1 billion in revenue and is targeted to earn G\$1.369 billion in 2014.

In 2013, the Government of Guyana purchased the old New Building Society Headquarters situated at Avenue of the Republic, which will house the Commercial Registry. Renovation of

this building is being undertaken in 2014. I had explained previously that the Deeds Registry will be separated from the Commercial Registry.

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

Mr. Nandlall: Furniture have already been purchased for the Commercial Registries and will continue to work to convert the agency from a paper based institution to a technologically advanced one.

In 2013, in relation to companies, 347 companies were registered and approximately 10,800 businesses either commenced in 2013 or registrations were renewed. Significantly, a contract was awarded to digitise ten years of conveyancing records held at the Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Suddie, on the Essequibo Coast, Registries. This contract was awarded in February of 2014 and shall be completed within the next eight months. The project involves the scanning of transports, leases, mortgages and their supporting documents, uploading same to a database and to make that database easily searchable and report friendly with a capacity for e-conveyancing.

We have established, in the Deeds Registry, a relationship with credit info and we are acting under a memorandum of understanding. This will allow for the Deeds Registry to assist credit info with a supply of information on a requested basis. The Deeds Registry is expected to earn from this engagement.

I want to touch on another important matter to which reference has been made. The Hon. Member Mr. Nagamootoo in his presentation made reference to the service commission and I agree with him that it is a matter of grave constitutional importance, except that he has it wrong, in terms of blaming the Government for its non appointment. It is trite knowledge that membership of several important constitutional commissions has expired. These include, but are not limited to, the Judicial Service Commission, the Public Service Commission and the Police Service Commission. Persons are appointed to these commissions by the President via a two-pronged process. Some are appointed after meaningful consultations with the Leader of the Opposition, others are appointed upon the recommendation of the National Assembly.

The President's attempt to consult with Leader of the Opposition, in respect of these appointments, has thus far not yielded great success. As far as I understand, the contention is that the National Assembly must conclude its process first. With this contention I do not agree. However, the reality is that the process is not moving forward. The Opposition controls the National Assembly and by extension all its processes, including the committee system which is to generate the names. The particular committee in question has had a dismal record in terms of the frequency of meetings since the commencement of the Tenth Parliament. This committee is chaired and controlled by the Opposition, by a majority of membership. The Opposition, therefore, cannot escape blame for this constitutional negligence. The consequences are both grave and multiple.

As regards the Judicial Service Commission, no judges or magistrates can be appointed because this is the agency that plays the most significant part in those appointments. To my learned friend Mr. Bond, rather than telling me to appoint 35 judges just help me to get one appointed by getting the Judicial Service Commission reactivated.

Currently, there are no Commissioners of Title and land court judges for the counties of Essequibo and Demerara. There are no sittings of these important courts. The consequential pile up of backlog cases is phenomenal. There are several vacancies in the magistracy to be filled and this also cannot be done. With the resignation of Justice of Appeal Rabi Sukul, there is a vacancy in the Court of Appeal. The matter is compounded by the fact that very shortly a sitting judge of that court will retire. This will deprive that court of a quorum to sit.

As regards the Public Service Commission (PSC), there is a pile up of disciplinary and promotional matters affecting the careers of several public officers which cannot be ventilated. Significantly the PSC is constitutionally required to play a role in determining which public officer should or should not be paid pensions and superannuation benefits. All of these cases are now at a standstill. Similar problems result from the non-functioning of the Police Service Commission in relation to Members of the police force.

Mr. Speaker: Wrap up, please, Mr. Attorney General.

Mr. Nandlall: I hope that I have demonstrated sufficiently that this is a matter of grave constitutional importance and it affects the welfare and livelihood of thousands of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I want to most respectfully remind you that as the officer who is constitutionally in charge of the National Assembly you are also not without responsibility. I therefore would like to take this opportunity to urge all concerned to proceed with every convenient speed and address this matter conclusively.

In conclusion, Budget 2014 was presented under the theme *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*. I have just articulated, most briefly, what it provides for the legal sector, the alter at which every single Guyanese, including yourself, Sir, prostrates in our quest to seek that amorphous but indispensable concept which we call justice. It is without reservation, therefore, that I call on the entire Assembly to support Budget 2014.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. B. Williams: I rise to make my presentation in relation to this “biggest budget” developed under the theme *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*, a theme somewhat akin to the theme of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU).

I would have loved to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance for this budget. I had done so several years ago but when we look at the budgets over the last eight years, which have been claimed to be sustained growth budgets, and we see the manner in which these budgets are presented, and we come again this year, I wonder to myself, surely, this Government must know that the picture it is painting to the world about Guyana, being so hunky-dory and life is so good in Guyana and Guyana is virtually a paradise, cannot be true. It cannot be true and it pains me. I wonder how we could pay any credence to the Members on the Government side when they try to pay lip service to national unity. A Government of national unity and they tell us that we must cooperate with them. The reality is that the majority of the Guyanese people are suffering.

It is apposite to note that the Government believes that the moneys of this state are its own. When a Member of the Government could tell a Member of the Opposition, who worked over ten years without pay on local government reform, who worked in this Parliament for ten years helping to shape the laws of Guyana... When there is a Government Minister speaking as though the moneys of the state are his and then tells another Member of Parliament that the Member cannot use the state’s resources to perform acts that the Member is supposed to perform for the Government then something has to be wrong.

When this is taken against the background that the Government Member has no problem expending Government resources in *Pradoville I*, fixing special roads leading from *Pradoville I*, bypassing the public road, well made roads, to service *Pardoville I* community, and then to add insult to injury there is *Pradoville II*, and the Member has the temerity to tell a hard-working Member, who have given public service in this country, that the Government cannot build a road in front of him, it built a road for a Member of the Government right next to him. I want to say this, that your supporters will not agree with you and we are going to campaign on this issue. The people of Guyana will not agree with you.

Mr. Speaker: One second Mr. Williams. Hon. Member Mr. Benn.

Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]: Mr. Speaker, as a matter of simply clarification, the road which the Hon. Member refers to in front of his house falls under the jurisdiction of the city council. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: One second, I cannot hear Mr. Benn.

Mr. Benn: ... falls under the city council which is headed by Hamilton Green of the Good and Green Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. Mr. Benn I cannot allow the clarification for the reason being that when you spoke you said that you would have got around to the Member's road so you...

Mr. Benn: I said that I will get around to it but...

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but then you cannot abrogate and reprobate...

Mr. Benn: I am not abrogating, I am saying that the speed with which he expects me to get to the road really relates to the Mayor's responsibility. *[Interruption]*...

Mr. Speaker: Very well.

Mr. Benn: Further, the roads, which were budgeted for in *Pradoville I and II*, as he termed them, are roads...

Mr. B. Williams: Mr. Speaker, what is this? Is this another presentation? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: No Mr. Benn, you can have someone rebut Mr. Williams at the end. Who speaks next? Ms. Teixeira speaks after Mr. Williams. She may rebut some of those points. Go ahead Mr. Williams.

Mr. B. Williams: Again this budget is touted as the “biggest budget” and for over eight years the Members said that the growth has been sustained. Unless there is some earth-shattering event, disaster, for example, political upheaval, an earthquake or a flood akin to the 2005 flood here in Guyana, it is expected that the budget of the current year would be bigger than the budget of the previous year. It is commonsense.

A mid-term budget which is this budget is supposed to review the successes and challenges of the first half of the term and set the stage for the second half in terms of the policies and strategic direction the Government will be taking over the rest of the term and what are the quantitative and qualitative improvements we could expect. For example, will there be an increase of reduction in the rate of unemployment and underemployment? Alas! This budget fails, in every respect, to give us an inkling or any direction as how the rest of this term, if the term is served out, we could expect what would happen.

The Hon. Irfaan Ali claimed that poverty has been reduced under the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) and vaunts many projects that have created jobs. The Hon. Member Pauline Sukhai said that there has been two decades of PPP/C transformative policy. “Eight years of uninterrupted growth, no other country is doing like us”, that was from the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

It is important, therefore, that we undertake a careful examination of the factual matrix so that we can see the following revelations that are made manifest:

- i. Guyana remains the second poorest country in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

I am not saying that; it is the *World Bank’s World Development Report 2014*.

- ii. Guyana has the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *per capita* ranking in the CARICOM.

That has been discussed already but what was not mentioned was that St. Kitts & Nevis, the smallest country in CARICOM, GDP is US\$13,330.00. This Government has been boasting that we are doing better than our partners in this region. It is fallacious.

iii. 36.1% of the Guyanese people are poor.

That is, they live below the poverty line and if they live below the poverty line what about those who are living on the poverty line which is called the breadline. You are talking about more than half of the population of this country is dirt poor under this Government which is proclaiming to have the biggest budget every year.

iv. Nearly 40,000 people are unemployed.

I notice that nobody is trying to challenge my source and it just confirms, in my mind, that when they are touting this biggest budget they know the reality in which Guyanese are living.

v. Of 182 countries in the world Guyana ranks five places from the bottom on the lowest on the lowest of the Human Development Index.

It is apposite to note that Barbados – and they say that we are doing so better than the rest of the countries in the CARICOM – ranks third in the world behind the United States of America and Canada.

Mr. Speaker: Please provide the source as you go along, Mr. Williams.

Mr. B. Williams: It is the *United Nations Human Development Index of March, 2013*. You could see clearly that this boast of having the biggest budget and sustained growth tells us nothing - my honourable friend Mr. Nagamootoo has made the point – about the quality of life of the Guyanese people and that life is one of misery, one of want. It is a modern day purgatory, so to speak.

When we factor in suicides, murders/suicides, domestic violence and a high crime rate, what other picture, what other word could describe the conditions that we exist under here, the masses of the people of this country, other than hell?

It is submitted that a high growth rate is meaningless to the majority of the Guyanese people. In my last year's presentation I indicated that it was the *per capita* income. It is the manner in which income is distributed and that income is distributed, basically, amongst a cabal of about 5% to 10% of the population whereas the masses gets nothing. Going to the fact, it is that a high growth rate is meaningless to the people. For example, in Tunisia a high growth rate did not translate into more jobs for the young people since unequal treatment limited the creation of new businesses and as a result the country erupted into turmoil in 2010, which later spread revolt across North Africa and the Middle East. It is so much for high growth rates.

The national census, conducted several years ago, has not been published. It means that no proper analysis can be made in any areas in Guyana, for example, unemployment statistics by sectors and industry, population migration from regions and the like. What we wish to assert is that the Government alone cannot have this information. The Government must share this information on the last census with the Guyanese people and with the parliamentary parties in this Parliament.

Permit me now to my remit – legal. The APNU welcomes the increase of the complement of judges to 20 to augment capacity, albeit, recognising it does not amount to the perfect ratio of judge per population. However, this must be complemented by the following:

- i. Transparency in the manner of appointing judges in general and those Puisne Judges in particular.

We must have a system in Guyana where we should stop hand-picking judges and where we must advertise for these vacancies. We have seen the result of hand-picking a Justice of Appeal by plucking someone out from London and placing that person into the Court of Appeal in Guyana. We have seen what has happened in that regard. APNU is on record of saying that the positions of the Chancellor and Chief Justice must be advertised as well as other positions in the judicial system.

- ii. There must be adequate facilities, including legal assistants.

The Hon. Member Mr. Bond elaborated on the importance of judges having legal assistants especially in light of the fact that legislation has been passed in this country directing that they must complete their judgement within a limited time frame.

iii. Adequate remuneration.

It is an uncontroverted fact that money has a lot to do with the security of tenure of judges. We are saying that there cannot be two judges alone having tax free salaries when they, in fact, have the highest amount in terms of salaries. All the judges should either be given tax free salaries or their salaries should be increased. There is no point in discriminating between the Chancellor and the Chief Justice and the other judges of the judiciary.

iv. We must restore lump sum payments to the judiciary.

That is restoring the independence of the judiciary. We have legislation before this honourable House and assent to which has been refused by the President but we will deal with that later in the presentation.

v. There must be a fully constituted Judicial Service Commission:

It comprises the:

- Chancellor
- Chief Justice
- Chairman of Public Service Commission.
- Appointment of a Commonwealth High Court or Court of Appeal Judge by the President after meaningful consultation with the Leader of the Opposition.
- Not more than two non-active attorneys-at-law, nominated by the National Assembly after consulting such bodies as it appears to represent attorneys-at-law.

In this connection, it is apposite to note that the Chairman of the Public Service Commission straddles a number of other commissions, including the Police Service Commission. However, for the Chairman to be appointed a quorate commission is necessary. APNU recommends

therefore that President meaningful consults with the Leader of the Opposition after appointing the other members of all service commissions, including the Police Service Commission. Why are we saying this? The Judicial Service Commission has been operating for year with only the Chancellor, the Chief Justice and the Chairman of the Public Service Commission. Three persons alone have been appointing judges in this country and if we were to appoint the Public Service Commission so that there could be a chairman then it is conceivable. We believe that Government has no interest in constituting the Police Service Commission.

Why? It is because, with that commission, the National Assembly alone nominates the members of that commission and the President identifies the chairman from amongst those members who have been nominated from this National Assembly. It means then that the Government Members feels then they feel they would have no control of the Police Service Commission because they have no control in the National Assembly. We do not expect that there will be any movement or any alacrity towards constituting the Police Service Commission. We are saying that, in the light of that, the President only has to consult with the Leader of the Opposition in every case in relation to one appointment on each commission. We are saying that all of the commissions must be constituted and then we could have meaningful consultation between the President and the Leader of the Opposition.

Let me say this, I do not know... The Hon. Attorney General has been attempting to place blame. I remember on the advent of this new Parliament there was no movement, whatsoever, to constitute the committees of this House. In fact, I would warrant that it might not have been until after a year before the Committee on Appointment might have been constituted. We reject any blame that the Government attempts to repose in the current construct of the Committee on Appointment in this honourable House.

APNU, likewise, welcomes the introduction of voice recording capacity in our court system. However, it is inexplicable why its introduction should be confined to the civil courts, when it is an uncontroverted fact that in the criminal assizes the importance of capturing every word of a witness cannot be over emphasised or the need for speedy trials. APNU recommends that voice recording capacity be forthwith installed in the criminal assizes.

Mr. Speaker, \$1.8 billion is voted to consolidate the alleged advances already made within the justice sector; perhaps some of this money will make the Family Court operational. Notwithstanding what the learned Attorney General has just said, he has been saying that from the beginning of this Parliament and we are saying it cannot hold any water for the Government to keep coming to tell us that it is furniture which is holding up the operation of the family court. We need to have some movements in that regard.

The Rodney Commission of Inquiry. It is unfortunate that the constitution of Rodney Commission of Inquiry has been attended by jurist. APNU recognises the right of Mrs. Walter Rodney to have closure with respect to her husband's death. However, we do not accept that she has a role in determining the formation and operation of the Commission of Inquiry (COI). APNU regards this as the sole preserve of the person in whom Parliament has reposed this power.

10.23 p.m.

The Commission of Inquiry Act, Chapter 19:03, gives that power to the person to act in his or her own deliberate judgement, not to be counselled and/or procured. APNU sees the acceptance of the advice from Mrs. Rodney to exclude the Working People's Alliance (WPA) and the PNC from being consulted on the setting up of the Inquiry as an abdication of the responsibility given by the Commission of Inquiry Act to that person.

The Rodney Commission of Inquiry (COI) is, therefore, flawed *ab initio* – in the beginning. APNU calls on the President to consult with the WPA and the PNC/R on this inquiry and to remove, in particular, term of reference number four.

The Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill: the AML/CFT Bill, along with APNU's amendments to the AML/CFT Act of 2009, will go a long way in improving the anti-money laundering regime. APNU is prepared to assist the passage of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill after the fulfilment of the following conditions:

1. The Government agrees to the APNU's amendments' simultaneous passage through the House;

2. The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development must issue the Commencement Order to make operational the Local Government Commission Act;
3. The Government must return the Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2012 to the National Assembly and secure its passage by a two-thirds majority for its return to the President for his assent by 13th May, 2014; and
4. The Government must return all five, including the last mentioned Bill from which he had withheld in assent, to the National Assembly for passage by a simple majority.

What that means is that in the case of the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, we have up to the 13th May, 2014 within which to return that Bill to the President. Once that Bill is returned to the President, the President must assent to that Bill.

The APNU welcomes the Government's shift towards accepting its amendments in the Special Select Committee on the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill and we urge them to come the full way so that we could proceed with the passage of the Bill and the amendments, as well as the other Bills the President has to return to us, through this honourable House.

It is apposite to note in this connection that the Hon. Minister of Finance told this honourable House that there has been a significant drop in remittances, by US\$140 million, to be exact. This means, and we are respectfully submitting, that the anti-money laundering regime has started to kick in. This amount – US\$140 million – could have been coming into this country under the guise of remittances, but was instead money being laundered. But because of the application of the requirements of the anti-money laundering regime, it can no longer be sent under the guise of remittances. [**Ms. Teixeira:** Well pass the Bill.] [**Mr. Nandlall:** What kind of logic is that?] I love to see when my friends are agitated. As a result, several persons have been caught attempting to move money in large amounts at airports and in the United States of America. The regime is starting to bite. Therefore, this reinforces APNU's position of having an effective Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill.

University of Guyana (UG) law students: it is not enough for the Government to say it has set up a team to look at the question of a local law school for our law graduates of the University of

Guyana. In fact, the Government had dropped the ball some years ago when the same issue surfaced as a result of its own myopic policies. We cannot continue to have our law students uncertain about their future. Therefore, APNU calls on the Government to find a long-term solution to our law students' access to a law school accredited by the Council of Legal Education.

The authority of Parliament: APNU will continue to assert the authority of our Parliament. We maintain that the Standing Orders of the National Assembly are the paramount rules that determine our procedures in this honourable House. We set our faces against the deliberate removal of the Leader of the Opposition from the Budget Cuts case who we maintain must be able to defend his decisions in the National Assembly when they are whimsically taken to the courts. APNU intends to vigorously pursue the Leader of the Opposition's appeal in the Court of Appeal. In this regard, the Attorney General's assertion in his presentation tonight that we are in breach of the learned Chief Justice's decision is fallacious. We know why the Hon. Attorney General is trying to point us in that direction. He is trying to point us in the direction of saying that we are going to disobey the decision of the learned Chief Justice. Do you know why? When the Hon. Attorney General would have examined that decision, he would have recognised that that decision of the Chief Justice has put the Government between a rock and a hard place. But we know the law and you cannot hoodwink us into saying we will breach the Chief Justice's decision. In this House, the Opposition will follow the Chief Justice's decision. Let us see when we not approve, as his decision requires us, what you would do in that regard.

We know that good things are there to come for us. There are some issues that the Hon. Attorney General raised in his presentation and I wish to address the question of presidential assent. It is clear that when we pass a Bill in this honourable House, the Standing Order states that the custody of that Bill lies in the Clerk of the National Assembly. Standing Order No. 67, to be exact, states that. Just now, the Hon. Attorney General told this honourable House that the President has never been late or he has never breached the 21-day requirement if he is going to give his non-assent because it depends on when it reaches him. That means that the Hon. Attorney General is overbearing the will of the Clerk of the National Assembly and so he suborns the Bill when we pass it in this House and it ends up in his custody. The Hon. Attorney

General has said to this nation that he has the Bills that we passed. The Bills are with him for him to tinker with.

Mr. Speaker: The Bills should be sent directly to the President. If, in fact, they ended up at the Attorney General's Chambers, they should not be there.

Mr. B. Williams: We want the record to show that when we pass Bills in this honourable House, the Bill should remain the preserve of the House and should be in the custody of the Clerk of the National Assembly. Therefore, when the Clerk of the National Assembly sends a Bill to the President, the President has 21 days within which to send it back if he is going to refuse his assent to that Bill.

On the question of the President refusing his assent, we reiterate that even though the President is given a power and a discretion under the Constitution, the President cannot exercise that discretion whimsically or capriciously. He must exercise that discretion judiciously. Therefore, the President cannot usurp the functions of the court of Guyana, which is the only authority vested with the power to determine whether something is constitutional or not.

It cannot be the Attorney General. The Attorney General cannot interpret any law in Guyana. [Mr. Nandlall: Could you interpret the law?] You cannot interpret the law for us. That is the question of the court. I could urge my interpretation on the court but it is arrogance for you to suggest that you can come and tell us that you have interpreted it and what the law states.

The Hon. Attorney General has regaled us with his take on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill and the reasons why the President withheld his assent.

Mr. Speaker, the President sent to you a letter, on this lovely letterhead, with his reasons for withholding his assent. A whole page outlines it and nowhere on this page and in the reasons given by the Hon. President is there anything that has been suggested by the Hon. Attorney General tonight in this honourable House - nothing! What he has represented to this honourable House is a fiction of his own imagination.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, the document from the President was sent to you.

Mr. Speaker: Was that document circulated to every Member of the House? It is not my document; it was circulated to every Member and to the press.

Mr. Nandlall: If my friend is going to refer to the document...

Mr. Speaker: He has a right to read from it.

Mr. Nandlall: Well, let him read from it.

Mr. Speaker: Or to refer to it. That is his right.

Mr. B. Williams: I did not interrupt my learned friend when he was speaking. We reject out of hand the contention of the Hon. Attorney General that he was suggesting all kinds of reasons the President had in the letter. [**Mr. Nandlall:** I was expanding on what the President said.] You cannot expand on what the President stated.

In addition to that, it is clear, and the Hon. Attorney General must agree with that because he did touch on it, that the Hon. President cannot just withhold his assent in a vacuum. He has to send the Bill back. What happens to the Bill when it comes back? Where does the Bill go? The Bill has to come back to us. It has to come back to this honourable House. When it comes to the honourable House, we would look at the reasons that the President has proffered to see whether we could meet and understand what he is trying to do and whether we could agree with his misapprehension. In other words, we would, therefore, look to see if we could compromise in the situation, as all politicians should try to do, so we could send back the Bill to the President for his assent. The Bill cannot be sent back and is cloistered somewhere. It must come back to us. [**Mr. Nandlall:** The Bill is here.] I am happy that for the first time, the Hon. Member has said that. I trust that this honourable House is clear on what the procedure of this honourable House is with respect to a very important function of this honourable House – the passage of legislation by this National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, might I respectfully turn my attention to the issue of labour?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you would require some time.

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

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. B. Williams: In the last budget debate, the Hon. Minister of Labour, Dr. Nanda Gopaul, told this honourable House that canoe does not bore punt. [**Dr. Ramsaran:** He said never the day can canoe bore punt]. He said never the day can canoe bore punt. I did my research. He did not say who the canoe was and who the punt was. If I could address the issue of co-operative societies, perhaps, that will clear itself up. The Minister of Labour, Dr. Nanda Gopaul, spoke of the dissolution of hundreds of co-operative societies by his Ministry. Section 3 of the Co-operative Societies Act, Chapter 88:01 establishes the office of the Chief Co-operative Development Officer (CCDO), who exercises the functions provided for under the Act. Nowhere in this Act is the Minister reposed with operational powers. The Minister sits on appeal from decisions of the CCDO. It is a serious fiduciary position which proscribes the Minister being at arm's length from the CCDO.

The most important question on the dissolution of a co-operative society is the destination of its assets - who takes what. A lot of these co-operative societies' assets really are land. We know that this Government has given away ancestral lands. This Government has absorbed co-operative societies land also. We want to be very clear. The National Assembly has passed an Act to deal with co-operative societies and it never put the Minister to do anything, other than sit on appeal if there is a problem with the decision from the Chief Co-operative Development Officer. APNU trusts, therefore, that the alleged dissolutions have been in accordance with the provisions of sections 38 and 39 of the Act which provide largely for dissolutions where three-quarter of the membership seeks to do that, where the membership falls below seven, or if there is an inquiry which eventuates into that result. APNU recommends that the Minister stays far away from the assets of these societies and not interfere with the CCDO in the execution of his functions under this Act.

Labour – RUSAL or Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc (BCGI): The Hon. Member, Dr. Nanda Gopaul, promised thus:

“I will pursue any employer who violates the rights of the workers or the labour laws.”

As Shakespeare said, “It came over my ears like the sweet sounds that breathe upon a bank of violets.”

I do not need to go further. All I want to say is, “Enough, no more.”

The Bauxite Company of Guyana Inc. has been violating the rights of the bauxite workers and our labour laws for years. It has failed to reinstate 57 workers dismissed for striking for increased wages and salaries. It, in fact, imposed a 5% increase in salaries *à la* the Government. It has failed, also, to reinstate 67 workers suspended for protesting against vermin infested food. Its occupational health and safety record is *dépits*. Only recently, a lot of employees were damaged when they were given instructions to dispose of what they thought were obsolete ammunition. A lot of them were injured. [Mr. Nandlall: They were damaged? They were injured.] Damage is more serious. Injury would not describe the damage.

This company has breached the collective bargaining agreement with the workers representative, the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers Union (GB&GWU), and it has breached, also, the provisions of the Trade Union Recognition Act, when it unlawfully purported to de-recognise the Union and imposed a 5% increase in wages and salaries, as I said earlier.

APNU again – this is another year – calls on the Hon. Minister of Labour to deliver on his promise to reinstate arbitral proceedings between BCGI and GB&GWU in order to resolve the myriad of problems heaped on the workers.

Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU): it was fallacious for the Hon. Minister of Labour to assert that this Government paid our workers real wages. Since 2001, our policemen, our soldiers, our nurses, our teachers and our traditional public servants have been kept on the breadline. Instead of paying an increase of 25%, as demanded by the Guyana Public Service Union, the Government has consistently imposed 5% increases, except for the odd occasion of an election budget. It is no different this year. An examination of the period 2001- 2014 reveals thus: the rate of increase in wages and salaries was always tied largely to the rate of inflation and there were instances when it was below the rate of inflation. So, there could not have been any real increases in wages and salaries from 2001 to now when all the Government does is keep imposing 5% increases which brings me to the importance of honouring the collective bargaining agreement. The Government has repeatedly breached the provisions of that agreement and imposed salary increases around 5% most of the time.

The Hon. Minister of the Public Service Ministry (PSM), Dr. Jennifer Westford, informed us that the Government has started discussions with the GPSU on salaries and wages. APNU regrets to inform that the Government has had only one meeting with the GPSU and that was in relation to other outstanding matters. The issue of salaries and wages was not discussed, despite the Union having written the Government with a three-year proposal for increases in wages and salaries. About 70% of public servants earn about \$50,000 and less and this is in light of the Government's claim that it has paid real wages since the year 2000.

Over the years, remittances have saved this Government but the fall in remittances would now force the Government to pay proper wages to the workers. Poor wages lead to migration of skills and, as we have seen recently in our newspapers, hospitals are forced to look to India for medical personnel. That means the Government is training nurses and teachers for migration all because of its unwillingness to pay a living wage to these workers.

Moreover, that was the same problem the Government had with the law school. The Government could have had a law school ever since but when it came to the question of payment of salaries and wages to the staff, the requirement of the Council of Legal Education was that the salaries must be harmonised with the other campuses in the region and the Government decided that it did not want to foot that bill. That really was the only issue. The Government did not want to foot that bill. We are saying to the Government that it cannot come and tell us it will spend money to extend the Trinidad and Tobago law school so that we can get a guaranteed 25. We must look at the question of having our own law school and putting the relevant inputs to get the students off of the ground. The students cannot be waiting every year to see if they would be admitted to the law school. This intervention of the Government with CARICOM, is the Government going to do that every year? Are we going to ask a friend in CARICOM to talk to the Council of Legal Education? We are calling, again, on this Government to look into the interest of a longer term solution to resolve the law students' issue.

APNU honestly believes that the time for platitudes is over. This Government must be honest with the Guyanese people and this Government must change. This Government must have compassion in its heart for its people. People are suffering in this country. These statistics do not lie. This is not APNU's statistics. People are poor. People are struggling to make ends meet. The Government cannot come and tell us that because there are plenty cars on the road, there is

development. The Government cannot tell us to look at progress when we are seeing all those monsters going up in the air. The Government is telling us that they came from salaried employees and business people. Other than rice and gold, where is the production in Guyana?

The APNU, holding fast to one of the basic tenets of its formation that we would work towards a government of national unity is still on the table. We invite you to come and sit with us at that table so that we could make plans and decisions and free up the Guyanese people in order for them to have a good life and a better life, to use your term. It does not matter to us. We would be working together.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I know the hour is very late and people are tired. I would not be as long as earlier speakers, as I am not allowed to speak too long in this place. This is the third budget of the PPP/C Government in the Tenth Parliament. It marks the midterm of this Parliament and despite the enormous challenges and hindrances and delays that have come to be the hallmark of what is the definition of this new dispensation in the Tenth Parliament, the PPP/Civic can proudly say that despite of all of this, the Government recorded its eighth consecutive year of positive economic growth.

10.53 p.m.

The “doubting Thomases” amongst us find the 5.2% growth rate unfathomable for them. This parliamentary debate has been replete with “doubting Thomases” who believe that somehow the figures are not right, but they do not have a clue whether the figures are right or not and they do not know how to even calculate GDP. But we, in this House, are made to suffer in this way by people who refuse to, even at a level of trust, accept that some of the figures might be right.

The IMF and other bodies have recognised Guyana for making prudent fiscal and financial management in relation to the economy of our country. This third Budget has, again, delivered on a series of transformative programmes and projects for *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*. I have heard people talking about this being somehow a plagiarised theme from the PNC, *A Good Life for All*. English is English. “A Better Guyana for all Guyanese”, the emphasis is on Guyana and that is where the whole thrust of this Budget is on.

I have heard speakers on the other side refer to the Budget as having no vision, that it is a “repair and maintenance” budget. I have seen some Members bring some recommendations, but regrettably most of these have no vision. I will give examples of those. I wonder if Members on the other side have any idea of what an achievement it is that Guyana has been able to reach positive economic growth for over eight years, consecutive eight years, especially in a period where world prices were falling for rice and gold.

The global economy is still trying to recover in a number of parts of the world from the crisis of seven years ago where many of our sister countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have recorded low levels of economic growth and some actually beginning to show some minus growth. How is this possible that Guyana could do this? Bringing examples of other countries is useful but, nevertheless, this is an achievement that we, as Guyanese, should be proud of because it was done under adverse conditions and adverse times. It was not given to us on a platter. It is also a time when we were coming out of the worst violent crime wave that this country had, which ended in 2008. It was at that time we had the global fuel and food crisis and the global financial and economic crisis which have impacted on our countries.

It is the expansion and diversification of the economic base, the restoration and expansion of rice, bauxite and mining and new investments, both local and foreign; the growth of micro and small businesses, including the integration of an untapped source of expansion through the transformative economies in the Amerindian villages.

I would like to refer to two observations in this Budget debate. One is the struggle that is going on in the House between what is a “small world vision” and what is a “big world view”. The small world view seems to be able to concentrate on the immediate needs and what are figured as what is immediately around them, hence the provision of goods and services, roads and so forth.

Certainly, we could forever complain about electricity, roads, air services in and out of Guyana, *et cetera*, but unless we have a big world view, we cannot solve these problems, hence Amaila Hydropower Project, the Mazaruni Hydropower Development Project, the CJIA, the Linden/Lethem Road, and other new roads and highways. Some of these take five years in preparation and negotiation before anything is built so one has to be looking beyond, at least, ten years up the road. The conflict within governments and the tension within any government is the

issue of delivering the immediate needs of the people and, at the same time, looking at the horizon and seeing how one can solve problems while one keeps the society going and developing.

But our Friends on the other side seem to not want the big projects. My colleague on the other side, Ms. Amna Ally, says, “Why is it always about projects? We do not want projects.”

Just put things in the schools. Fix the schools.” That is what I am calling ‘classical small world vision’. In fact, not one speaker, I believe, as I have listened to every speaker, including my friend, the last speaker... I truly believe that the Opposition wants a “repair and maintenance” budget and not a vision for a better Guyana, not a vision for a future Guyana, because not one speaker has referred to how we solve the ever growing demand for energy as we become more modern and people are able to afford more fridges, televisions, microwaves, household appliances, including more construction, mechanic shops, air conditioning, elevators, escalators, even car washes than before. These are crucial ingredients for our expansion and diversification of our economy. Not one speaker referred to how we can use IT and connectivity to make Government more efficient and to be able to make sure that we have equitable access to the delivery of services. All we got was a litany of woes - again, tunnel vision, small world vision.

The problem with the Opposition... They may have a new name, the APNU and the AFC, but both parties are trapped in a time warp of the 1980s, the same old mantra of provision of jobs instead of calling for job creation, new investments, self employment, small business opportunities with no recognition of how we can, as a primary producing country, expand further, diversify further and be able to find new markets and so on.

I waited with bated breath for my Friend across the aisle, the Hon. Mr. Greenidge, as a lead speaker, as I felt that he, having been exposed to overseas and also being an older politician, would have a vision for Guyana... Again, hearing the Hon. Member, as with other speakers, come with the same mantra - reduce that, reduce the Berbice Bridge fees, increase salaries, increase universal old age pension, with no idea of sustainability... There was not one comment in relation to impact of these proposals on inflation, not one idea of expanding a new sector. There was not one new idea of a new venture for this country and its people. There was nothing on LCDS and the amount of moneys earned through trade in our carbon credit as a brand new

area of the international trade agenda. Is US\$115 million of no consequence to the Opposition? Is it of no importance that we are earning this amount of money with a brand new area of trading?

The debate has been about the “small world view” versus the “big world view” and I will just use a classical anecdote. My Friend is not here sitting in his seat, but the classical example of how absurd we could get in this House is when we were regaled by a certain Member in the Opposition about how there were only 20 rolls of toilet paper in a ward in the psychiatric hospital on a monthly basis. This is a budget to do with the future of our country. The 20 rolls of toilet paper could be put in a question to a Minister during normal times of the Sitting.

This “small world view”, this tunnel vision... The medical definition of tunnel vision is very clear and, in fact, is almost the same as the definition of the small world view. Tunnel vision is a medical condition in which one can only see what is directly in front of him or her. One has no peripheral vision and can only see exactly what is in front of him or her. In general parlance, it refers to the tendency to concentrate on one goal or one aspect without considering anything else.

I submit that the Opposition speakers seem to have suffered from some level of tunnel vision and maybe need a good ophthalmologist.

The Opposition cannot ignore that life has changed in Guyana. Yes, we still have poverty, but it has been reduced and will continue to be reduced under the PPP/Civic Government. We can deliver more goods and services more efficiently and better. Are there any ideas from the Opposition on how to do that? Again, not one Member on that side... How do we, as a people? You talk about partnership but it is all a bunch of fluff. It is all a bunch of fluff because you do not come to us. You do not sit with us and talk about partnership. What is our interest as a Government and an Opposition? We want the betterment of our people, that a child in Waramadong, a child in Sophia and a child in Corentyne can all have the same access to the same things. How do we do that? Do you think that it is done by waving a magic wand and because you say it has to be done?

The profile of poverty has changed. The abject poverty of squatting housing areas and slums made with zinc and cardboard that one could have found in every Region of Guyana with no water, no sanitation, no roads are gone; from 30 years ago, they are gone! The days of children

pushing carts with drums of water for miles up the road and skipping school are over! The days of 54% of our children under the age of five having malnutrition and swollen bellies, with kwashiorkor, are over! The days of 71% of our pregnant mothers being anaemic are over! The days of Amerindian children not accessing secondary education and primary education are over! It may return if they come back into office because we have gone through that before.

The challenge that even the former President, Mr. Burnham, had - he wanted to create, under Marcus Garveyism, a new middle class and he was right; we were independent and we needed to create a new middle class. However, the problem was that this conflicted with his other view of the state controlling 80% of the economy and, therefore, the middle class in Guyana could not have emerged. The opening up of the society... He could not develop a business class, as he would have liked, and instead created a professional class who were party members and the space at the top was only for those who held the card with the palm tree. There was no other space for anybody else.

Our children today can talk about wanting to be pilots, nurses, doctors, teachers and so on, but 20 years ago or 30 years, if one went to the sugar working areas, a child in the sugar working areas was told to go cut cane when he or she finished primary school. On parts of the East Coast, they were told to go and work in the farms. Life has changed and we say that there is poverty, but the abject grinding poverty that we saw...and there is photographic evidence and medical evidence that you will have difficulties believing anyway because you do not believe anything that we say.

When 13,000 solar units are given out to Amerindian households in the interior, it changes, radically, their lives. Children can do their homework, not by “juug-juug” lamp, as it was on the coast 30 years ago or 20 years ago, but children are able to read by light to be able to study and to do their homework. It has radically changed their way of live.

I just thought I would share some statistics with you. I thought that you, in particular, would like these, Mr. Speaker. The number of landlines that we had in Guyana in 1992 was 20,000. In December, 2013, there were 156,805 land lines. The number of cellular phones: in 2000, there were only 10,000 cellular services active. Do you know what it was at the end of December?

It was 555,035; two-thirds of the population in Guyana has cellular phone. The number of persons with electrical connections has grown from 108,000 to 174,000. **[Lt. Col. (Ret'd)]**

Harmon: Paid for by the people's money. Did you buy it?] It is a provision of service, Mr. Harmon. You are missing the boat, as usual!

We made comments about vehicles and so on, but social capital, when one assesses poverty levels and the upward mobility and the change of the profile in society, it is measured in a series of things, including cellular phones, televisions, fridges, stoves, cars and so on. **[Mr. Nadir:** Access to latrine...] When last have you seen a latrine? Right here in Georgetown there were many of them. I would not go through the data from 1992.

In 2013, there were 15,694 new vehicles registered in Guyana. A third of these were private vehicles - 5,850. The percentage of private cars as of a percentage of new vehicles was 37.3% so we see too that people are being able to acquire property, goods and services on their own, on their own merit. We moved away from the Burnham era of the "padroni" (godfather) culture, of the state taking care of everything. People are growing and being able to stand on their own two feet and the Government is urged to stand with them and help them to get there. Whereas, before, under the Burnham mentality, it was that persons would only do what the state told them to do and the state will take care of everything and the state could not take care of anything.

The old age pension: Hon. Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett spoke very well about the importance of this pension and non-contributory pension schemes in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is something relatively new. But Guyana has been doing it for quite a while. Our old age pension as a percentage – this is our old age pension, which is universal – of GDP is 1.19%, which is higher than most of the other Latin American countries. If we add on other pensions, such as statutory pensions, GDF pensions and so forth, and NIS, the total percentage of the GDP for pension, contributory and non-contributory, has risen to 4.05% of the GDP.

Therefore, when one starts tinkering with some of these issues, it is important to recognise the impact of all of this. The old age pension is an example of what is called, in the Latin American context... They are now introducing non-contributory pension schemes to reduce poverty and since their introduction over the last ten years or so, they have reduced poverty by over 11 million persons over the age of 65. Therefore, this is a major issue which we have been doing for quite a long time and these non-contributory schemes are not meant to be living wages. They are there to be able to lend support.

Before I move on, I cannot, as a woman, leave out women. More women in Guyana own land and property than ever before in our history and property is one of the key ingredients for empowering women, the poor and the vulnerable, and improving their economic independence. Not only do women own government house lots, but they own land as farmers, including rice, micro and small businesses, vehicles, buses, and mining companies. We see women in charge of mining companies - their own mining companies. They have their own miners' association now. This is a major change. Women have hair salons, pharmacies, medical and dental clinics, catering services and taxis. Ten years ago, one did not have that level of women's participation in the economy, not only as salaried workers but now as movers and drivers of the economy, and that is something important. When a woman owns a piece of land or a motorbike or something, she has collateral; she can use it then to be able to make money and to expand herself.

The comment about drug money is offensive. It is offensive to the people, the ordinary people – women and men – who build, borrow, scrimp and save to build their houses, buy motor cycles and cars and minibuses or tractors and who contribute to the development of our country. It is not to say that they are no drug people in our country, but when there is the sweeping generalisation... When the Hon. Member gets up and talks about an entire sector or even earlier comments which I would not go into as I would probably get in trouble with the Speaker about... Anyway, the issue is that the Opposition has gotten entrapped in opposition politics and they cannot emerge from the time warp and trap of their own making. They are victims of their own making. You cannot get out of being opposition for opposition sake and, therefore, and regrettably, Sirs and Ladies, you are making Guyana the victim too. It is okay if you want to be victims, but you are making Guyana the victim too.

My second observation - and I am coming closer down to the end - is to do with the fundamental debate that is going on in this House, from the beginning of 2012 when Parliament was launched to now, and more so in this debate, and that is a fundamental philosophical and ideological difference between the Government and the Opposition and, in fact, this Opposition and the entire history of Parliaments throughout the world. That is the separation of powers of the three branches of Government – the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. Each of these three branches has its respective roles, functions, responsibilities and, of course, powers. The Tenth Parliament, thus far, would be characterised in the future on a fundamental flaw of the

Opposition with its new dispensation of its understanding of the separation of powers between the three branches in what is a constitutional democracy.

Mr. Speaker, you passed around these magazines during the debate and I do not want to quote because it will take time, but I would like to refer Members to look at *The Parliamentarian* you circulated and the chapters or articles that have to do with the separation of the powers of the three branches of Government and, in particular, one of the recommendations on page 281:

“The concepts of the separation of powers and good governance must take into account the need for rapid political, social and economic development.”

I do not want to read more than that because of my time.

The Guyana Parliament is being observed with some disbelief by other countries' Parliaments and international and regional bodies; it is that the legislature believes that it can run roughshod over a democratically elected Government which has a plurality of votes and can stymie the movement of critical matters before the National Assembly, such as with the budget and the allocation of funds, amending bills to remove Ministers' roles and replacing with nothing, in some cases, or new parliamentary appointments which are even more lengthy than the Government's also tardy path of decision making, all with the intention of running the Executive from the Legislature. And where they cannot achieve that, they work to ensure that nothing can be done. The most glaring example, rather than read all of them, is the experience with the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill which has been held hostage in the Parliamentary Select Committee.

I would like to read from the Inter-American Dialogue. This is a news letter that comes out - www.thedialogue.org, the Inter-American Dialogue, Latin American Advisor, Financial Services, 6th - 19th March, 2014. They quote from different people writing on Guyana and the non-passage of the bill in Guyana. I would like to quote the General Manager of the Jamaican National Building Society, Mr. Jarrett. He has a preamble.

“The fight against the use of the global financial network for criminal activity is as effective as the weakest link in this chain of effort. It is therefore important for every nation state, no matter how small, to participate fully by passing the appropriate

legislation to allow financial institutions to monitor and report on transactions, as part of their efforts to combat a global scourge. From public reports it would seem that lawmakers in Guyana are being frustrated as passage of the AML/CFT law is being leveraged as a negotiating tool by opposition political parties. I submit that of all the laws, the AML/CFT law is not a law to be used for political maneuvering.”

He goes on to say:

“The implications for Guyana are grave as it could find itself locked out of the global financial network and unable to perform routine international financial transactions. Guyana has the third largest inflow of remittances in the Caribbean, and a consequence of the country's failure to pass the law could disrupt this important lifeline for citizens, as international banks may be obliged to cease corresponding and remittance relationships with entities in Guyana.”

I will use that as an example and I refer the Members of the House who talked about the remittances to please look at page 10, paragraph 3.13, of the Budget Speech where it refers to the decline in the remittances that have been received, and it is quite a sizable decline.

Mr. Speaker: Five minutes to wrap up, please, Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, this is for the year 2013 and I remind the House that the first deadline we missed was in May, 2013, when Guyana went up on all the lists of the financial services institutions in the region.

There is a lot more to be said, obviously, but one comment in the debate was quite amusing. I found it quite amusing and it was just a minor point which was a number of Members pointed out about the state of the airstrips in the interior, apparently forgetting that they had removed the allocation for interior airstrips in 2013 so there is amnesia again. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please. What is happening?

Ms. Teixeira: No one is opposed to the Government's performance and policies being scrutinised and that there has been oversight of public expenses. That is what the role and the function of the Legislature are and, in particular, the Opposition. It plays a watchdog role while,

theoretically, it is waiting for its day in Government, but it cannot attempt to run the Executive from the benches of the Opposition; it is a role the Opposition parties seem to have difficulty understanding. Somehow in their minds they think they are the Government. Unfortunately, according to my Mathematics, and I did pass Mathematics, by the way, 32 is more than 26 and 32 is more than 7 and the arrangement of convenience and expediency we see in this House between the two Opposition parties were never put to the ultimate test, and the ultimate test is that the electorates of this nation will judge. Until then, you are 26 against 32 and 7 against 32. Go and face the electorate. The public is waiting for you. They are waiting for the Opposition Members to see if you will pass this Budget. Will you once again try the same mantras you did in 2012 and 2013 or will you concoct some new concoction to create greater problems [*inaudible*]? Or is it going to be another level of delays and so on and uncertainties that will cause all sorts of concerns among the people, businessmen and investors?

We are at the crossroads but the onus right now is on the Members on the other side and their judgement and how we treat next week, as we go into the Estimates, will determine, not your fate, not my fate, not the fate of this side of the House, but Guyana's fate and that is more important. Whatever you do, when we come to the Estimates, is at your peril. It is at your peril. The electorate is watching you. The men, women and children who can benefit from this Budget are watching you and they will judge you. Stand by Guyana; put Guyana first.

In conclusion, I lend my unreserved support to the Budget presented by the PPP/Civic Government. Thank you. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have concluded our business for today. I invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment.

Mr. Hinds: Yes, Sir. I propose that the House be adjourned until tomorrow...

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. One second, Prime Minister. I recognise Mr. Greenidge.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to seek your permission, in view of the decision you took in relation to the comments by the Attorney General, to allow me to circulate the correspondence pertaining to the Budget discussions.

Mr. Speaker: Which decision was this, sorry? Oh, the Budget, of course.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, please proceed.

Mr. Hinds: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I propose that the House be adjourned until 2.00 p.m. tomorrow afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, we stand adjourned until 2.00 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, 8th April. Thank you.

Assembly adjourned accordingly at 11.22 p.m.