

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

78TH Sitting

Tuesday, 8TH April, 2014

The Assembly convened at 2.07 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

OATH OF A NEW MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am honoured this afternoon to announce that following the resignation of Mr. Jaipaul Sharma and my call upon the representative of A Partnership for National Unity's list of candidates, the name Mr. Ernest Elliot was extracted from the list and he was, on 7th April, 2014, declared to be an elected Member of the National Assembly.

Before Mr. Elliot can take part in the proceedings of the Assembly, he will have to make and subscribe to an oath before this Assembly, as required by article 176 of the Constitution. As Mr. Elliot is present, he can now make and subscribe to that Oath which will be administered to him by the Clerk.

The Clerk administered the Oath to Mr. Ernest Elliot.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I just want to say congratulations again to Mr. Ernest Elliot who is not a novice, having been a veteran himself, serving in the Ninth Parliament, representing Region 4, Georgetown/Mahaica. Mr. Elliot will now have to make his way through the maze of

the press core and the tripods. I hope, Mr. Elliot, you can carve out a space for yourself in and between the press.

Thank you and welcome.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Objection by Mr. Greenidge to use of words by Mr. Nadir

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have just one announcement and that is that last evening, during the presentation by the Hon. Member, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, certain words were stated by him, which Mr. Greenidge took objection to. I have since had an opportunity to review the transcript and I wish to say, firstly, that Mr. Greenidge was in order when he said he never used the word “manipulate”. Secondly, words used in reference to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the exchange rate, as stated, even though I believe not intended, could have conveyed an impression to a layperson that things were done. But Mr. Greenidge did cap that off by saying that these are things which you would not understand. I do appreciate that the words, as stated to the layperson, could have given rise to an impression that things were done with the exchange rate vis-a-vis GuySuCo. But, as I said, Mr. Greenidge did go on to say that these are things which have to be explained and understood by all. So, in fact, the word “manipulate” was not used by Mr. Greenidge, but the other words used could have given the layperson, an untrained mind, a person who is not an economist, a different view. That is the announcement.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTION TO APPROVE THE ESTIMATS OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 2014

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

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the 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]*

Budget debate resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate on the Budget for 2014. This is the last day for the debate proper. So I invite Mr. Khemraj Prakash Ramjattan to deliver his presentation.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are here gathered again in this august Assembly to debate the 2014 Budget. I must state, at the very inception, that it is necessary that the necessary protocols be announced, and that is largely that our Minister of Finance must be congratulated for managing, in a very difficult and challenging set of circumstances, nationally and internationally, for presenting the Budget, as he did. That does not, however, mean that there will not be criticisms, and constructive criticisms at that, from this side, from the Alliance For Change, that is going to endeavour with the purpose of ensuring that we all come to, what I would regard as, a national consensus that will make the life of ordinary Guyanese a better one - all Guyana, as the theme is, having their lives far more improved than what exists as of today.

That is why I want initially to make a preambular point that we like to boast as to where we are today as against where we were some years ago. But it is still important to point that the

important question that should be asked is: “Are we where are supposed to be?” That is the important question.

On the last occasion I stood here and spoke in the National Assembly about the Budget was last year. I have been doing so for some 20 years or more now. I indicated that if this Government were to tighten up, the Opposition would lighten up. Over the years, however, we have seen a total lack of that tightening up and it is in that activity of not tightening up that the Alliance For Change and, I know, APNU have done what they have done. They have the national interest at heart, fundamentally. It is not as if we are grandstanding politically and would shout down simply because we see persons across the aisle as people who we do not appreciate. This country belongs to all of us and all of us must be participants in its glory.

I feel that this Budget could have been a far superior budget had there been the incorporation of the views of the Opposition, and it is not as if the Opposition’s views are not known. We have indicated to the Government side a number of things we would like to see, since last year, when we had our tripartite talks and indicated so many things in that list of items the AFC and APNU gave to the Government side. We are of the view that by virtue of this exclusion from the process, and I concede, as mentioned yesterday and quoted from Mr. David McGee, that it is the right of the Government side to prepare the budget.

But when we do have a dispensation where there is a majority on the Opposition side, because of that newness and novelty of the circumstance, it is incumbent on a government that would like to see things happen that there be, what is called, inclusiveness on the part of the government of opposition views. In a minority government, there must be multi-party governance by necessity. It is not multi-party governance that is of the status that we have to be as Members of the Cabinet... No! We will sit just here and make our points. But we want our points to be considered, we want our points to be deliberated on. And, to that extent, the non-incorporation of the views of the Opposition has sunk this Budget to the level of one which there are tremendous criticisms.

I want to make the very first point. It came on the very first day when Dr. Vindhya Persaud asked what is wrong with this Opposition that is going to use the scissors on the Budget to deny people of Guyana certain benefits. Well I want to tell the House, and especially direct this

remark to the Hon. Member, that we must appreciate that even if the Opposition is going to use its scissors, this Budget, at its preparatory stage, has had a hatchet and shears used on it prior to its coming here. The cuts were made because of old revenue streams not coming in to the Consolidated Fund so we can have a fair grasp of how much revenue we have to disburse and expend; it was never accurately represented in this Budget. I have made this point since 2012 and, indeed, because it continues to happen, I have to continuously make it. We are told that we largely have approximately \$208 billion to spend, but, if we were to put all the revenue streams into this Budget, we would have a lot more than that. In the approximation of the experts that have indicated to me what it should be, it is in the vicinity of more than \$50 billion that was cut prior to this Budget being laid here in this honourable Assembly.

Moneys are being hived off into certain accounts that belong to certain statutory agencies, statutory bodies. The Guyana Forestry Commission's balance - and at page 597 one is going to see this - as of 31st December, 2013 totalled some \$1.034 billion. That was never put into the Consolidated Fund. The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission's bank balance at the end of 2013 is \$12.625 billion. The Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission - an additional \$365 million, and this is at page 600 of Volume 1; the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority - \$742 million, page 605 of Volume 1 again; the Central Housing and Planning Authority - \$2.7 billion, page 616; the Lotto Funds - \$1.1 billion; and, of course, the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Ltd. (NICIL), always - \$9 billion and even more.

These bodies have Government moneys, what is called public moneys under the Constitution and the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. That alone totals some \$27.7 billion that is not there in our Treasury. I want to give this analogy. It is like a husband, who is the income earner, giving the housewife not the total sum that he earns. He actually earns \$100,000 and goes and says he only earns \$60,000. With that, the housewife has to pay rent and do all the necessary things to the extent of only \$60,000 because he hived off the further \$40,000. This is what we have here in this Budget. In addition to that, we will then not be in the position to know what is there in the Consolidated Fund so that we, in this National Assembly, in accordance with constitutional provision and Standing Orders, will be in a position to know how much we can spend and on what.

So when the Government goes and does its propaganda on the National Communications Network (NCN) and the Government Information Agency (GINA), they must understand that when the Opposition is saying they will use their scissors, a big chop on the wings, literally, of this economy and how much it really has in the Treasury has been made at the preparatory stage. [Mr. Nagamootoo: How brutal!] It is very, very brutal to the extent that so much has been chopped off. Then I ask the question: what is wrong with a government that is going to do that kind of axing of a huge set of moneys? Everything is wrong.

In addition to those sums I spoke about just now, we have, from the Auditor General's Report of 2012, a number of agencies that have bank balances that have not been put into the Consolidated Fund, although the Hon. Auditor General makes it clear that these sums ought to be put in there because they are transferable into the Consolidated Fund. I want to quote from the Auditor General's Report of 2012. In his Executive Summary on page vi, he makes mention of it, but it is expanded at page 9, paragraph 21:

“The Auditor Office's assessment of the balances held in special accounts at Bank of Guyana indicated that eleven accounts with balances totally approximately \$4.140 billion appear to be funds that were transferable to the Consolidated Fund.”

But they have not been transferred. And these include the Infrastructure Development Fund Account, the Accountant General-GEC Wartsila Account, the Agriculture Sector Loan Account, SIMAP Account and the Financial Sector Reform Programme Account. Then there are some other static accounts, the Japanese Non-Project Grant Aid, CARICOM Headquarters Project and so on. That is at page 10.

The Ministry's response - and this is 2012 because we have not received the 2013 Auditor General's Report as yet - was that they are making considerable efforts to transfer these moneys into the Consolidated Fund. What is it that is such a big effort to transfer these moneys when, at the behest of the Auditor General, it is a requirement and an instruction from that higher authority, in relation to our revenues, that it be done? The recommendation of the Auditor General was that the Audit Office, once again, recommends to the Ministry of Finance to urgently review the status of these accounts with a view to paying it into the Consolidated Fund.

So apart from the \$28 billion I mentioned of NICIL, Lotto, GGMC and all those, we have an additional \$4 billion in bank accounts at the Bank of Guyana.

These moneys are not there in the Consolidated Fund, so that we now in this August Assembly, like the board of directors in a corporate entity, having the treasurer come forward and saying that this is the income we have, and then the members of the board as a matter of policy makes the disbursements based on that true genuine reflection of the state of revenues... So the cut is made long before we come here and that must be appreciated because, unless we have all that is in the Consolidated Fund, we will not have a true representation of the state of our finances. For those Members who are going to be critical of us, who are going to run to the television station and do the hue and cry that the AFC and APNU have cut the Budget, I want the point to be made that billions have been axed and sheared. This is very important, and is not for want of the governing party's Cabinet not knowing about these things; they know. And that is, first of all, a huge flaw of this Budget - no true depiction of what the state of our revenues is to the extent then that we can have an ability to make the assessments as to where the priority should go.

This Budget will have a deficit in the vicinity of some \$32 billion. It was always the pride of the founder leader of the PPP that budgets must, as best as possible, be balanced. If we had these incomes from those sources coming in that will total in the vicinity of approximately \$32 billion – \$28 billion plus the \$4 billion that is in the static accounts – we could have had a balanced budget. But “no” says the Minister of Finance; “no” says the Cabinet; leave it there in the static accounts and leave it there in the statutory bodies. These, apparently, are not public moneys anymore for the public, through its representatives in this Parliament, to spend. No; they are going to spend it as they want.

And that is why recognised academics and even one who was there as an Auditor General recently made the remark that we have a parallel Treasury in the form of these sums of moneys. Dr. Goolsarran indicated in a publication only about two or three days ago how we are having the creation of a parallel treasury. This is wrong. Articles 216 and 217 state that all these moneys must go into the Consolidated Fund, as I have been urging, so that we can have a better hand at what will be spent and what will be known. It is through these funds, I would want to deduce, that a lot of additional spending without the National Assembly's approval is being carried out. It is through the moneys in these bank accounts that we probably have the Marriott Hotel

construction still going on, because, obviously, we do not know how it is they are carrying on with the project as is.

And that is wrong. Every major capital project in this country, which is going to utilise public moneys, must have the National Assembly's approval. But we do not have that happening, let us say, in relation to the Marriott Hotel. And a whole lot of moneys from the public purse have gone there without the approval of the National Assembly. Now when you are going to do bypass mechanisms like these, you are going to anger your legally elected representatives of the National Assembly which is then going to cause vexation of the spirit to demand scissoring in relation to other items. It is like a con game on the housewife with that deceptive husband. It is going to anger the housewife when she has to struggle with \$60,000 when the income is \$100,000. I want that point to be brought home. I am going to bring it constantly here and especially as we see our constitutional office holder, the Auditor General, making these claims that these moneys must be placed in the Consolidated Fund.

We see, in addition, other revenue streams that are being denied the budgetary process. Take for example - and we read about it recently in Jamaica - the spectrum there was sold for US\$25 million. That is money that will go into the Consolidated Fund of Jamaica. But what do we have with our spectrum here in Guyana? We put in the Telecommunications Act who and who will get licences for these things without any payment. What we are saying is that friends, family members and close associates are going to be beneficiaries when indeed if it is something of value that ought to be sold. And when the sale price is gotten, the moneys will come into our Treasury. There is a denial of the Treasury collecting that which would have raised the Consolidated Fund even more.

We see also going on in natural resources - and I will come to that later on - in connection with forestry and mining resources. Extraordinary low rates in relation to concessions which are going to deny the revenue streams that would ordinarily have been there to the quantum that the market rates would have demanded. That is important.

2.37 p.m.

We have a huge set of other areas where moneys are denied. One of which is billions of dollars out of exemptions and tax concessions granted to certain investors. When one asks the question

as to why certain investors are getting these tax exemptions and concessions in a number of areas, duty-free this and duty-free that! Of course, I appreciate that for incentivising our foreign and local investors, it is yes indeed, but it is not rational. We notice a whole set of exemptions and concessions being granted, which are denying Guyanese a better day for them.

It is but a huge flaw in this budget presented, again, in 2014. We feel that it must come to an end. It must be brought to an end simply because our Constitution says that all public moneys must go into the Consolidated Fund. Of course, as the very garrulous Attorney General would state, “The Constitution is supreme”, but when it comes to the finances, it could be scattered about for them to spend as they want, and that which indicates it should be in the budget is to be hived off.

We must not have parallel treasuries in Guyana, not from the year 2014. It must stop! When the Opposition is going to make the point that it should be halted, please, Members of the Government side, listen up. Do not go and say we are chopping the budget, when we know that you are chopping it 10 times more – tenfold more. That is why we cannot have moneys for the Old Age Pension increasing to \$15,000, as we demanded. With that \$50 billion and more, which I think is all across in bank accounts, National Industrial & Commercial Investment Ltd. (NICIL), and so on, it is denying the people their rightful due that can make Guyana a better place.

A lot of talk also was done by Members of the Government, indicating how great we are as a nation today as against what was before. I want to say that the point must be made that a lot of Guyanese are leaving this country. Their migration levels are so high today that the Government does not want to bring out the census report to show what really our population is. It is very opaque when it comes to giving that information so that we can know where we really stand. There is a page in the Budget speech, I think it is page 79, “Net Migration” per month, in which there are almost 1,000 persons leaving Guyana per month – net. We then have a population growth that is obviously declining - 2.7%. It is in the budget speech of the Hon. Minister, to that extent. The whole point of it ... **[Dr. Singh:** It is disclosed there. You cannot say that we did not disclose it. Make up your mind.] **Make up what mind?** You do not want to give us the census because it will give a lot more information as to the poverty levels of Guyanese. Do you see how he is jumping like a kangaroo already?

Mr. Speaker: Okay gentlemen. Mr. Ramjattan, stay to you speech please.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. We would know whether indeed the poverty rates...

Mr. Speaker: In Guyana the appropriate analogy would be “like a *hoourie*,” but we are not going to have none of that here.

Mr. Ramjattan: We do have this very damning figure coming out because the Hon. Minister had to state something about our net migration rate. It has always been there. The census will obviously give us a lot more information, on to a number of other things, so that we can make better assessments in conveying to the population what the priorities on spending should be. I think it was the economic forum that mentioned the high migration of skilled labour from Guyana. When they regale themselves that we are doing fantastic in relations to job creation and all of that, we are not getting the true picture. Though our declined population is the highest in the Caribbean, at 2.7%, we cannot progress as a nation when so many skilled workers are leaving to the extent of about 1,000 per month. That is why in the sugar industry and in so many other spheres of activities we are not getting the quality people because they are overseas.

There is a previous speech, which I had made, in which it would appear that we are just manufacturing skills for other countries. We are outsourcing our greatest assets, that is, our human resource. That is why a number of the industries, especially sugar, are in the state where they are. I will come back to sugar just now.

These kinds of facts cannot be disputed, as are in the Estimates, the budget speech and those schedules attached to them. They cannot be disputed. It does go to show what it is that an Opposition, duly elected, is being denied of, to the extent that its inputs into it are going to be somewhat incomplete as it were.

I want to indicate, too, that there were lots of talks about this job-creation and all of that. We have to do a lot of research to find out if that is true. One of the indicators to know whether so many jobs have been created is to go to our National Insurance Scheme (NIS) data report. And we have gone there. The NIS registration data would tell us. Indeed, it logically flows that if there is plenty of employment - they are saying that it is good quality employment with big moneys and middle class size moneys are coming from the jobs that are being created - why then

in the NIS registration data there are only literally 1,000 employed persons being the number for each year since 2009? In 2009, active, at the end of the year, for persons paying national insurance was 1,000, then it was about 1,100 from 2011 and another 1,000 more for 2013 from 2012.

What is here is an indicia or an index in relations to how much employment is being created? Unless of course, the Members are saying that the NIS is not collecting its dues and those are still not being active, they would tell me that these figures are all statistics and statistics on stilts. They are not of the first category of what we would call lies.

It is “1,000, as per active at the end of each year”. I have got these numbers in this document, from 1990, which was taken from NIS. This hue and cry, again, that we are doing wonderful is not reflected in an institution that it ought to be reflected it. You are going to say, “but they are not paying” and that now comes to another question which I would want to develop a bit later on our rule of law. Why then are there many non-registered...? What is the NIS doing? Why then is the actuarial report is stating that the Minister must at least go after people who have to pay their NIS and he is not doing it? We will have statistics here that is going to show something otherwise, but in the Minister’s rebuttal he will be saying, “They are not actually paying up.” This is very wrong.

This is all budget because we want to be a constructive critic here as to what the Minister is talking about. What the Minister is talking about obviously then, by a logical deduction, is a misrepresentation. It is important... [Mr. Nandlall: You have the 1990 records, Comrade. Get 2014 record.] Well, we do not have the records for 2014. You cannot have the records for 2014 on the NIS registration data. It is important that this be the record. You are going to say whatever you want Mr. Attorney General. Do you see how garrulous he is? He has a sharp tongue to respond, but it is if he could only pay attention, with that sharpness, on actual facts as to employment rates, actual facts in relation to the revenues, our country would have been a better one. Obviously, it must not be allowed to work here.

It is important... [Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Nandlall, if you do not pay NIS... He does not pay NIS, he or his staff.] Well, you see it is going to get personal now to the extent. The NIS that is paid... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, order.

Mr. Ramjattan: I would have been the first that the NIS would have come to, knowing that I am an Opposition that it feared badly and it would have come and charged. I and my staff pay the highest rates of NIS in this country. If it is one person who should know that, it is Ms. Priya Manickchand because she worked and came from that stable. **[Interruption]**

Mr. Speaker: One second Mr. Ramjattan. Members, this is going in a direction that is bringing disrepute to the House. I would ask that we do not go down this road please. It is becoming personal and with that comes emotionalism.

Mr. Ramjattan: That comes with resignation. She probably wants my resignation.

Mr. Speaker: Let us please allow Mr. Ramjattan to make his presentation, as he intended to, originally. Proceed Mr. Ramjattan.

[Mr. Nandlall: Please do not resign.] I will not. Even heckles from my learned friend are not going to make me resign.

I come now to a very important aspect of this sojourn to accountability and that is the Procurement Commission. We know that this country has a lot of corruption. The corruption is stated in the Auditor General's report. Corruption, not only in relations to what the Ministry of Finance has done with hiving off the moneys, but dealing with a lot of things such as the Contingencies Fund. At page vii of the Auditor General's report, "Advance continues to be issued from the Contingencies Fund which does not meet the required criteria for such advances..."

He went on to say that there were massive overpayments to contractors, at page vii - "A significance amount of overpayments to contractors has occurred on works." This is 2012 report, the latest one, page vii. Do you see it? You have it there, paragraph 9, page vii. Mr. Minister, do you see it?

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Ramjattan, speak to the Chair please. Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. At paragraph 6, page vii, what is the Ministry of Finance doing in relations to the Contingencies Fund? This is what is said; "Key findings relating to

Ministries/Departments/Regions, overpayment to contractors”. I hope that a second look might be taken by the Minister of Finance on these issues.

It is also talking about compliance with stores regulations. A number of Ministries, Departments and regions have been found in breach of the store regulations. It would appear that this Government just cannot store properly! They put it all over the place. The inventory to do with what is Government’s property is not reflected. Again, other specific findings have to do with a number of moneys that are not collected – huge sets of moneys. In one case, there is over US\$2 million for Guyana Stores Ltd., as he mentioned. Of course, there is litigation going on. He said that. Guyana Stores Ltd. was sold for some money and it is here that certain moneys have not been collected.

Extending and developing these executive summary points of the Auditor General Report, there are pages thereafter in which he stated clearly. I do not want to go into them because they give greater amplitude to that which was in the executive summary.

I will come back now to the Procurement Commission, which is but another aspect, that has to deal directly with moneys and how moneys are spent this time. It is not how the revenues streams come into the country.

This country literally went into a civil war in the 1999/2000 era. It came as a result of elections, as we all know, then the Herdmanston Accord, where Caribbean leaders had to come to our country and then they developed constitutional reform, one such reform being the establishment of the Procurement Commission. It came as a result, (as we all know, because we have lived through the experience), of the stone scam, the milk scam and a number of scams that occurred in the 2001 era.

We have the scenario, where again, as the Attorney General would want us to be heckled off, the point I am trying to make,... [An Hon. Member: The lotto scam.] That was another one. We fought for that, it was included and provided for in article 212W of the Constitution. That Government, of which I was a part, in 2001, indicated that later down in the year it was going to establish and make operational that Procurement Commission because that Procurement Commission was going to be body to police procurement matters - all matters.

What do we have today after some 13 years? It is that none of those provisions have become operational by virtue of the establishment, that is, the operationalisation of the Procurement Commission. Today, we have, however, the junior Minister of Finance saying that it is too pricey. It would be something too pricey to establish and operationalise. Well, if we were to do a comparison...

Minister within the Ministry of Finance [Bishop Edghill]: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: One second please, Mr. Ramjattan.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, while I notice that it was a headline in the newspapers I never said that in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. If you did say it outside of the House then it could be referred to. For example, we quote from newspapers.

Bishop Edghill: I never said so.

Mr. Ramjattan: He said it was too expensive. His words were “too expensive”.

Mr. Speaker: But then Mr. Ramjattan...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the point Bishop Edghill is making is that this was a newspapers headline, it is not quoting him. It was the editorial choice of words.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know; I have not seen it. Mr. Ramjattan, is it that the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill used those words?

Mr. Ramjattan: The Hon. Bishop Edghill used words that it was too expensive to go and have that established now. I want to tell him because I can withdraw the word “pricey” if he is saying that he did not say so.

Mr. Speaker: Well, that is a euphemism for the word “expensive.” It is like a substitution.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is right. It is a substitution for the word “expensive.”

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, we can go back to the transcript. This is what I said to the House. I brought the figures and said it would have been 24 cases that the Procurement Commission would have been handling for the period.

Mr. Ramjattan: Well, you did say that it was too expensive.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Ramjattan, find a choice of words and proceed please.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. It is important to understand that from since those days, in 2001 and then in 2003, when we passed the Procurement Act to give teeth to the constitutional provisions, we have not seen the establishment and the operationalisation of the Procurement Commission. That is a constitutional mandate; that is a constitutional requirement: “There shall be a Procurement Commission...” What is there of recent times, since we have been making the call that it must be established and operationalised, is, first of all,... We do not want to deny ourselves the “no objection” clause and after 10 years, or more, they are now coming with that, that they have to have this “no objection” clause. The Procurement Commission states clearly in section 54..., as we all know, I debated it here. Indeed, I had a role to play and that role was that after the establishment of the Procurement Commission and its operationalisation Cabinet’s role shall be zero to the extent of the awards.

Now they come and they say that they have to change that section 54. [**An Hon. Member:** Who is “they”?] It is the Government side. The whole point of it is that they do not want to have this Procurement Commission for the simple reason that they want the continuation of gorging at the trough. That is what they want. Imagine the thing being established in the 2001/2003 period for the simple purpose of ensuring that there is more transparency; that there is more accountability. Then in 2004, 2005, right up to 2011 when they were in Government, at a majority level, they did not put it up. When they are in a minority state now they come and say: “This policeman, called Procurement Commission, we do not want him.” That is what the Government Members were saying, recently. They do not want the policeman, because, as I said, more than now we are trying... We are always consensus building. We told them, in the Government, that we are going to do what is called an amendment to section 54 to give them a compliant status. “No” said the Cabinet, “We do not want that, we want the no objection,” which is doctrine, in accordance with section 54 of the existing Act. This is the new proposal as to why

it should not be operationalised. It is because only 24 complaints, and 25, will come for the whole year.

The Hon. Member Bishop Edghill is going to say that 24 or 25 now. But it is because we do not have the policeman, people are not complaining to it. Otherwise we would have got hundreds of complaints! Little that the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill did not realise, too, was that there are other functions of the Procurement Commission. It shall rewrite the laws in relations to procurement and advise the National Assembly – literally that. The Constitution makes provision in a certain article, to review the laws and bring it to the National Assembly. That is an important one. Also, it is not only the laws, but guidelines, criteria, and so, for those that are going to bid for projects.

They do not like that too. They are going to get their tender boards to go and write up the guidelines, such as the one, which was recently done, that we brought to the press in relation to pharmaceuticals. Friends and family, and those who are very close to them, will forever be the ones who will benefit from those criteria. [Mr. Nagamootoo: They do not want to stop the gravy train.] That is right. They do not want to stop the gravy train.

The qualification in 2013, in relations to pharmaceuticals, was again changed so that the goal post could be narrowed, so that only one “footballer” could kick the ball inside. One has to get a \$50 million revenue or income tax base; one has to do a whole set of other things. When it is looked upon there is only one person who will get it. We all know that person. They are then going to grant ... [Mr. Nadir: Do you know the man?] You know the man, I know the man, all of us know the man.

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

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Hon. Member be given another 15 minutes to continue his wonderful presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Ramjattan: I want to make this point to close on the Procurement Commission that the losses we are making but its absence is tenfold greater than that cost, Bishop Edghill, you are talking about. Take for example, I see here the prices from Queens Atlantic or the New Guyana

Pharmaceutical Corporation (GPC) in relation... I am not going to mention the one with the Ketoconazole. I am going to mention Depo-Provera. It is, and I am using here, the authorised document... I do not know what the medicine is, but whatever the medicine is it has indicated that its total cost for it is going to be \$25 million – the New GPC. Thirteen thousand vials, at \$495 each is what it could have been bought for from any other pharmaceutical provider. This one here, the unit, is literally \$1,900. It is from \$495 from any other person or where it is selling, even at the pharmacy, to \$1,900 for one vial. Do you know how much it was that one vial of medicine came up to? It was \$25 million and if it was tendered to anyone else it would have come up to literally \$6,000,478. That is what we lost. We have heard the story of Ketoconazole.

Mr. Speaker, we have to deal with that very important other industry because procurement is like an industry for that Government across there, a very profitable industry, without the Procurement Commission. One that is very unprofitable, notwithstanding we pour moneys into it for the last three or four years, some \$11 billion, is the sugar industry. They are saying that it is too big to fail. Others have argued the case that it is too big to succeed.

3.07 p.m.

I want to make the point that when it comes to sugar, it touches a chord in all of us – this side of the aisle and that side. It is important that we ensure that that sector succeeds, but it must succeed without bail-outs every year. The great President Obama, when he needed to bail out certain industries, car and whatever else, had made it a criterion that the industries have to pay back the money within 10 to 15 years. And, moreover, the big criterion was that the board, which is there that is now asking for the bail-outs, should bail out. It is to get a new board because the Government cannot give good money to the same bad managers and board members. Then what they will do is to come and say that they want to close down the industry and they want to rear tilapia.

This mechanisation programme, which it has, is something that we feel is a good input into it because the workers today and their children of tomorrow are not going to want to do the back breaking work, which for centuries has been going on in that industry, cut and load. It has to mechanise. When it is mechanised we are going to see the displacement of workers. Workers are going to be displaced and I want to know if the deduction could be made that it is probably

realising that there will be displacement, that the Government wants the money and then it is not going to mechanise for the purpose, as it is known, that there are certain special interest in the employment creation in that set of estates which is going to produce livelihoods for workers. Which, also, in a sense, is an advantage for Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) to have lots more workers under its trade union membership. When the Government Members come here saying things to the effect that they have plans and strategic plans for the sugar industry, we have to check those things out thoroughly.

My good friend Dr. Ramayya indicated that we have to do a couple of things. We are not going to be *paglees*. We have to ensure that we are going to have all that, which they are talking about, to reduce the cost of production. We have been saying this for over eight years now, since the Alliance For Change (AFC) came into being, that you have to start doing best agricultural practices, you have to do the husbandry practices, you have to increase private cane farmers supplies, you have to get on with the business of mechanisation, notwithstanding that GAWU would probably have less trade union members. The Members have to talk about the rehabilitation of factories, not only the sugar factory at Skeldon, but it is to rehabilitate all. What is also very important is that we have to get the skills back into that industry. What we see now, especially at the middle and upper management levels and even lower down to the supervisory level, are a lot of people who want to make the proper assessments, that can get that industry going, literally are being asked to shut up or if they do not shut up they are being silenced. A number of managers have indicated, in the sugar sector, that a lot of what the Board and the Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, are doing is not the right thing. They have been telling them sugar is produced in the cane fields and there is where it is and not on the fancy boardrooms where there could be an analysis but the people are not being incentivised at the bottom there to do the hard work.

This sector must have a certain plan that will have to be supported by the Members of the Opposition, (I speak here on the AFC behalf, and I am certain that is the position of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU)), before we move forward. We are not going to take good money and send it off to bad. It is bad economics - terrible economics. I want to just forewarn the Members on that side of the House that our sugar industry, which is so important to all of us, must be managed better. That is what we are talking about. If we are going to move

from where we are to where we ought to be then it is better governance; it is better management, and so on.

The other important point that I wish to talk on has to do largely with what I have to say on the natural resources sector. Sugar is important and it is not making a profit. Natural resources sector, gold and forestry, is making a profit and so to that extent we still have to ensure that we maintain that high profitability. I want to say this: we could make lots more profit if it is managed better.

Notwithstanding, the Hon. Minister Robert Persaud was indicating that this forest sector is doing well, I want to say no. In a sense, it is in decline. The Minister claimed that log exports have declined in 2013 compared to 2014 by 12%. When we tabulate the official information we are seeing export value being decline by 10% and the volume by 8%. The Minister also claimed that valued added export increased by 30%. Information and this is information from someone who has been tabulating it, Ms. Janet Bulkan – based on Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) data and GFC forest sector information, I have cross-checked these developments with its monthly reports and it is saying no - that it is not true. The only time there was ever a boom was when there was the Barama boom and that is when it was renting out, and, of course, we then penalised it because that was regarded as illegal logging.

There is also the point, which was made, that we are suffering from *Asia-phobia*. We are not *Asia-phobia*. Foreign direct investments, when they come here, must abide by the laws of the country, the labour laws, especially as Dr. Cheddi Jagan would have demanded. We also would want, not only that, but when they are conducting their businesses, that their accounting arrangements must not see, what is called, transfer pricing. They pay us in Guyana little or nothing but when we check what their invoices are in China and India they are hundreds of US dollars per cubic metre. Take for example the prime timber, royalty class special, not only has it been overcut by tremendous percentages but we are seeing also, high on the heel, what is called, severe transfer pricing where we are losing out. [Mr. Benn: Where are the invoices?] The invoices we have sought from out of those countries... [An Hon. Member: You want to... *[inaudible]*.] That is the point. The point is whereas we would normally pay in Guyana approximately \$560 for metric cubic metre when Malaysia charges more than six times that for the equivalent timbers. [Mr. Benn: Where is the invoice?] The invoices can be found... That

is one of the reasons that transparency is what we require. If we did not go and check that the budget was cut at the preparatory stages..., but you now are telling me that... We have the invoices from the Guyana Forestry Commission as to what it is. We also have the invoices from China and India where they are selling timber per cubic metre for almost US\$200.

The export of raw logs nets a profit of US\$90 free on board (FOB) from Georgetown. When it is taken into consideration a lot of other things which could be done, it is a profiteering through, what I call, transfer prices. Now we have to ensure that we create jobs here and job creation can come from tertiary production, from our forest resources. What are we doing about that? All we want is log exportation because it is easy and quite frankly there has been a lot of corruption in relation to the amounts and the pricing and we are losing. The AFC wants to provide an alternative and we are recommending... These were some of the things we had in our Action Plan. We want the rationalisation of the investments from the foreign investors to eliminate the absurd cost advantage given to Asian log traders through tax concessions when they provide no added value in Guyana. Tie it to the fact that when added value is given to tertiary production and manufacturing you are going to get the incentives. You do not, and you only want to have,...

Mr. Speaker: I recognise the Hon. Prime Minister, one second, Mr. Ramjattan.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: I wonder if I could be allowed to ask the Hon. Member why he said...

Mr. Speaker: No Sir, with respect.

Mr. Hinds: We are not *Asian phobic*.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, with the greatest of respect, you cannot ask a Member a question while he is presenting. More importantly, you are speaking immediately after him and you may make all of the points you wish to make after him. Go ahead please Mr. Ramjattan. Mr. Ramjattan, you will have to begin wrapping up.

Mr. Ramjattan: We have to also ensure that Guyana Office for investment (GO-Invest) and the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) operate a level playing field for tax audits and tax concessions in the forestry sector instead of political favouritism which is now evident.

We have to recreate a development bank, perhaps, similar to Guyana Agricultural and Industrial Development Bank (GAIBANK) to make use of the excess liquidity in Guyanese commercial banks for investing in the forest products industry, but learning from the bad experiences of loan defaults, and so on, earlier in the 1970s. Reduce the opportunity for corruptions in Customs and Trade Administration. This is something which has constantly been written about by Janet Bulkan, as in a very brilliant article, “The rule of law - inefficiency and corruption in timber exports.”

Similarly, reduce the opportunities for corruption in the Guyana Forestry Commission, eliminating all opportunities for administrative discretion, negotiated penalties and the compound system they have under the old forest law. It is important that these be done. If they are not, we are going to make grand losses, in which, if we had avoided them would make Guyana better.

There are lots of other things that I really wanted to talk on, but realising that the time is up would have to wrap up and state this: That indeed what is required to move us into that better position is to have genuine democracy. Economics depends on the comfort of the citizens seeing that justice is being done, fairness is being exhibited and when that happens there is confidence in the industry, confidence in all industries, confidence in the management of GRA and the customs authority, we feel comfortable. But, when we see what we see and then when we make a cry about it and ask that it be remedied and the Government say no, it is good what it is! We are going to, as I said, not have that confidence. Young people, as I mentioned, are going to go away – migration levels, skilled levels – and corruption is going to persist.

Lord Acton said corruption... [Mr. Nagamootoo: Absolute corruption corrupts absolutely] Yes. Corruption corrupts... [Hon. Members (Government): Power corrupts.] Power corrupts but what we have here now is twist that I would like to bring to it, “absolute corruption empowers”. The thing is empowering them. They have the control of the National Communications Network (NCN) and the Government Information Agency (GINA) and everything and they could do what they want with that empowerment and the moneys. It is creating more political polarisation.

I want to end on this note that we must not do what is called democracy at the level of its minimalist position, that it only means winning the votes. In Guyana, if we can have democracy ensuring that we create better citizens, that would have meant going a far way, meaning men and women who strive to live in genuine freedom, who want genuine development and see genuine justice done to themselves and others. It must not simply be this democracy that we see in the minimalist fashion.... simply a regime. We must make it a political culture.

If we are going to criticise my good friend Mr. Neendkumar, he must go back and ask, “Is this criticism a genuine one?” “Is this something we could consider and deliberate on rather than simply coming off the high horse and start chastising us for making these...?” If this genuine democracy does not deepen beyond its current electoral form as the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) wants it, and wants it to be frozen like that so that poverty, inequality and corruption, and so on, are not remedied, I want to warn that this minimalist democracy in Guyana will not survive. Guyanese will perceive it to be irrelevant and worthless and the next generation will not have men and women to defend it much less nurture it. We will not have the men and the lieutenants such as Dr. Jagan and his other lieutenants and other men, such as Mr. Rodney and so many others, and even in the PNC, such as Mr. Hoyte. No. We are going to have a generation that will simply move away and not defend or nurture it.

In this minority Government, this dispensation, there must be multiparty governance. We each have to give a little so that our citizens will get much more.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Hinds: Allow me to join in commending our colleague the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Singh and his team for Budget 2014.

In his budget speech, in a businesslike manner, the Hon. Minister laid out an adequate outline of the state of the world and region today and he did so in six pages, positioning us in the world in which we live and in which we must find our way. He went on to review in some detail our accomplishments over the past year – he did not spend too much time on it - and in the next seven pages, and quite properly, he focused on the sectoral developments and agenda for 2014. Here he took some 60 pages for this, dealt with it quite extensively. He ended with some five pages of the measures for 2014 and two pages of reflections in his concluding statements.

This is a most logical layout, easily grasped and comprehensive, as our Minister of Foreign Affairs said yesterday. It was well worth the nearly three hours it took to be read. I wish that it could be arranged for every citizen to have at hand a copy to which to refer to from time to time so that he could be enrolled in the Minister's call to the task of creating, by all Guyana, *A Better Guyana for All Guyanese*.

Even as our Hon. Minister recounted in his concluding sentences that was it not for the desire for brevity in the theme, that theme would have been, "By All Guyana, A Better Guyana, for All Guyanese." I wish that he had not dropped that first phrase "by all Guyanese". I regret it that he dropped it. The budget is a call for all of us to work and it shows the many opportunities where we can seek and find work.

My regret became more intense as I listened to many of the speakers on the other side. They seemed to focus on what should be provided to our people as if by magic from the air..., as if our people could be or should be or want to be just passive onlookers at the determination of our own fortunes or that of our country, to use the Minister's words. They are wrong. It is in the building of Guyana that we learn, that we develop and demonstrate the capability of how good and powerful we are, or we can be, and that we come to understand that the road along, which the PPP/C has been taking our country, has been the road that we should be on, the road that has brought us the reward of eight consecutive years of steady growth.

Allow me, from time to time, to recall some sections from the Hon. Minister's budget speech, for he has said many things so well that they hardly could be said better. I call on every one of us and all of our citizens to reflect on the word found in paragraph 7.6 on page 77.

"Mr. Speaker, everyday each, each and every single one of us has an opportunity to make Guyana a better place, for ourselves and our countrymen."

These days we should have had "and women too".

"Whether we teach a child to read or we repair an engine, treat a patient or saw some timber, pan some gold or cut some cane, paint a fence or sew some trousers, bake some bread or sell an insurance policy, create a job or open a business, build a bridge or carve a

sculpture, we are producing and we are earning, and the more of it we do and the more efficiently we do it, the more prosperous we will be and so too our country.”

I think those words should be set to music and maybe become some kind of a song, our country’s song in these time. The speakers on the other side have been emphasising rights and entitlements and shortfalls and gaps therein, not wanting to recognise that rights and entitlements have to be produced and to be provided and the production and provisioning precede the employment.

There is everything right in pointing to rights. We, the party of Dr. Cheddi Jagan, are all for rights. We have demonstrated a passion for rights and entitlements and compassion. It is we who have moved the old age pension, removed the mean test and moved it along from where it was to what it is today. We know that in the commitment to rights, entitlement and compassion there must be a commitment to work and we have been doing the work to provide the entitlement and rights and make them real. It is not just talk.

As the old saying goes “we have to be doing well before we can do something good” and also we have to be doing well so that we could be in a position to do something good. That is what has been guiding the PPP/C administration over the last two decades. We will maintain and argue that it is in accord with all that Dr. Cheddi Jagan stood for. He was, most of all, a man for great discipline in all things. Thinking of right for food and nutrition, for example, for which I had the privilege to receive an award from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, Italy, last year, in recognition of the fact that Guyana had already achieved Millennium Development Goal (MDG) that refers to food and nutrition, we, in the PPP/C, in crafting this and all other of our budgets, have proceeded from the knowledge that there is cassava to eat only if someone would have taken up a fork, made the beds, ploughed it, tended it, reaped the cassava, cooked it and put it on the table. There is milk to offer a needy child only after someone would have brought in the cows, put them in the pen, cut grass and fed them, milked them in the morning and boiled the milk. There is work to be done and the reason why in our period of administration we have been so better is because we recognise that we have to work, there is work to be done.

We have smiled at some times on hearing stories about the traditions of old people in some of our villages chewing grain to make a fomentation pot. It is amusing but I think it illustrates the point and poses the question as to whether there is not something useful everyone could do. No

one should waste any hour of any day in not working. I demand of the Hon. Members on the other side to join us in the call and the challenge to everyone in Guyana to do something useful each day and to do it pleasantly too, as much as everyone could do, whatever is that person circumstances. Yes, join us in the call for each person to do his or her duty as we sang and sing in our national service. We should always keep before us that the life we live and the experience here in Guyana is the life that we provide to each other in exchanging the goods and the services that we each produce and provide to each other. The life we live is the life we together create here in Guyana and complaints about poor goods and services and about life in Guyana are criticisms of us in Guyana and there should be calls for each of us to do better in whatever we do.

3.37 p.m.

Budgeting is key to development at both the personal and national levels. It creates a lot of difficulties for us. In talking about having our law school in Guyana, we heard, yesterday, Hon. Member Williams talking about this Government not wanting to harmonise the pay to that which the tutors in the law schools in Trinidad and Barbados receive. We would like to do it, but there are difficult questions. How could we harmonise the pay of tutors in Guyana with those of tutors in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados and not expect Hon. Williams himself to come leading the call for him to get the same pay as those people at this law school? It would not end there. It would go throughout all the judiciary. It would go to the University of Guyana (UG). It would go throughout our system and we will be back again on the road of spiralling inflation. We have to manage these things and we do things in good time. That has been the key of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) – doing things in good time.

The Hon. Minister puts the imperatives of budgeting into perspective, into words worth recalling from paragraphs 1.7 and 1.8 on pages two and three of the Budget speech. It states:

“Every day chief executive officers of large companies, small business owners, and heads of households across our country grapple with the challenges of balancing amongst competing calls on finite resources.”

He goes on to state:

“Worthwhile investment opportunities have to contest against each other for funding, consumption needs have to be prioritised, and savings have to be accumulated for unforeseen difficult circumstances. These choices are not drastically different at the national level.”

We hear from Members over there all of the areas in which people should get paid more and all the areas where taxes should be reduced. That is what we hear from Members of the other side. What the Hon. Minister is saying here is that as much as we would like to, we cannot do all the good things we would like to do, not in this Budget. Indeed, perhaps, never in any budget. The issue is not that there are good things left undone, but which of the good things that have been provided for in the Budget we should have foregone. That is the issue. It is not about the good things left undone, but the good thing that we have included which we should have left out so as to accommodate something else that might have been judged to be more important.

Let me take some timeout here and commend our women, in particular our mothers. Many of us would think of our mothers, many of whom might not have been familiar with the word ‘budget’, but would have had to develop budgeting to a fine art as they contrived to make ends meet.

In paragraph 1.8 of the Budget speech, the Hon. Minister develops for the nation the tasks that he outlined in paragraph 1.7 with these words:

“As a country, we need to make the investments that are critical to raising quality of life for all our people. At the same time, we need to be constantly attentive to guarding the fiscal sustainability that we have worked so hard to achieve and that could so easily be lost if the wrong choices are made today.”

When we talk about the spiralling inflation we had in the 1970s and 1980s, it is not to cast blame on anybody, but it is to remind us, as a nation, that we have to keep the books balanced and that there are lots of things that we have to hold horses on, until we can do it sustainably. He continued:

“We need to implement the catalytic and transformative projects that will see a truly modern Guyana emerge to take advantage of the opportunities of the future and realise

our long term growth potential. At the same time, we need to address urgently the local nuisances that affect the day to day lives of our people.”

This is what our Minister said and I find it very germane.

“In all aspects of productive activity, we need to endeavour constantly to do more. At the same time, we need to endeavour constantly to do what we do better.”

We need to be advocating and demonstrating that theme from Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Company (GT&T), *Getting Better All the Time*, if we, Guyanese, are to build a better Guyana for all of us in Guyana.

I invite all Guyana, whatever their political and other affiliations, to join in celebrating the successes of our country which we have together achieved.

Last year, 2013, was the eighth year of steady expansion. The Hon. Minister and all of us in Government are extremely gratified and we know that whilst we have sought to set out the enabling environment, we know that the success is a manifestation of our citizen’s response and their work.

I want to make some comments on the issues which the Hon. Member, who spoke just now, spoke to. He spoke about moneys in the various agencies. I would like to point out to him that these are moneys that have been accumulated over some years. I would like to point out to him, too, that there have been transfers, from time to time, to the Consolidated Fund. They should be seen as local reserves. I can tell you some things because I was the Minister responsible for mining and minerals and for the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). In the early days when we were under very tight strictures, one of the things that one could do was the amount of money spent on security and army. We had a situation where the Bell X12 helicopter was in need of one of the biggest servicing. Whether it was a, b or c, I cannot recall, but it needed a lot of money. Do you know where that money came from? That money came from the GGMC. If not, we would have also heard issues about the helicopter being there for one year and not being fixed. Money had to be got for it to be fixed.

More than that, one would read papers on budget financing. In all jurisdictions, it is recognised as a way of handling and, maybe, giving flexibilities to Executive – Governments – which they

exercise for the good and benefit of the nation. Just go and read some of the things the former Prime Minister of England, Blair, did in England.

There is all this talk about corruption. You might recall, Sir, that there was an investigation and it seemed that people believed that not two cents but half of a billion dollars was involved in sales of aeroplanes and armaments and so on. At a certain time, Mr. Blair said that was it. To proceed further was not in the nation's interest. Let us see what the developed countries are doing today when their interests are challenged and let us see what they did 100 years ago when they were comparably where we are today. Let us also look at that. Do not let us get carried away about the things they are talking about now.

Hon. Member Ramjattan spoke about spectrum and the spectrum auction in Jamaica. There are two ways, generally, of allocating spectrum. One is an auction and usually it is an auction for the period of the licence – 10 or 20 years. The second way is to charge annual fees. When there is a great attraction to getting to a place, auction is the way to go. When there is not that big attraction, fees is the way to go. In any case, it is not free money. Whether it is auction or whether it is annual fees, it comes out of the earnings of the company. It comes out of the charges that are paid. It is not free money that comes out of space. It is money that the customers pay, whether they pay it in auction fees or whether they pay it in annual fees; it is one way or the other.

Regarding the talk about the approaches, I would take the opportunity to assure you that this Government has been studying these approaches. We had an expert from India in. In looking at the charges over many states and countries, usually the total charges for telecommunications companies vary between 6% and 16% in terms of the average take for government on their annual revenues that the customers pay. We have been looking at this matter fairly earnestly, Sir.

On the question, too, of properties in the mining and natural resources area, here again our approach has been, particularly seeing that Guyana has not had a big record in success in these areas and no big economic activities in this area, what is one way of doing it too. That is on a first-come-first-served basis. The first person who comes and applies - generally, not too many people apply - is given consideration. We did try, I think in the 1980s, some oil auction but, as far as I know, it did not go so well because Guyana did not have a name and a tradition as yet in

oil business and many of the businessmen asked why they should put all of that money up in front. They said it was better for the country to allow them to keep the money, not pay big auction fees and invest it in the prospecting so they could know if they had something. When they knew they had something, the country could pick it up in royalties.

Let me tell you some more. Regarding the people who write those kinds of reports, we have to take it with grains of salt, like Hon. Member Greenidge had said sometime. In the case of mining and oil properties, in the 1990s, when we were not having much happening, our friendly bilateral countries and multilaterals would come and give me advice and they said we needed to be more attractive, we needed to cut royalties, we needed to give more incentives so that people would come. They said we had to do more to attract people. Then, in 2010, when it seemed like oil would have been found tomorrow, somebody just had to strike the ground somewhere and oil would gush up, those same sets of people came around and told me that I have to look and see how much I can get. Whilst contracts are sacred, maybe, I could have read it over and see if I could have gotten more than I had committed to before.

These, again, were the same multilaterals and the same friendly governments which came and advised me in the 1990s that we should be giving more. They came back in 2009 and told me that we were giving too much and we should read the documents again closely. One of them did feel a little bit uneasy. He said that contracts cannot be broken because they were sacrosanct, but I could always read it a bit more closely and I might find that I could have gotten more than I thought I might have gotten when I first read it. Comrades, let us get realistic on what the world is really like.

In terms of our young people who are leaving, it is time we think about this in a more developed way. If someone has a son or daughter who is doing well, whether as an accountant or physicist, engineer or doctor, chances are that they are going to be encouraged to go and see if they can cap their names in the stars and headlines in some one of the developed cities in the United States. We are under the same pressure like people in some county in Alabama or Dakota in the United States. The young people go and remittances come back too. We have to develop a much more up-to-date view of the world and our position in it.

Continuing my advocacy of our Budget, I want to refer to and commend our continuing large allocations to education and health so that we and, more so, our sons and daughters would be healthier and better equipped to build this land of ours. We may see the allocations to infrastructure as investments in improving of our world, investments for the future.

I think, on the other hand, our allocation to culture, youth and sport is dedicated to the enjoyment and satisfaction of the present generation of Guyanese today, even as I agree with the Minister that there is therein in culture, youth and sport, a basis for development of careers in culture and sports and also culture and sports industries. But I see that as giving ourselves some satisfaction. In the discussions about growth and development and high saving rates, they also say you have to keep people happy and satisfied so that they would continue working and living with enthusiasm. I think there is a good balance in the allocation to culture, youth and sports.

The synthetic athletic track being completed at Leonora, together with other major facilities built in the last decade, and some others that the Minister has in the works would equip Guyana with a complete set of facilities for major events of which Guyanese can be proud.

There is much to be pleased about in Guyana. We could be pleased about our larger private enterprises and also about persons who we know in the private sectors. But there are also many smaller persons, self-employed, who are worthy of celebration, too, and from amongst whom we would look to arise many of the bigger businesses of the future.

In my walks about the town and elsewhere in our country, I am pleased to note how improved the various displays at our arcades, malls and mini malls, their selection and pricing of items calculated to meet the pockets of all citizens are. Indeed, I hear now that in some ways things have reversed and people from Barbados come to Guyana to shop when it used to be done the other way around.

There is much about which we can be proud and our pride should be the basis for us to accept and work for a higher level of order and discipline. As past Minister with responsibility for mines, I want to join in commending our small and medium scale gold and diamond miners. But, the very growth in mining and the number of dredging operations have brought us to a point where what we used to do, we can no longer do. The bar is being raised and we have to get up to that higher bar. We have to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts and, in

particular, let me say – and I hope I have built up enough trust with my friends in the mining industry – we have to give up our *kaimoos* and accompanying shops which are often sources of alcohol and drugs and points from which crime often originates. We have to do that.

I want to say that I was in Imbaimadai with some of my other colleagues, briefing the people in the villages on the proposed new Upper Mazaruni hydro development. We landed and were met by one of the old miners there, Mr. Tafares, and he said to me, “Did you notice our town as you flew in?” He said that many people from elsewhere in Guyana, the coastland and so on, live there 10 to 11 months a year and it is time they start thinking about themselves as residents of Imbaimadai. They have started to do it and now there is a big town. It was quite striking. We have had other people too, like Campton Mendonca, who, maybe even 20 years ago, had deserted the coast for Imbaimadai at Christmas time. Good things are happening. It calls for some patience and it calls for talking and interacting and building up a sense of being on a team.

Something of which we could not be proud is the way we drop our garbage all around our city and through most of our coastland and inland towns. Both money and a major change in attitudes and behaviour are required to get to a higher level of responsibility and to reverse this shameful blot on our nation. The Hon. Minister has provided a lot of money - \$1 billion in Budget 2014 – of which \$500 million is for the city of Georgetown. We, the citizens of Guyana, have to provide the change in our habits, behaviour and practice. At the end of this clean-up campaign, we should have systems in place to allow us to stay clean so that not only Georgetown, but all of Guyana would be worthy of being thought of as garden city and garden country, a city and country which tourists find pleasing and welcoming and one in which they feel safe.

There is great reason why we should celebrate our achievements and become comfortable with them. There is a reason why I want to talk about this and why I want us to feel comfortable. It is because we have been talking about Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). With foreign direct investments come the people who bring the investments, the ones who have the money and the ones who have the techniques and technologies and practices and systems and so on.

We need to feel secure if we are to consistently welcome foreign direct investment. With a population of about three quarter million – and I am not going to get in the row as to whether it is 750,000 or 760,000 and all of that; I have not had a preview of the census – in this large country

of ours and given the world of today, our economy and society could not but be open to the world and very open to the world. I do not know if my good Friend, the Hon. Minister, would talk sometime about the openness of economy. Maybe, I am thinking we are like 35% open, where only 35% of our goods and services are produced locally or something like that. This is certainly not my field. Many of our people have gone to all parts of the world, have found welcome and have done well. We, in turn, need to develop an understanding that would allow us to welcome, consistently, people from all over the world to help us to develop this country and to allow us to enjoy much of what the world has to offer today. There is a need, at all levels, for us to think about this.

At many of our meetings and business forums, we speak about the possibilities of Guyana becoming a bridge head between Brazil and South America and the Caribbean and North America. But as we travel down some of our streets, even coming from one of those meetings, and we see some Brazilian establishment, we, including members of the private sector, grow uneasy. We have to resolve this so that we could be consistent. This is a job we have to do amongst ourselves. Apart from recalling that there are Guyanese citizens all around the world – in neighbouring countries and North America - we must develop an understanding which enables us to consistently welcome foreigners who come with foreign direct investments to work in partnership with us.

As we grow and develop to higher levels, as we have been growing, we have to look at issues in greater detail, and become more nimble with our limbs and adroit with our brains. Whilst we should always be looking to simplify issues, we must also look to the fuller story with its greater complexities.

4.07 p.m.

Let me speak for a few minutes on some things - and I am afraid that I might be treading on difficult grounds, like Hon. Member Mr. Lumumba was saying. As someone who would have seen more days in this Parliament in the past than days to come, maybe I owe it to myself and Hon. Members to speak about difficult subjects.

Let us talk about the Marriott Hotel. There have been complaints about Guyanese workers not being in the team that is involved in building the Marriott Hotel and I could see some good

feelings in that. We want to become the Guyanese team that built the Marriot, the sense of achievement and so on. That part is good but it would take a decade or so to build such an efficient team and then it would be uncertain as to whether we could find work in Guyana to support that team. The question is: what do we want? We want a hotel that is built very well, in good time and with good costs. Just as you may want a car, you import a car from some other country or a flat screen television, you do not say that we must build our cars or we do not get that feeling but I can understand that the building is there and you have a feeling that we should be building it and that part is good. If we challenge ourselves to develop that kind of quality and the team spirit, that part is good but we did not lose all in building the Marriott Hotel. Guyana and Guyanese were not shut out. The bulk of concrete and the filling cement blocks were supplied by a local contractor – a bidding that we did not have anything to do with, Comrades. It happens to be that it was just located half of a mile away so this was not any corruption. I do not see corruption here. Apart from this, a team of engineers from Trinidad and Tobago, mostly men - I do not think there were any women - about 35 to 45 years old, came to see me to sell themselves and they were proud to say that there was a Guyanese born amongst them. They were proud to say that they had responded to the invitation in Trinidad to provide the design for the foundations of the Marriott Hotel and they had won it. They told me that they were very proud about it. There was also a presentation to [inaudible] in the design and construction of the Hotel, which, I understand, was well received.

There have been two mentions of bauxite in these debates and, as someone from the bauxite industry, 25 years, working there from 1967 to 1972 and the past Minister of Mining, again, I have a duty to speak to bauxite issues and the difficult issues which were raised by Hon. Members on the other side.

Firstly, the incident in Aroaima: the Hon. Member Trevor Williams, in his recounting, spoke - and I think I heard it right although I would like to read the Hansard - about the manager striking workers with his spade. That was not so. There was no striking with spades. There was threatening. We accept that there was a threat about it. The manager was angry. Disputes between managers and workers are to be regretted and, indeed, I encourage the Minister of Labour to do whatever he needs to do. I was the Minister at the time, for mining, and I could say this: something that always causes, at least in me, some hesitation, and I would like it to be

demonstrated to be not so... But I recall in the run up to independence and nationalisation, we tolerated, encouraged, promoted, a lot of activity and behaviour that should not have been but those behavioural patterns and conduct were accepted because of the just cause of 'Guyanisation' and nationalisation later. Once one gets into certain habits and behaviour, they do not just die when you sign the document and nationalise. They persisted after nationalisation and they were one of the problems there and we had, even there in that time, unions being taken off the books and not being recognised and so on. This is something that we have to change and I think it is much more extensive than we know. We have to work at our discipline of our labour. We have to create a different sense these days because if we are going to invite FDIs, we must realise that they are coming here at our invitation and, at least, we need to treat them decently.

It brings me back to the issue of *Asia-phobia*. Let me say something else, Comrades. Again, I think we read certain documents and we put our brains to one side, not that I am known to be someone who is against people, but if one looks at the timings, up to about the 1970s, all of our forestry Timber Sales Agreements (TSAs) in Guyana were held by Europeans, English in particular, and Americans, and it was just about that time that times changed and people from Asia started taking up the TSAs in Guyana, and it was just about that time, partly coincidence, that all the issues came up about environmental this and that and forestry checking and so on. It all came up at about the same time. One has to think if it were all coincidence. I think it was some coincidence, but I do not think that it was all coincidence. It was a response to the growing capability of people in the Asian countries. There must have been some of that and we should not take up 'fire rage' for other people. We should not take up 'fire rage' for other people, other people who brought our fore parents here as slaves and as indentured people. We should not be taking up the 'fire rage' for other people.

I am not saying that we do not be friendly with everybody. In fact, I want to say we are friendly with everybody but we keep our own counsel. That is what the PPP/C does, follow in the footsteps of Cheddi Jagan - keep our own counsel.

Secondly, Hon. Member Dr. Roopnarine questioned about RUSAL and BOSAI not proceeding with the aluminium plant and the hydropower project and the smelter that we talked about and I could understand it. I would like to have it maybe more than anyone else in Guyana now. I would be happy to go and work and have an aluminium plant to go to work in after this career in

politics. But the studies were done and they did not come out sufficiently attractive and it is known that our best days with bauxite were in World War II, so it is difficult. It is a difficult issue. Our bauxite has a premium in a mix with other bauxite but it is a disincentive, an extra cost. When one uses it in an aluminium plant here in Guyana, one has to bring other things in to blend with it and so on.

I have another note here on forest because we have talked about people buying imported doors in Guyana. Imported doors in Guyana cost about 60% - 70% of the local equivalent but there is a reason for this, a good reason for this. It is that 90% of the moneys in forestry, including paper, comes from forests in temperate countries and 80% of them are planted and when one cuts trees in a planted forest, the productivity is huge, but when one has to go typically half of a mile or more for each tree in our diverse forest in Guyana, the cost is exceedingly high. One has to write off about a half mile or more of trail against every tree; so the costs are higher and that is why. If we think about this and accept this, it will give us ways of managing so maybe we would not feel uncomfortable and unhappy about using pine wood in Guyana where we could and we could sell all of the local wood we have to companies abroad where they can convert it into special things and, in terms of the usual words, they could be sold into high end areas.

There are lots that we have been doing that we could be happy about but we have to develop a higher level of knowledge and understanding of situations and we can do it. I am sure that we could do it.

Let me speak a bit about electricity and energy and about this Government's programme to steadily improve and extend along a sustainable path a supply of electricity to every home all across our country. Our general aim is to provide, where needed and as our budgets can carry, the first capital installation and to provide, monthly, a certain minimum quantity of electricity at a highly subsidised charged or at no charge at all. Customers can utilise additionally as much electricity as they can pay for but those additional quantities must meet the full cost of service, although, in practice, that full service cost is also capped and subsidised to some degree.

Electrification in Guyana has been advanced steadily over the last two decades. About 95% of homes in Guyana now – this is all across Guyana – have some degree of electrification. About 80% of our homes and other buildings are supplied by GPL with its customer base today of

175,000. The growth of GPL customers over the last two decades is evident in the increases from 75,000 or about in the year 1992 to 120,000 in 2000 and 175,000 today. These increases did not just happen just so but we provided, under our Unserved Areas Electrification Programme (UAEP), the opportunity for some 40,000 not so well off Guyanese families to have connection to GPL.

There are about 12,000 customers on the Linden, Kwakwani and Ituni grids in Region 10. There are about 15,000 homes with *Photovoltaic* (PV) systems across the hinterland and about 5,000 on mini grids, such as that developed at Lethem, Mahdia and Port Kaituma and there are some micro grids which were initiated by Amerindian villages for their village courts for which they sought and received our support – Moraikobai up the Mahaicony, St. Cuthbert's Mission on the Mahaica, Orealla and Siparuta of the Corentyne and a number of others that have been knocking on our door to get working with them.

In this 2014 Budget, there are, in the capital budget, allocations totalling \$4.350 billion in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) budget. The largest part, \$3.850 billion, is for capital investments in GPL. There is also the Current Estimates of the Ministry of Finance as a contribution to local organisations, a total of \$3.176 billion, \$2.830 billion for Linden and for Kwakwani is \$346 million to subsidise the provision of electricity in those areas. Let me say that the \$3.850 billion capital allocation for GPL is neither a handout nor money being thrown down a black hole. It is a quantity of money which GPL, in 2014, ought to be receiving from tariffs. The tariff calculation established at the time of GPL's privatisation, which is based on international practice, sets the annual tariff adjustment of GPL for 2014 at about 12%, which will provide GPL with \$4 billion more from increased tariffs. So, GPL, if Government would allow the tariff to go where it should be, would get \$4 billion more this year, which is just a little bit more than the \$3.850 billion that is being allocated from the Budget.

I know that Hon. Members can say that there have been large allocations to GPL in every year since the core investor departed and handed his 50% share to the Government of Guyana for the proverbial dollar and leaving behind, on his account, something like US\$30 million to his credit. I say that just to show the judgements that he has made. The total provisioning to GPL over these times would have been more than \$40 billion but, on the other hand, and it is also a big hand, Government, according to long tradition and practice since the early 1970s, has been keeping

electricity charges to consumers suppressed, at times by up to 30%, so whilst the Government allocations to GPL have totalled over \$40 billion during this period, the net total suppression of tariffs, the net foregone revenue of GPL, has totalled about \$27 billion. One might say there is still another \$15 billion - \$20 billion to talk about. What about that? But GPL has been growing and expanding over this period and Government, as owner, has had to provide the financing for GPL to be expanding. To name two of the biggest expansions, there are two new generation stations at two locations, over 40 megawatts, and there is the transmission upgrade being completed now and there are other things happening.

Capital improvement over this period totalled over \$28 billion and this has come from Government, through these same types of allocation, and it is a responsibility that Government had to do. Even so, we, in Government, constantly question whether GPL, the management and the workers are doing well enough with the resources made available to them. We keep pressing for better performance and we look to benchmarks. The best we could do is to look to benchmarks. We look at how GPL is doing in both the cost of providing electricity and the tariffs we are allowing to be charged in comparison to utilities in other countries, particularly across the Caribbean.

We would like to have – and I know our private sector always calls for this – the costs and tariffs, as in Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago but Suriname has a paid up hydro of about 160 megawatts and also some local oil and Trinidad and Tobago has lots of gas and they still have some medium amounts of oil. So we cannot compare with Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago and that is why we want to get the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in. That is why we are persevering and persisting to get Amaila done. It is because you, in the Opposition, and the people of Guyana want to have the lower cost of generation that we could have, generation lowered from \$0.22 - \$0.23 per kilowatt/hour with heavy fuel oil in the sets versus about \$0.12 and less from Amaila Falls. We want that and that is why we are persisting.

Returning to my script here, we should compare our GPL with Barbados and Jamaica and if we do that, we will find that we are doing reasonably well. We are somewhere between Barbados and Jamaica. We are in that order.

Another indication that the board, management and workers of GPL are not getting away, let us say, with murder or not doing too badly is the fact that almost continuously over the years, one or more energy and electricity specialists from within the IDB and one or more consultants retained for various programmes by the IDB have been studying and reporting on all aspects of GPL's operations from corporate governance structure through generation, distributions, losses, customer relations and quality of service. Sooner or later, and often very soon, all of these reports are published and are available on the websites of IDB, GPL and the Office of the Prime Minister. Two years ago, we had that corporate development plan that some people interpreted as saying that GPL is no good, which I felt a little bit uneasy about before. But what did it say? It said that GPL needed a further US\$150 million – US\$250 million of investment and it needed a dozen high-flyers from the United States of America or North America, somewhere, or Europe, and the interpretation of that is that we are doing pretty well with what we have. We are doing reasonably well with what we have.

The other thing, too, is that GPL is fully under the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) and submits to providing for each year a five-year rolling development and expansion plan with a 15-year perspective and this gets into the public arena. PUC holds three public hearings – I think there was one about three weeks ago – at set times each year on the total operations of GPL and a once per year public reviewing of operating standards and performance targets and PUC adjudicates customer complaints and applies customer service standards. So GPL is under continuous review by experts and consulting groups. We should know that when we suppress the tariff and we do not give any money, the company can only run down and that is how the Guyana Electricity Corporation (GEC) and all of Guyana were in 1992 when we came into office.

Let me say as well that providing the money this way to GPL also helps to reduce costs for eventual costs to the customer because these moneys are onward here to GPL at interest rates between about 2% - 4% because these moneys, \$3.850 billion to GPL, come from the Chinese Export-Import (Exim) Bank with respect to the completion of the transmission upgrade from the IDB, particularly in some ways of dealing with losses, trying to understand and reduce losses, and from our PetroCaribe accounts. This \$3.58 billion is for investments in completion of the transmission upgrade, a new substation at Williamsburg, an extension of the substation at No. 53

on the Corentyne Coast, completing a current loss reduction pilot programme with the IDB, including piloting of smart metres, and installation of additional generators at Leguan and Wakenaam. We heard about them before. GPL, this time, is going to put additional generators so that they can get 24/7 electricity. We are putting in the money. I want to thank citizens on the islands for their long patience with having a less than 24-hour a day service. We did put in two new units at Anna Regina, but that was 20 years ago and we now have to put another station with two new units again. We have to do some things at Bartica and GPL has been working in Bartica.

What will happen? The Opposition has been saying that it is going to cut this allocation for GPL. I have put the arguments there that show clearly that GPL is no inefficient operation and it is well worth this money to make up for the suppression of the tariffs. It is well worth the money to make up for the suppression. I say to the Opposition and I will say this to all the people in Guyana: if you are to cut this money for GPL, there will be no opportunity to make the investments at this concessionary charge of 4%. I hope that if they cut and if in our need to supply to make these investments and to improve the power supply in the Corentyne, Leguan, Wakenaam, Essequibo and Bartica, that if we go out to get this money and we get it on the private market at 15% - 25%, they would not come back and shout 'corruption'. I hope they would not come back and shout 'corruption' because this is 2% - 4% interest. If you force us and we have this need to be provided, what are we to do? If we go to the public and we raise the funds and these funds are raised at 15% - 25% - that is the order and that is the practice - then do not come and shout 'corruption'.

I think that I have said enough. I would say that we have said enough but, maybe before we finish, let me talk a little bit to this question of this new dispensation and what has been the experience. I think I can speak about it without the notes. In 2012, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, you would recall that tripartite meetings were held around the budget and you would recall, and I remember, that it was interesting that the two parties, APNU and AFC, made their presentations then and presentations which kind of held the same line in subsequent meetings in the following year and, generally, APNU Members said that they do not want to talk about specifics; they wanted to talk about broad principles on approaching a budget for our nation,

priorities and so on, and that was quite okay. The AFC spoke more to deals, negotiations and tradeoffs and that, also, is okay; that is how the world is like.

4.37 p.m.

Sir, you would recall that in 2012, as we were making our way along this discussion, we accepted the pushing from the Opposition Members to increase old age pension. It is not that we did not want to; we wanted to, but maybe we were too disciplined. Maybe that has been the fault of the PPP/C. But we accepted increasing it and the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh read a statement on the commitment about making the change. As we continued the next day, we spoke about the need to start a reform of the electricity supply in Linden. And it was accepted that we need to get on with the reform because we want Linden to grow and develop, but it must grow and develop on a sound basis. So we had acceptance. I hurried up and got some things done and we had it reviewed by my two Friends on the other side. Our friendship goes back a long way and I do not think any experiences in this House here will break our friendship; our friendship goes back a long, long time. We had them review it and I read it, and it stood. But it appears to us - we do not know for sure - that someone from the AFC called to Linden and told them that Granger and APNU just sold out on them. We know what happened after that. So all this talk about this Government being arrogant and not being prepared to compromise...

Mr. Speaker: One second please, Hon. Prime Minister. I recognise the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Leader of the Opposition [Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger]: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Prime Minister has been repeating this story for over two years. A Partnership for National Unity never engaged in and never signed any agreement. The Prime Minister drafted a statement which he read. APNU never entered any agreement, never appended its signature to any dates or any agreement. Dr. Roopnarine and I went to Linden and explained that; there was never any agreement.

Mr. Hinds: I accept what the Hon. Member says but we are talking about accommodation and compromises. The most important agreements in this world have been done on a handshake, nothing signed. And Mr. Speaker, the statement was read and allowed to stand at the time. From some of the movement I saw at the side of my eyes, it appeared that somebody from the AFC benches went and made some calls. The two Hon. Members had to run up the same afternoon to

make sure that something green and everything green were not burnt in Linden. So, all this accusing of this Government as being the one that is not compromising and that is being arrogant is a questionable basis. Ordinary people must question that position. I would say this, Sir: clearly, the ball for compromise on the Budget is in the court of the Opposition. I call on them to make recompense; it is their turn to do something, to compromise now, and to make recompense. Let this Budget pass because it is going to be difficult for them to cut it; let this Budget pass and, as soon as everything is over, let us resume our talks.

I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is approximately 20 minutes to five o'clock. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition is scheduled to speak next but I propose that we take the suspension now and, on our return, we will have the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to be followed by the rebuttal of the Minister of Finance.

Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 4.40p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.34p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. The sitting is resumed. Please be seated.

Hon. Members, I now invite the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Arthur Granger, to make his presentation, please.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first duty is to welcome my colleague and friend, Mr. Ernest Elliot, into this National Assembly. I am very happy to have him here. My only regret is, of course, the circumstances which led to his being selected to enter the National Assembly at this time.

I must add that over the last few days we have had to reflect on the level of our political culture in two particular events, one which led to the premature withdrawal of a promising young colleague, Mr. Jaipaul Sharma, a solid, invaluable member of our team, just two years into his parliamentary career, which has been cut short.

We also know that this month, April, is the twentieth anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide. I would just like to caution on the injury that loose comments can make, in the one instance to the career of Mr. Jaipaul Sharma. In another instance, Rwanda was no joke; it was a deadly serious genocidal conflict in which over 750,000 persons were killed. That is the population of Guyana. It is a crime against humanity and we must not throw around these expressions as if they were just riots.

I hope the lessons learnt from these two events will help to improve our political culture. We should refrain from making remarks which are deliberately injurious, which are malicious and which very frequently are also gratuitous and spurious.

I stood here on Tuesday, 17th April, 2012 to participate in the first Budget debate for the Tenth Parliament. I stood here again on Tuesday, 9th April, 2013 to participate in the debate on that year's Budget. Today, I stand here on Tuesday, 8th April, 2014 to participate in a debate on another Budget.

This year, as before, the Budget was planned, prepared, and presented by the People's Progressive Party / Civic Administration without meaningful consultation and collaboration with the majority in this Assembly. What we have today is a document which will provide a bitter Guyana for many Guyanese. The attention of this nation is focused on this Budget and we have a collective responsibility to ensure that the debates are serious and that the results of our discussions would provide the Guyanese people with the good life. But what we have is the same old PPP, the same old evasions.

The National Assembly meets today to deliberate on the Budget. The Minister of Finance, who has masterminded this document, has avoided mentioning, even once, the word 'poverty.' It is remarkable that in 85 pages you cannot mention 'poverty' once. He does not mention the word 'unemployment', not once. He does not mention the word 'emigration' when everybody knows that there is a massive brain drain. One must ask oneself for which country was this Budget written?

Budget 2014 is not a budget for the poor. It is not a budget for workers. It is not a budget for the young. It is not a budget for the old. It is anti-poor, anti-people and anti-progress. It is driven by politics, not by economics.

The very presentation of this Budget re-emphasises the need to establish, as early as possible, a parliamentary office of the budget. We need to build a permanent institution right here. We need to ensure that all sides in the National Assembly could comprehensively sit down and propose national measures which are needed for national development. It is clear that the Minister of Finance must be given the information and insights which seem to be so desperately deficient up Main Street.

No single person or party knows everything. A Partnership for National Unity is on the road. We are in the villages and among the people every week. We covered the broken and collapsing waterfront at Kumaka. We covered the sunken road in Barabina just before the Hon. Minister got there. We covered the collapsing bridge at Moruca. We visited the flood victims at Friendship and Hackney in the Pomeroon and the Anna Regina Market. We inspected the rotting stellings at Parika and Vreed-en-Hoop. We meet the frequently robbed residents of La Parfaite Harmonie. We walk the ground in Albouystown and Sophia and listened to the woes of the vendors in the Lusignan and the Mon Repos markets. We are in Perth; we are at Brothers; we are at Sisters, we are in Rose Hall; we are in Port Mourant; we are in Bartica; we are in Waramadong. We see the broken water reservoir at Paramakatoi. We are in Bamboo Creek; we are in Annai, Aranaputa, Surama, Sawariwau, Ituni and Kwakwani. Listen to us and let us tell you what is going on. APNU is on the road. We explore the huge country beyond Main Street.

That is why we have been the ones to call, over the past 12 months, for a national flood control plan to stop this annual cycle of flooding. People are fed up. We are the ones to call for a national infrastructure plan to design a reliable countrywide network of aerodromes, bridges, highways and stellings. We are the ones to call for a national plan of action for hinterland development to integrate western Guyana more closely with eastern Guyana. We are the ones to call for a national youth policy, year after year, to allow the young to participate more fully in the management of their communities. We are the ones who call for a National Drug Strategy Master Plan that expired five years ago so that our communities would be protected from drug traffickers.

APNU is on the road; listen to us. We do not know everything, but we know a lot and we know there are problems. That is why we have called for a commission of inquiry into our primary school system. We have called for a commission of inquiry into the public health system where

young mothers have so frequently died. We have called for a commission of inquiry into criminal violence. We are the ones who are calling for an investigation into the assassination of Satyadeo Sawh. We are the ones who are calling for an inquiry into trafficking in persons. We are the ones who are calling for an inquiry into the problems affecting the sugar industry. We want to save sugar, but we want to save sugar from mismanagement. We are the ones who are calling for an inquiry into the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) because we want to save our pensioners and other persons who are beneficiaries of that scheme from mismanagement. We are the ones who are calling for investigation into the deaths from gastro-enteritis in the Barima-Waini. We are the ones who are calling for an investigation into the maritime accidents which have claimed so many of our lives.

We know which side of the House does not support independent inquiries into lawlessness. We know which side has not learnt from its mistakes and we know which side of the House keeps on making the same old mistakes.

These are the micro-economic fundamentals by which people live every day. We are concerned about the people who have to stare into the face of the people who run our schools, our hospitals, our police stations, and the NIS; the unfriendly face of an uncaring state. Our people, the ordinary people, want a budget that goes to the heart of the everyday issues, the issues that confront them – a budget that does the greatest good for the greatest number. We want a budget for the people who are struggling with stagnant wages, with rampant cost-of-living increases and with rising child-care costs. We want a Budget that stimulates, not frustrates growth.

The Budget before this Assembly, however, has evinced no inspiration, no imagination and no innovation. What is it? It is the same old PPP, the same old platitudes. The Minister of Finance lays on the platitudes with a trowel. They are thick and heavy in the Budget's so-called 'medium-term outlook'. No one will challenge the vision of a Guyana which makes the leap from being a country of promise and potential to one in which that promise is fulfilled and that potential is realised. No one can deny that we all want a country, as the Budget Speech states:

“...one where the unique advantages of our geographic location and our historical and bilateral relationships, the vastness of our natural resources and the richness of our human resources, are all harnessed in service to the national good. That Guyana is one where we

are better connected infrastructurally with our neighbours to realise more fully the benefits of integration and where, within our country, our people are better connected across land, air, and river to make our markets more efficient and to improve the ease with which our people can travel domestically. That Guyana is one where the domestic digital divide is eliminated, and where access to the vast advantages of information and communications technology is universally enjoyed. That Guyana is one where our domestic energy requirements are met entirely by renewable sources, and where we become an exporter of clean energy. That Guyana is one that is abundant in food supply far exceeding our domestic requirements and making a tangible contribution to regional and global food security. That Guyana is one where every single Guyanese person has access to social services of a suitably high quality, and where our national health and education attainment indicators meet international standards.”

Mr. Speaker, people promise in poetry, but they perform in prose. As the bride said, the wedding was poetry but the marriage is prose. So it is good to have a good speech but what does the Budget provide?

This Budget is not the road to get us there; it is not the way ahead. This Budget simply does not provide the resources to transform the beautiful rhetoric of the Minister’s Budget Speech into reality. What provisions and resources are there in the Budget to build real highways between Linden to Lethem, between Ituni and Kwakwani, between Bartica and Mahdia, between Annai and Aishalton? What resources are there to develop a comprehensive national infrastructure network? None. What resources are there to give our youth access to high quality education even at primary and secondary levels? What resources are there to provide every young person with an opportunity to find rewarding and productive employment? What resources are there to prevent our citizens, our qualified citizens, from migrating? What resources are there to allow every elderly person to retire in comfort? What resources are there to bring an end to the cronyism that is undermining the transparent award of contracts to bona fide businessmen? What resources are there to make our hinterland safe from daily banditry, safe enough from piracy to attract investors who want to bring their business here? What resources are there to stop the contraband trade which distorts our economy and which nearly obliterated Port Kaituma last week when an illegal fuel boat exploded?

Mr. Speaker, let me tell this honourable House that the Cabinet commissioned an inquiry, in 2003, eleven years ago, to investigate the same fuel smuggling. The then Head of State - I do not know if I can mention his name – announced, at that time, that the State was losing \$6 billion a year in unpaid duties on fuel alone. Yet, 11 years later, in broad daylight, we still have an explosive fuel smuggling situation. Can the blind Commissioner bring an end to the contraband? What do we have? The same old PPP, the same old indifference to contraband.

The public security crisis will not correct itself. Narco-trafficking is the engine of growth that is driving this country's high rates of money-laundering, high rates of gun-running, execution murders and armed robberies. Violent crime - not *Kaieteur News*, not *Stabroek News* - is what is scaring foreign investors, driving away the educated élite, undermining economic growth and impeding social development. The lucrative narco-trade has spawned armed gangs which use their wealth to purchase political influence and suborn the security forces in order to protect their interests. Money-launderers associated with narcotics-traffickers also distort the domestic economy by pricing their goods and services below market rates and thus undermine legitimate businesses.

Revelations in the international media of a Guyana-Italy cocaine conspiracy are ominous. Evidence that Guyanese narco-traffickers are working hand-in-hand with Italian Mafiosi linked to the Gambino and Bonanno families and the Italian crime syndicates confirm fears that Guyana is sleepwalking into narco-statehood.

Some people diligently collect newspaper clippings of 20 years ago but cannot remember what happened two months ago. As old people say, "*Jackass ears long, but he nah hear he own story.*"

Guyana's hinterland west of Fort Island on the Essequibo River is a dangerous place. Banditry is rampant; contraband smuggling is an everyday occurrence; disease is prevalent; poverty is pervasive and educational standards, particularly in those Regions – 1, 7, 8 and 9 are lower than the rest of the country. The hinterland comprises over three-quarters of this country's territory. It has long unwatched land borders with Brazil, Venezuela and Suriname; vast unpatrolled open spaces; unmonitored airstrips and numberless rivers and creeks, creeks which have become corridors and channels for illegal narcotics and firearms to be brought into the country.

The truth is that our nation wakes up every morning to the dreary reality of shoddy road repairs, broken schools, an underfunded university, shaky institutions and a brigade of jobless dropouts. The problem, of course, is that this Budget simply does not provide the funds to confront the most serious challenges facing our families. Those challenges are: the unavailability of jobs for young school-leavers; poor quality of education at the primary and secondary levels in both the coastland and the hinterland; the daily threats to human safety where there is an armed robbery every eight hours, two murders every week and twelve fatal accidents every month; and the threats of disease – of dengue, of gastro-enteritis, and of malaria. Why? Because we have the same old PPP, with the same old prejudices.

This minority Administration must not presume that it can ignore the will of the majority, that it can ignore what the majority of people want and desire in this country. The minority Administration cannot attempt to exclude the majority side from contributing to the Budget preparation. The minority Administration must collaborate with the majority so that together we can be co-workers in creating a budget which affects the future of all the people of this country.

The view from Main Street is limited. It is difficult to fully comprehend the complexity of the demographic, economic, social and political changes taking place throughout the country. All politics is local. We are on the ground among the people, listening to the ordinary people, learning from the ordinary people. When we speak, we speak with the voice of the people and that is why we want to be heard; we want to be listened to.

The Budget, despite its promise – *A Better Guyana for all Guyanese* – is, as I said before, degenerating into “a bitter Guyana for most Guyanese.” But, more seriously, this Budget is dangerously dividing Guyana into two nations. It is creating an East-West divide that separates everything west of the Essequibo River from everything that lies to the East. Let the Budget analyse the average per capita income of residents west of the Essequibo. Let the budget analyse the allocation of finance for roads west of the Essequibo. Let the Budget calculate the standard of living of the largest concentration of poor people in this country west of the Essequibo.

Look at the Budget Speech, for example. Look at the section entitled “Physical Infrastructure for Transportation”, pages 32-33. Where are the roads that are going to be built? East Bank Demerara, West Coast Demerara and East Coast Demerara are not in the rich gold-bearing and

timber-bearing areas. This Budget perpetuates a dangerous divergence; it perpetuates disparities and divisions which have hindered the development of the larger part of this country. Is this deliberate or is it an acute case of Main Street myopia?

5.59 p.m.

The hinterland underdevelopment crisis has been ably articulated by our Members of Parliament Mr. Sydney Allicock, Mrs. Dawn Hastings-Williams, Mrs. Valerie Garrido-Lowe, Ms. Eula Marcello, Dr. George Norton and Ms. Renita Williams. No one knows the interior locations better than they do in this House. They know that hinterland underdevelopment will not correct itself. There must be budgetary intervention. The Potaro-Siparuni, Barima-Waini, Cuyuni-Mazaruni and the Rupununi regions might be the biggest parts of the country but they are also the poorest. What do we have? We have the same old People's Progressive Party (PPP) with the same old *eye-pass* for the hinterland.

Hinterland communities do not need baubles and beads; they do not need toys and trinkets. Handouts smother human initiative; any of the residents will tell you that; handouts extinguish local enterprise. The hinterland, like everywhere else, needs reliable services; it needs community-based solar, wind and electricity generation projects to give it water supply. Look at what has happened at the Chieung River; that is a charade, if I ever saw one. The Chieung Falls, beautiful photographs, but, do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Probably in your lifetime there would be no hydro-project on the Chieung River, just as Amaila Falls Hydropower Project because there is no road to get the turbines to it. They will plan all they want, but there is no road to get the turbines in. The first thing is that they have the great photographs and then discover there is no road to move the turbines in.

The hinterland looks like a diseased animal with mined out parts which have degenerated into a mosquito-infested wasteland. Our evergreen forest and pristine waterways are under threat. Our people are poor. Exploiting the economic resources, sustaining the livelihood of residents and protecting the environment demand a new approach to hinterland administration. The national budget must provide for regional administrative centres. Bartica, one of the oldest communities in this country, over 150 years old, Mahdia, Mabaruma and Lethem, which are all administrative

centres for those important regions of 1, 7, 8 and 9, must be quickly ungraded to township status with their own mayors and town councils. We must stop treating the hinterland as ‘bush.’

[Interruption from the Government Members.] I did not interrupt you. I really did not interrupt you. I was tempted, but I gave you a break. The hinterland’s mining, logging and tourism resources have been exploited for over a century and they continue to enrich the national treasury, but their physical infrastructure is inadequate for such a vast territory. Its small scattered population is vulnerable to criminal violence, human trafficking and environmental hazard.

Guyana’s economic development has been impeded. Its international competitiveness has been impaired because of the lack of major investment in public infrastructure. Collapsing stellings, an aging fleet of ferries, deteriorating hinterland airstrips, broken bridges, impassable roadways, and weakened *kokers* and sea defences have all become major obstacles to everyday commuting, communication and commerce. Why? It is because we have the same old PPP and the same old presumptuousness.

Budget 2014 has done nothing to inspire hope. A bold budget was needed to move the country forward at a faster pace, but such a budget is yet to be seen. Every budget is a plan, an economic plan or a financial plan; a plan that must be forward not backward-looking if it is to be of any value. It must have a clear vision; it must have a sense of mission; it must be a projection of what needs to be done tomorrow to solve today’s problems and the resources must be allocated to achieve these objectives. It is not a recapitulation of previous administrations. It is to be a prospect of what will take place in the future.

The budget is meant to point the economy in the direction of transformation, to marshal the people’s efforts and to draw on their entrepreneurial energy to overcome those challenges together.

This budget did throw a few crumbs to schoolchildren and pensioners, but those amounts are crummy. Those amounts may please some of the people some of the time, but it could have done more to address other constituencies, especially the youth and students and most particularly, the workers. Our partnership deliberately designated 2014 as “The Year for Workers.” The underlying hope was that the authors of this budget would have understood the meaning for that

designation and would have taken reasonable and realistic measures to encourage job creation for our potential workforce. This budget continues to neglect our young workers. It neglects the provision of employment opportunity and enterprise.

The PPP spends like a drunken sailor on a lot of little projects - the President's Youth Choice Initiative, we do not even hear about it anymore, the President's Youth Award Republic of Guyana, the Youth Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurial Scheme, which just came on board last year, and the National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment. What is the value of all of these schemes? Who measures the impact of these schemes on the lives of young people, on their careers and jobs of the persons who graduate from them? These schemes are good at sharing out lots of red polo shirts, but, in fact, they are just versions of PPP pet projects.

What young people want and what they have told us they want are permanent institutions, not *ad hoc* programmes. They told us that they want regional technical institutes. Every region must have a technical institute; every region must have an agricultural institute; every one of those regions, particularly Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 is an agricultural region and people make their living from farming and they want to have these institutes, not just on the coastland, but also in the hinterland and regions where they live. They told us they want regional swimming and sports centres; they told us they want regional agricultural development banks. They do not want to be treated as 'bush'; they want to be treated as part of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

The budget must include real measures that provide work for young people, wherever they are, all over Guyana. The basic fact is that all the parties acknowledge that Budget 2014 is not capable of bringing about change for the mass of young people. The fact is that jobs are scarce. Young school leavers simply do not have the skills to equip many of them for the world of work in Guyana. They migrate to Brazil where our secondary school graduates work as farmhands or in restaurants because there is no work here in Guyana. The economy simply is not providing jobs for the employment of those young people.

The story of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) is another dream that has gone sour. As we know, the NIS began its operation 45 years ago under the People's National Congress administration. Prime Minister Forbes Burnham had a clear vision of a welfare state which stood on three pillars. One was free education from the nursery to the university; the other was

affordable housing and the third pillar was social protection through the creation of the National Insurance Scheme. That scheme was designed to provide coverage from the cradle to the grave and we expect that concrete measures would ensure that the social protection, which was promised through the NIS, is guaranteed. But what do we have? It is the same old PPP - the same old *cochore*. The Government of Guyana needs to introduce a serious... [Mr. Nandlall: Is *cochore* a parliamentary word?] Check Allsopp.

The Government of Guyana needs to introduce a serious security strategy to protect our citizens from criminal violence. A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) accuses the PPP of failing to implement the types of reforms that could strengthen border and hinterland security. APNU accuses the PPP in this budget debate of deliberately avoiding references to the high rate of armed robberies, contraband smuggling, gun-running, money-laundering, narcotics-trafficking, people-trafficking, piracy and banditry. These are the crimes that are sucking the oxygen out of the economy, stifling the manufacturing sector and strangling local enterprise.

In the meantime, the PPP is infatuated with community policing, citizens' security and the neighbourhood police, but that infatuation is misplaced. We still experience the shockwaves of criminal violence which plagued the first decade of this millennium, during the presidency of Mr. Jagdeo. This period will be remembered in this country's history for its extraordinary number of drug-driven murders, massacres and executions. Yet, these crimes remain uninvestigated and many of the criminals remain unpunished. Guyana is bleeding. The PPP administration has failed to enforce laws which protect lives and ensure that the killings are investigated.

Budget 2014 has failed to promise new measures which could strengthen the Guyana Police Force to enable it to prevent recurrences of those atrocities. The budget must show us how the provision of financial resources will make the country safe by curbing the cocaine trade, by curbing gun-running, by curbing the crimes which are pumping violence into this country. What we have in the budget is the same old PPP - the same old stinginess.

This country has never been wealthy, but the proliferation of hordes of extremely poor, destitute and homeless persons and of street children over the last two decades is a man-made catastrophe. We are not in a post-war situation. Poverty is not an act of God; poverty is not *force majeure*. It

is a man-made problem, a problem that could be solved with good governance and sensible public policies. There are too many poor people, people who cannot afford to purchase even a low cost diet every day. That is why the APNU has put so much emphasis on the human condition in our budget debates. Even at this late stage, the PPP administration can still amend its own budget, by reducing the Value Added Tax (VAT) to 10%, reducing the income tax and by generating and guaranteeing jobs for school-leavers. [Mr. Nandlall: We will plant a couple of money trees. Do not worry.] Our colleague, Mr. Ramjattan, has told you where to get the money from. The once secret accounts have never been brought to light.

The budget did not even mention Guyana's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, not even as a footnote. This poverty reduction strategy paper was meant to be a mechanism by which Guyana could eliminate poverty, but what we see in this budget is that the poor have been abandoned.

The PPP's Budget 2014 will be measured by its impact on poor people – its impact on the nation. APNU reserves its right to disagree with its provisions, those provisions which we do not see to be in the national interest. There is no way the country can move forward with such a budget, one that continues to disregard the needs of the most important factor in national development, the ordinary people.

We have here the same old PPP, but the time is up - "*Moon ah run til sun ketch um.*" There is still time for Guyana to move forward. The National Assembly has an obligation to provide the leadership that is needed to produce a better budget. We have a duty now, as we enter the Committee of Supply, to design plans and strategies to make changes so that we could overcome the economic and social challenges in order to provide the quality of life to our people. We must use the next stage of this budget process to forestall any folly that might prolong the nightmare of poverty that could lead us down the path of destitution.

Mr. Speaker, A Partnership for National Unity signals tonight that it disagrees with certain measures which have been proposed. When you put those questions, as put you must, we shall exercise our constitutional right to express our agreement or disagreement. We might have the same old PPP, but we also have a new APNU and Alliance For Change (AFC) dispensation and if the old PPP would not do it, the new partners, together, must move to save this budget from

itself. We must work towards giving our people a better life and not the bitter life that the present budget promises.

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

Hon. Members (Opposition): Same old, same old.

Mr. Speaker: Okay Hon. Members. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. A. K. Singh to respond to the six plus days of debates that ensued.

Ministry of Finance [Dr. Singh] (replying): Mr. Speaker, I hear the chants of “same old PPP” and I think, to myself, immediately that there really is no shame in being the “same old PPP”. The People’s Progressive Party is a party that has practised and believes in democracy and we will always do so. When it comes to a party who believes in democracy, we will be the “same old PPP”.

The People’s Progressive Party has been a party that has always stood with the working people of Guyana. When it comes to that regard, we will always be the “same old PPP”. The People’s Progressive Party has never issued an instruction, through the commander of the Guyana Defence Force, that soldiers must march after a party’s congress. We will always remain that way. Sir, we have nothing to be ashamed of in our past. As a matter of fact, Sir, we have a party whose track record is sufficient for us to be immensely proud of it. If it means that we will adhere to our principled positions, we will stand with and serve the people of Guyana, then, Sir. We will always be the “same old PPP.”

We did not have to change our name from PNC to APNU to deceive the people of Guyana. Sir, the Leader of the Opposition would have us believe that if you change the colour of your tie or the style of your shirt, that if perhaps you change your name and hide behind the flimsy negligee of a new name, that somehow you would not be the “same old.” On the contrary, what we have before us, even if they call themselves the APNU, is the same old PNC. For them, “same old” is something to be embarrassed and ashamed of. No wonder they speak of “same old” as if it is something to eschew because in their case it is. As soon as they can plausibly have the people of Guyana forget their disgraceful and outrageous legacy, the trauma that they wrought upon the people of Guyana, they will unleash upon the people an imposed amnesia.

We do not have to look far for examples of this. We heard the Leader of the Opposition spoke so passionately about Rwanda. It appears that he heard a Member from this side of the House spoke of Rwanda. Conveniently, immediately before a Member on our side of the House spoke of Rwanda, a speaker on that side of the House spoke of Nuremberg, but apparently no one on that side of the House heard the reference to Nuremberg. The Leader of the Opposition is a historian and indeed a historian of some respect and renown. He must know the significance of Nuremberg. Conveniently, that reference was ignored – missed completely - and much ado has been made about the reference to Rwanda. The story of Nuremberg is well known and its insinuations are no less than implications of a reference to Rwanda. Once again, the same old PNC will ignore what transpires on that side of the House and only sees and hears what is happening over here. It is the same old PNC trying to deceive the people of Guyana.

We do not have to look far to see the same old PNC at work. The Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge circulated before this honourable House, this afternoon, copies of email exchanges purporting to represent and indeed representing communication that he and I exchanged. However, he rather conveniently stopped at 28th November, 2013 - same old PNC, selective memory. Mr. Speaker, I draw to your attention, Sir, that as recent as the 24th January, 2014, I wrote Mr. Greenidge and I said:

“Dear Carl...”

As I so often address it. I would not be able to replicate the Euro-philic accent, but if I could I would. I said:

“Dear Carl,

Government maintains that there is still adequate time for input to be received and considered in relations to Budget 2014 and wishes to restate our invitation to meet a delegation from the parliamentary Opposition in this regard. To this end, I repeat our invitation to you to suggest a date and time for such a meeting. Alternatively, please feel free to share with us, in writing, any specific suggestions you may wish to make in relations to Budget 2014.”

I went on, Sir, because the email was copied to the leadership of the other parliamentary Opposition party, to say:

“I wish to take this opportunity to clarify also that Government will be please to meet with a delegation from either of the parliamentary Opposition parties individually, should one or other be disinclined to meet.”

I went on further Sir:

“Accordingly, by copy of this email, I invited Mr. Ramjattan to suggest a date and time, should the AFC be willing to meet with us on the matter.

We would similarly be willing to receive a submission in writing, either alternatively or additionally.”

That email on the 24th January. Mr. Greenidge did reply, to his credit. Mr. Ramjattan did not, at least not according to my records. Mr. Greenidge did reply on the 26th January and outlined a very lengthy reply. I am not going to read his reply. He elected not to share his reply with the House. I can only speculate on what his motivation might have been for sharing a partial or abbreviated sequence of the communication. [**Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon:** He was answering Mr. Nandlall who said that there was no meeting.] Why did he not share the complete sequence of correspondence? Do you know why, Sir? It is the same old PNC – selective memory. They want to conveniently omit from their memories parts of the history of this country, hoping that the people of Guyana would be misled. Why did the Member not share with the people of this country the entire sequence of communication?

Mr. Greenidge left the Chamber.

Hon. Members (Government): Run Carl, run.

Dr. Singh: Typically, Sir, the Hon. Member scurries out of the House. I believe the appropriate verb is to scurry - same old PNC. Do their mischief and then run away – same old PNC.

If one were to peruse the course of this debate one would observe a very clear pattern emerging, a pattern whereby... The Leader of the Opposition's presentation, which ordinary I would look forward to immensely every year, fell into the same category, unfortunately, this year, and that is

to say, Sir, that instead of proffering alternatives or how we could do what we are doing better, and I have no doubt that there are some things that we could do considerably better,... [Ms. Wade: You were not listening.]

6.29 p.m.

I hear the Hon. Member Jennifer Wade saying that I was not listening. I would say that, in fact, I was listening and I paid very keen attention and it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge those instances where recommendations were made because they were made. I see Dr. Cummings here, a new Member of Parliament, who identified, I thought, in a very structured manner, specific things that she thought were issues and made recommendations, most of which I do not think any of us on this side of the House had a major problem. Instances where recommendations were made they would have to be acknowledged and I would be happy to do so. Instead what we were regaled with was a series of most regrettable misrepresentations and even more unfortunately resort to insult and invective. I say this because it is something that I feel very strongly about because we see emerging now, in our political culture, what appears to me to be, an asymmetric entitlement to criticise.

When the Opposition Members criticise us, in Government, they are holding us accountable. Irrespective of what names they call us and what insults they throw, irrespective of the cacophony or the extent to which their tirade is cacophonous, they are holding us accountable. When we criticise them we are cussing them out and it is arrogance on our part. This asymmetry is most unhealthy. The Opposition does not enjoy a monopoly on the right to criticise; the Opposition does not enjoy a monopoly on the right to call people names; the Opposition does not enjoy the right... I heard, even during the space of today, a reference to something about the donkey's ears; I heard something about a kangaroo, and those are just the two that I recall. [Hon. Member (Government): *Cochore*.] I heard something about *cochore*. If we were to use such language we would be castigated for cussing them out because somehow the Opposition, apparently, has no obligation to be accountable to the people of Guyana; it has no responsibility for being truthful; it has no responsibility for being factual about anything that the Members say. It appears that they have no responsibility to be accountable.

In the Leader of the Opposition's presentation we heard about the school that was broken, and indeed, there are school buildings that are broken; we heard about the water reservoir, I think that was the example which I took note of, that was broken. A few examples were offered. There was the water reservoir and one or two other things that were broken, but we did not hear of any of the two schools that were built; we did not hear about the new dormitory at Waramadong, somehow that was not noticed, that houses hundreds of students; we did not notice the new Amerindian Hostel at Liliendaal that houses dozens of students; we did not notice the new businesses that are being opened throughout the length and breadth of our country, the new industrial and commercial estate in Lethem. We did not notice that because somehow we have no obligation if we are sitting in the Opposition to be balanced or truthful. We can say what we please.

Mr. Basil Williams, the Hon. Member, displayed this well when yesterday he said to us and he will correct me if I am wrong, I have no doubt. He said that of 182 countries in the world, Guyana ranks 5 places from the bottom on the lowest on the lowest of the Human Development Index. It is an index published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He went further to say that it is apposite to note that Barbados ranks third in the world behind the United States and Canada.

I was astonished, astounded. I was worried that I had read the wrong report so I immediately requested a copy of the report to establish whether my memory is failing me more rapidly with the onset of time. Having requisitioned a copy of the Human Development Report of 2013, we see that there are 186 countries listed – it is the Human Development Report of 2013, incidentally of 2013 and I believe that he did say 2013 - of which Guyana is 118. Now I do not know, I would not claim to be a mathematical genius, but 186 minus 118 is not 5, at least not when I did arithmetic. [**Mr. Neendkumar:** Same old PNC.] Yes you said it there Hon. Member - same old PNC. Here is the report. [*Minister raised report to the Assembly.*] Stop misleading the people of Guyana. Do not mislead the people; stop misrepresenting the facts to the people of Guyana. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: On second Hon. Member.

Mr. B. Williams: Might I respectfully refer to Standing Order 40. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately the Speaker does not have a copy to make any...

Dr. Singh: I would happily tender it to you, Sir.

Mr. Williams: I am on my feet. I am making a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Hind: Mr. Speaker, I think the issue is whether Guyana is five from the bottom or whether we were at 118.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you for that...

Mr. Hinds: This is an issue that can be determined objectively.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you for that Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members we all have access to different reports at different times.

Hon. Members, we have a debate. We must have a debate.

Mr. B. Williams: Is the PPP challenging that Guyana is the second poorest country in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Members of this House, we will proceed with the debate. No questions will be put to the Minister of Finance. We all have our opinions. We are winding up this debate tonight. Proceed Hon. Minister of Finance.

Dr. Singh: Thank you Sir. Suffice it to say that, according to the report, which I would be happy to share with you, contrary to the assertion of the Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams; Guyana is not fifth from the bottom or even remotely close to that. We should not be surprised by this. There is a simple way that we can characterise this discovery – same old PNC.

Let me say this: the dilemma is that throughout this debate we have been regaled with such misrepresentations from that side of the House and when misrepresentations were not readily at hand resort was had to what I described earlier as insults and invectives. I could give many examples of these but I will select one in particular that resonated with me. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Dear Carl.] It is not Carl on this occasion, but instead it is my friend and honourable brother

the retired Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Harmon. I select this example for a reason that, I have no doubt, will be evident to him. In another place Mr. Harmon would call me a friend and brother. [Mr. Bond: I know of that place.] You do not know that place yet, son. In another place the good colonel would call me a friend and brother but when it came to the amphitheatre of competitive politics my friend and brother elected to say to me that I am tired and that my team is tired. He said, "Dr. Singh and his budget team are tired". He went on further and offered me, what perhaps he would characterise as fraternal advice, that I should listen to the small voice within me and that I should give up and find another job. I was struck by the highly personalised nature of this comment, particularly given that it came from one who I would readily and happily describe as a friend and brother. [Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I have a bigger work for you...to the party.] The colonel is offering me a promotion.

I will say this: First of all my team is far from tired and I think that it is tragic that... Put me aside for the moment because I signed up for this amphitheatre of competitive politics. There are dozens of hardworking professionals in the Ministry of Finance, young and experienced professionals, who work day and night in the interest of and in service of the people of Guyana and you insulted them, Sir, by calling them tired.

I do not know if I heard correctly but I believe I heard the Leader of the Opposition spoke of the blind commissioner. Leader of Opposition if I am quoting you incorrectly stop me immediately. I believe I heard the reference to the blind commissioner. I do not know any commissioner who is a politician and I do not know which commissioner was being referred to, but no public officer should be insulted in this manner in this House. We are politicians in this House and even if we might argue about whether we should call each other names, and so on, I do not think that we should call each other names. The Leader of the Opposition is not an ordinarily a man who calls people names but perhaps he is now signed up for the same old PNC, intimidating public officers, hoping that if do his bidding he will stop calling them blind and they might march after his congress. It is the same old PNC - insulting and intimidating public officers. I condemn it on behalf of this Government.

I will go further and say that the economic policies of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) are not about Ashni Singh and if Ashni Singh gets tired the Member can be assured, long after Ashni Singh would have tired and fallen it will still be standing and succeeding - the same old

PPP. The Member needs not worry about whether I look tired and he needs not to worry about whether I might be getting another job, because long after I am gone the PPP will still be on this side of the House.

There is even a more important lesson and there is a reason why I chose the contribution of my friend and brother. You know why, Sir, because even though in that other place he would call me a friend and brother and take all manner of solemn oaths and obligations, that I rather suspect you would be vaguely familiar with,... I hope that you do not mind that I am disclosing that you and I are not the only two Members of that organisation because I gather that rumours abound that you and I are the only two, there are a few over there. Mr. Harmon is not the only one.

I would say the reason why I chose that example is because it illustrates the hunger for political power, that in the haste to seize political power every boundary of decency is crossed, every principle is abandoned and personal attacks are unleashed if they are politically expedient to do so, even by them who would profess and proclaim you to be a friend and brother. That is the reason I chose that example. Such is the hunger for political power by the same old PNC. [**Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon:** That is why you are angry because that goes directly to you.] I am not angry, Sir. As I said this is very little to... As you know, I am a partner of a collective and long after I am gone, Sir - let me repeat it slowly and listen to me keenly - the People's Progressive Party will still be on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker: One second Minister. I recognise Mr. Basil Williams, the Deputy Speaker.

Mr. B. Williams: I stand in relation to Standing Order 41(1) and it states that we must be relevant in this House. The Minister of Finance is not proceeding on any matter that is relevant to this debate. We could understand if he wants to throw in a snippet or so but he cannot continue to regale this honourable House with irrelevant matters. I am objecting on the grounds of his irrelevancy. If he does not wish to treat with the material issues, which are before this honourable House, we will not give him a hearing. I have already indicated to him that we are giving him an hour and he has already used up 45 minutes and he has not said anything.

Mr. Speaker: One second Mr. Williams. Just let me deal with a few matters. One point of correction is that the Minister of Finance shall speak and finish his debate without a time restriction, except that reasonableness must apply.

The second thing is that relevance went through the window weeks ago. However, Minister I would ask that we proceed onwards. I believe that you have driven home your point. The matter has been made on the point to Lieutenant Colonel (Ret'd) Harmon and Mr. Harmon, retired, whichever version one wishes to use. The point has been made metaphorically and literally.

Dr. Singh: This has been the nature of the debate over the past week or so. There are a number of things that were said. I would not respond to each of them because I think almost all of them have been adequately responded to by my colleagues on this side of the House. There was one matter in particular that I feel constrained to correct and that is a matter... **[Mr. Ali: Nagamootoo and economics.]** I would not deal with Mr. Nagamootoo. An elementary textbook would explain to Mr. Nagamootoo how to calculate *per capita* Gross Domestic Product (GDP). I would not detain this House. I would not detain 65 Members of this House with a lesson to Mr. Nagamootoo on how to compute *per capita* GDP. I would have thought that, given his experience with death last year, he might have been a bit more careful but never mind Mr. Nagamootoo.

Mr. Ramjattan said something that I think really needs factual correction. He said many things that I could respond to but I would be here all night. He made reference in particular to Government's bank accounts and balances that were recommended by the Auditor General to be transferred to the Consolidated Fund. That is a fact. The Auditor General did identify that there are bank accounts that, for one reason or the other, have residual balances in them of various amounts. The amounts are stated in the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General did say on page 11 of the report:

“The Ministry of Finance indicated that considerable action was taken in 2010 with respect to the closure of bank accounts resulting in 136 accounts being closed and the relevant balances transferred to the Consolidated Fund.”

A similar reference is in the previous year's report. That is not the point that I really wanted to make. These are all Government's bank accounts. The Consolidated Fund is the Government bank account. Let us say, to use one example that he used, I think, he used the Agricultural Rehabilitation Project and that is another of Government's bank account. That bank account might have originated from an old project, perhaps a project called the Agricultural Project. The

project was executed and at the end of its execution a balance was left remaining, perhaps to discharge unknown liabilities at the time, or perhaps to meet any obligations that might have been in dispute or, indeed, not transferred because somebody did not do what he or she was supposed to do. Any one of those things could have happened.

Fast forward, now several years after that project would have completed execution that account has money in it and that money, according to the Auditor General, has to be transferred to the Consolidated Fund. Most of those balances are extremely old; they have been there for 15 to 20 years and sometimes more than that. We need, first of all, to thoroughly investigate and examine, why those balances are still there, if the undischarged purposes have now been discharged and whether the balances are unencumbered and can be transferred, but the more important point is that that account is also a Government bank account, so moving money from one of Government's bank account to another of Government's bank account does not create revenue out of which expenditure can be met. That is as moving money from your left pocket to your right pocket, Sir. You do not become wealthier by moving money from one account that you hold at Scotia Bank to another account that you hold at Demerara Bank Limited; you do not become wealthier by moving money from your left pocket to your right pocket, Sir; you do not become wealthier by changing a cheque to cash, Sir. These are both bank accounts that belong to Government. Moving the money from one account to another - I am not saying that it is not required in many instances, it is - does not generate revenue that becomes available to meet expenditure. Were that to be the case, Sir, you could generate income... You know that housewife, who you referred to, in that case her husband could... Do you, Sir, remember that example that you gave about the housewife whose husband was not declaring all of his income to her?

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Singh, you have had a go at Lieutenant Colonel (Ret'd) Harmon and you moved on to Mr. Ramjattan, but the debate is really to the Chair.

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I know that Mr. Ramjattan seems to be very engrossed... [*Interruption from Opposition Members.*]

Dr. Singh: The same old..., but in our case it is something to be proud of and not to be ashamed of. As I said, I was doing this as level headed. It requires some patience on my part.

The husband of that housewife, were we to use that analogy, Mr. Ramjattan's couple, the husband was under declaring his income to his housewife, that husband will be able to generate additional income by moving money from his left pocket to his right pocket or by moving money from his shirt pocket to his wallet. Both accounts belong to the Government and moving money from one account to another account does not generate revenue, does not increase the net balances of the Government. The same applies...

Mr. Ramjattan cited the total revenues of a number of statutory bodies, including National Industrial & Commercial Investments Ltd (NICIL). Let me say this: each one of these entities was established by a law. The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) was established by an Act enacted by this Parliament. It retains its revenue under a statute enacted by this House. The Guyana Forestry Commission is established under a statute enacted by our predecessors in this House.

In 1991 our predecessors in this House enacted something called the Companies Act 1991. NICIL is incorporated as a company under the Companies Act that this House enacted in 1991. Let us not create the misleading or mistaken impression... I would like to give Mr. Nagamootoo the benefit of the doubt and say that it was not his intention to mislead. I can only assume that it was a mistaken impression. I do not believe that he gets wealthy when he moves money from his left pocket to his right pocket. I am sure he knows this. The people of Guyana must not have this mistaken notion perpetuated that somehow these entities are operating outside of the framework of the law. They were established under a law. They retain their revenues under one law or another enacted by this House. In fact, this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is proud to have been the first government to include in the national estimates, for the information of the Parliament, the detailed revenue and expenditure of these very statutory bodies. We are the ones who brought them here. They are not a secret. We put them in the Estimate and bring them here. You can check the Estimates of 20 years ago they were never there. I sought myself constrained to mention...

Mr. Greenidge: I just like to correct two points being made. First of all, as regards whether or not the accounts of the public corporations were incorporated in the Budget, I wish to assure you that whilst they may be more comprehensive now...

6.59 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Greenidge, you may clarify on a Point of Clarification based on something you have said, but to go back into old practices means the debate will never end.

Mr. Greenidge: Let me just clarify something because it is not the first time I have run into this difficulty. To the extent that a speaker states something that is factually wrong, I am not allowed to object to it or to correct it. Is this what you are saying?

Mr. Speaker: It is a debate and, therefore, on both sides, erroneous things and misinformed things will be said. For example, Dr. Singh brought a United Nations (UN) report just now. Mr. Williams said he has another one. Where do we go? It is a debate. Do you see? Standing Order No. 40 (b) states that a Member may rise to clarify something based on his own speech at some time. Standing Order No. 40 (b) states:

“...to elucidate some matter raised by that Member in the course of his or her speech...”

You may rise to elucidate or clarify something said while you were speaking, if it is misinterpreted by another Member. Strictly speaking, to be able to rise to give corrections as we go really interrupts the flow of a debate. You may make the point quickly and we will move on, but we cannot have multiple interruptions.

Mr. Greenidge: I hear you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have your assurance that when the speaker is finished, on two matters...

Mr. Speaker: No, sorry. We are going to finish this debate tonight. If not, it becomes an unending...a right of reply will then have to be given to the Minister because the Standing Order is that any debate which is unfavourable to the Government, the Government has the right of last resort to it and so we will never end. It must be brought to an end tonight.

Proceed, please, Dr. Singh.

Dr. Singh: I am happy to hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, acknowledge publicly that the level of detail submitted on the finances of public corporations and other public enterprises is greater than before. I believe I heard him acknowledge that and I thank him for that admission.

What was most regrettable is that there was, almost for the entire part, an absence on the part of the Opposition of any acknowledgement of anything at all that is happening that they agree with or that is positive in Guyana. [An. Hon. Member: That is not true.] Like I said, with notable exceptions. I did not say for the entire part; I said for the greater part. I think there were one or two attempts at magnanimity, including by Mr. Ramjattan until he got excited this afternoon and went off about kangaroos and so on. Setting that aside for the moment, Mr. Ramjattan, you did acknowledge one or two. I think you started off on a generally positive note.

I have said it before and I must say it again. Where this Government brings to this National Assembly an initiative, a policy, a programme, or a project that the Opposition has, itself, advocated and chooses now, either conveniently or opportunistically, to denigrate it or even, perhaps, to ignore it, it is disclosing its hands as a critic for the sake of criticising. I have, as I do every year, perused the promises that all three of the political parties made to the people of Guyana. I would not regale you, Sir, with those promises contained in the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C's) manifesto that we have continued to deliver on. They are many. We have remained faithful to our manifesto. We have delivered on our promises and done so considerably. We are well on our way to delivering on all of our promises and I think that does deserve some applause. We are well on our way to delivering on all our promises to the people of Guyana, notwithstanding what I described in the Budget speech as this self-styled new dispensation.

A more interesting reference for current purposes is the manifestos of the other parties in this House. I heard Mr. Granger say that this Budget is anti-people, anti-poor people, anti-old people, and anti-progress. Mr Granger said that this Budget is counter to the interests of the poor people, the middle class people, the business people, the old people, and the young people. He saw nothing of merit in the Budget. The only problem is that having gone through APNU's manifesto...and I do not have a problem with our budget theme being similar to APNU's budget manifesto theme, whether it is a good life for all Guyanese or a better Guyana for all Guyanese; it is something we do not disagree on.

I would not detain this House, but I could pick a page anywhere and regale you with examples where APNU, itself, promised things that we have delivered in this Budget. I heard of the east/west divide, big words intended to drive fear. Do I hear same old People's National Congress (PNC)? I heard of the east/west divide but we included hundreds of millions of dollars for hinterland airstrips, a promise, in fact, made in APNU manifesto. We are delivering on the promises that they made and not only on the promises that we made. We are delivering on our promises and theirs. Did I hear any acknowledgment of the \$1 billion we are investing in hinterland roads? No. If you listen to the Leader of the Opposition, nothing is being done for the hinterland at all. [Mr. Nandlall: They cut the money for the airstrip the last time.] As a matter of fact, I am reminded by my colleague, the distinguished Attorney General, that, last year, APNU, although it promised the people of Guyana rehabilitation of hinterland airstrips in its own manifesto, cut the money for the hinterland airstrip from the Budget, failing to deliver its own promise to the people of Guyana.

Would you like me to read what APNU manifesto states? Hinterland airstrips, major and key secondary roads to mining and forestry sites, and Amerindian villages and other communities outside of main settlement areas would be upgraded. That is what we are doing, but they cannot see that and acknowledge that. They would not. Do you know why, Sir? It is because it is the same old PNC, no matter that they think the people of Guyana can be hoodwinked by the new name APNU. Even if they call themselves APNU, they know you are the same old PNC.

Whether it is the new Demerara Bridge, whether it is a transportation subsidy, whether it is tourism training and enhanced facility... [Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Did you not hear me recognise the Harbour Bridge?] To his credit, Mr. Harmon did acknowledge but his Leader saw nothing in the Budget. At least, he could have said that the people who will cross the Demerara Harbour Bridge got something.

It is APNU that promised tourism training. Do you know what they promised, Sir? They promised a separate and dedicated training institution for the tourism and hospitality institute. Does it sound familiar? Yet, when we announced the establishment of a hospitality institute, which will train hundreds of young Guyanese to get jobs, the Leader of the Opposition said he saw nothing in the Budget for business; he saw nothing in the Budget for young people; he saw

nothing in the Budget about jobs. Do you know what, Sir? It is the same old PNC. The list goes on.

The same, indeed, could be said of the AFC's manifesto.

We might have struggled with this one-seat majority and the legislative challenges we face but we will not be diverted from the calls of delivering on our promises to the people of Guyana. Where appropriate, where we find things that are commendable in the Opposition parties' manifestos, we will deliver those two. Do you know why? It is because we are a listening and caring Government.

The Private Sector Commission (PSC) and the organised private sector bodies in Guyana have identified a number of priority areas – the dredging of the Georgetown Harbour, the East Bank road, an alternative bypass on the East Bank, the Linden to Lethem road, interior airstrips and hinterland roads, the Demerara Harbour Bridge and, certainly of no less importance, environmental enhancement and clean up of our city. Do you know what, Sir? All of these things that they identified as priorities are in the Budget, identified by the people of Guyana and not by the people sitting in Congress Place.

Much was said, almost disparagingly, about Main Street. If results were to be the measure, Main Street has a far better consciousness of the pulse of the nation than Sophia, Congress Place. I assume that the reference to Main Street was the Ministry of Finance. I could have been mistaken. Small wonder then that so many persons, both through their organised representative groups and individuals in the streets of Guyana, came out and said they welcome *Budget 2014*.

The Hon. Minister, Minister Rohee, spoke so movingly of the ordinary Guyanese citizen who stopped him at the corner of Avenue of the Republic and Robb Street and who said to him, "I saw something in *Budget 2014* for me." Many of us have been on the receiving end of similar acknowledgement. [Mr. B. Williams: What is this thing about who praised your budget? Who gave views and all kinds of things; who liked your budget and who did not like your budget; what is the point? Tell us something about our responses.] The utility or lack thereof of responding to what Mr. Basil Williams has said has already been demonstrated to this House.

We have a responsibility in this House for leadership and I hasten to add that we have an obligation to display responsible leadership. Responsible leadership is about ensuring we manage the expectations of our people. I tried to catch the words of Mr. Granger towards the end of his presentation. He spoke of what the Budget is supposed to do for people and he gave a few examples. I really did not manage to catch the words he used but I will say this: as responsible leaders, we have an obligation not only to say to our people that they must expect wages to be doubled next year, they must expect old age pension to be enough to live on, or they must expect the Government or the public treasury or the State to provide for every need... The State has its responsibilities and obligations, but a responsible leader must also ensure that he does not create in the minds of his people an expectation that the state will solve all of their problems.

The truth is that the citizen has a great individual responsibility for his own future and his own prosperity. Any leader, anywhere in the world, who says to a public employee that his or her wage should be doubled and that is what is reasonable, frankly speaking, is creating an unreasonable expectation and creating a misleading expectation. Any leader who stands up and says that Value Added Tax (VAT) should be slashed from 16% to 10% is a leader who is creating an unrealistic expectation in the minds of his people. Having created an unrealistic expectation, because he does not have an obligation currently to deliver on that expectation, he then has to turn around and use his one-seat majority in this National Assembly to create a dysfunctional situation and then go out there and say that the good APNU wanted to cut VAT from 16% to 10% and the big bad wolves on the Government side refused to do it. That is the game but APNU has been unmasked in this game. It is irresponsible to say to the people of Guyana that wages will be doubled, pensions will be doubled, and VAT will be cut by half.

Mr. Ramjattan spoke of the family. If a family reduces its income by half and doubles its expenditure, it will soon be bankrupt. I do not know, Opposition Leader, if your advisor is Mr. Greenidge. He has some experience with bankrupt economies. I like how you smile at my Mr. Greenidge jokes, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. I know that you have a particular fondness for my Greenidge jokes. This PPP/C Government and our successors in successive PPP/C Governments will never bankrupt Guyana at the altar of political expediency. Do you not think it will make me an immensely popular man to go out there and cut VAT? Imagine our prospects if we cut VAT from 16% to 10% and call an election. My President would be the most popular

man in the universe. He might win one of those parliamentary majorities – 93% or one hundred and something per cent, like it used to be in those days. My President could say to me that I should cut VAT from 16% to 10%, call an election and let me win one of those 93% or 103% majority that the PNC used to win in those days. But we will never do that! We will never sacrifice the sovereignty and prosperity of our country at the altar of political expediency. Never shall be the day, Sir! Never shall be the day! [Mr. B. Williams: The PPP/C says it will never cut VAT.] No, Sir. Mr. Speaker, do you hear the...

Mr. Speaker: What I would like to hear is you addressing the Chair and not trying to get into cross banter.

Dr. Singh: Okay, Sir. Let me say definitively that I did not say we will never cut VAT. I said we will never bankrupt Guyana like Mr. Greenidge did! I never said we will never cut the VAT! [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, do you hear the misrepresentations being made on that side of the House? Do you know what you call that, Sir? It is the same old PNC trying to distort what I said. I never said we will never cut VAT! They are trying to misrepresent the facts once again!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members and Hon. Minister, could we move on, please? I suggest we move on.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, lest there be any doubt, I will repeat that I never said we will never cut VAT and no misrepresentation on that side of the House can change that. I said we will never bankrupt this country. We will never pursue policies that are aimed... [Interruption] The point has been made.

Responsible leadership requires us to be frank and honest with our people, but our Friends on that side of the House, not least by their current display, are far removed from honesty and frankness with our people. They would listen to something that I say in this House that is crystal clear and seek to distort it to deceive the people. They would read a report and come and stand up here and recite something that is not in that report to mislead the people of Guyana. Such is the nature of the Opposition that we are dealing with.

This PPP/C Government will always have the interests of the people of Guyana at heart - their interests today, their interests tomorrow, and their interests one generation from today. [Ms.

Ally: I will never cut VAT.] I am glad you are confessing that; that is not our position. It might be yours, ma'am.

Mr. Speaker, I could quite happily go on for a long time, Sir, and I could repeat that point a hundred times if you permit me. **[Mr. B. Williams:** I will never cut VAT.] I am not the one saying it; he is. Confession is good for the soul.

Our track record speaks for itself. It is this Government that has more than doubled the income tax threshold in less than 10 years. It is this Government that has reduced the income tax rate from 33 1/3% to 30%. It is this Government that has reduced the corporate tax rate from 35% and 45% to 30% and 40%. It is this PPP/C Government that has done all of those things. Let there be no mistake about our faithfulness to the interests of the people of Guyana.

The ultimate test is: are we moving in the right direction? If I were told that there were some things we could do better, I would agree. I believe most people in the Cabinet would agree. I know the President would agree. If I were told that in addition to the things we are doing, a few more needed to be done, I rather suspect that all of us on this side of the House would agree. Let me say unequivocally that all of us on this side of the House would like to see more done; we would like to see more done more quickly; and we would like to see it done better. To say that nothing has happened - and I return to my Friend, Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon, who said... **[Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon:** I have to give you a copy of my speech.] I have it. I read it with disbelief and some measure of disgust but put that aside for the moment. The Hon. Member, the Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon, said that Guyana is not better for anybody or for most people from 1992 to now. These are not his exact words. **[Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon:** Read my lips. Do not misquote me.] No, sir. Your tune changes far too frequently for me to read your lips. I would get dizzy reading your lips because your tune changes so frequently. You are the one who said you would approve funding for the Amaila road and then came here and tried to cut it. Your tune changes too frequently. **[Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon:** All I am saying is do not misquote me. Let me hear what you are saying. I have my speech here.] I do not have to misquote you. I am done with you. I have moved on. The good Colonel said that Guyana is not a better place for most Guyanese. If one were to examine the responsibility with which we have discharged our stewardship of the Guyanese economy and of Guyana, the facts speak for themselves.

Let us examine some key statistics. What was the per capita income of Guyana in 1992? In 1992, the per capita income of our country was US\$454, after 10 years of Mr. Greenidge's distinguished – with emphasis on that word – stewardship. In fact, I will go back a little bit and say how per capita income moved for the 10 years prior and then 10 years subsequent. In 1992, Guyana's per capita income was US\$454.

7.29 p.m.

In 2013, it was US\$3, 496. The minimum wage of the public sector, after all of those soldiers and policemen got that memo and they had to march at congress and after Mr. Greenidge had discharged ten years of stewardship of the Guyanese economy, was the equivalent of US\$25 per month. Today, it is the Guyana Dollar equivalent of US\$192, not where we want it to be.

Our external debt was a whopping US\$2.1 billion. Today, our external debt is US\$1.2 billion and our economy is many times larger. Our external debt as a percent of GDP... One does not get debt write off as an act of benevolence, Sir, as you should be well aware. One gets debt write off as a result of demonstrating policy responsibility and we qualify for debt write off on the basis of responsibly policy [Mr. Greenidge: The debt write off came before you.] We qualified for debt relief on the basis of responsible policy implementation. [Interruption] Do I sense that the cacophony has subsided? I believe it has. Our external debt to GDP ratio in 1992 was 561.3%; that is to say that our external debt was 561.3% of the size of the Guyanese economy and I hear Mr. Greenidge heckling about debt write off. We could argue about when debt write off started, but the question is: why did debt write off become necessary? Why did debt write off become necessary, sir? Sir, the Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge, presided over the accumulation... [Mr. Greenidge: Do not personalise it.] Mr. Speaker, it is okay when the personalising happens on that side of the House and is aimed at this side of the House. It is okay when the personalising happens from that side of the House and is aimed at this side of the House. [Mr. Greenidge: Did you hear me say “Ashni Singh”? How many times have you mentioned my name? That is all you have done.] These are facts, sir. Face the facts, Mr. Greenidge! Own up!

Mr. Speaker: Okay, Hon. Minister, let us move on.

Dr. Singh: Face the facts. Is there a paramedic in the House? One might be needed. As they say, “Is there a doctor in the house?” One might be needed. Guyana’s total public debt amounted, in 1992, to 600% of GDP. Today, it is 58% of GDP.

Our infant mortality rate – that is a rate expressed in terms of 1,000 live births – was 42.9%; it is now 12.9%, reflecting improved maternal and infant care. The public healthcare system as a percentage of the National Budget in 1992 was 4.8%. Last year, it was 13.6%. Number of doctors per 10,000 of the population: in 1992, we had 2 doctors per 10,000, now we have 9.5. The number of nurses per 10,000 in 1992 was 5.9. Today, we have 15.3. This is impact. This is impact, if you want one: the rate of low birth weight babies as a percentage of live births was 23.9% in 1992. Today, it is only 8.9%. Do you know what that meant? It meant that one in every four children was born with a low birth weight in 1992. Today, that has declined to 8.9%.

Every indicator that one looks at, whether it is life expectancy, whether it is expected years of schooling, whether it is mean years of schooling, whether it is our GDP and GNP, as I have alluded to earlier, or whether it is our human development index, a whole digest of statistics could be produced and, indeed, is available to demonstrate that we have made tremendous progress in improving the quality of life of all Guyanese people.

If one looks at an indicator like our exchange rate - and much was said of our exchange rate... I know it is a subject that Mr. Greenidge, in fact, made a number of post speech interventions on. In 1970, the Guyana dollar to United States of America dollar exchange rate was 2:1. In 1980, it was 2.55. For the greater part of that period, our exchange rate was fixed; in fact, perhaps, the whole of the period. The year 1980 is a good point of reference. Mr Greenidge, I believe, became Minister in 1983, although he would have us believe that he became Minister in 1989. [Mr. Greenidge: Did I say that?] No, sir, you did not. Mr. Greenidge often speaks of the post 1989 years and he very rarely speaks of the 1983 to 1989 years, which we can call the years of decay and rot. He seems to have a fondness for 1989 to 1992 and he wants the Guyanese people to forget that he was also Minister for 1983 to 1989.

Mr. Speaker: Move on from Mr. Greenidge, please.

Dr. Singh: Anyway, Sir, our exchange rate was, in 1980, 2.55:1. By 1992, our exchange rate had moved from 2.55:1 to 126:1. Let us compare. What matters is the stability of the rate. [Mr.

Greenidge: It went to 200 under you.] It moved from 2 to 126 under you and that is a fact. [Mr. Greenidge: That is not so. You just read something different.] Okay, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Greenidge became Finance Minister in 1983. The exchange rate in 1983 was 3:1. In 1992, the exchange rate was 126:1. That is an incontrovertible fact. Over the last ten years, a comparable period, the exchange rate has moved, if I take 2003, ten years ago, from 194:1 to 206:1. There are many other references. Whether it is our external reserves which, by 1990, were virtually zero, today, we have nearly \$800 million in exchange reserves. Yes, your exchange reserves were nearly zero.

Let us talk about what transpired over a period, as we want to talk about same old PPP and same old PNC. In 1975...

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Singh, one second. You have been dwelling for some time on the past. I believe that we are dealing with the 2014 Budget so at some time we expect you to go into the Budget of 2014.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. I will readily acquiesce to your request and simply make this final historical point. In 1975... [Mr. B. Williams: The Speaker said to move on. You are disrespecting...] I said I will readily acquiesce. I am not the one who refused to obey the Speaker's order when it came to allowing a Member to speak in this House. I am not the one who tried to drown out a Member of this House from speak when the Speaker had ruled, so do not speak about respect for the Speaker. We, on this side of the House, have respect for authority and the rule of law, unlike you, on that side of the House. Mr. Speaker, if I might be permitted, Sir, to make this final historical point... In 1975... [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, when they try to drown you out, it is because you are saying something that they do not want the people of Guyana to hear. When they try to drown you out, it is because you are saying something that they do not want the people of Guyana to hear. In 1975, our external reserves had accumulated - at the time, sugar was doing extremely well, as most of us know - to US\$99.7 million. We had, as external reserves, in 1975, US\$99.7 million. By 1988, we had the grand sum of US\$4 million of external reserves, after five years of Mr. Greenidge's tenure.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. I think that we need to move off from Mr. Greenidge. Move on to the Budget.

Dr. Singh: Yes, Sir. Today, our external reserves stand at US\$776 million. I could easily regale this House and detain this House with every statistic, be it macroeconomic, be it social indicators, be it educational attainment, be it our standing in the international community, but I would not. I believe that the point has been made.

Budget 2014 represents the latest instalment of responsible policy by this PPP/Civic Government. Whether it is the purchase of uniforms for our children at school or the payment of a cash grant to parents, whether it is the construction of a new hospital, whether it is the construction of a fibre optic cable to attract investors to create new jobs, whether it is responsible management of the macro economy to ensure that investors coming into Guyana do not have to worry about exchange rates stability, interest rates stability, domestic price stability or domestic wage volatility, this Government has demonstrated a track record of taking Guyana in the right direction and *Budget 2014* will continue to do so.

The Leader of the Opposition said that there are no jobs. We want jobs in Guyana. Give us Amaila. If you give us Amaila, power will be cheaper, energy will be cheaper. I will say this: no responsible political leader...never mind they say that we get personal with them; they do not ever get personal with us. The nation is watching to see the double standards practised by this Opposition. The nation is watching. I do not mind the personal barb because the nation is watching them. No political leader in this country can claim to be responsible and not want our country to harness hydropower so that we can have cheaper energy, so that we can attract investors, and so that we can create jobs, and any political leader who stymies or frustrates that project is a political leader who is not serving the interest of the people of Guyana. One cannot say that one wants to create jobs and one is deferring hydropower in this country for another 15 years. One cannot say that one is committed to creating jobs and be frustrating the passage of legislation like the Anti-Money Laundering legislation, trying to use it as a political bargaining chip, trying to extract political rents in exchange. One cannot, Sir. No responsible political leader can claim to be serving the interest of his people if he will place his country at risk of being black listed by the international community.

Mr. Speaker: One second. What has happened? Members of the public, you are not to engage in taking photographs engaging Members of the Assembly, please. Unless you are a member of the press corps seated over there, you are not to do that. I have not seen anything, but please desist.

Go ahead, please, Dr. Singh.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, there are some things that we must be prepared to put above partisan politics and we have two examples, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, with a major international investor ready to invest in this project, with the prospect of energy being cheaper and more affordable and more reliable, with the prospect of investors – again the Opposition Leader spoke of job creation. Who is going to create these jobs? Investors are coming in, who will find Guyana an attractive place to do business because electricity is not as expensive as it currently is. Those are the people who will create the jobs. One cannot say that one is committed to private sector growth and then frustrate the achievement of affordable energy in our country. And so we have before us two prime examples, to extremely illustrative examples, the Anti-Money Laundering legislation and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project.

I hope that we would have learned from our collective experiences over the last two and a half years. I said in the Budget Speech that this, perhaps, is the occasion for some introspection. I sense, from the Opposition, mixed signals. Sometimes I hear the proverbial scissors being wielded and, on other occasions, I get different signals. I trust that the Opposition will use the days available to them or the hours available to them to have a look at their manifesto, to have a look at the things they promised the people of Guyana, to remind themselves that there is much in *Budget 2014* that they said to the people of Guyana they will do. They cannot abandon those now. And there is much that they might not have promised the people of Guyana, but that the PPP/C promised the people of Guyana and we are delivering. I invite you to peruse, at the same time, our manifesto as we have done yours.

Let me say, Sir, that when we come to the time, only now a matter of hours, a day at most, perhaps, for consideration of the Estimates, I hope that we can rise above the business of brandishing these scissors just for the purpose... [Mr. Greenidge: *[inaudible]* favour.] I am not asking for a favour. I am asking for the interest of the people of Guyana to be served. I have no apology for asking for that. I am asking for the interest... Do you believe that you are doing the people of Guyana a favour, sir? I am not doing the people of Guyana a favour. I am their servant. You might believe that you are doing the people of Guyana a favour. I am not doing the people of Guyana a favour. Mr. Greenidge might believe that he is doing the people of Guyana...

I heard him say that we are asking for a favour. The people of Guyana are not asking you for a favour, sir. You and I are servants of the people of Guyana.

As I said, I will end on the same note, the note of this asymmetry. I hear Mr. Greenidge lamenting about the ‘cuss out’. It is okay for every disparaging and insulting comment to be made from that side of the House, for every criticism...when they do so, they are holding our feet to fire; they are holding us accountable. [Mr. Nandlall: Parliamentary scrutiny.] Is that what it is called, AG? It is called parliamentary scrutiny, Sir. When the shoe is on the other foot, as they say, they cannot take it because they believe that they are above criticism. Does that sound familiar? Do I hear the cries ‘same old PNC’? They are tired of the same old PNC. Just like the people of Guyana, they are tired of the same old PNC. Finally, they and the people of Guyana are saying, “We are tired of the same old PNC.”

We will approach these Estimates in good faith. We have no problem answering every single question that will be asked. We know that we can withstand scrutiny. We have never shied away from a question asked at this Parliament - never. There is no question remaining unanswered in this Parliament except for one, I think, for which the answer is pending until after... Apart from one which has been deferred to after this Budget deliberation, no other question has been unanswered in this Parliament. We have no difficulty answering any question posed to us. We will subject the Estimates to the ultimate degree of scrutiny and we trust that once that would have been done, those on that side of the House, my distinguished Hon. Friends, will see merit in the proposals contained in the Estimates for 2014 and will vote resoundingly in favour of this year’s Budget.

I thank you very much, Sir, and I exhort them and I encourage them to give us their support. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the general debate on the Budget concluded just a few minutes ago, today Tuesday, 8th April, 2014. Before we adjourn, I would like to thank every Member for their participation and contributions. I believe that the debate this year could have been better. There were moments when we dipped into some low troughs that I believe we ought not to have descended into, yet, at the same time, I believe that we managed to pull ourselves out of those and still rise above them, so I would like to thank you.

Before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the Report of the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2014 Estimates of expenditure...

Mr. Greenidge: I apologise for interrupting you. If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I am rising to put a motion to the House. In seeking to put this motion, I believe that I am required to obtain the Speaker's consent and that of the majority of the Members of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: One second, Mr. Greenidge. Have a seat. I did receive a copy of the motion formally this afternoon. It is a copy. The Clerk is yet to advise me on the way forward with it and so I have just informed Mr. Williams that we will deal with it as the first order of business tomorrow. It will be the first order of business before we go into Committee of Supply tomorrow.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. I was saying that before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the Report of the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2014 Estimates of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply. We will have to go into Committee of Supply for this purpose.

Assembly resolved into Committee of Supply.

In Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Members, we are now formally in Committee of Supply and I wish to report that the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday, Monday, 7th April, 2014, and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2014 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply and a resolution was passed. Copies of the Sub-Committee's Minutes, Resolution and schedule have already been circulated, I believe, last evening and so I invite the Hon. Minister of Finance to move the necessary motion.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I now move that the Committee of Supply agrees with the Business Sub-committee in its resolution.

Question put, and carried.

Mr. Chairman: Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated seven days for the consideration of the Estimates. Consideration will begin tomorrow, Wednesday, 9th April, 2014, and will be in accordance with the Resolution of the Sub-committee. Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: For our new Member, I know that this sounds like a completely different language but your colleagues will guide you, Dr. Cummings. It will be something you will learn. Like you, Ms. Rennita Williams joined us last year in the middle of the process and I could see that she was bewildered but she quickly found her feet. I have no doubt that you will as well. Mr. Elliot, I do not need to give you that charge because I know that you know the system.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, I invite you to move the motion for our adjournment.

Mr. Hinds: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House be adjourned to tomorrow at 2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we stand adjourned until tomorrow, 9th April, 2014 at 2.00 p.m. Thank you.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.59 p.m.