

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2012-2013) 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

41ST Sitting

Tuesday, 2ND April, 2013

Assembly convened at 1.17 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Minimum interruptions during Budget Debates

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. There are just a few short announcements. Hon. Members, good afternoon. Our debate starts today so I am asking for the cooperation of all Members to ensure that each Member has an opportunity to speak and is heard, so we expect the minimum of interruptions and even as Mr. Greenidge starts the debate on behalf of the Opposition this afternoon, I would expect that he will be given the same level of courtesy and respect accorded to the Minister of Finance last Monday and that he will not be interrupted.

Photocopying and printing facilities

Mr. Speaker: I have also asked the Clerk to ensure that there is a facility which has been placed in the lobby. [**Mr. Lumumba:** I guarantee that.] Please, Mr. Lumumba. You will guarantee that, thank you. I have asked the Clerk to ensure that there is a facility for Members for photocopying and printing purposes so there is a desk and there is a photocopier available because I know that

we may wish to reproduce previous speeches, statements or documents, so that facility has been established immediately outside of the Chamber.

New time schedule

Mr. Speaker: I had asked Members and those present to note our new times. We are to start at 1.00 p.m., promptly, go until 4.00 p.m., have a break at 4.00 p.m. until 5.00 p.m., resume at 5.00 p.m. and go until 7.30 p.m., resume at 8.00 p.m. and go until 10.00 p.m. I ask us all to bear in mind that it is not just us who are here, but there are dozens of persons attending to the Assembly on the outside; the police officers, drivers, cleaners, persons who need to go to their families so let us try to stick to the time.

The use of Committee Rooms

Mr. Speaker: The Clerk has also ensured that one of the Committee Rooms has been set aside and will be fully stocked with refreshments for use by Members, should there be the need for discussions or any dialogue during this period.

Special guest

Mr. Speaker: For my final announcement, my guest this afternoon is the distinguished Senior Council from Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Stanley Marcus- a Guyanese who has been practicing in Trinidad since 1976 and who is also a good friend of Mr. Keith Scott- so we welcome Mr. Marcus who has distinguished himself as a practitioner in the twin-island republic. Thank you very much and we may proceed. Thank you.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

1. IMPACT OF THE ‘NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND POLICY

Ms. Selman: Could the Hon. Minister of Education inform this House whether an evaluation has been conducted to ascertain the impact of the ‘No Child left behind Policy’ on the delivery of education in Guyana?

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE ‘NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND POLICY

Ms. Selman: Could the Hon. Minister of Education inform this House whether the Hon. Minister considers an assessment of the ‘No Child left behind Policy’ a necessity in relation to the improvement of the quality of education delivery in Guyana?

3. PAYMENT OF CLEANERS BY PARENT TEACHER’S ASSOCIATIONS (PTA)

Mrs. Hughes: Can the Hon. Minister explain why Parent Teacher’s Associations (PTA) are being asked to pay cleaners employed at senior secondary schools?

The Minister of Education did not pass copies of the answers to the above questions to the Clerk of the National Assembly for circulation to Members at that sitting as required by Standing Order No. 22(4).

Request for leave

Mr. Speaker: Members, before we proceed, please permit me to go back to announcements and to say, by way of announcements, that leave has been granted from today’s sitting for the Hon. Members: Ms. Amna Ally, Mrs. Catherine Hughes and Dr. Ramayya who are unavoidably absent from today’s sitting. Thank you.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2013 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2013

“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 2013 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2013-03-25

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2013, of a total sum of **one hundred and ninety four billion, three hundred and forty three million, seven hundred and sixty four thousand, eight hundred and seventy three dollars (\$194,343,764,873), excluding fourteen billion, and four hundred and ninety six million, six hundred and seventy nine thousand, one hundred and twenty seven dollars (\$14,496,679,127)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.” *[Minister of Finance]*

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the debate on the budget for the year 2013. For the budget debate and for consideration of the estimates by the Committee of Supply, as noted before, we will be commencing at 1.00 p.m. and taking our customary break at 4.00 p.m. and resuming at 5.00 p.m.

Our first speaker for today is Mr. Carl Barrington Greenidge, Chief Opposition Spokesperson on Finance. Thank you. Mr. Greenidge, please proceed.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I take the opportunity to express the wish that colleagues would have had an enjoyable Easter and are suitably rejuvenated to help us through the exercise that is before us this week and the following week and thank you also for giving me my full title.

Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, I would like to start by thanking the Minister of Finance for giving us on Monday, 25th March, a most interesting budget presentation; a presentation itself which I believe was full of what I might call “slights of hand” and “little tricks”. We had a budget opportunity that would have enabled us, I think, to address a number of very important issues before the country and rather than taking the opportunity to deal with them frontally, we did some other things. Let me say that even a cursory reading of the recent social and political

history of Guyana would reveal that a general consensus exists around the fact that whatever might be the Government's claims as regards economic statistics that Guyana is facing severe problems that warrant attention. These problems include a very high and socially dysfunctional rate of unemployment and that high rate persists in spite of an unprecedented flight of Guyanese from these shores; a flight which has left us in a situation where we started off in the early 1960s with a population similar to that of Trinidad and Tobago and now our own population struggles to be half of that of Trinidad and Tobago.

The problems faced by Guyana that contribute to that flight include simmering communal and other tensions, one of the highest rates of suicide in the world, a growing army of destitute and mentally ill persons on our streets, along with hoards of unskilled and often hopeless youths. No one visiting Guyana within the last 15 years has failed to notice the impending environmental and public health catastrophe associated with what appears to be a calculated policy to dispose of solid waste in public spaces and waterways in a manner that defies civilized public health standards and practices.

A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), in particular, continues to vigorously draw to the Government's attention the need to address these burning issues. Indeed, I think that we never miss an opportunity. The calls have generally been resolutely ignored and in the run-up to the Minister's laying of the 2012 Appropriation Bill, the Opposition Parties agreed amongst themselves, that is the APNU and the Alliance For Change (AFC), that they would only support a budget which addressed these key concerns. In their discussions, they called on the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and Government representatives to attend to these burning issues and in the preliminaries, which was all we had, of the 2013 tripartite talks – these are the talks that never materialised – the points were again raised. Since many, I think, commentators, partisan and non-partisan, seem to forget that the two parties have, at various points, announced priorities that they felt should be addressed, let me just remind the House that the joint APNU/AFC agreement which formed, in part, the backbone to the discussions that took place in 2012, as I mentioned, made it clear that the budget that we saw in 2012 did not meet the demands for changes to stimulate growth, to lower the cost of living and improve the quality of life for ordinary people and those remain major concerns certainly of the APNU and the AFC will speak for themselves.

The Opposition's demands at that time were a reduction in the Value Added Tax (VAT), reduction and changed arrangements for the Berbice River Bridge toll rate, an increase in the salaries of Public Servants, increases in the subvention to the University of Guyana, increases in the retirement age of Public Servants, a removal of the constitutional offices from the schedule of budgetary agencies captured in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act which would include Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), the Service Commission, the courts, DPP, the Auditor General and so forth; the call for the Government to restructure the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and Guyana Power and Light (GPL) so as to convert them into viable corporations that could contribute in a meaningful way to the development and the exploitation of our productive capacity; the need to restructure the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) and to bring its financial assets within the ambit of the Consolidated Fund and to restructure the Guyana Information Agency (GINA) and the National Communications Network (NCN) to make them into responsible national institutions. I might also add that the parties also urge the Government to establish, without delay, the National Procurement Commission.

There has been very little discussion on most of these matters in the budget statement itself and even less provision in the estimates, so before I turn to some of the specifics mentioned by the Hon. Minister in the budget statement, I would like to touch on some of these areas and I start with a set of comments on the question of poverty and pro-poor policies. The proposals coming from the APNU in terms of poverty and the need to alleviate and reduce poverty and the growing income inequality in Guyana was supported by findings from several studies. Those studies, including one prepared by the World Bank and published in 2003, argue that in addition to the outward migration or, if you like, emigration of skilled workers and declines in domestic and foreign investment, the declines in Guyana's economic growth between 1998 and 2004 were partly due to less favourable political and institutional environment after 1997 and they argued that investment is needed, but it is impeded by a number of factors – some of which appear in the most recent report on the ease of doing business in the Caribbean and in the world, in which Guyana is featured. They argue, for example, that investment is impeded by a complex regulatory framework and that the enforceability of laws remains limited in Guyana.

Beyond weaknesses in legal and institutional arrangements, they note that the polarised nature of Guyanese society is a continuing source of violence and that also acts as a disincentive to investment, but really what I am trying to emphasise here is that the analysis underlines or underscores the role that institutional weaknesses play in hindering the effectiveness of the policies which are fashioned and intended to enhance growth and development and the bank, in looking at the debt relief initiative, had helped to lead, on Guyana's behalf, pointed at that time to the fact that these institutional weaknesses were hindering the effectiveness of the debt relief initiative and it included a weak capacity to plan, implement and manage development policies and they emphasise the lack of skilled personnel.

The importance of institutional capacity, I think, is one that we cannot exaggerate and in the light of that one would hope and would have hoped that the budget would pay some special attention to building the human resource base, strengthening human resource capacity in Guyana and in that way, not only increasing the quality of the human resources that we have, but trying to attenuate the flight of skills which has characterized us for so long in the Region, but when we had had some discussion on this in the past, there was a justifiable claim on the Government's side that they had had policies in the past, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) in particular, which reflected an agreed approach to poverty alleviation and that approach had been one agreed to between the donors and the Government of Guyana. More recently, as this budget itself shows, there is or has been something of a lack of attention to poverty and poverty alleviation in the approach of the Government and that has been especially the case since the so-called National Competitiveness Strategy has taken the emphasis away from issues of poverty alleviation and put them elsewhere when, in reality, these ought to be complementary strategies and should not be at the expense of dealing with poverty, especially at a time when inequalities and, as I say, destitution in the streets seem to be growing almost daily.

The APNU itself had expected that a pro-poor policy programme would have been a significant pillar of government policy. In fact, when the Government of Guyana was seeking Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) assistance it had agreed to give priority to a number of areas and I would like to mention them because in my view, and I think in the view of many others, these areas still warrant priority attention. They were the projects that were captured and these could be called "poverty oriented expenditure programmes". They were projects executed under the

Social Impact Amelioration Programme which, of course, had been launched prior to the accession of this Government to office. There was a Basic Needs Trust Fund. There were elements of a poverty programme administered by the Ministry of Finance. There is also a student loan programme and a number of the programmes and projects within some of the sectors, such as agriculture, communications, the sanitation sector, I may emphasise and the need for institutional strengthening in a number of these areas.

It perhaps is worth mentioning that as the millennium developed pro-poor spending fluctuated and it fluctuated because the priority to poverty was concentrated on a few programmes; these that I have listed, but the thing is that these programmes were funded primarily by external donors and to the extent that the donors funding to these agencies have declined in recent times, the importance of these projects seem also to have declined commensurately. What I am saying is that the decline in the emphasis given to the pro-poor package is entirely attributable to Government's policy – the policy of the Government and its advisors – which exhibits a preoccupation with flagship project, large, lumpy, prestige projects rather than projects that address the critical issues that are before us. The Government seems to feel that dealing with poverty is not their responsibility; it is the responsibility of the foreign and donor community so as a consequence, when those donor funds have been reduced, the projects of this type have been denied funds. The Government has, in other words, failed to compensate the changed composition of the donor package and in the process, the poor have been neglected.

In the work that we have been doing over the last 14 to 15 months, there is a continuing public concern with this issue of poverty, the related issue of unemployment and a recognition and acknowledgement, a clamoring for institutional reform that could help us to attenuate these problems. These concerns outside seem to find no resonance with the PPP leadership- none at all.

The second observation that I would like to touch on, because it has not been discussed in any significant way in the budget presentation, has to do with the debate on taxation and the Value Added Tax in particular. As a result of the tripartite discussions last March, President Ramotar had agreed to establish a committee to look at the Opposition's request for a reduction in VAT rates and that was to be treated as part of an overall review of the incidents of the tax system on different groups. The committee, consisting of business men and at least one academic, was

supposed to make recommendations in the light of these concerns. Of course, since the President set up that body and relatively recently, the Hon. Minister of Finance has publicly rejected calls for reduction in VAT and in that regard, he was joined by the Director General of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) in putting forward a most furious and ill-founded argument to the effect that a VAT reduction will primarily affect businesses. The poor private sector, I might add, have had some of their spokesmen swallow this particular line *hook, line and sinker*, as they would say and followed them along this line of argument and they have even garnished it a bit with an even more alluring and selfless claim, I might add; namely, that the VAT is a luxury tax and therefore, it is mainly borne by the rich and for that reason, the poor should be happy that it is in place and protecting them from the Government, so the Private Sector Commission has been selling this idea as a complementary idea to the Minister's argument.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to cite you a letter written by two members of an Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) - Red Thread- in fact, because it is instructive and it points to how distant our policy makers are from the reality of what is in the street and how distant they are, if you like, the considerations governing the theory and policy of taxation. The writers pointing to the impact of tax on their daily purchases state:

“For example, at the cheapest price one pack of chowmein costs \$167 plus VAT which is \$26.72 extra, one pack of macaroni costs \$150 plus VAT which is \$24 extra and a 185 gram package of curry powder costs \$92 plus Vat which is \$14.72 extra, but we not only need food, we need to iron our clothes and a cheap iron costs \$1995 plus 16% VAT which is \$319 extra. We need to cook and a four-burner gas stove costs \$36,000 plus VAT which is \$5,760 extra. We need to store our vegetables and meats and a small fridge 5.3 cubic feet in size costs \$59,999 plus VAT which is \$9,600 extra. We need a bed to sleep on and a single bed costs \$15,960 plus VAT which \$2,554 extra and a double bed costs \$38,640 plus VAT which is \$6,182 extra. We need lights and the energy-saver bulb which we will want to use to save money costs \$365 plus VAT [I understand that it is uncomfortable] which is \$58 extra. The telephone bill also attracts VAT. Most of these extra costs look small [and I am still quoting, Mr. Speaker] but only to those whose incomes are large...”

May I repeat that?

“Most of these extra costs look small but only to those whose incomes are large. Imagine a single mother on public assistance who gets \$5,900 subsequent to the 2012 Budget needing a kerosene stove at the cost of \$1,512 plus VAT which is \$288 extra and the three energy saver bulbs are the cost of \$1,095 plus a total of \$174 for VAT.”

Mr. Speaker, the authors of the letter to the *Stabroek News* published on 5th April are making a fundamental point. [Mr. Nandlall: inaudible] It should be familiar... All single mothers do not want to work; yes, Mr. Attorney General. It should be familiar to all second year economic students, namely, that for low-income groups characterized by a Guyanese earning \$5,900 or \$50,900 a month, the VAT is paid on almost all of the entire income since for obvious reasons, all that income will be spent on basics; notwithstanding the zero-rated items or those attracting low rates which include some unprocessed foods such as flour as well as clothes and medicines- most of the purchases effected by the poor attract taxes. As may be seen from the foregoing example, the idea that VAT is a luxury tax is so ridiculous as to not merit further comment here.

VAT and consumption taxes are termed regressive taxes and were initially not high in the priority list of economists precisely because they bore more heavily on the lower than on the higher income groups. They are a greater burden on the lower than on the higher income groups and this means that they take a smaller portion of the income of the well-off than they do of the poor.

1.47 p.m.

It follows that the suggestion that a reduction of the tax would benefit from the poor little but will mainly be of benefit to the rich is one that any second year economics student would acquire a failed grade for proposing. The burden of taxes is measured not in absolute terms, but in proportional terms. The argument that a tax, which bears more heavily on the poor than on the rich, will not benefit the poor if reduced or lifted is one that I could not imagine a politician in Barbados or Jamaica making and surviving. In a way, Guyana is a blessed place for some.

For those who missed the relevant lecture on “Public Finance,” the attraction of the Value Added Tax (VAT) has nothing to do with its intrinsic value on equity grounds, that is, whether it is supposedly agreed to burden upon the rich than on the poor but because its base is every transaction; it is collected from a larger proportion of firms than any other income tax of any

type or any single stage consumption tax. Therefore the total amounts collect by VAT and those affected by it are far wider than the consumption tax that preceded it and which it replaced. That is the issue; that is the strength of the VAT; it is not that it is more equitable. It is not more equitable; it is a regressive tax, and that has always been the case.

As far as equity is concerned, however, because it is regressive and because it is inequitable, this tax normally is associated with a reform of what the tax is and a reform of those other taxes is intended to cushion the repressiveness either by promoting more progressive taxes - but that has problems toady in the way that we look at these tax burdens - or by way of specifically reducing those taxes that are normally borne by the poor. In other words, it is to try to compensate by reducing the taxes paid by those who are regarded as being less well off. In Guyana this was especially important because we had, under the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) and subsequently, taken the step of removing a good deal of the progressiveness in our taxes, including in the personal income tax with the arrangement that we have now where it is a flat tax beyond the certain income level and the same proportion is paid by everyone. That is something which needs to be borne in mind and that is why when the advisers to the Ministry of Finance looked at the question of the VAT it was clearly understood and agreed upon at that time that the imposition of it would be accompanied by the adjustment of other taxes.

The Government, having introduced it and realising that the bulk of the poor are, perhaps, not its concerned, has decided to abandon this second stage. We saw that last year, when the President offered to have the tax regime and the incident of taxation on different groups examined by a group. We have not heard a beep from him since then. It is doubtful whether the Committee has met and the Minister has not had the decency to even report to us as to the status of that Committee and of the report. We have nothing in the budget that tells us that the President does not hope that we have forgotten the pledge that he took to have the Committee meet and report within the year 2012. The structure of the taxation system, which was to have been modified, remains and in the meantime the businesses, which are supposed to gallantly carrying the tax burden on behalf of the poor, are busy, some of them, trying to dodge the burden of the taxes by a range of devices, including the misclassification of a number of items so that they do not have to carry the impost.

My grandmother was fond of saying that “God don’t sleep.” There is an electorate out there and they include the poor, they include those who pay VAT and there will come a time when we have to turn to that electorate and they will not forget this bad faith on the part of the President, in particular, and the PPP in general. We will bear that in mind.

The PPP regime continues to be in denial as regards these general issues of poverty, unemployment, and so forth, which I have mentioned, and that the two opposition parties try to encourage it to examine. I would like to draw to the House’s attention that we have been asked to look at an Appropriation Bill and Estimates whilst the basic requirements of the Constitution are still the subject of infringement by the Government. The Constitution, let me remind you - I know that some people are tired of hearing this - Mr. Speaker that the Constitution, in relation to the format of the Estimates, has something to say and article 222A states that in relation to the entities, which are supposed to be independent, the constitutional entities that the annual subvention should be reflected in the Estimates by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after review, and so on. They are supposed to be a part of a direct charge and more specifically that are supposed to be reflected as a lump sum in the Estimates.

The Estimate I have before me..., a matter on which the Chief Justice had something to say and specifically he had something to say interestingly enough about one of the few entities, which is reflected in here, that actually should be shown as a lump sum and is shown as a lump sum - the Ethnic Relations Commission. Mr. Speaker, you will find that between pages 397 and 400 the Estimates show that not all of the entities, which are listed in the Schedule, including the Audit Office, are reflected as is the ERC and as is required by the Constitution. I hope that I am making myself clear. We are confronted by an administration that has consistently flouted the requirements of the Constitution, consistently ignored the calls, the decisions, the resolution of this House passed last year to amend the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) and then ignored the Bill which was an amendment to the Constitution adding these constitutional offices where they had been omitted from the Schedule, Third Schedule (a), and in spite of this infringement of the Constitution we are being asked to approve a budget. In other words, we are being asked it is to join the Government in breaking the law.

Maybe, I should add that just in case there are some questions as to time or the ability of the Government to amend the relevant tables I notice - I am not trying to be malicious - that on page

398 of these Estimates there is a category, which I had not noticed before. Obviously, it was there, but it now has resources alongside it, for the year 2013, and that item is called, under Agency 01 under the Office of the President, Office of the First Lady. It has been added and there is a figure there. In other words, it seems that the Government has its priorities a bit skewed. I am not saying that this should not be there, but I am saying that just as how this could have been added... There is a First Lady. I am not sure what the office does, by the way, but let us not dwell on that for now. The fact is that it has been added; it has not caused a crisis in the Ministry of Finance; it has not caused a collapse in our debt status, or anything such as that, and we are being asked to find money for it. In the same way the constitutional offices, in addition to the ERC, should have been reflected in this section of the Estimates.

The question, which has to be asked, is: Does the Minister have a right and is the Government, in order to ignore the constitutional requirements, at the same time, to ask us to approve moneys for them? Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no reason why these requirements could not have been dealt with. You will note that last year, I am sure you will remember, the distinguished Minister of Home Affairs and our very energetic Minister for Housing and Water, and acting on Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, and so forth, had a lot to say, in addition to the Minister of Finance, as they usually support him on this matter, when we cut the amount for Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) and State Planning Secretariat on the grounds that the Auditor General had properly pointed out that these things should not have been where they were and we were not prepared to approve moneys for them. I am happy to say that this year, I note, that the funds for CANU - the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit - have been reduced to zero under this subsidy and presumably funded where it should have been funded in the first instance. I think I noticed that it is the same for the State Planning Secretariat.

I do not know whether I am making sense. *[Interruption from the Government Members.]* Well, it is just in case, because if you can get the economics...*[Interruption from the Government Members.]* You cannot understand the difference between a question and a comment. Those who cannot understand the difference between a regressive tax and a luxury tax then one needs to make sure as, you go along, that you are being followed. This is a simple exercise. We are saying that until such time, as the Minister comes and talks to us on this matter,...It is not a surprise to them because I read to them the fact that these issues were raised when we had the tripartite

meeting with the President and his advisers. The excuse they made, at the time, was that those corrections, in terms of the Third Schedule, required, first, a constitutional amendment. We agreed with them on that and we have subsequently effected that constitutional amendment. Nothing stops the Minister from including these items in the Estimates. I am interested to know that a lawyer, our Attorney General, could find that a procedural matter to with a constitutional requirement does not warrant attention. [*Interruption from the Government Members.*] I am speaking about the substance of the Estimates...

Mr. Speaker: Members, allow Mr. Greenidge to make his presentation without interruption and unhindered.

Mr. Greenidge: The Constitution requires that these Estimates come to us differently prepared and differently presented. We would like to know how the Government proposes to do that because, at this point in time, it cannot attract our support, because it is unconstitutional.

We had also discussed, drawn to the attention of the President and his advisers, that several constitutional offices remained unfilled or the offices, such as the ERC, which were not properly or fully established. It is true of the Ombudsman's office. There are issues in relation to the Public Procurement Committee. Incidentally the PPP is the only party not to have submitted a list of nominees for this particular body. That is another dimension that had been raised and I think we need to get answers, maybe at the Committee of Supply, so that some decision could be taken on this side as to how to deal with the Government's request.

I will also draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, as you will be aware, that this House passed a resolution pertaining to the Extra-budgetary Agencies and it specifically called upon the Minister..., in relation to those very contentious agencies which seem to be used as a device for bypassing this House, entities collecting State revenues and using them in a manner that is less than transparent, in a manner that seeks deliberately to deny this House its role of overseeing and reviewing the expenditure request of the country, and looking at the priority. National Industrial and Commercial Investment Ltd. (NICIL), Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the lotto fund, the use of the funds from the 2005 floods, the Cricket World Cup, the hosting of Caribbean Festival of Arts (Carifesta) X and the International Cricket Council (ICC) Twenty20 tournament, all of these items were the subject of a resolution by this House.

Without going through the details of the resolution, let me just remind colleagues that in relation to those agencies the decision was that the entities which as of February of 2012... I emphasise this because we have since had a mad rush on the other side to lay annual reports and a whole set of things, but the resolution was clear. It stated that if those entities which were supposed to have laid reports before this House, audited accounts and other reports, and if by February of 2012 those reports had not been laid those entities should be required - the Minister responsible in this case is the Minister of Finance - to channel all of the funds, other than the operating expenses that they had, to the Consolidated Fund until such time as we would have looked at them and decided otherwise.

Nothing appears to have happened, whatsoever, on that front and yet we have a request for the approval of an Appropriation Bill. Again, having defied the House, the Minister comes back to the House to demand that moneys be provided for additional expenditures which in effect amount to more of the same. In other words, it is where part of the revenues of the state are diverted and managed without reference to the House.

The problem, therefore, is the same as with the constitutional offices. There is a fourth element that I need to mention. The Bills, which have been passed, at least two of them, I understand, are with the President for signature. The time available by which that signature should have been effected, or a report concerning the President's reason for not signing, I believe, has expired. In such circumstances, again, I have a difficulty understanding how we could be expected to pass a budget when such fundamental breaches of the Constitution and of our own responsibilities have continued to take place. That is a general background.

In his speech, the Minister of Finance made reference to the seven prerequisites, such as commitment to democracy, equal access, and so forth, which prerequisites were highlighted in Budget 2012. Political dialogue, which is supposed to be part of that package, would have provided the opportunity for the Minister - I am sure he is not surprised - not to be arriving at a position in the Committee of Supply where preconditions, prerequisites, concerns about legality and constitutional acceptability would loom large. Those discussions could have removed this block or removed the need for us to try and deal with that at the last minute. Here we are, they have yet to be attended. Public pledges to political dialogue by the Government filled the airwaves even as officials charged with such dialogue on the Government side once again

refused either to provide information or to fix meetings, in the context of a series of meetings, rather than a last minute meeting before the consideration of the Estimates.

The question of equal access, which was also one of the things mentioned by the Minister, is an interesting one. Again, although it is a much touted, it is clear that the Government honours these things more in the breach than anything else.

The current outrage over the allocations for television and radio frequencies is a case in point demonstrating the extent to which the Government is contemptuous of public opinion and its constitutional obligations. Although the Parliament approved the establishment of a body to oversee the exercise, which should have been part of that allocation of frequencies, we find ourselves in a situation where the effect of a decision taken after the House passed the Bill, but before it was assented, in which equal access is certainly what did not take place. That is a concern. What I was saying earlier is that the Bills passed by the House seem to lie unsigned because these political and constitutional issues, which I have mentioned, are regarded by the Government in a very peculiar light. I say peculiar because this is a Government which often times claims to have been the catalyst for a return to democracy in Guyana. We find ourselves in a situation where the President believes that he has no obligation to assent to Bills which his party does not approve, which his party cannot approve on its own because it is in a House in which it is in a minority. For as long as it is in the minority it is supposed to consult with the majority and to seek the support of the majority in order to have the legislation and the measures that the Members have in mind passed. They eschew that obligation and demand the rights of a majority although they hold a minority in the House.

There is also the case of the Minister of Finance - the Minister who claims to have been advised by the Attorney General, I have no doubt to believe that he was not - in which decisions taken by this House concerning expenditures, including those out of the Contingencies Fund that did not meet the criteria set out in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act were approved and funds not approved under the Appropriation Act were spent. We would like to know how the Government proposes to resolve that conundrum because it is an important issue, again, in terms of whether it is the House that has the responsibility for approving the expenditure or the Minister of Finance by himself or the Minister of Finance and the Attorney General.

In the light of these matters, Mr. Speaker - what I would call sins of omission as well as sins of commission - you would have thought that the honourable Minister of Finance would recognise the prudence of being perhaps a bit circumspect in his presentation. I was particularly caught by the overture in the budget, I think on the second page - well, certainly it was within the first five minutes of his presentation - an overture I think was provocative, if not arrogant. It was a tirade against the opposition parties for a variety of perceived sins facilitated by the constitutional, what he called, one-seat majority via which the House passed motions, and I quote, "...or Bills that defy reason and collide with the Constitution."

Up to now, after over one year of debate, neither the Attorney General nor the Minister has explained why the constitutional offices are not all reflected, such as the ERC, in the Estimates and they have the gall to speak of proposals that conflict with the Constitution. There is no more obvious conflict with the Constitution than the Estimates before us today that defy article 222A.

Then there was reference to the undesirable legislative actions [Mr. Nandlall: They are not my words.] They are not your words. I want to say that these undesirable legislative actions to which the Minister referred, the ones that defy reason and collide with the Constitution, include the attempts by the House to correct the abuses as reflected in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. Presumably, that is one of the things that collide with reason. The interesting thing is that the Minister, himself, laid an order here, after the first motion, that removed the Audit Department from the Schedule and subsequently nothing has happened in relation to that office, as regards to the Constitution.

2.17 p.m.

These political descendants of Dr. Jagan, who speak in hushed terms about his struggle for independence and the rights of the majority, somehow see no contradiction between Dr. Jagan's professed principles and behaviour which accept a majority, in this case, a majority decision only if that majority comprises of PPP Members. The President's party, having at the polls lost its majority, goes to the courts to, in effect, authorise it to continue to behave as though the PPP had won a majority of seats. That is the point. It does not have a majority and it wants the powers to behave as a majority. That is the point, in case the Members missed it. Under the current dispensation, the President only signs Bills, it seems, presented by his party. That is the new

democracy that the PPP has heralded in for us. It is a loser takes all politics. That is what I call loser takes all politics - you lose a majority and you exercise the functions of a majority. Many of those who stood alongside the PPP, when the PPP was fighting itself for democracy, would have never expected this behaviour. Even under the PPP it was expected that the simple majority would be recognised with no distinction between a majority of fifty and a majority of one.

The basis for the parliamentary cooperation has to be a resolution to these issues pertaining to the budget itself. As regards the measures themselves, a look at the Estimates suggests a number of interesting facts. We see, for example, what appears to be the movement in numbers, that is between from one year to the next and from budgeted figures to revised figures, suggest that in some places, especially as regard Gross Domestic Product (GDP), there is the manipulation of the numbers in order to attain growth rates. [*Interruption from the Government Members.*] Thank you Hon. Minister. If the Members look at figures for agriculture, over the last four years, they will see what I am talking about. In fact, if they look at the balance of payment figures especially the movement of non-factor services, they will see what I am talking about, so that is one dimension.

When one looks at loans and the borrowing by the Government, the movement from one year to the next also poses a problem, in the sense that the figure posted in the budget, at the time of the budget, seems to vary so much from the out turn at the end of the year, which suggests either that sometimes, as the World Bank was arguing, planning is very poor, because if within the year - it is March now, for example, the revision is effected at the end of December - such wide movements can be seen, then if it not bad planning it has to be synergism in providing figures just to keep the other side of the House quite.

In relation to debt, the Minister's claimed about PPP stewardship, in this regard, is a claim that turned out not to be warranted. At the end of year 2010, Guyana's total external indebtedness, according to his figures, stood at over a billion dollars and by the end of the year 2012 that figure had risen to \$1.358 billion, that is \$318 million increase within two years. The bulk of those loans associated with the debts were associated with projects, many of which we have a difficulty and, of course, one of them would have been Skeldon... I mention this to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that the expansion of debt needs to be informed by some criteria...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have, as a per arrangement, spoken for one hour. It is fifteen minutes to conclude.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker [Mrs. Backer]: I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Mr. Speaker: It is to conclude. He has spoken for one hour. Is it to continue? The understanding that I have is one hour for certain frontbenchers and fifteen minutes to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Exactly.

Mr. Speaker: It is one hour and fifteen minutes.

Ms. Teixeira: No Sir. It was an agreement that Mr. Greenidge be given one hour, thirty minutes plus two fifteen minutes extensions, therefore equalling one hour. That was the agreement we had. If it is that on the very first day we are breaking the agreement, then I do not know what we are doing in this budget. Thank you.

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: One second please...

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, please allow me.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Backer: That is not the agreement we had. As Ms. Teixeira was leaving here we spoke for about an hour and I said a further extension... If she was going to say, "Well, yes, it is supposed to be fifteen minutes to conclude"..., but we had an agreement was that if he needed an extension beyond the hour, he would get it. We said it right here.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, that is totally incorrect. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I be heard, please? That last time we need to do is to address this matter in such a public fashion. The document, which I have before me, states thirty minutes plus two fifteen minutes extensions, which is sixty minutes, with a fifteen-minute extension. That is my understanding. If it is not the understanding of both sides of the House, I would ask that we

take a recess and fix it and come back, but I will not have us discussing this matter in the open because it is bringing the House into disrepute in the manner in which it is done. Mr. Greenidge, I apologise to you and I ask that we take five minutes and I will see the Whips in my office please.

Break for discussion with the Chief Whips.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, in discussion with the Whips of the Government and Opposition, it is being determined that, given the seriousness and the size of the portfolio that Mr. Greenidge has as a remit to oversee, he will be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Greenidge, I invite you to proceed. Please accept our apology for the interruption.

Mr. Greenidge: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I know you have nothing to apologise for. These are parts for the courses, as it were. I was on the question of debt and raising a concern that one would have expected to see the Minister or one would like to see the Minister, since he has not done so far, provides some guidelines for the contracting of debt in future for especially the rate at which it is increasing is significant. May I just remind you, Mr. Speaker? Since this is an issue that the other side speaks a lot about, that the volume of debt contracted by this Government, in the last ten years, has exceeded the total volume of debt contracted by its two predecessors, the PNC as well as Dr. Jagan's Government, so it is not something that is insignificant. There is a large amount of external indebtedness here and it needs to be noted that to the extent that the debts are spent upon activities, such as at Skeldon, which do not yield the return when they are supposed to yield them, and we will end up having to pay more taxes, including the VAT than we need to do. That is the importance of the point that is being made here.

In view of the time, I am going to perhaps be a bit eclectic in dealing with the other issues. Let me say that one of the areas that needed attention, and we would like to see a more detailed, a more care on it, has to do with the treatment of youth. Under the Government of the late Dr. Jagan as well as the PNC Government of the late Mr. Burnham the country was faced... I mentioned that because it is not a new problem, it is perennial problem but they had the initiative, both of them, to try and deal with the problem of the large and growing youth

unemployment. In the case of Dr. Jagan, there was, of course, the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary (MMA) project which was a major effort to be made to tackle unemployment. Subsequently there was, of course, the question of the Youth Corp, Guyana National Service, MMA, for example, on the PNC side, to deal with the question of unemployment. We have no similar initiative of any import or of any worth in relation to the current budget before us at a time when there is the unemployment problem and it is probably even greater than it was in those times. I would urge the Government to have a look.

We, ourselves, had made a proposal. Again, when speaking to the Government, the President seems much interested in an initiative that we were proposing which would work on, first of all, on providing immediate employment, which would at the same time deal with the environmental decay that is taking place around us and it will combine it with the training for the young in relation to a range of skills in place, including entrepreneurial skills. This was a proposal. The President seemed responsive at the time. It seemed that we could have gone forward if we could have discussed the modalities. Nothing has happened. It seemed to have died a death. Elsewhere, countries faced by unemployment amongst youth of the same magnitude they are putting in place major measures, including measures for helping young people to get apprenticeship of any number. The point is that when these proposals, which the Minister mentioned, are looked at they are insignificant, relative to the numbers affected.

If I might jump to the question of old-age pensions, its arrangements, I think, are something of concern to us after discussing this, again, with the Government last year, and the Government, having indicated in a first instance that an interim payment would take it to \$10,000, we are appalled to find one year later it cannot even see it fit to move to \$15,000, at a time when revenue levels have increased substantial and significantly, when the moneys collected from the VAT, for example, are significant over the preceding year and yet, with resources available to it the Minister boasting about the size of the budget, there is this mean-spirited response to a major need, a major group that is challenged. If you look, Mr. Speaker, we were speaking in relation to VAT and the expenditure of moneys on basic items, the movement of prices for food and for medicines over the year 2012, as a whole, have gone up by a ten percentage point. This is more than the five per cent paid across the board to public sector workers.

The issue here is a very important one. We are saying that a variety of concerns have been raised.

A number of issues, mentioned by the Minister, have not dealt adequately with the needs of the poor. I know that the Minister is going to cite what he is going to be proposing, in relation to water and electricity. The point is, in relation to those areas, that not all pensioners will benefit from them because of the way in which the arrangements have been set out, and that is going to be the problem there.

As regards of my final set of points, Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the Guyana Power and Light (GPL), again, are emerging as a major factor here. I was at pains to point out the importance of institutional reform, the importance of organisational change and depoliticisation of our major corporations. This, again, was the subject of discussion with the Government. I am emphasising this because making suggestion to Government is almost as throwing water off a duck's back. It ignores them. There are numbers in the Estimates that suggest that output levels would move positively and significantly from one year to the next. The point that I was making earlier, which seemed to have upset our colleagues on the other side, is this: To the extent, it only shows the numbers are increasing, but the factors that are supposed to enhance the output are not there. In other words, the investment levels do not seem to go in that direction.

The reform of the corporation is non-existent; depoliticisation is non-existent, which means no change is going to be effected. When the Minister comes to us and tells us that GuySuCo will only required \$1 billion in transfer this year, we do not believe him, because he has already established a reputation for being in love specifically with the Contingencies Fund, so no sooner will we pass these votes then he will come back. The Auditor General, over the last six years at least, has drawn our attention to what I would regard as serial abuse of the Contingencies Fund, up to the year 2010. The 2010 Auditor General's Report attests to that specific and therefore that is a matter that the Minister needs to address. We do not believe him; he is going to come back for more money.

The \$11 billion to GPL, Mr. Prime Minister, in response to our demands for reform that will justify the moneys and to give us the assurance that the Government will not be asking for more money, gave us a - I do not know what to call it - a plan of some type. Here we are, a year later, it is asking for \$11.2 billion, beyond the amount approved last year, which was \$6 billion. We have here a black hole. The combined sugar and GPL are a black hole in which resources of

taxpayers are being thumped and this is being taking place at the expense [Dr. Singh: Putting money... [inaudible]... is a black hole.] Yes. It is a black hole because the only point in putting money there is if you are going to fix it and since you have made no attempt to fix it, in relation to GuySuCo, we are promised a plan.

Let me conclude... [Interruption from the Government Members.] I never mentioned sugar workers. Sugar workers are your problem if you believe that is the thing. The opportunity... [Interruption from the Government Members.] Well, you did not show any interest looking at the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) because up to now there has been no proposal. The President promised that the Government views on the NIS would be laid in this House by September of 2012. We have not seen them. Instead of fixing a board, which has given away a lot of investment income, we have just seen a transfer of \$125 million to the NIS. That cannot fix the NIS.

Mr. Speaker, what I want to conclude is to say that the financial position of the Government has been quite favourable compares to previous years. That is the case now; that is my reading of the Minister.

In spite of this, the opportunity to fix management and political problems has been missed due to a political obsession about the no dialogue. The measures demonstrate political denial and the ignoring of public concerns, in the areas such as corruption, which, in fact, is getting worse, and nepotism especially, as reflected in the story of the frequencies, is again getting worse. I am not going to call any names but the Members on the Government side know who I am talking about. The programme allocates resources primarily to the privileged few and if the allocation of capital expenditure is looked at one will see a dramatic reduction in the quantity of resources made available to agriculture, no logic, but yet it is doing better this year. I do not know whether the Members on the Government side have noticed, but I notice that they are not shouting now.

There is the Transport and Harbours Department which is cut drastically at a time when it has major vessels that seem to have high operating cost.

There are a number of issues here and the point is that the budget has been framed in relatively easy financial circumstances but the measures, especially the relief provided to the poor and vulnerable, are far less than the figures suggest we could afford, especially when compared to the

sweeteners provided by the Government to their friends and cronies. There is a certain meanness of spirit underlying the proposals which the Minister of Finance has tried to hide by various tricks and sleight of hand, what, in the fairground in England, is called smoke and mirrors.

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

Mr. Speaker: It is my understanding that the Minister will be given one hour and should he need any extra time I will be allowing that extra time, given the vastness of his portfolio and he does have two Ministries under his remit.

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]: Mr. Speaker, allow me, first of all, to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for the production of a budget that seeks to realise the dreams of Guyanese; that seeks to set the framework through which Guyana would move forward and our people would advance. Budget 2013 is the embodiment of hope, the spirit of optimism and the definition of Guyana's dream. The future is ours. It is Guyana's time - *waka waka*.

It is not my intention to be dragged along an aimless road of negativity. It is not my intention to be dragged in a debate that seeks to castigate Guyana and does not analyse the plan that resides in the budget to take us forward. In the more than one hour of rambling from the Hon. Member, which concluded a few second ago, he failed to address, or acknowledge, all of the ten measures announced by the Minister of Finance. That is what I call sleight of hand. The argument that VAT brings burden to the poor and the consumers without acknowledging the fact that that sixteen per cent replaced a thirty per cent consumption tax is sleight of hand - that is sleight of hand. It is not what the Minister of Finance produced here.

The Hon. Member denigrated us. He said that we missed the lecture on "Public Finance." Well, my dear professor, Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge, the champion of the poor, the man who knew exactly what to do to improve the conditions of the poor, in 1990, had this to say...

[*Interruption*]

2.47 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, allow the Minister to make his presentation. Hon. Minister, can you quote the source from which you are about to...

Mr. Ali: In the Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge's own words...

Mr. Speaker: What is it you are quoting from?

Mr. Ali: Budget speech 1990 titled, *Laying the Foundation for Growth in the 1990s*.

Mr. Speaker: Very well.

Mr. Ali: This is what the Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge said:

“The Government was, of course, especially concerned about the rise in the price of certain essential goods. The retail price of rice, for example, rose by 224 per cent in the first two months after devaluation, and that of cooking gas rose by 244 per cent.”

[**Member:** Who was the Minister again?] That was the Hon. Carl Barrington Greenidge.

As I said, it is not my intention to go down and recap the state of Guyana, the state of hopelessness. Over the last seven years, this Government has transformed the economic landscape of our country. This Government has created a stable business environment that encourages both domestic and foreign investments. May I say that every single one of the statements I make here I will substantiate with facts a bit later.

Secondly, we have improved the quality of the country's social and physical infrastructure, improved access to shelter through the provision of housing to low income families, expanded the economic base of the country so that it is more resilient to external shocks, improved the competitiveness of the domestic economy, improved the country's human capital, strengthened the national institution responsible for safety and justice, reduced poverty and inequality, maintained fiscal prudence and, most importantly, restored hope in Guyana.

Let us examine some macro-economic fundamentals. Let us examine facts surrounding Guyana today. Over the last seven years, we grew by almost 4.5 per cent on an average. When we compare this to other countries within the region, we would see that Guyana, during the period 2006 to 2011, grew at 4.53 per cent compared with 0.73 per cent, 0.03 per cent and 2.82 per cent for Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago respectively. This is not what the Minister of Finance said; this is what is reported in the *Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC) 2012 Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Let us look at Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. The average income which would give us the average income and improvement in the well being of our citizens, the GDP per capita, increased from US\$1,694 in 2006 to US\$3,148 in 2012. Is this not progress? Is this not advancement in our economy?

One can argue that the increase in per capita GDP can have inflationary effect, but this has not been the case here in Guyana. Why it has not been the case is because of the same measures that the Hon. Carl Greenidge characterised as black-hole measures. It is the subsidy on key and important commodities and services that this Government took on behalf of the people that would have ensured inflation rates remain stable. You may call it black-hole measures, but it is these measures that ensured we had inflation decreasing to 3.5 per cent.

The Hon. Member raised the question of investment. Let us look at Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and what the evidence is in relation to this. The growth in Foreign Direct Investment between 2006 and 2012 trended upwards to \$1,326,000,000 dollars. Our Foreign Direct Investment in 2006 was US\$102.4 million. Our Foreign Direct Investment in 2012 accumulatively stands at GYD \$1,326,000,000. This is as a direct result of the confidence investors have in Guyana, the confidence they have in our economy and the confidence they have in this PPP/Civic Government leading a prosperous Guyana.

Let us look at domestic investment. The best indication of the expansion in domestic investment is the growth in loans and advances to business enterprises by the banking sector. One has seen a growth in advances and loans to the private sector from \$30.6 billion in 2006 to \$82.6 billion in 2012. We were able to stimulate Foreign Direct Investment; we were able to build the confidence with our local investors, our Guyanese investors, to the extent that they have expanded their investment portfolio to advances in loans and grants.

This is for the avoidance of any doubt. The Hon. Carl Greenidge made a statement that there is some consensus somewhere that none of us are aware of which seeks to portray Guyana as a country facing tremendous difficulties. Let me quote some of the consensus which we will provide the evidence for. Kari Grenade and Denny Lewis-Bynoe in their study entitled, *Reflecting on Development Outcomes: A Comparative Analysis of Barbados and Guyana*, which was published in the Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies, showed that the growth in our local

economy outpaced that of Barbados since 2006. According to the authors, sound macro-economic management and institutional strengthening, coupled with deeper social cohesion and political stability contributed to this outturn.

More recently, Kari Grenade and Sukrishnalall Pasha in a study entitled, *Accelerating Guyana's Growth Momentum*, which was published in the Journal of Developing Countries Studies last November, revealed that the local economy posted above normal growth rates between 2006 and 2011. According to this study, the local economy grew at a faster rate when compared to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, due particularly to higher domestic investment, FDI, net flow and trade.

The study also noted that the rate of economic growth between 2006 and 2010 was significantly higher than rates reported during the period 1998 to 2005. The 2012 survey by ECLAC noted the following about our growth prospect for 2012: in the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean, the strongest growth to be posted by countries with natural resources endowment, especially Guyana and Suriname, while the other countries in the sub-region will see growth of between 1.0 per cent and 3 per cent.

The *Caribbean Economic Performance Report Jan-June 2012* by the Caribbean Centre for Money and Finance also noted that the commodity-based economies of Guyana and Suriname are expected to record growth in excess of 3 per cent in 2012 and 2013, while Trinidad and Tobago continues to experience slow growth over this period due to continuing challenges to business and consumer confidence.

Meanwhile, Article IV of IMF Surveillance Report of 2011 noted the following:

“Guyana’s future looks brighter despite the many challenges. With a fifth consecutive year of economic growth, Guyana is beginning to lock in gains from recent years of fiscal consolidation. Prudent and sustained macro-economic policies have developed resilience in the face of external and domestic shocks. There are growing indications that the private sector is building up major plans for the exploitation of Guyana’s sizable natural resources while the public sector is proceeding with large investments in infrastructure, including in the electricity sector. Over the medium term, the LCDS should help Guyana compete better on the global stage and unleash opportunities for lowering poverty.”

Let me quote again, what the IMF said, "...unleash opportunities for the lowering of poverty". Every piece of evidence here, Hon. Carl Greenidge, has debunked your ramblings about Guyana's future. None of it comes from the Minister of Finance; all comes from external and independent sources.

Let me give you one more. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospect Report for 2011, while noting that there are threats to the United States economy and a struggle by European countries, argued that Guyana's economy is projected to grow by 5.6 per cent during 2013.

The story continues. I have a booklet, which I will publish, on all that is said and is being said about Guyana even as we speak here now.

As a result of our economic success, we are no longer classified as a highly indebted country. Let us speak of the issue of debt sustainability. Listen to this: as a result of our economic success, we are no longer classified as a highly indebted country, but now reclassified as a lower middle-income developing country.

In the international publication, we are no longer characterised by a shortage of critical consumer and intermediate goods such as fuel, food, machinery and foreign exchange necessary to obtain these goods. Instead, we are a nation on the move with an economy that is posting high growth rates and creating great opportunities. We are witnessing return migration for the first time in history.

This is what we call the Guyana dream, and this is the dream we will work after until every single Guyanese inherits a component of this dream. It is time for all of us in this House to strip ourselves of selfish desire. Let us unite. Let us join our hands together and ensure every Guyanese can live the Guyanese dream of owning their own home, the Guyanese dream of having education, and the Guyanese dream of having equal access to health care.

On the issue of building human resource capital, the Hon. Member spoke about this and the lack of human capital. What he failed to realise is that, in this Budget, the Minister of Finance is making available \$52.2 billion for expenditure in health and education alone. The ICT strategy, which is aimed at young people and single parents, is testimony to the fact that youths and the

vulnerable part of our population form the core group that this Government is seeking to remove from poverty and improve their living conditions.

The Hon. Carl Greenidge just woke up and realised that he needed to say something on pro-poor approach to growth. I wish to send him back to 2006 to the presentation of the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh so that he could see that the entire medium term strategy of Guyana was premised on the pro-poor approach to growth and development - not only now, the entire medium-term was premised on the pro-poor approach to growth and development.

Let us answer a very important question on the availability of finance. We can say that the Government has a big capital programme. We can say that mining is doing well. I hear this argument sometimes, not only in here, that the construction sector is doing well, but we must beware of a bubble. Yes, we must be careful, but let us look at the financial soundness and financial viability of our local financial institutions.

A casual examination of the prudential indicators of financial soundness and stability will reveal that the banking system is adequately capitalised, highly liquid and capable of coping with various risks. As a matter of fact, the ratio for the LFI stood at 20 per cent at the end of December 2012 when the international accepted standard is 8 per cent. Twenty per cent is our ratio when the internationally accepted standard in 8 per cent. This is viability. The local financial institutions remain viable and financially sound. Why is this? It is because of the policies, the institutional strengthening and reforms that the Minister of Finance led in modernising the financial sector of this country.

Having said this, it is not surprising – and I want us to listen to this – that our banking system is ranked 30 out of 142 countries in terms of soundness. We are ranked 30 out of 142 countries in terms of our soundness. Who ranked us? It is not the Minister of Finance who ranked us, but the World Economic Forum of 2011-2012 Report. In other words, our financial reforms are responsible for greater access to credit and at lower cost by the local private sector - not only access, but lower cost. Why do I say this? GDP was 24.15 per cent, during 2012, of lending of advances to business, compared to 14.12 per cent in 2009. The average lending rate – I am not going down that old road, Mr. Speaker, when the average lending rate was 42 per cent – in

December 2006 was 13.12 per cent. The average lending rate today is 10.1 per cent. So, not only is the access to capital improved, but, more importantly, the cost of capital has also reduced.

The Hon. Member raised the question in terms of the cost and ease of doing business which I am most willingly ready to answer. The Minister of Finance recognises that everything is not perfect. He recognises that in living the Guyanese dream, we need to improve ourselves. That is why he outlined and made it very clear that there are 60 measures that we are going to put in place to improve our ranking on the doing business indicator. We are setting ourselves the target that within five years, once we accomplish the implementation of these 60 measures, we are going to move our ranking from its present position to 80, in line with the Caribbean and Latin America.

Guyana has a steady GDP growth rate of 5 per cent. Let me just edify the Hon. Member. Carl Greenidge. The action plan will be enacted over two to five years and will consist of more than sixty competitiveness and efficiency enhancing reforms which will be implemented in a coordinated manner across ten targeted policy areas, namely starting a business, dealing with construction permits and licences, getting electricity, registering property, getting credit, protecting investment, paying taxes, trading across borders, and enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency. Those are the broad areas in which we have targeted measures that will see our ranking improve dramatically in the next five years in the growing business indicator. First they asked us why we are not doing it. Now when we are doing it, they are asking why we have not done it five years ago. Mr. Speaker, come on, what are we doing here?

Poor infrastructure characterised the Guyana that the Hon. Carl Greenidge presided over. He raised the issue of SIMAP programmes that targeted investment and pro-poor approach to growth and creation of wealth. What he did not say, by his usual *sleight of hand* approach, was that Budget 2013 provides \$27.7 billion; 13.3 per cent of the Budget would go towards programmes like that which SIMAP would have implemented.

Let us now turn our attention to structural production transformation. The Marriott Hotel, for instance, would yield a positive net present value of estimated \$6.5 million over a 10 year holding period. This is equivalent to a rate of return of 11 per cent. The total value creation or

value-added impact of the project is estimated to be approximately \$17.4 billion during the construction phase alone.

If you look at the Airport expansion, based on the economic feasibility study, the Airport Expansion Project is estimated to yield an internal rate of return of 11 per cent. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) has experienced continuous growth in passenger traffic over the last ten years. The official statistics show that passenger arrival increased from 99,317 passengers in 2001 to 156,910 during 2011, a growth of approximately 58 per cent. During 2012, passenger traffic increased further by 16 per cent, significantly higher than what we experienced worldwide of 5 per cent and in Latin America and the Caribbean of 8 per cent.

Mr. Speaker: What is the source of your references?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, the source on the arrivals is the Cheddi Jagan International Airport.

Mr. Speaker, let us look now at what the Hon. Member, Carl Greenidge, sought to ignore in his presentation by his usual *sleight of hand* approach. Let me show you how these measures would ensure Guyana continues to progress and would ensure that the most vulnerable, the poor, are secured and their livelihoods protected.

The Hon. Member referred to this issue of sugar and GPL as a black-hole approach. The Hon. Member said that sugar workers are our problem. Let me say this: if the sugar workers are our problem, it is a problem we happily accept! For us, sugar workers and the sugar industry are not a problem; it is a solution; it is an opportunity for us and for Guyana! At no time will we abandon the sugar workers! At no time will we abandon the sugar industry! Call it our problem; call it bailout; call it black-hole; we are going to stick with it because we believe in it.

In a similar vein, we believe in the bauxite industry and we are going to stick with it; we are going to work with it; and we are going to fix it because we believe! We, on this side, believe in the Guyanese dream. We believe in the vision. We believe in the opportunity. We believe that Guyana comes first and we believe that Guyanese should come first! Nothing that you say would stop us from believing. Nothing that you say would cause us to lose hope. As President Obama said, "Hope is essential for success," and, for us, hope is the foundation upon which we stand for the future of Guyana.

3.17 p.m.

The \$1 billion transfer to assist the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) to implement its transformation plan. The value of GuySuCo to the economy extends beyond financial consideration, that is, the profitability of the organisation. The value of this industry has to be seen in wider macroeconomic context. We must be mindful of the wider socioeconomic implication. It is no secret that this industry employs approximately 18,000 directly. But, more importantly, it supports at least 100,000 indirectly, that is, 24000 households. Do not call it a dark hole. [**Hon. Member:** It is.] Don't! These are the lives of people in 24,000 households. Do not say that it is our problem. Members cannot be responsible and say that. Let us be responsible. People are looking at us. People are listening to us. Let us provide the leadership that people want us to provide. Join us, Hon. Carl Greenidge. Let us be nationalistic for once. Let us let this policy work for the people. Let it safeguard the industry. One hundred and twenty thousand Guyanese depend on it.

Furthermore, GuySuCo earns in excess of US\$100 million. If the Corporation is allowed to fail, there will be considerable foreign exchange loss to the economy. The impact on foreign exchange currency market would have wider implications for national economic well-being. It would threaten exchange rate, Mr. Nagamootoo, and price stability with implication for the import of critical capital and consumer goods. Declining foreign earnings could trigger depreciation in the exchange rate.

Let us now look to the support for the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Inc. The \$5.8 billion to support GPL cash flow requirements represent an effective subsidy of approximately \$34,940 per consumer per annum. Are you saying, in rejecting this subsidy, that you are going to deny the ordinary Guyanese of that incentive where the Government is taking up a cost of almost \$60,000 on their behalf? Of course, Mr. Speaker, they must concern themselves because this subsidy is what is going to mitigate cost increases and against price increases. Or, is it that the Hon. Carl Greenidge is saying that we must allow the 28 per cent increase to be passed on to the consumer? We say, "No!" The gains from the economy must be translated into benefits for the vulnerable and poor, and that is why that subsidy is there.

The Hon. Member asked what benefit it will bring to GPL. The capital injection would also reduce line losses by 2.2 per cent and translate into savings amounting to \$596 million annually. For Linden electricity, there is a subsidy of \$2.2 billion. This will translate to a subsidy of \$279,801 per customer.

Old Age Pension: Old age pension was defined as old age pension by the Hon. Member, but the old age supplement is not a pension. The old age supplement is given to ease the burden of the vulnerable persons in our society, especially the elderly. What is the real value? The real value for the more than 42,500 citizens, who are the elderly, is not only the increase of 25 per cent. If one adds the subsidy for water and the subsidy for electricity, one is talking about a real benefit of \$18,745 for every pensioner. That is the reality. It is \$18,745 per month, Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, not \$15,000.

The Hon. Member asked about tax reform. Although we have not gotten the report as yet, the Government is sticking to its commitment to have reforms that will bring benefit to the society.

Companies: If one looks at companies, and let us assume that a company now owns net properties amounting to \$40 million, under the previous structure, the company would be required to pay taxes of \$276,000. Under this new structure, that company would only be paying \$187,500 in taxes. These are small companies.

Property Tax on Individuals: Under the old structure, assuming it is the same \$40 million, companies would have been paying \$231,250. Under the new system, it is substantially reduced by almost \$35,000.

Mortgage Interest Relief: Let us look at a low income earner in the upper unit, as defined by the banking sector. When one applies the mortgage interest relief, one would see that if that tax earner – we are talking about young people owning homes for the first time – takes the cost savings, as a result of the interest rebate, and apply it to the principal, they would save two months' money every year. When that is translated to a 25-year loan, a person is saving almost four and a half years from the loan payment time. If that is put into cash and 48 months is multiplied by \$40,000 per month, one will get the cost saving that will resound to the young people who are first-time homeowners.

Tourism: Let me be the first to say I agree that we need to solve, in a holistic manner, the issue of airlift for Guyana. We have to solve it. We must find that solution and the Government is aware of this. That is why we are launching a public/private group which will go to Atlanta, where most of the head offices are, to negotiate and find that solution for Guyana. We need to create a new culture. We need to create a culture for the tourism sector. We need to understand what the value of a tourist is. In understanding the value of a tourist, it will allow us to understand the magnitude of change that we need to make in our culture with regards to how we treat tourism.

We are going to start that process. We need to remove barriers in the tourism sector. That is why the investment in the new airport and the investment in the hinterland airstrips are important components of the Tourism Development Action Plan. Nowhere else in this region can a municipal airport boast of an average of 100 takeoffs per day. The Ogle International Airport can boast of 100 takeoffs per day. Name one other municipal airport that can boast of that.

Performance in the Sector: Tourism arrival in Guyana increased by 12.6 per cent, only surpassed by Mexico with 13.5 per cent. This is the statistics of the Caribbean Tourism Organization. Room stock moved from 1,716 in 2006 to 3,000 in 2012. The Marriott Hotel would add 197 rooms.

To verify the fact of the increase, Kaieteur National Park has had an increase of 142 per cent in 2012 over 2006. Arrivals at Kaieteur National Park were 2,754; arrivals in 2012 were 6,667. Let us use a private enterprise. In 2006, Arrowpoint Nature Resort had 2,880 visitors. In 2012, Arrowpoint Nature Resort had 3,840 – an increase of 33 per cent.

It is now time for us to focus on our image. We have to develop an image for Guyana, that image that will sell us to the world; that image that will drive traffic to us.

Let us look at some of the potential that exists. These are the testimonials from articles and celebrity visits:

“Guyana – Avatar on Earth”

This was said by Bob Payne from *Condé Nast Traveler*.

“Guyana is South America’s biggest little secret.”

That is from *BBC Wildlife Magazine*.

“Totally Tropical”

That is from Mike Weedon, *Bird Watching*.

“In God’s Garden”

That is from *Wonderlust Travel Magazine*.

“If you want to see wildlife, Guyana wins hands down. It is just stunning.”

That is from Mike Russell, People and Wildlife Manager, Sussex Wildlife Trust.

“This is a lovely country. Kaieteur Falls is magnificent and I heard that you have to drink the water to return. I will definitely do that.”

Who said this? It was Ms. Leila Lopes, former Miss Universe. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, allow the Minister to speak. I am not getting to hear him. Could you repeat the last reference?

Mr. Ali: I want to say this: the cultural change for the tourism sector must start here. Here it is I am describing the positive image of Guyana in the eyes of celebrities and listen to the behaviour from the Members on the other side. How are we going to move forward?

“This is an amazing country. The people are warm and there is so much beauty here. I will tell all of my friends to make a trip to Guyana.”

That is from Miss Anna Maria Horsford, an American television and film actress.

“The spirit of ecology is everywhere. The children are very proud. Their environment... which is often found in today’s world. My trip showed me a new way of travelling. Kaieteur is an untouched splendor. Amazing to find such an incredible sight that is still so pristine.”

Appearing on the Late Show with David Letterman, on 27th June, 2012, actor Channing Tatum shared details on his intense ten-day excursion that he took into Guyana's rainforest. This is what he said:

“It was truly one of the most beautiful things I have ever done.”

We must drive traffic to Guyana and we want to target our Diaspora aggressively. We have launched the Rediscover Home campaign. We are taking this very seriously because that market has a potential number of tourists in excess of one million persons. It is our view that we can target, in the first two years, at least 30 per cent of that market. In doing this, we are creating packages around national events and holidays. Several packages were developed to encourage this and they are being advertised in the international media.

We also have to target new markets, develop holiday packages, targeting backpackers and students for adventure tourism. To this end, we have a team of young volunteers who will go to the University of West Indies and they are going to try to lure students to this amazing adventure in Guyana, so that they can come here and enjoy their summer vacation.

Sport fishing, the yachting rally, late in September, and the birding festival are all part of special markets that we are targeting. There are 13 new tourism projects that are currently underway with a total investment of GYD \$39 billion. Triple A Investment, Da Silva Grand, Windjammer International, Oxford Flight, Roraima Duke Lodge, Platinum Inn, the advanced Guyana Pegasus, Millennium Manor, and Mackey Hotel Swimming Entertainment are all part of this grand plan in which more than \$39 billion from the private sector would be invested into the tourism sector.

Housing: Our vision remains a nation housed in sustainable settlements. In Budget 2013, the overriding objectives of Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) for 2013 are premised on the following:

1. Continuing to facilitate access to decent housing by all Guyanese;
2. Increasing the ability of Government to address the needs of special groups for sustainable and affordable housing;
3. Enhancing the ability of homeowners to improve and expand existing shelters;
4. Consolidating and expanding partnerships for sustained growth of the housing sector;

5. Providing houses to target groups, vulnerable and moderate income;
6. Continuing to stimulate local economic development;
7. Create the environment for transitioning; and
8. Empowering communities through participatory planning and development.

In terms of squatter regularisation, we had a total of 216 areas to be regularised. A total of 171 areas have been regularised so far, representing 79 per cent. Forty-five of the areas that are not regularised are along what we consider to be zero tolerance zones. Approximately 800 households are to be relocated along these zones and it is our task this year to commence that process.

In terms of our allocation, in the last five years, we have been able to allocate 28,582 lots. Remaining in the system, applications to be processed remains at 30,000 so we still have some amount of work to do. The average age of a house lot allottee is 35 years old. These are young people, young professionals.

In addition to this, we will continue to host the International Building Expo. The turn-key houses have been a hit. As a matter of fact, we have constructed almost 300 of these homes and the demand for these homes is increasing. That is because, through economies of scale, we are able to construct these homes at an average cost of \$6,000 per square foot when the national cost is about \$9,000 per square foot. We are constructing homes for professionals at \$7,000 per square foot when the national cost is almost \$10,000 per square foot.

We have developed many partnerships – the public/private partnership, the partnership of professional groups, partnership with clerical service sector workers, partnership with construction companies and hardware suppliers, and partnership with financial institutions.

It is our hope that through these partnerships we will be able to target specific groups, meet their needs, and fulfil their expectations, their decent expectations of owning their own homes, of realising the dream of their families living in their own homes and turning their own keys. It is this great Guyana dream that we will work hard to realise. On behalf of the many young people who would be first-time homeowners, I want to publicly thank the Minister of Finance and his staff for ensuring that this measure was put in place to accommodate, fulfil, and advance the dream of these young professionals and young people.

For the very vulnerable, poor, and disadvantaged, we will continue our core homes project. We will continue to ensure that we reach out to that group and that we fulfil the dream of that group, for all of us have dreams. We will ensure that we create infrastructure, that we build a mechanism, and that we implement the mechanism so that every single Guyanese would not only dream of, but will be part of, homeownership and advance their lives.

Water Sector: We have developed a strategic plan for the water sector that will see the company break even in the next five years. Our objective is to ensure that the company breaks even within the next five years.

We are going to try, in that plan, to reduce non-revenue water from 65 per cent to 35 per cent, increase treated water coverage from 49 per cent to 80 per cent, develop an integrated water resource management strategy, improve energy efficiency, improve sewage disposal efficiency, and increase collection ratio from 70 per cent to more than 80 per cent. I am brave enough to put the targets that we have set ourselves because we are confident that we are going to achieve them. We are confident and we will hold ourselves accountable to the achievements of those goals and targets. But, we hope that the Opposition would facilitate the accomplishment of this target by giving its support to the Budget and by ensuring that the budgetary injection is given. **[Mr. Nagamootoo: Can we drink the water in Georgetown?]** Of course you can.

Let us look at what would be the impact of the investment in the water sector on the economy. The generation of demand for almost 10,000 sacks of cement; the generation of demand for almost 2,500 loads of sand; the generation of demand for almost 15,000 cubic metres of stones; the demand for nearly 5,000 metres of greenheart timber; demand for almost 25,000 thousand pipelines, which would have a direct linkage to the manufacturing sector where the growth in local production of pipe and pipe fitting would grow by almost 7,000 pipelines...This is the impact of this Budget. This is what this Budget brings to our people. This is the hope it creates.

I want to conclude by saying that all of us, this afternoon, must band ourselves together. We must send one message out there with one voice and that is that all of us in here care about the Guyana dream. All of us want to be a part of the Guyanese dream and from today we are launching operation Guyanese dream. From today, let us all live the great Guyanese dream.

The Hon. Minister of Finance noted, in his presentation last week, that Budget 2013 makes provision for everyone, including the 42,500 old age pensioners who will be part of that dream; the 184,000 taxpayers who would benefit from a reduction in personal income tax rate and will be part of that dream; the low income households and young professionals with first time mortgages will now be able to repay their mortgages in shorter time periods, resulting from the mortgage relief, accomplishing their dream of home ownership; the 18,000 workers directly attached and more than 100,000 indirectly will benefit from the fiscal support to GuySuCo, realising their dream of a decent standard of living; hinterland communities will benefit significantly from the land titling and demarcation programme; hinterland scholarship programmes to benefit more than 388 hinterland students realising their legitimate dream of decent education. This is the Guyanese dream; the dream that was never there; the dream that this Government has ignited in all of our Guyanese brothers and sisters.

Single parent mothers will now be able to access a first-time loan under the expanded Women of Worth (WOW) Programme. Over 64,000 school children will continue to benefit from the School feeding programme - the Guyanese dream.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your stipulated time is up. Could someone ask for an extension for the Minister?

Ms. Teixeira: I ask that the Hon. Minister be given an extension of five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Ali: Small and medium scale businesses will receive collateral guarantees, interest subsidies, grants, development services, which include management and technical services training.

3.47 p.m.

More than 166,000 customers of GPL as well as 10,363 consumers of Linden will continue to benefit from subsidised electricity; the legitimate dream of having access to electricity. Businesses and private individuals with significant net assets will now benefit from the adjustment of the property tax regime. Some 180 street dwellers to benefit from the completion

and operationalisation of the centre for rehabilitation and reintegration; some 200 elderly persons who reside at the Palms Geriatric Institution will now benefit from improved care; over 2,500 young people will now benefit from training under several skills training programmes; \$1.7 billion set aside for the University of Guyana, will benefit students pursuing various areas of studies.

It is this dream, it is this hope, that we have built this budget. This hope for a better Guyana, this hope for an improved Guyana; this hope that all our people will prosper; all our people will have improvement in their lives. It is this hope that will drive us along the dream that will see every Guyanese accomplishing their ambition right here in Guyana. Together we will, together we must; together we will move forward, together we shall. I commend Budget 2013 to this House.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. I invite the Hon. Member Mr. Keith Scott to address us at the end of which we will take our recess.

Mr. Scott: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Comrades all, at many social gatherings when someone gets heated, I would hear wise old men say, “the man in liquor is the man himself.”

(Power outage)

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Scott, take it as they say from the top.

Mr. Scott: Which one?

Mr. Speaker: You have your full time.

Mr. Scott: I have been asked to repeat. Maybe GPL knows that my relationship with them is not so good.

As I was saying, at many social gatherings when someone got heated I would hear wise old men saying, “The man in liquor is the man himself.”

Mr. Speaker: In liquor as in alcohol?

Mr. Scott: Yes, “the man in liquor is the man himself.”

Mr. Speaker: Member, is this a reference to a Member of the House?

Mr. Scott: This is a popular saying. The uncharacteristic vituperation flowing from the mouth of the Minister of Finance at page 1, bullet 1.1 of the Introduction to his Budget has left me asking is this my dear friend. It reads:

“The past 14 months have rendered a veritable plethora of examples of Parliamentary action, occasioned at the behest of the Opposition’s one-seat majority, that consumed valuable legislative time and effort in futile, unproductive, and oftentimes counter-productive pursuits. Whether it be attempts to cut essential budgetary allocations or deny an elected Member the right to speak, the moving of motions or passing of Bills that defy reason and collide with our Constitution or, perhaps ultimately, attempts to amend the very Constitution by the slendermost of simple majorities with no attempt at consultation much less consensus, the Courts of Law and the courts of public opinion have both been condign in their judgement.”

When I heard that explosion of attack, I could not believe it was my friend who would have said that. I asked myself is this the preferred way to persuade APNU and AFC as against reasoned consultations that your budget measures are the best for all of us? Are we only good people when we abdicate our responsibility to our constituencies and to the citizens of Guyana and agree to whatever the Government puts on the table? What does that mean when in his conclusion on page 3 bullet 1.11 he called on “all others to join us in the steady march to further develop our country?” It is development according to whom? Real development will only be realised when there is respect and meaningful consultation between the Minority Government and the majority Opposition.

I come now to what I call the “Ali show”. Listening to Ali... [*Shouts of Hon. Ali*] I do apologise anytime I miss on that because I do like the idea of saying Honourable for all Members. I have no problem with that. I like to hear Mr. Ali speak. He took me to lofty heights when I heard his expostulations when he was talking about what glorious things would happen. He reminded me of Macbeth where there is a part which says, “It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound of fury signifying nothing.” He speaks of growth. Has this growth he spoke about been translated into more jobs? Tell us then what is the unemployment figure in Guyana? How many teachers are

retained as a result of proper pay? Tell us also what are the full CXC passes in all subjects, not some, as against the rest of the West Indies. Why does land under his Ministry sell for nothing less than \$500,000 per house lot as against the old days when there was another government and it was \$10,000 per lot? This is a country with less than one million people and 83,000 square miles which translates into less than 10 persons per square mile. It tells us therefore that we ought to be in a position to actually give land away as the way in which the west was developed – go west young man and you get free land. We ought to be in a position where we can say to young families go and take land and develop. It is not happening. Instead local people are asked to find at least \$500,000 while overseas persons – persons who have a United States (US) residency of some sort – the same land they have to pay a certain kind of inflated amount. This is not the way to develop a housing programme.

Then he went on to talk about being in love with the sugar workers. When I heard him talking about the sugar workers and how he was going on, I know he was at a show because I almost cried. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government which likes to boast about the representation for sugar workers is the very Government that threatened to derecognise the sugar workers union when those people decided to agitate for a decent minimum wage.

Comrades, we object and shall never support the incompetence of GuySuCo. We will not be fooled with the charade where we are seeing sugar workers at the top, when in effect, it is really GuySuCo that we are talking about. We will not keep sending money into a hole to waste behind a corporation that has failed time and time again that had a turnaround plan that has spun out of control and now we are hearing about a new turnaround plan. We cannot support that. This is not sugar workers. It is because we are concerned about the welfare of the sugar workers that we have to make sure that money must not keep on being wasted down the line.

There was a time when the major parties in this country shared the dream of a tri-sectoral economy. It was a participatory partnership between government, private sector and the cooperative movement. The phrase that “the small man will be a real man” was meaningful because you would remember how many poor people through the self-help housing programme acquired useful skills and also were able to build their own homes. This type of economic model was successful because it afforded not only the wealthy, but the small man to grow. He also felt

involved in building a nation and seeing tangible results for his sacrifices. Now this Budget confirms the shift to openly supporting the business sector. It is called the new engine of...

(Power outage)

Mr. Speaker: Guyana Power and Light just sent a message to say they had an unfortunate incident with a breaker. Proceed Mr. Scott

Mr. Scott: This Budget confirms the shift to openly support the business sector, the new engine of growth, at the expense of the majority of citizens. There is little here in this budget for the poor. We all know the song, “the rich get rich and the poor get poorer.” Consider the expectations of the poor as they wait to hear of a reduction in VAT, the receipt of a living wage and the creation of value added enterprises like in fishing, timber and gold. Their hopes have all been dashed; they get nothing while the better-off are smiling all the way.

The Minister presents a bigger budget than its predecessor. This year the budget is \$208.8 billion. We have come to expect this, followed inevitably in a few months time by the requests for supplementary approvals. Each year we are told of economic growth. This year we are told to expect a 5.3 percent growth, and to expect for the eight successive year, positive growth. Why then do we have 50 percent of the population earning US\$300 per household per month? When will some of this great wealth begin to flow in the direction of the poor so that they too can rise above the poverty line? Now is the time for an increase in wages. We had asked last year for 10 percent across the board in the first instance for public servants and for an increase in the minimum wage. The Minister says our economy is healthy with positive growth rate, so why is he silent on a call for a reduction of VAT? Why instead of heeding our call for 10 percent across the board for public servants and for a living wage, he breaks his silence only to tout multiyear wage agreements as accepted by the teachers union. There is no increase in wages. The Government persuaded teachers to accept a multiyear deal of five percent sweetened with a number of things like duty free cars for some headmasters. However, in exchange for a multiyear agreement, they in fact really got nothing, nothing extra that others persons who did not agitate received. So those who did not participate in agitating for an increase also got the same 5 percent. So nobody got anything extra at Public Service Union (PSU) – your union. So why go through the trouble to fight for an increase, is what they said, when all will get the same thing.

We say today, that multiyear agreements lock in unions, inflation and wage value outweigh this trend, collective bargaining must be retained and we shall continue to battle for collective bargaining for all workers and their unions.

Mining is one of the traditional pillars of our economy. The Minister gushes that gold production has reached unprecedented levels. More jobs, he claims, will be created. What he has not told us is the real cost of this money to the society as a whole. Go to internet and google “Major General (Ret’d) Joe Singh” and the pictures you will see of our rivers will show the unbelievable discoloration and damage to our river banks as a result of dredging and other mineral extraction in the interior. A few days ago we saw the deadly effect of the outbreak of water borne diseases in Region No.1 as residents of Port Kaituma struggled to contend with polluted water from the river. There is a quote, “only when the last tree has died, the last river has been poisoned, the last fish has been caught will we realise that we cannot eat money.” Tell us then Mr. Minister since gold production was the highest in history, even 20.8 percent higher than last year, how much will you set aside from this wealth to clean up our rivers? How do you intend to restore our river banks and how do you plan to enhance the capacity of the Environmental Protection Agency and other environmental forces so they can adequately police mining operations ensuring best international safety practices are maintained so the residents can live in a clean and safe environment. Show us that some of the wealth extracted will be used to help the small man enjoy a better standard of living.

This Finance Minister is a magician. He knows how to dispense handouts some real and some imagined. He is a master of illusion. Here the elderly is given a \$2,500 top up on their pension. He says 42,000 pensioners will now receive \$12,500 each month from May instead of January as would have been the decent thing to do. Since last year the APNU pointed out that the minimum a pensioner should receive should be somewhere around \$15,000. Now in 2013 I find it should be at least 20,000 a month. It should be paid from January this year. We must stop referring to these pensioners as non-contributory. These pensioners have paid their dues; (they have already contributed in the past. [APNU Member: Unlike Jagdeo] You cannot say Jagdeo you have to say Mr. Jagdeo. [APNU Member: Doctor, Doctor, Doctor] No, sorry you cannot say Doctor either. Doctor is honorary, not given to a person to say Doctor; one has to say Mister. If you are doing the curriculum vitae of someone, then one says he has a doctorate. Unlike Dr. Singh, he

has earned his. These pensioners have paid their dues; they have contributed. It is on their sacrifices that today we stand. We honour them and acknowledge their contributions. It is therefore not too much to give them a living pension so they may live the rest of their lives in comfort. We ought also to refer to the contribution now with a dignified name.

The real handouts continue – GPL and GuySuCo – and these we should examine. The Minister speaking on the sugar industry asserts:

“No effort must be spared to ensure the long term viability and competitiveness and profitability for the industry.”

He confesses that the \$39.5 billion dollars was spent to re-capitalize and support this industry and that last year he transferred \$4 billion for the same purpose. We have been hearing about the modernisation of the industry for a long time and a vaunted turnaround plan which could deliver 400,000 tonnes of sugar. Each year targets are set, each year targets a few months later are revised and each year these targets are still not met. We need full accountability for the money poured into this industry over the years. This year the excuses for continued failure are the same as before. However, now he wants \$1 billion dollars to be transferred and a new turnaround plan is to be prepared. The returns do not give us value for money. With an unchanged management team money will continue to be wasted. A new technical team is needed at this industry including the Enmore packaging plant before any transfers can be given safely to this entity.

The same applies to GPL. We just had an example of the success or lack thereof of GPL. People live GPL. Every time one goes home and has to change fridge parts or call in the technician one is reminded of GPL and its gross incompetence. Last year GPL received \$6 billion. In my presentation, I recalled that I had outlined a number of measures that if implemented could have set GPL on the road to profitability. Poor management was identified as one of the main causes of poor performance. Now with the same team, no progress, and consistent failure, Government wants to transfer \$11.2 billion to them. We see what is happening and they want to give not another billion, not \$4 billion, not \$6 billion but \$11 plus billion dollars of our money to GPL. Brothers and sisters how can we support this unbelievable wasteful disposal of our assets, the assets of our people? Until a technical team is likewise appointed to investigate and recommend a way forward we cannot support this measure.

The illusion of gifts to the poor is evident. When the minister announces a contribution of \$1,650 per month to help pay the light bill of a pensioner the illusion continues. The catch is this: this payment is only to a GPL customer. How many of the 42,000 pensioners still have metres in their names? This is where we see the mean-spiritedness of this budget. On the one hand GPL is given billions when the poor receive a little over one and a half thousand dollars. This so called saving of \$590 million is already contained in the billion dollar transfer of gifts. This is not a gift to the poor at all. It is a further bailout for a failed industry.

After 20 years and billions of dollars spent on wells, water supply programmes, and miles of transmission of mains residents of East Coast, East Bank, the City, and the hinterland should have been adequately supplied with a regular supply of potable water. We still have low pressure; we still have contaminated water and the outbreak of gastroenteritis and other water borne diseases.

4.17 p.m.

School children still have to travel long distances to fetch water... [Mr. Nandlall: ...Where] [Hon. Member (Opposition): ...Sophia] Do you want to go to Sophia or Barnwell North? I will go to Barnwell North then. Over head tanks are still needed. Persons still have to buy treated water, thus driving up the cost of delivering water to households.

Martin Luther King in a 1967 speech, asked, “Why is it that people have to pay water bills in a world that is two thirds water.” We are a land of many waters and we see no relief to our water costs. The delivery of water to the first storey still remains an elusive dream.

When it comes to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), every single contributor becomes nervous. The scheme is in dire straits and could very well collapse. The blame for this must be placed squarely at the foot of the Board’s Chairman, Dr. Roger Luncheon and the Board members. To begin the rescue of this scheme, the Board must resign and then a thorough investigation into its stewardship for over the last twenty years must be undertaken. This is a Board which has ignored actuarial warnings in 2001 and 2007.

They only woke up last year when they saw the first deficit of \$371 Million. It was in the 2011 Report; that was when they woke up. They made poor investments, like for example, \$6 Billion

was given to CLICO and we can expect, of course, no returns on that loss. They gave \$2 Billion to the Berbice River Bridge and as yet still no returns. Not even reduction in the cost of travel over that bridge. They have a large amount of self-employed persons also, in the mining, fishing and timber industries. These persons remain outside of the compliance net. They are aware of the corrupt practices of some business bodies who prefer to pay their way rather than meeting their obligations to the Scheme and they wrongly blame, for this failing, an aging population.

In order to hide one of the actuaries' recommendations of raising the contribution to 15%, they raised it instead by 1%, it is now 14%. In order to please their friends in the new found favourite sector, they engage in what I would term questionable legal practices, by agreeing to pay the employers' portion of the increase, along with the employees' portion.

I can understand if they wish to cushion the effect of the raise on poor workers, but what help can you want to give to an employer? Is it because the Private Sector Commission rejected the raise of any reforms for the NIS, unless there was a complete revamping of the management?

In spite of this side of the budget, the measures proposed do not help to bridge the gap between the income earners and the wealthy. In fact, it satisfies the wealthy, while it is silent on wage increases for the poor. The vision of creating value added industries and jobs is not yet realised. The school dropout rate, the drug problem, the pervasive corruption continues without adequate remedies. Discrimination in the awarding of contracts, the building of roads in supporters areas while other areas are given far less attention, the general lack of consultation and the secrecy surrounding the award of contracts and the signing of agreements, as in the case of the New Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation (New GPC) for drugs. The selection of companies for Amelia, Marriot and the Cheddie Jagan International Airport (CJIA) expansion project among others, all contribute to a lack of trust and confidence in this Administration.

They can redeem themselves however, by according the respect to Trade Unions, restoring the convention to the Critchlow Labour College, by reaching out to the people representatives and by governing on behalf of all Guyana.

The Opposition will remain vigilant on behalf of all of Guyana, but we stand ready to engage in meaningful consultation in an effort to build a better country for our children. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. This is a convenient moment for us to go in the recess for one hour. We will resume at 5.20 p.m. Thank you and enjoy your refreshments.

Sitting Suspended at 4.23 p.m.

Sitting Resumed at 5.23

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I invite the Hon. Minister of Public Works, Mr. Benn to address us now.

Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]: Thank you Mr. Speaker for this opportunity to enjoin the debate on the 2013 Budget, the Budget which speaks essentially on realising the hopes and dreams of Guyanese. I say realising the hopes and dreams of the Guyanese people because I listened to the speaker on our side before me, the Hon. Mr. Ifraan Ali, whose presentation I would not be able to replicate; a wonderful presentation, which falls in the same vein as the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh.

I thought momentarily to myself, *oh to be young again* because here it is, after many years of struggle and hard work and as we raise our kites, the Guyanese people, this Easter on the seawalls and all over the country, there is a realisation amongst all the people, in spite of our quarrels, challenges and the critiques on all sides, finally we have come to the point where we are living the dream and that we can realise the dream of the Guyanese people here and now.

There have of course been understandably, criticisms proffered by speakers on the other side of the House with respect to the budget. I am still really worried that at this day and age and from learned technical persons on the other side mostly we would still be debating the issues of Value Added Tax (VAT). That we are somehow still ignoring the fact that in instituting VAT, Consumption Taxes of up to 35% were removed in relations to establishing the VAT regime and that there is a long list which we will perhaps have to print out and share out again with respect to the items which are Zero Rated for VAT. It is surprising that today and in this day and age and in this Parliament, we are still discussing the merits of VAT and declaring that VAT should be removed. It is surprising and it is disturbing.

If there are suggestions as to the removal partially or totally of VAT, we must have an answer of what is to replace it. We must have an answer as to where the funding is going to come from to

continue the important social programmes and to continue the major infrastructural works, which are required to continue the development of our country. That is the answer we need. We do not need emotive outreaches or emotive attempts to try to pull at the ideas and understanding of the poor, the youth and the unemployed. With respect to this Budget Debate, we need to have a serious discussion on the issues which are presented in the measures and a clear understanding of the measures which are already in place to ensure that we have good stable economic growth.

This stable economic growth has been achieved year and year for the last seven years. This is a remarkable achievement for any young developing country, such as Guyana, which has come out of a morass over many years of economic stagnation. This stable economic growth has been achieved in the face of great difficulties and I do not have to mention the difficulties we have had even last year and where even last year I think some of the steps we took in this House was a matter for regret on both sides of the House.

I want to say to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and there was some Shakespearian quote, Macbeth, which was made in this House about a tale told by an idiot. I do not want to wax Shakespearian in this House, what I would like say is that if there is any present or former Finance Minister in this House or even before who can point to seven years of year and year growth in Guyana, when the regional and international economic landscape is littered with economies which are in trouble. I can go to Europe, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, Greece; I can go to the issues of the regional economies which were also mentioned. If I can go to those things then I want to be on the side of those idiots who presented this Budget, which has given us seven years, year and year growth in Guyana. That is the side of the idiots I want to be on in this Hon. House because any Finance Minister, any Government, any Presidency, which can deliver the average of 4.5% or 5% growth over the last seven years to this country... And this is not simply the Finance Minister delivering or the PPP/Civic delivering or President Ramotar delivering, this is what Guyana has delivered to the Regional and world economy. This is what Guyana delivers; this is Guyana's contribution to the Regional and World Economy in a time when many economies needs support for food and for many issues, particularly food, budget support and all those issues, this is what Guyana has delivered. This is what Guyana does not have to go out to, to beg for, this is what Guyana is producing in terms of its rice, gold, wood, and the efforts of its people into the World Economy. So I believe I am on the right side of the House with respect to this issue.

We have just had and I need to mention this, the example where we celebrated one hundred years of aviation in Guyana; flying. I made a point where I suggested that despite all of our religious, ethnic, social, political and all those perspectives, in the aviation industry where we have to prepare and put the planes up to fly, everyone does their job professionally. Everyone makes sure that everything is done at every level of the industry from the ordinary worker, the sweeper, the engineer, down to the pilot and the loaders of the plane to make sure that the planes fly and that we have no tragedy nor a collapse of the industry. The fact that flying aviation is the safest form of transport in Guyana; the fact that it is an example for the Caribbean in terms of the industry; the fact that it continues to deliver the critical support to the Hinterland and indigenous communities, these facts speaks so much for our Guyanese people when we all work together in the national interest because that is a national interest.

If there is anything I would say in appealing here this afternoon, it is that in spite of the different directions or the different perspectives on our country's development, we paid particular attention to how we fly and that when we fly, we must land safe. That is the duty of each and every Member of this House to make sure that that is realise, irrespective of all our perspectives on national development and politics and other social issues.

One other issue which I am unhappy with in the presentation on the other side is what appears to be an undisguised attack on the Private Sector. I am surprised to note that statements are being made which suggest that the Budget openly supports the business sector. That the engine of growth is the Private Sector, the way it is set. I think it has been a clear policy over all the years that the Government, through its National Development Strategy took the approach. I always was under the impression that it was supported by both sides of the House. That the resources of all Guyanese at all levels would be garnered towards the development of the country and the efforts towards public/private partnerships, the Ogle Airport Inc. the Berbice River Bridge, all of these efforts and the discussions we have even now with respect to fashioning a public/private model for the Demerara Harbour Bridge and its maintenance, that all of these issues would have the support of both sides of the House.

I would be very unhappy and I think we need a definitive statement from the Opposition benches on this matter as to whether indeed they do support a public/private partnership as one of the pillars which would move Guyana's development forward. We need a definitive statement on

this issue because the funds held, controlled and owned by private persons in their individual capacity and as corporations are necessary to help develop the country.

Yes, indeed the Private Sector is an engine of growth of Guyanese economy and we should not cast aspersions on the question of public/private partnership and on the question of garnering private resources into the effort to develop the country.

There has been said that this is a new engine of growth at the expense of the poor. I was under the impression that the investments, whether it is by a big corporation, whether it is by a private person who has gone out there after “working in the bush: for many years and he has bought an excavator to go out in the “bush” to do mining. [Mrs. Backer: Which bush?] In the interior, since you know it differently. I would have thought that if that man or person makes that investment, if he lays out that investment and he hires in excess of twenty persons, that he has a multiplier in the economy of a hundred persons and that he is earning an income and livelihood to Guyanese, to his employees and to those who are in the multiplier train that his investments refers to. This question, this undisguised attack on the Private Sector, as I said, needs a ... [Mrs. Backer: A statement] ...an irrevocable statement from the other side.

There were talks about black holes, that the question of support to GuySuCo of \$1 Billion would not be supported and the support to Guyana Power and Light Company (GPL), no support it was said; this bale out to GPL. Can I pose the question? In whose interest is their support to GPL going to; who benefits from a support to GPL? Which people; which segment of the population; which class of people? Does it not rebound to the benefit of the poor and working people, the old people and the pensioners, not mentioning the support in the budget with respect to direct support to pensioners? In whose interest is this support being made? Of course, it has to be in the interest of the poor and working people largely that this intervention is being made, without with electricity rates will raise. I am surprise that persons in this House would stand up and say they will not support this intervention by the budget. They will not support this budgetary measure. [Mrs. Backer: Unless.] There was no unless said about it, but I would be happy to hear the “unless”, after I am finish you can rebut with the “unless”.

There were issues about the support to CLICO, the \$2 Billion that the NIS made to the Berbice Bridge Company...

I thank the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh again for giving an exemplary budget; Dr. Ashni Singh and his staff for giving another wonderful budget. For having us stay on course with respect to the prudent measures which are needed and expected by the people and are warranted with respect to Guyana staying and remaining on course, so that we overcome the challenges together and we accelerate the gains that we have made over these years.

A new generation of Guyanese will have indeed solid things to build on, solid infrastructure to build on, solid sea defences to build on and solid roads to build on. We as I have said before are building anew in Guyana, after many years we are building anew. We have gone past the stage of repairs - running repairs - as was said by a Hon. Member the last time, we have gone past the phase of rehabilitations; we are also building anew in Guyana. Not us alone, not the Government alone, not the Government through its efforts. If we look at any housing scheme, if we go down Regent Street or in any commercial district in the country; if we go to New Amsterdam or Corriverton; if we go to Amelia's Ward; if we go to Bartica, the Guyanese people are building anew in an environment of hope and in an environment of realising their dreams here and now. So I say again, old to be young again.

The Government by its requirements to this Ministry by way of this budget will continue to solidify and concretise our gains and take our infrastructure to new heights and to accelerate the development that is required for our country.

Infrastructure development as we all know and expect is critical to synergising our economy to making the linkages, not only the domestic linkages, but the linkages to our neighbouring countries, to Suriname, Brazil and onwards towards Venezuela. We have been working hard to realise the effort, to make the best use, to optimise the resources which have been given to the Ministry with respect to the Ministry of Public Works programme.

In 2012, we were given \$19.5 Billion with increases we have had an expenditure of 81.4% of our programme in 2012. I would say that based on interventions, some amount of confusion engendered by the budgetary exercises last year in this Parliament, there were delays and mis-scheduling to some of the activities which we intended to undertake. I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, that the best effort of the Ministry, its engineers and workers are

being expended to ensure that we have the best use of the resources in respect of our budgetary allocations.

We have spent in the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation some \$2,268 Million with respect to Capital Works in 2012 and we have continued the work of the fabrication of buoys, pontoons, rehabilitation of cluster piles, the fabrication of end posts, the supply of wire ropes and other issues for this amount.

5.47 p.m.

We have made replacements to ropes for anchorage, one hundred and seventy eight in 2012; sheaves – eleven; connecting posts - thirty eight; buoys - twenty one; deck plates, an ongoing activity constantly - four hundred and sixty six and particularly, the retractor hydraulic raft, a major exercise for the Harbour Bridge, done in good time and at good cost last year.

The Harbour Bridge has seen an enormous increase, a 6.5% increase, over 2011 in terms of its traffic and the daily average traffic has moved from 7,553 vehicles per day to 8,010 per day.

Marine traffic has increased from a total of 1,152 transits in 2011 to 1,219 transits in 2012, a difference of 5.8%. The average retraction times have remained essentially the same with respect to our financial numbers. At 2011, there was a total expenditure of \$348.5 Million in terms of expenditure. In 2012, there was an expenditure of \$347 Million. The total income in 2011 was \$422 Million and in 2012 there was an increase in the income of \$432 Million, yielding a surplus at the end of the year of \$85 Million.

There was indeed, in terms of significant disruptions, on the 23rd of July, 2012, the inability of vehicular traffic to transit the bridge for two days, while there were repair works being undertaken on span 6061 and a tremendous effort had to be put in place to refloat the pontoon sections and bring the facility back into service.

We have recently installed traffic lights at the intersection with the Demerara Harbour Bridge and are looking at making the intersection more efficient in terms of traffic disposal. At the moment, we are undertaking a prefeasibility study, with a completion in June with respect to three options for a new Demerara Harbour Bridge. The three options are the Versailles, Houston access, the Schoonord, Peter's Hall access and the Patentia, New Hope access. \$300 million have

been provided in the budget for 2013 for the continued maintenance of the bridge. We anticipate that the bridge has to remain in serviceability for at least the next six years before a new crossing at the outside... six to seven years before a new bridge will come into place.

In terms of roads and bridges with our international partners, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) a number of projects are still ongoing, some are roll over projects and I will give a status on these projects. We have practically completed the East and West Canje Roads, 19.5 kilometres at a cost of US\$9 million. The contract was H. Nauth and Sons, a national contractor. We have practically completed the BlackBush Polder Roads, 34 kilometres of road, practically completed at US\$6.7 million. The contractor is BK International, a national contractor. We have completed the first section of the access road to the international airport, 3.5 kilometres, practically completed at US\$1.62 million. The contractor is BK International, a national contractor.

The four lane expansion on the East Bank of Demerara is underway. There have been delays due to the relocation of utilities. We looked at the contract duration to May, 2013, but these delays will have some impacts. Lot 1 is under DIPCON Engineering Services Ltd. of US\$8 Million. Lot 2 is under Guyco Construction and General Services for US\$5.8 Million dollars and under BK International Inc. for \$3.4 Million. I would point out that one of the issues in doing this road is that to assure that we have a stable embankment over the life of the road, we are installing vertical drains, which allow for or which requires a settlement time of six months before the embankment is stable enough to build on, which is why and it is built into the contract. Which is why it appears to some people that the work is progressing slowly, but that is the schedule of construction with respect to the installation of vertical drains.

We have the remedial works on the third road projects, 75% completed. Delays have been engendered due to surges or aggregates. The project cost is \$2.1 Million, we believe with the completion of this work, the access into Georgetown on its southern side will be much eased and this work is being done by DIPCON Engineering Services Ltd.

Under bridges and culverts in various lots we have a 35% completion with a project cost of \$5.4 Million. Kears's Engineer Inc. and V. Dalip Enterprise are two national contractors who are engaged in this work.

Under Nationally Funded Projects, we have 2.5 kilometres of new access road to the international airport, it is 60% completed. We have had delays due to issues regarding the relocation of the Timehri market vendors and the removal of Guyana Telephone and telegraph (GT&T) infrastructure. A new market has been completed and this work is underway. The four lane upgrade on the East Coast of Demerara is 25% completed. Lot 1 was awarded to Falcon Transportation Construction Services, the contract was terminated for fundamental breach of contract in June, 2012 and the incomplete works have been awarded to DIPCON Engineering Services Ltd. under public tender for the sum of \$522 Million.

The other lots, lot 2 is again under DIPCON Engineering Services Ltd.; lot 3 is awarded to Courtney Benn Constructing Services; lot 4 is under Compustruc Engineering Inc.; lot 5 is under DIPCON Engineering Services Ltd.; Lot 6 is under Colin Talbot; Bridges at Better Success is under Contractor Sukhai; bridges at Three Friends, Sophia are under Deodat Singh and Courtney Benn Constructing Services Ltd. respectively.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is up. You will need someone to move an extension for you.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Minister be granted fifteen minutes to continue his presentation...

Mr. Speaker: Conclude.

Mr. Hinds: Conclude.

Mr. Benn: Continue.

Mr. Speaker: It is to conclude. Thank you.

Question put, motion carried

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, our force account unit made an expenditure of 99.8% of its total allocation of \$236 Million and they have maintained 359 kilometres of roads, mostly in the city of Georgetown and I may mention Irving Street, Sheriff Street, Duncan Street, UG Road, Water Street, Seawall Road, Camp Street, Barr Street, Younge Street, Thomas Road, Mandela, Soesdyke, Linden Highway, Homestretch Avenue, Carifesta Avenue, the Railway Embankment,

West Coast Demerara, East Coast Demerara, West Bank Demerara and the East Bank Demerara Roads, which is hole-patching, weeding of roads, grading and shaping of shoulders, digging of drains and road markings are all the activities which was undertaken.

In addition to the expenditures directly on the roads, we have spent \$9 million from the force account work with respect to clean up exercises in Georgetown in the first instance and then a second trans-effort at \$3.8 million for the cleanup of garbage in Georgetown.

On the issue of road safety, we have been seeing and noting reductions in travel time and vehicle operating costs, the extension of the service life roads and the increase in driving comfort on the roads. Certainly, we are not yet ourselves satisfied that we are at the point where we ought to be with these issues, but along with the efforts of the Guyana Police Force and the Ministry of Home Affairs, we have seen a steady reduction in fatalities and accidents on the roads in our country, in spite of a dramatic increase in the number of vehicles on the roads. The number of vehicles on the roads have been increasing by almost ten thousand units annually and in spite of this great increase in the number of units on the roads and also in the miles driven, we have had a continued decrease in the number of fatalities on the roads in Guyana and I think this is a tremendous development with respect to safety on our roads. The efforts of the Guyana Police Force with their speed guns, with the issues of impaired driving and also the installation of the infrastructure with respect to traffic lights, highway lights, safety barriers, chevrons and those issues which we admit are not yet at the level where we want it to be, I think have all gone into having us achieve this result and it is a matter that we are continuing to work diligently at.

I would mention on the issue of traffic and lights and highway lighting that we have had quite a bit of damage with respect to the infrastructure. Damage both to improper use on the road or accidents on the road and also particularly with respect to vandalism on the road and it is a matter that we are still working at. Still trying to get the all round support which would result in some segments of the highway lights and traffic lights being out of service for too long a period of time, while we put in place an improved supply chain with respect to compliments which are damaged.

The Amalia Falls Road is under construction. The Hon. Members may be aware that the contract with Synergy Holdings was terminated as a result of what I term a fatal flaw which was the

absence of a performance bond. There are a number of contractors, including the Ministry on section two, but section two to seven are under construction by various contractors and we look forward to the completion of the road and its requisite bridges this year. There are issues of course with the availability of materials for the most preferred servicing materials for the road, the cycle time to haul that material and the alignment and sections of the road and areas of the road, which turned out to be deep swamps and where the equipment was lost by the previous contractor.

On interior/hinterland roads, we have been working on the rehabilitation of the Santa Rosa, Kwebana, Akira to Waramuri Roads; the construction of the five miles Bartica Road; the construction of the road at Dog Point; the construction of the Karasabai Monkey Mountain Road and I may say it is now possible to travel from Karasabai to Lethem in an hour and fifteen minutes at best, if too fast, from a previous time of eight or ten hours. The Karasabai Monkey Mountain Road area which is further up the plateau is some 70% completed and the Katunarib Bridge is also 70% completed.

In discussion and critique of our budgets there was mention made of what were termed flag ship lump projects. It was said that the attention by the Government of these flag ships, so called lumpy projects, that the Government has no responsibility for the poor with respect to a focus and overwhelming focus, I believe, a bias towards these large projects.

I would suggest that the lumpy project, which we have been paying attention to, the project to build a road from Lethem to Linden is a necessary project. It is a project we have had the studies by Moth Mc Donalds and others with regards to the prefeasibility and the feasibility study and this is an important project which in the first instance would see the development and advance of Linden as a port not only for the bauxite and timber exports of the Linden area, but for northeast Brazil, in terms of soybeans, in terms of rice which is not being developed there in the Savannahs, but particularly for Northeast Brazil. Linden is the first port of effort. [*Interruption*]

The other lumpy project which we have been considering, is the expansion of the Cheddie Jagan International Airport and we have turned the sod; we have broken the ground and we intend to build a runway extension of 1000 metres and a new terminal building which will fit all, which will fit the best standards for international travellers to our region and realise the hopes and the

intention of Guyana to exploit its dual strategic position, to be a hub for international flights, north and south over the continent and east and west to Africa and Asia and to the homelands of the Guyanese people; the ancestral homelands. The ancestral homelands are Africa, Asia, China and Siberia. Those are the ancestral homelands of the Guyanese people.

However, there has been some discussion in the press as to the quantum of money, I repeat as I have said before in this House, that there are allocations intended and made at a time and convenient to get certain sums of money and support from the People's Republic of China, the Xingbang of China with respect to this project. The detailed engineering analysis are now coming out with respect to the project, but this project, since we have broken grounds, is a go and within two years Guyanese can expect to travel cheaper, in greater comfort and over greater distances as a result of this airport.

There was mention made of failures of some airline operations and schedules which we had approved, low cost – low budget airlines, Ez Jet and Red Jet. There have been questions as to the sustainability of these operations and there are questions as to the competitive environment in which these low cost carriers intend to operate. We want to repeat, as the Hon. Minister Ifraan Ali identified, that we will leave no stone unturned to make it possible for low cost travel to and from the Guyanese Diaspora and to open new markets with respect to tourism and business for Guyana to take advantage of its position with respect to low cost carriage.

The discussions which have to go on with Caribbean Airlines and with other carriers with respect to issues of fuel cost, with respect to what may be termed otherwise predatory prices, are issues that we have to work with and those are issues which are challenges in the international aviation environment at the moment internationally and locally.

We have had great difficulty with respect to issues with our domestic marine transport. We have had a great growth with respect to smaller boats, twenty or thirty foot boats carrying a one hundred and fifty or two hundred horsepower engines. We have had a great growth in that sector as a result of mining as a result of forestry and other support activities related to those two. We have had unfortunately a number of accidents. I would be the first to apologise to the Hon. House that we have not gotten on top of as yet, the growth in this area and in ruling out

comprehensively, which we are still working at, the safety and other interventions which needs to be in place with respect to assuring greater safety on our water ways.

We intend to continue to make sure that the Speedboat Associations comply with the safety measures. We intend to make sure that they make the necessary design changes which we have proposed to them and which are working well on various routes. We are requiring that they put in place a safety representative on each association and we are training for the first time in many years, twenty four marine cadets to become captains, pilots and surveillance assistants, surveillance cadets...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is up, but I would permit that he be allowed to wrap up.

Mrs. Backer: Wrap up, take 15 minutes.

Mr. Benn: I like you when you are nice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to close in saying that we in the Ministry where we have many young engineers, average age I think is 27 years or 28 years old, young Guyanese who are working in Guyana and are not opting to go out of Guyana. They are staying here to work and our engineers, who developed these lists with us for the doing of miscellaneous roads or urban roads, do not subscribe as we do not ourselves, to issues of discrimination and all those things with respect to the doing of these roads. There is no issue about that. If I look at all of the roads that we do and I will lay in all the roads which we are doing as part of the record for my speech. If one were to map them, using GIS and GPS and all those newfangled ideas, it would be clear to any unbiased observer that the roads, that our efforts on the ground are intended to serve the people of Guyana; all the people of Guyana.

We want that the communities which formerly relies on the foot or bullock cart or heavy 4x4 to have an improvement in their infrastructural support. We continue and want to serve the people's interest. We want to be able to make sure, to be able to do our work of course and to see continued development in our country and continued growth as the Hon. Minister Ashni Singh intends, the continuation of peace, unity, secured livelihood through our jobs and expansion of jobs and through an improvement in social support.

On closing I would like to call on all the Members of this House to continue to work at the challenge, to let our people's progress towards prosperity continue, to let us all live the Guyanese

dreams; to let our children, the generations that we create on all sides, to let them have a better life than we ourselves have had. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister. I now invite Mr. Bulkan to address us.

Mr. Bulkan: Mr. Speaker, I rise in relation to the motion before us, the one standing in the name of Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni K. Singh, Minister of Finance and which seeks the approval of this House for the eventual spending of \$194,343, billion, plus several hundred thousand dollars being the estimates of expenses for financial year 2013.

I would like to begin my contribution by making a reference to something that was said by the previous speaker, the Hon. Minister of Public Works. The Hon. Minister did say that it was not his intention to wax Shakespearian, but what he did wax on was the question of road safety and road fatalities.

6.17 p.m.

Apart from the fact that I am not so sure what road safety and road fatalities have to do with today's budget I notice that the Minister also referred to the widening of the East Bank of Demerara road into a four-lane road and touting this as part of transformational projects, even though they consume vast amounts of money, the benefits of which are unclear. By that, I mean, currently the four-lane expansion begins at La Penitence and it goes all the way to the Demerara Harbour Bridge, but on either side of those four lanes, and at any one time, there can be found encumbrances. Here it is we are spending lots of money and, as I said, the benefits are unclear because motorist and consumers do not have access to four lanes. There is invariably an obstruction of one kind or another going in both directions.

I believe it is this institutional weakness and lack of capacity that my colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, spoke of earlier that is hindering development.

Mr. Speaker: Should the obstructions be removed?

Mr. Bulkan: It should have been part of a programme in the first place to see if, indeed, the expansion was sited in the proper place or if it should have been a totally different roadway.

We sat and listened to the Hon. Minister presented Budget 2013 last Monday, a presentation that lasted almost two hundred minutes - one hundred eighty-eight in fact - a budget that the Minister boasted is the largest ever in our country's history at \$208.8 billion and under a theme that surely is a misnomer, given the exclusionary nature of its formulation.

It seems to me – and I am informed by experience and lessons of history - that one should not boast of size, but, if at all, of effectiveness or, in this instance, what the proposed expenditure of over US\$1 billion will do to develop our country - create jobs, raise living standards, address the structural imbalance of our economy, improve access to and the level of education and health services, public safety and public security, reverse the deteriorating state of basic physical and economic infrastructure, address and arrest the spiralling cost of living as well as the plight of the poor and vulnerable, including old and young unemployed females and males, especially those without education, to inform us how this expenditure will reduce the large numbers of employed poor, and to see that there will be better pay and conditions of work for those poor as well as nurses, teachers and public servants, of how this massive expenditure will make a dent on the present prominence of crime and drugs, the prevalence of discrimination and corruption, of the widening income and wealth disparities within the society.

Sad to say, the priority and preferences that the Hon. Minister has presented to this House does not meaningfully address the above concerns in any structured manner, but these are all issues of grave concern to us in A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), leading as they do to a *de facto* simmering rebellion and widespread feelings of discrimination and alienation amongst the population. Under the Minister's recipe we can expect more of the same - cronyism, corruption, and incompetence - where political loyalty trumps merit.

We are told that a few so-called flagship projects, and these include building of the Marriott Hotel, the expansion of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) which the Hon. Minister just waxed defiantly, the Amalia Falls Hydro Project, are going to solve the structural imbalances of our economy, projects that have not been the subject of independent technical appraisal.

I would have thought that the fiasco of the Skeldon Sugar Factory would have been of salutary value, but evidently it is not so.

The financial plan and management of the economy ought to be informed by a vision. In our opinion, it should be one that places people at its centre, therefore, it ought to address factors such as I have said:

- Jobs for our people.
- Improved living standards.
- Improved basic infrastructure.
- Good quality education and accessible by all.
- In short, human development as opposed to growth benefiting just a few.

A central component of this vision has to include, indeed encompass, a vision for the development of the ten regions of our country. I submit that the fashioning of such a plan can only be arrived at by way of meaningful engagement with the ten regional governments that exist.

Regrettably it is necessary that I remind the Hon. Minister, and the Government, that he is a part of, of a few truths. The first is that he holds the office that he does and derives his legitimacy from the election held on November 28, 2011. Those elections were known as General and Regional Elections and electors were required to cast two ballots. It brought into being a central Government and ten regional governments. Under our Constitution, which is the supreme law, the role of Local Democratic Organs is clearly defined. Article 12 states that:

“Local government by freely elected representatives of the people is an integral part of the democratic organisation of the State”.

Chapter VII, which is titled “Local Democracy”, containing articles, 71–78b is explicit. Article 71 (1) states that:

“Local Government is a vital aspect of democracy and shall be organised so as to involve as many people as possible in the task of managing and developing the communities in which they live”.

And most germane is article 77 which states:

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

The Government, therefore, has not just a moral obligation to meaningfully engage the duly and democratically constituted Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), but a constitutional duty to do so. The Minister, in his speech of sixty-nine pages, made no reference to any such consultations or engagement nor did he even allude to any such exercise. The table of contents of his speech lists seven headings beginning with an introduction and ending with a conclusion. In the former, even though the Hon. Minister saw it necessary to indulge in polemics directed against the majority of Members of this House, there is no mention there of engagements with the ten RDCs or of a plan or vision for regional development and or hinterland development. There is reference to “Ongoing stakeholder engagements”, but it does not identify who these stakeholders are. Later in his presentation the Minister qualified what was the prerequisite to be considered a stakeholder, but I will get to that later. In his conclusion, though, there is a solitary reference to the hinterland and it is that ten thousand six hundred and one hinterland families now enjoy solar electricity as a result of the hinterland electrification programme.

With regard to this project, in *Stabroek News*, of March 31 – that was some three days ago - there is a photograph of a solar system installation at the Kako Primary School but the accompanying text informs us that whilst this installation was done in December 2012 it has never worked. I do not know if this particular solar system is one of the ten thousand six hundred and one in which the Hon. Minister referred to, but given this revelation, I would say that if one were to hyphenate the word solar one would get a totally different interpretation of the worth of this initiative. On the other side of the spectrum, the former Regional Chairman of Region 8 openly boasted of having thirteen solar installations at his home in Paramakatoi. APNU will be calling for an audit of this project and of the ten thousand six hundred and one recipients to learn of its usefulness, efficacy and its cost effectiveness.

In between those two headings – I am referring to the Table of Contents of the Minister’s budget speech - there are the following:

- Global Economic Developments.

- Domestic Macroeconomic Developments, listed from A – G.
- Sectoral Developments and the Agenda for 2013, listed as A – H, with many sub headings, totalling forty-four.
- Targets for 2013, and
- Measures.

In all of this, there is only one heading that specifically addresses hinterland or regional issues and it is 4.E,f, vi, paragraph 4.100 to paragraph 4.102, titled “Indigenous Communities.” In these three paragraphs the Hon. Minister informed us that the Government’s aim, and I quote:

“is to ensure that the economies of Amerindian villages are put on a more sustainable path, and that improved social services are delivered to their communities.”

In this regard the respective programmes and allocations in 2012 were the following:

- \$160 million for community development interventions in the areas of ecotourism, provision of agricultural tools, provision of means of transportation and establishment of village offices.
- \$4.4 million was expended to support agricultural, aquaculture and beekeeping projects under the National Hinterland Secure Livelihood Programme (NHLSP).
- Three hundred and sixty-two students benefited from the hinterland scholarship programme and sixty-two students graduated from secondary and technical institutions.

That was it for the year 2012.

For the year 2013, the following interventions are proposed to advance development of our Amerindian communities:

- \$77.9 million for the Land Titling and Demarcation Programme.
- \$350 million for the commencement of implementation of one hundred and eighty Community Development Plans.
- \$66 million towards the Hinterland Scholarship Programme.
- \$200 million to support an Amerindian youth entrepreneurship and apprenticeship scheme.

- \$500 million to roll out the OLPF to Amerindian villages.

There we have it, Mr. Speaker.

What I have just outlined is all that the Hon. Minister chose to highlight in his budget speech, with regard to the Government's plans, vision, programme and initiatives relating to hinterland and regional development. The question needs to be asked [Mr. Hinds: It is not true. It is Amerindian...] If you listen, Hon. Prime Minister, you will find out. The question that needs to be asked: Is this a suitable or an acceptable vision for the development of the regions and or hinterland? I say the answer is an emphatic no. Mr. Speaker, Poverty is widespread in hinterland communities. Sad to say the gold and other extractive resources, which are being dug out from hinterland areas, bring very little benefits to residents of the nearby communities. What accompanies much of this mining activity are various public health crises, such as the outbreak of gastro-enteritis, recently in Region 1, arising from poor regulation and sanitation, anti-social activities, such as prostitution, higher cost of living for those not involved in mining itself due to higher prices for basic necessities, increased criminal activity, unsafe waterways and there have even been deaths due to caving in of mining pits.

What is needed is a comprehensive approach to the needs of the regions and of hinterland communities but this task has to be approached from the bottom up, not top down. In other words, the regional governments have to be meaningfully engaged to identify their priorities. It is not what currently obtains, which is central Government unilaterally deciding what hinterland communities will receive such as an inadequate laptop when young people cannot even get jobs. We have to find out who are actually benefiting from these interventions. Are they the suppliers of goods and the providers of services or the hinterland residents? Seeking to place hinterland economies on a sustainable path has to be a priority of any Government if we are to do justice to the expectations of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I am by no means saying that this budget makes no provision for allocation of funding to the ten regions. It does. Let us look at same. A total of \$22.054 billion is allocated to all ten regions, made up of \$19.453 billion for current expenditure and \$2.601 billion for capital expenditure. To this, is to be added the \$1.371 billion allocated to Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development for a grand total of \$23.426 billion - I see the Hon. Minister is

looking intently as if he wants to correct me - to the regions and the subject Ministry. This compares with a total of \$21.774 billion allocated in the year 2012, or an increase of 7.6 per cent. By and of itself, this percentage increase says nothing; we have to look within the figures to see what they tell us.

The first observation is that the total capital allocation of \$2.6 billion to all ten regions represents 1.25 per cent of the total budget, same as in the year 2012. Clearly a lot more than \$2.6 billion is budgeted to be spent for capital works throughout the country, with expenditure under different programme heads and via different subject Ministries. The objective clearly is twofold, that is:

To miniaturise the scope and authority of the ten regional governments; and more importantly

- (i) To increase the profile of the Central Government, making it to be the sole center of authority and where all have to look toward for access to state resources.

The fountainhead: The Government makes no pretense to disguise this phenomenon, the one of miniaturising the role and authority of all other institutions, whether it is this National Assembly itself or other constitutional bodies such as RDCs, Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), and conversely presenting the executive branch of Government to be the giver of all.

Mr. Speaker, you, as well as Members of this honourable House, will be aware that I have submitted questions, numbers 105 – 113, to various Ministers dealing with the very issue. The question to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for example, sought an explanation as to why no Member from the majority or Opposition in the National Assembly is a member of the joint Guyana-Brazil working infrastructure group which met in Guyana at the end of February this year. The one to the Minister of Amerindian Affairs similarly sought an explanation as to why when she visited communities in the North Pakaraimas in late of the year 2012 and earlier this year she had two members of the appointed element of the regional administration, namely the Regional Executive Officer (REO) and the recently appointed Deputy Regional Executive Officer (DREO) accompanying her and did not invite the RDC of Region 8 to nominate at least one of its members to be a part of her delegation. The question, to the Minister of Health, which was asked, was why was the medical team, which was deployed to several communities in Region 7 in January and February of this year, did not consult with or engage either prior to its deployment or subsequently the RDC of Region 7. These actions tell their own story, and it is

that the Government sees no need to operate within the constitutional framework, rather that it has no compunction in violating the dictates of the Constitution that it is happy to operate via the back door.

When I made a similar observation last year in my response to Budget 2012 speech, the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development had this to say:

“Mr. Speaker, please permit me to assure the Hon. Member, Mr. Bulkan, that the PPP/C Government has not breached the Constitution of the Republic of Guyana and has no intention to do so. The systems, procedures and processes established within the present legal framework for the consultations, compilations, preparation and presentation of this budget were all followed. The programme heads, be it education, administration, public works, health or agriculture, had to present their respective proposed budget to the relevant subcommittees of the RDCs, after consultation with their various constituencies. After those presentations, from subcommittee level, the proposals were taken to the RDCs. There the debates and discussion continued and after approval those draft budgets were presented to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and then on to the respective subject ministries. I am willing to guide the Hon. Member through the process but time does not permit.”

I am now informing this House that those were but empty words. In fact, so hollow was that statement that the budgetary submission of Region 8 was not endorsed by either the Chairman or any member of that council. It was a clandestine submission of the REO and one that was accepted by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The Regional Chairman made several attempts to find out from the Ministry why this unauthorised submission was accepted, but to no avail.

It is very important that these practices and actions be brought to the attention of this House and to the public as they strike at the heart of good governance. It informs the legislature and the nation of the philosophy and mindset that pervades the executive, which is, that the Members will be a law unto themselves, even to the extent of making it up as they go along.

I will provide another example to illustrate this point. It is when the Hon. Member Dr. Ramsammy, Minister of Agriculture, answered questions in this House on December 20, of last

year, seeking to justify supplementary spending. The Hon. Minister's explanation was that the Ministry was taking on more and more of the responsibilities of municipalities and NDCs. It is here in the *Hansard* of the 32nd Sitting, on page 7,094. The Hon. Minister went on to add that there is a danger that persons, who they are helping, would expect that to be the norm. This is why I refer to a mindset. It is one of displacing local authorities and executing a programme of central control, hijacking the process.

Last year I called on the Government to cease this invidious practice of breaching provisions of the Constitution. I do so once more. Again, as well, I call on the Government to engage local democratic organs, as mandated by the Constitution and to see that projects in the regions are not the sole responsibility of a handful of unelected Ministry officials.

Before I move off from the capital allocations and paltry as they are, I will point out that the two highest allocations are to Regions 6 and 2 at \$383 million and \$367 million respectively, or two regions controlled by the PPP/C, and the regions receiving the two lowest allocations are Regions 8 and 7 at \$151 million and \$134 million respectively, both being the Opposition dominated regions. In the case of Region 4, which has the largest population by far, its allocation is less than all the regions with the exception of the two just named and the signal is unmistakable, which is that the central Government will exercise a steel heel on the Opposition controlled RDCs, perhaps in the vain expectation that voters in these regions will someday see the error of their ways and switch allegiance to the PPP/C. It is not going to happen, Mr. Speaker.

Let us now examine the proposals for current expenditure for the ten regions. A total of \$19.453 billion is allocated under this heading. As is the case with capital allocations, Region 6 once more heads the list with an allocation of \$3.785 billion followed by Regions 4 and 3. Bottom of the list is Region 8, which is the only region out of the ten regions with a proposed allocation of less than \$1 billion, \$735 million in fact. This money is allocated under five programme heads, namely Administration and Finance, Public Works, Education, Health and Agriculture. Again, if we look within the figures, it becomes more informative. We notice the following:

- About sixty-one per cent goes to one programme head, that is, Education.
- Next is Health, which receives about twenty per cent.

- Administration and Finance receives about the same amount as Public Works and Agriculture at roughly six per cent each.
- There is no allocation for Agriculture for four regions, these being Regions 1, 7, 8 and 10.

Time constraints will allow me to make just two comments, namely, one, for the four regions in which there are no allocations for agriculture, a total of \$389 million is spent only for dietary provision, meals for schoolchildren. Some of this expenditure could be tied to supporting agricultural activities in those four regions. This will result in job creation – helping to build the hinterland economies - and the provision of a healthier diet and better nutrition for our hinterland students. I would rather suspect that, right now, much of their diet consists of a lot of refined foods which will – I heard the Hon. Minister of Health speaking recently - lead to health problems later on.

My other observation relates to the stipend paid to regional councillors, which is currently \$10,000 monthly. There are a total of two hundred and five councillors across the regions which would mean that the total paid to all councillors, or rather I should say supposed to – I will come to that later - is \$24.6 million annually, if my math is correct. The allocation to Regional Administration and Finance Department is \$1.127 billion plus a further \$100 million under capital, but the councillors, who are expected to be the backbone of the system, receive a mere \$25 million or two per cent of it.

What is democratic about this, Mr. Speaker? Is this the Government’s understanding of article 12 of the Constitution, which I read earlier, or article 77, which mandates that “...the Government shall allocate funds to each region to enable it to implement its development programme” by being stingy towards the elected councillors, councillors who are put there by the people to represent their interests? We are calling for this figure to be set at \$30,000 monthly as from the next budget. We must not only favour the appointed element of the regional administration, we have to reward the councillors who the people have placed their trust in. Incidentally, none of the Opposition councillors for Region 8 were paid stipend for five months of last year or any for the year 2013. It defies rational explanation as an entire region is being punished, it seems, because residents there turned their backs on the PPP/C at the last elections, but those people are resilient. As my colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, said earlier -

he reminded us about his grandmother saying that the Lord does not sleep - those voters are waiting, once again, for the opportunity to demonstrate how they feel.

I do not know if the PPP/C councillors are in receipt of their stipend as the REO of this region, Mr. Harsawack, who is supposed to be the Clerk of the Council, does not volunteer any information to the RDC, particularly in relation to finance and in this he seems to have the support of his superiors.

I would now like to look at some of the interventions that receive funding in the 2012...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. You will need to have an extension of ten minutes to conclude.

Mrs. Backer: Well, I heard two proposals of five minutes...

Mr. Speaker: I am proposing ten minutes so...

Mrs. Backer: Yes. I was going to take the combine proposal and ask that the Hon. Member be give ten minutes to conclude.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. Bulkan: In Budget 2012 I will look at one region and that is Region 8. It is important for us to look at the proposed funding because when the Hon. Minister, when he spoke last year, boasted that with regard to Budget 2011 allocations 96.1 per cent was spent on the capital side and 98.1 per cent on the current side. Overall, according to the Hon. Minister, for allocations to the Ministry and the Regions, 99.1 per cent was spent, "in fulfilling the programs and projects identified in budget 2011". The Hon. Minister was very proud of this and seemed to equate expenditure with development. The lawyers may say *ipso facto*, Mr. Speaker.

6.47 p.m.

On the capital side, profile reference number 350, \$5 million was budgeted for land and water transport. The RDC of that region is unsure if that money was spent and what it was spent on. A further \$14 million was allocated for two bridges at Tumong and Ireng, profile reference number 352. It appears that to date no work has commenced. A further \$40 million was allocated for five

interventions under capital project, profile reference number 354. Of those, just one was partially executed, which was very minor repairs to Mahdia dorms. It was nothing that would have cost anywhere near the \$9 million budgeted for that rehabilitation; \$15.963 million was allocated to build a health post at Princeville and to extend one at Kurukabaru, again very minor work was done and it appears as though the contract for the one at Kurukubaru was terminated; \$2.5 million was approved for installation of solar systems at the Medex quarters at Kato, again it is unclear; \$8 million was voted to buy a Model M Bedford truck and an all-terrain vehicle (ATV), profile reference number 358, for the Mahdia Health Services, neither was bought.

A further \$56.54 million was budgeted on the current side for Maintenance of Infrastructure, public works, line items 6251 to 6255, for works on roads, bridges, drainage and irrigation, sea and river defence. Again, it appears as though none of those works were carried out. Yet when the council successfully carried a no confidence motion against the Regional Executive Office of Region 8 for non cooperation and the government did nothing.

Whilst I have provided a few examples, and it is in only one region, I am convinced that this region is not an exception. I have witnessed the behaviour of the particular Ministry ever since I entered this Parliament and I understand its DNA. It has no respect for local democracy; it believes in central control.

There are many other areas in this budget that I would have liked to address but time does not permit, including the sugar industry, GPL and others. There is one I cannot allow to go unnoticed and it has to do with the national census which is dealt with in paragraphs 4.137 and 4.138 of the budget speech. We are informed by the Hon. Minister that this census started in September 15, last year and that the field enumeration exercise was concluded in December of last year. The Hon. Minister went on to tell us, and I am quoting his words:

“The first deliverable of the Census, the preliminary report which is a quick count of the population, is expected to be produced in the fourth quarter of 2013”.

By the Minister’s admission, it will take one year or possibly longer to produce a quick count of a population of less than one million. What does this say about us as a nation? I heard the Minister spoke about an image, the other Minister spoke of building a new Guyana.

Earlier I referred to what, according the Minister of Finance, is the requirement of the Government to be accepted as a stakeholder. It is given at paragraph 7.1 and it is that one needs to be “likeminded”. It will take more time than I have already spoken to try to explain the philosophy that informs such a statement, so I cannot even begin. The previous speaker said it is loser takes all.

Budget 2013 suffers from the same terminal defect as Budget 2012 which is that it arose out of an illegitimate process, given that the majority of the legislature were shut out of the process.

In conclusion, my closing remark is that this budget deserves to be declared DOA – Dead On Arrival. I do not commend it to this House. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Scott: On a Point of Order. There is a news cast that is now circulated on *INEWS* about what I just said in my speech...

Mr. Speaker: I would like to see it.

Mr. Scott: ...and I would like to bring it to your attention. It is not exactly correct, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Maybe, it is because I have pronounced on them that I do not have it.

Mr. Scott: Do you not have it, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: No. I need to know what is being said. Read it out for me, please.

Mr. Scott: “MP Scott calls miners destroyers...”

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, may I be allowed...?

Mr. Speaker: Do you have the same text?

Mrs. Backer: Yes please.

“The Opposition, A Partner for National Unity Member of Parliament, Keith Scott, today launched an attack on miners and other operators in the mining sector accusing them of destroying Guyana and the lives of dwelling of Guyanese. During his presentation on Budget 2013 debate Scott claimed that miners continue to rape Guyana of...”

Mr. Speaker, that is a very... He never said that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, only about ten days ago I sought to have a gathering with members of the press so that we could have, from them, a better understanding of our role and our function. I would ask that the Member sent me a formal complaint. I would also ask the Clerk to provide me with the text of his presentation and we will take it from there, and we will move on. Members of the press, this is not Stabroek Market. You are not to come in here and twist the words of Members of Parliament to conjure up something you feel that will sell your news or your newspaper or bring more viewership to your television stations. We have to bring it to an end. I intend on this occasion, if what is stated there is not true, to take measures because we did discuss some of this at our last meeting. It is not appropriate; it cannot happen in any Parliament in the world and it is not going to happen here.

Mr. Ali: In a related incident, Mr. Speaker, I would like if you can reiterate the behaviour of persons sitting in the gallery because, as you were speaking just now, someone shouted out in a very aggressive way across this side of the table. I would wish if you can let members understand the responsibility they have.

Mr. Speaker: Members of the public are here as our guests, to observe, and it is not to participate audibly, to make comments, to engage Members. I will ask that any member whose voice we hear be asked to leave. Mr. Serjeant-at-Arms, please take note of any person who seems to be getting involved. You are to have that person removed from the public gallery, please.

Minister of Public Service Ministry [Dr. Westford]: I, as my colleagues before me, take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his able staff for working assiduously in the recent several weeks of the budget preparation exercise. I must contend that what we have before us is not a budget full of tricks, as the Hon. Member Mr. Carl Greenidge mentioned in his presentation, but, in terms of policies, plans and strategies, it has been well thought out and truly reflects the strategic plans for the year 2013 that is being designed to promote a common and shared vision for Guyana's future in close partnership with the private sector, civil society and development partners for sustain economic growth.

It is imperative that the Government, the private sector and all of our development partners work together to transform this economy into one which is globally competitive, more diversified and resilient to external shocks. To do so, we need to thoroughly examine the way we have been doing our business. We need to accept that today's challenges require a new set of solutions and strategies and be prepared to let go of old practices that no longer yield good results. We must find innovative solutions that are consistent with the changing environment. We must believe in ourselves and our people. We must believe in that Guyanese dream which we heard so much about in the two former speeches before.

Our challenge as a country is to focus on areas that will improve national productivity and accelerate growth of the economy. Of key importance on this transformation is the development of an education sector that allows for the formation of competitive and productive human resources. Such a strategy is necessary for transformation, diversification and the long-term growth of the economy. To achieve this, the Government has provided the necessary resources to create the optimal conditions in our various sectors.

The education sector, for instance, has benefited from massive infrastructural improvements over the years and this year's budget makes provision for additional improvements. Over the last ten years the Public Service Ministry has awarded scholarships to a total of three hundred and sixteen teachers to attend the University of Guyana and other overseas institutions in order to improve the quality of the education delivery human resource personnel. The Hon. Minister of Education will expand on this sector when she gives her speech. Also for us to improve productivity, a diligent workforce, drawn from a healthy population, remains an important factor. It is for this reason that Government continues to develop and improve health services throughout the length and breadth of this country.

In Budget 2013, increased funds have been allocated to maintain these services and to effectively operate the health sector. Again, the Public Service Ministry, over the last ten years, has trained two thousand four hundred and sixty-three health care professionals, such as medical doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, laboratory and x-ray technicians. This year more emphasis will be placed on training health care specialists in the fields of gynaecology, obstetrics, paediatrics, pathology, ophthalmology and the general service. Again, the Hon. Minister of Health will expand on this sector when he gets up to speak.

The agricultural sector has also been heavily financed over the years by this Government and this Budget 2013 has continued that trend to ensure that the sector fulfil its mandate of providing food security for our nation, creation of jobs and external revenue. To enhance the performance of this sector, the Public Service Ministry has also trained, over the last ten years, a total of two hundred and eighty-seven agricultural professionals and agricultural technicians, such as veterinary doctors, agronomist, marine biologist, agricultural scientist and agricultural technicians. This year, six persons will receive additional training in the planting and harvesting of non-traditional products, such as nutmeg, cinnamon and clove harvesting.

The housing and water sector has also recorded unparalleled development, as described by the Hon. Minister Ali during his speech. To facilitate the functioning of these sectors the Public Service Ministry trained several persons in water resource technology, well drilling and urban housing planning and surveying. Additional staff training is planned for this year.

Promoting regional and international trade is critical in the diversification of our economic base and enhancing our ability to transfer the economy to a high income status. Hence, in a drive to expand market access for our goods and services and implementation of trade arrangements with our partners, the Public Service Ministry provided and will continue to provide training in the fields of trade negotiations, market economics and diplomacy to current and specific employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade International Co-operation.

The current development of the e-Governance programme, which is within the National Information Communication Technology (ICT) policy, will provide a platform for effective and efficient provision of services, both locally and internationally. Already we have seen the emergence of several call centres and medical transcriptional businesses. We have also computerised some of our local businesses and will expand the reach this year. Again, having the appropriately qualified staff is vital for the success of the sector. To date the Public Service Ministry has trained five hundred and eighteen information technology professionals at various levels and will provide training for thirty more this year, both at local and foreign institutions.

Electrification and community development have also received a lot of attention by this Government over the years and for this reason in Budget 2013 we see allocation to the Guyana Power and Light. I dare say that I do not consider this being moneys thrown into a black hole.

The sums, which are being allocated, will benefit all of our persons, including us sitting in this House. We also saw an allocation of \$2.9 billion to Linden and I hope that is also not being deemed as moneys being thrown wastefully, because I know that our brothers and sisters in Linden are really interested and would like to have these moneys.

In the field of community development, we have also seen allocation for the construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, dormitories, health centres and facilities in all of our hinterland communities, even though we heard, a short while ago, of everything that was done in the region, so far, and is proposed to be done in Budget 2013, is inadequate. On that score of inadequacy, I do not know, but I have read several budgets from several other countries and I dare say that I do not think that there is any country which has ever produced a budget that holistically caters for every item of want of a country. A budget is based on a progressive plan for countries and that is why there are annual budgets to ensure that there is continuity. I know that this Government always plans our budgets and it is based on the continuity of services to our people.

Another key example of the fact that we are running an effective, responsive and representative Government, one that is alive to the challenges faced by the citizens of the State, is the old-age pension scheme for the aged. In this Budget 2013, Government has increased the old-age pension to \$12,500 monthly... **[Mrs. Backer: The top up.]** Yes, the top up... to all elderly persons in the country who are above the age of sixty-five. Also those persons will benefit from additional moneys, \$20,000 per annum to assist in their electricity bills. They also benefit from assistance with their water bills. We also saw increased allocations for gender empowerment. More in this sector will be said by the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security.

All of the above are complimented by the massive investment that this Government is also making in tourism. Almost one billion persons engaged in tourism annually around the world. Tourism has come to be recognised as an activity essential to the life of the nations because of its direct effect on the social, cultural, educational and economic sectors. We as a nation cannot but recognised this important area of the economy of our country which is blessed with some the most picturesque natural land scheme, including beautiful mountains, waterfalls, rivers and creeks. Against this backdrop, and in the light of the blessings of our topography, Government's goal is to make Guyana the most attractive destination for relaxation and holidaying in this region.

What this budget has done is to link governance with infrastructural developments and established a connection between education and human capital development, gender equality and women empowerment and tied all of those with the need for a healthy population. The modernisation of agriculture has also been connected to the massive push for industrial development.

For us to achieve the benefits and to solidify the gains which have been made it is necessary for an attitudinal change in our society. We must have an attitudinal change towards work, towards littering, littering as we heard Members on the opposite side muttering when the Minister was speaking about tourism - about the rubbish and the littering. Littering was not creating and is not caused by persons on this side. It is a problem that all of us must grapple with; that all of us must let persons in this country know that littering is an indictment on all of us as Guyanese. It is not an indictment to the people of the People Progressive Party/Civic.

This Government places high priority on the welfare of its labour force and it shall continue to support the workers in all ramification to contribute maximally to the growth and development of our public sector. The Hon. Member, Mr. Greenidge mentioned that the Government has not been paying attention to the strengthening of our human resource base. I mentioned a short while ago some of the category staff that the PPP/C Government has trained over the last ten years. Let me mention that never before has this country engaged in training with so many partners. Currently we enjoy partnership in training with a number of countries. We trained persons right home, here in Guyana, at the University of Guyana, at the Government Technical Institute, the Guyana School of Agriculture. We trained persons in Cuba, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, New Zealand, Australia, and University of the West Indies, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, India, Indonesia, China, Russia, Venezuela, Brazil, Canada, Denmark and Israel.

Between the years 1993 and 2012, this Government trained a total of two thousand four hundred and sixty-five persons at university level; it has also trained two thousand seven hundred and one persons at the technical level. Over the last ten years the human resource base has been strengthened with three thousand eight hundred and twenty-two persons, of that amount thirty-five left before the end of the fifth year and of that thirty-five, twelve were university graduates and twenty-three were graduates at the technical level. The great flight of skills that we are hearing about I am not seeing that from our database. We must understand that this skill flight,

which we keep harping on, is not a Guyanese phenomenon. Currently the World Bank is organising forums to deal with this issue in the developing world and Guyana has been attending such forums and will continue doing so.

Government has been also looking at ways and means, the Hon. Member also spoke about reducing the flight of our professionals, by which it can arrest some of the flight of some of its professionals.

7.17 p.m.

Right here in our 2013 Budget are measures. We have measures such as improvement in employment benefits.

I heard one of the speakers before me on the Opposition side; I think it was the Hon. Member, Mr. Scott, who spoke about there being nothing in the Budget for increased wages. I do not know where he got that information from, but I do know that moneys are in the Budget. Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge, I am not in a position to say how much increases we will get since those increases, the amounts, will be based on our negotiations with our trade union partners. Once again, may I say that even though the Hon. Member, Mr. Scott, said that multi-year agreements are not good and that they lock in the unions, I would like to differ because multi-year agreements are very good; they are predictable. When one locks in a multi-year agreement, he or she will know that over the next five or six years, he or she will have a predictable sum coming to the workers, irrespective of what the economic situation turns out to be.

It is a fact that over the years, this Administration has continually improved wages and salaries and has implemented various schemes aimed at economic relief for our human resources, especially at a time when around us we see some countries which were deemed developed countries retrenching workers and cutting salaries. We have never had to engage in such activities because of our prudent management of our economy.

Again, in this Budget, provision is made for income tax relief for our workers. Special housing facilities for our young professionals are also there, and improved working environment. This Administration shall continue to support any scheme that would improve the welfare of the entire workforce. We will continue to work with the trade unions to ensure that staff are accorded

maximum available employment benefits. Training and retraining of the workforce shall also be accorded a high priority which is geared at creating a conducive environment for the provision of effective, efficient service to the populace.

This 2013 Budget seeks to sustain sound macro-economic growth and will translate to achieving socio-economic transformation and gainful employment for our people. But we can only progress in this course and turn our possibilities into reality when we diligently adhere to the implementation of well thought-out and articulated developmental policies.

This Budget, as a whole, has taken the welfare of Guyanese as top priority. In an environment of global uncertainties and domestic challenges, the strong support of our people is invaluable for us to achieve our set developmental goals.

As we collectively resolve to create a brighter and enduring future for all Guyanese, a future of hope and prosperity, not lack, fear or hatred, we must prepare to overcome any adversity that may arise. Accordingly, we must all be determined and committed to follow through with the difficult but balanced choices that we make in piloting the affairs of this nation. We have to stop pulling our country down into the abyss. We have to carry our own torches because no one will carry them for us.

I encourage us to dialogue openly, frankly and in good faith over the challenges that face us as a nation. It is my hope that this new dispensation will not continue to cloud our judgement as we deliberate over issues that can make or break our nation.

We spend too much of our precious time quibbling over issues that will not bring benefits to our people, the people who have put us all here. We refer to ourselves as leaders in this honourable House so let us conduct ourselves and our business as such. Let us leave a legacy of meaningful engagement for our future leaders, our young people, to follow.

In closing, we have lots of challenges to overcome, but we can only surmount them if we do it together. What we need is more productive collaboration to the benefit of all our people. Should we fail, history would judge us harshly. Let us move this country of ours forward, together as one people and one nation aspiring to achieve one destiny.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I suggest that we take the suspension now for half of an hour rather than start a presentation that will be cut after about five or seven minutes. We will suspend for half of an hour and will resume at 7.50 p.m. or thereabout.

Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 7.24 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.57 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. The Sitting is resumed. I now invite Hon. Member Dr. Gilbert to address the Assembly.

Rev. Dr. Gilbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to commend the Hon. Dr. Singh, the Minister of Finance, and his team for maintaining the tradition of what has become a common expectation of the Guyanese people, which is a carefully thought-out, responsive and visionary budget. I believe also that it would be prudent for me to also express gratitude and thanksgiving to God publicly for his help and his guidance over our nation. We are reminded in scripture that except the Lord builds the house, they that build labour in vain. While I do not believe that Dr. Singh and his team have not put in the work necessary, I believe that their efforts would have been in vain as well if it had not been for the help of the Almighty God. So, I must say thanks as well.

Today, we begin, again, in this National Assembly, our annual Budget battle. I do believe and expect that it is going to be a battle. It is going to be a battle of ideas, a battle of points of views, and a battle of facts and fiction. I will like to quickly share my expectations for the benefit of those who may be interested in what they might be: I expect that we, on this side, will present and re-present the facts and evidence to support what we are confident of, and that is that this Budget, as presented by the Minister, is a pro-poor, pro-working class, pro-youth, pro-development, pro-Guyanese Budget. I expect that the Members on the opposite side of this Assembly will vociferously object and will seek to counter the arguments that will be advanced in the hope of convincing themselves and the nation at large that something is terribly wrong with this Budget, but that is fine. It is okay because I understand the nature of our politics as a nation. People expect the Opposition to do exactly that. They expect the Opposition to hold the

Government accountable. They expect the Opposition to *rake the Government over the coals* and to *hold their feet to the fire*. People, and that includes us on this side, also expect the Opposition to be reasonable and responsible. People expect the Opposition to know when political posturing should end and when working in the national interest should begin.

I would like to ask also that you forgive my presumption, but I do not believe that the consideration of the National Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure is an occasion for politicking. This activity that we engage in every year – and this is my sixth Budget, I believe – is a deliberate determination of the destiny of our people. This is literally a life and death deliberation. There is no accommodation for political posturing or pontification on matters that have to do with people's lives. So, this is why I am so optimistic in my expectations. I am confident that our colleagues in the Opposition will, in the interest of continued national development, give their wholehearted support to the passage of this National Budget; I am very optimistic about that.

I am also optimistic because of what we have as the antecedents to this Budget. This Budget of 2013 comes on the shoulders of previous budgets which have laid the foundation for the consistent and sustained growth and development that we have experienced as a nation. When we, on this side of the House, talk about growth and development, it always sounds as though we are attempting to blow our own horn. It is improper, but it is also necessary.

There is the culture also in our country for the purpose of political posturing and to make political points that sometimes we deliberately ignore the strides that we have made, undervalue the developments that we have accomplished as a nation in order to make a political point, and that can be harmful to our country.

We have heard, consistently, calls being made for the Government to be responsive to not just the local, but the international climate and create the kind of legal and political environment to attract foreign direct investments. On one hand, that call can be made and Government can be responsive to that, and has been responsive to that, but one has to be careful that in the attempt to make a political point that a country is not growing, that we can, in effect, create a sense of panic and fear in the minds of the international community regarding Guyana's viability as an investment destination. So, even in our politicking, we can harm ourselves.

When we speak of economic development, it is important also to hear, and the Hon. Minister Irfaan Ali, in his presentation, alluded, in a very detailed way, to some of the expressions by external sources and individuals regarding Guyana's current economic health. I would want to just allude, briefly, to maybe one or two. I will go back to 2007, not in an attempt to regurgitate, but simply to establish the premise of what I am saying. In an online report by USAID on an assessment of Guyana's economic performance, in 2007, it shows that Guyana has had increased growth rates which were anticipated to be sustained in the ensuing years, 2007, 2008, going forward. The report stated, and that is in 2007, that in order to raise the standard of living and to reduce poverty, this new growth momentum must be sustained and even accelerated. This was the pronouncement made in 2007. I put emphasis on the word "accelerate".

Just a few days ago, an article appeared on the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book, reporting that Guyana's economic profile for 2013... It states:

"Guyana has experienced positive growth almost every year over the past decade."

This recognition, in 2007, of the need to sustain and even accelerate our developmental and growth momentum is the very theme of this year's Budget, which is, *Overcoming Challenges Together and Accelerating Gains for Guyana*.

We are committed to the acceleration of Guyana's development as is evidenced by the many significant and welcomed provisions outlined in this Budget. We desire that our development, as a nation, not necessarily be the end product of a PPP/C Government. Rather, it is our desire that our development be as a result or rather be the glorious manifestation of the dedication, service and faithful cooperation of Guyanese, particularly those of us who share this hallowed Chamber. In essence, to quote the words of Henry Ford, "If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself." Jesus said it another way. He said, "A House divided against itself shall not stand." The essence, therefore, is that we have a stake collectively in the development of our country. I believe the sooner we recognise that what holds us together is greater and stronger than what divides us, we would carve for ourselves and our generation a path which, when many of us in this House would have gone on, the wellbeing of our nation would be secured.

The Sittings and their outcomes of the past year in this august Assembly have been painful reminders to all of us that nothing fruitful and beneficial to this nation would be accomplished unless we work together. I believe I speak for all Guyanese when I say that the pettiness must end; we must grow up and do the nation's business. I am not suggesting that we should not fight. I am not suggesting that we not put our life, spirit and energy into our debates.

Those of us who stand in this House, I believe, are here because the people have reposed in us a confidence, not necessarily because we are skilled debaters, or that we are the most eloquent amongst our peers, but because, in some way, I believe, they believe that we, from our various backgrounds of socialisation and experiences, will represent them well in this House. I do expect our debates would have spirit, but, at the end of the day, they must always be guided by what is in the interest of the nation.

The records do speak for themselves with respect to the robustness of our economy, a testimony to the adroitness of the fiscal management by this administration, whether it is in the 4.8 per cent GDP growth; the 5 per cent growth in the rice industry; the 2.4 per cent growth in manufacturing output; the 5.3 per cent growth in non-traditional, agricultural production; the 14.8 per cent growth in the mining and quarrying industry; or the 12.5% growth in the value added in the bauxite industry. The evidence of growth and development is everywhere. I can almost hear persons saying, "Well, what does that have to do with the ordinary people? Those are a whole lot of numbers and figures." It may appear to be insignificant if one were to just look at these figures in isolation of the broader context, because development occurs within a certain context.

Development is a process; growth is a process. If we were to really understand what these figures really mean to the ordinary person, we must appreciate the context from which these figures are drawn. It is drawn from a context of where we came from. I do not have specific interest tonight in going back to where we have come from, except to say that if we were to examine our economy in the context of the global economy and all that has occurred over the past seven to ten years, one has to appreciate that it is not by accident that our economy was preserved from the impact of the global financial contagion that affected the world, when economies that were strong tottered at the edge of collapse. It is not by accident that our economy was insulated. These numbers, therefore, tell a story. If we were to appreciate the broader context in which our country has come or from whence our country came, what we, as a nation, have inherited.

These are not conjectures; they are facts. It is a fact that more Guyanese have become homeowners in the past six years than at other times in the history of our nation. More young people have access to loans, educational and developmental opportunities. More young people are owning their own vehicles. I recall in the early 1970s, as a young boy, the community in which I lived with my grandmother, there were two persons who owned motors vehicles. It was a man who was an overseer with the Ministry of Works, I believe it was, and another gentleman who was a pharmacist or something like that. He owned the drugstore in the community. Those were the only two cars I remember as a young boy. It took hours for you to see a car passing through the community. In fact, back then, as a little boy, you did not necessarily see a lot of young people driving cars.

One understands, therefore, the process of development. We must, as a nation, be appreciative for where we have come from as a nation.

It is a fact also that the National Health Care Programme, over the past six years, is the best it has ever been in the history of our country. It is a fact that we have more qualified and competent doctors than we have had, and many of them are Guyanese. This Government has continued to invest both in human and the infrastructural development of the health sector. With the speciality hospital in sight, I think the best is yet to come.

It is also a fact that the needs of the elderly as well as women and children have never been more central and critical on the national agenda like it is over the past years of this Administration. I believe that is a fact.

We recognise the fundamental role of the family and the value of strong, stable families in a nation's development. It is for this reason that the National Commission for the Family, under the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, has been reconfigured and resuscitated. This Commission has aggressively pursued interventions for the support and relief of families, particularly vulnerable families.

We have begun nationwide campaign of conducting parenting workshops in several communities. Thus far, the testimonies have been very heartening. The Family Commission has also been working on building strategic alliances to engage men and boys with the intent of producing sustained behavioural change. The establishment and the work of the Men's Affair

Bureau is another effort to arrest the epidemic of male underachievement and underperformance in our society. More of our boys are not completing. These are things that I believe Government strategic, deliberate, interventions are being brought to address and to arrest - these issues.

Over the past year, there have been several collaborative initiatives geared at involving and empowering men to play a greater role in parenting, and the child rearing and child caring process. There should be no doubt, therefore, that the *raison d'être* of these interventions is the holistic development of the Guyanese people and the Guyanese nation as a whole.

We continue to hear about the importance of job creation and the blame is laid at the Government's feet regarding not creating jobs. I am not an economist and I would not attempt to speak on issues that I am unfamiliar with. In my sojourn through the University of Guyana, I did do a course in economics. I recall, I think it was Mr. Norton who was the lecturer at the time, talking about the shift from a big government to governance and identifying, in that particular lecture – I think there was a paper that was also published on that – that the new and emerging role of Government is that of service creation, creating a political and legal environment to attract foreign direct investment, not necessarily engaging in the creation of jobs, but creating the environment in which the private sector can indeed function as the engine of growth and to create the legal and political environment to attract foreign direct investments.

One has to, therefore, appreciate that there is a function in which Government can create the environment, but the other corporate responsibilities that must be consummated by those who have the means and those who have the responsibility to ensure that a nation grows... There is such a thing as corporate responsibility and the private sector, I believe, knows that very well.

I am confident that the subject Minister for education will enlighten us, when she speaks, on the tremendous work being done in her sector, but permit me, Sir, to point out, just briefly, the findings of a simple analysis which I did on education. It is not an academic analysis; it is just a simple pulling together of some figures. The Federal Government of the United States of America allocates for education and the delivery of educational service 9 per cent of the Federal Budget. It might be constructive to note that that is in comparison to 55 per cent that it spends on defence. Nine per cent is spent on education and 55 per cent on defence. Canada allocates 12.7

per cent of its Budget on education. Jamaica spends just about 11.4 per cent. Trinidad and Tobago spends about 15 per cent on education.

8.20 p.m.

In 2013, the Government of Guyana allocates almost 14 per cent of its National Budget to educational development. In fact, I believe that this is the largest sector allocation, if my memory serves me right, made in this Budget. I believe that we would all agree, Sir, that the surest way to end poverty is to invest in a nation's education. So, the focus and the priorities of this Budget is on sustaining and accelerating the gains for all of Guyana and its people.

The question, therefore, which begs to be answered, as I conclude, is: what is at stake? We have been presented, in this National Assembly, with a financial roadmap; that is what the Budget is. There were interventions made earlier in the evening, addressing what I believe to be administrative and procedural matters regarding what the Government should and should not do. I rather suspect, Sir, that those things cannot be addressed in the context of a national budget. Again, forgive my ignorance if that is inaccurate, but that is my own humble submission.

This Budget is a roadmap that the Minister and his team have presented that will navigate our country towards achieving its optimum potential over the next year. It is a roadmap which will create greater personal development and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people in Guyana.

Our friends on the other side of this House have developed quite a proclivity for cutting things. I would like to caution that if the intent is to cut a limb from a tree, hoping that it will fall on their neighbour's head, it would be wise to ensure that they are not sitting on the limb they intend to cut. In essence, cutting the Budget will not just affect 32 persons in this House; it will affect the entire nation. That is what is at stake.

As I said when I began, I am hopeful and I am optimistic that when this process is completed, we would have gone at each other in the most aggressive of ways but the end result would be that the Guyanese people and their best interests are served, that Budget 2013 is passed with the full support of all parties in this House and together we accelerate the gains for Guyana.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present my analysis of the Budget speech, Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure for financial year 2013, under the theme, “*Overcoming Challenges together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana,*” presented by the Minister of Finance, Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh. My presentation will focus primarily on the health sector which falls under Sectoral Developments and the Agenda for 2013.

Mr. Speaker, Guyana, over the years, since gaining independence status some 46 years ago, still encounters major challenges in all spheres. As it relates to health, our people, more so the underprivileged, elderly and vulnerable groups, continue to experience challenges. Article 24 of Guyana’s Constitution clearly states:

“Every citizen has the right to free medical attention and also to social care in case of old age and disability.”

Mr. Speaker, I know there are those who would agree with me and those who would not. Guyana continues to struggle among CARICOM countries to rise from just above Haiti. Our country does not have the accountability framework to make all our achievements sustainable. When it has not been the legitimacy to enforce regulations, it has been the majoritarian arrogance in not recognising that accountability relies on impartial and unbiased enforcement of all rules and regulations.

On Monday, 25th March, 2013, we all sat in this honourable House to hear the Hon. Minister, in his usual rhetorical manner, outline what the economy is likely to achieve within the fiscal year. There is not one single determinant in these Estimates of Expenditure, under the health sector, which can convince me that in the year 2013, Guyanese who are reliant on the public health care systems will have access to the quality of professional health care that their tax dollars should afford them. I am disappointed in the manner in which the Budget speech was crafted. For me, it lacks specificity and relevance in health needs for all Guyanese.

The National Health Sector Strategy (NHSS) has indicated that there are four goals of sector development:

1. Equity in distribution of health knowledge, opportunities and services;
2. Consumer-oriented services: people focused and user friendly;

3. High quality services and good value for money; and
4. Accountable providers and government.

To achieve these broad sector goals, the NHSS 2008-2012 focused on achieving strong organisations and built-in incentives to drive change. The Sector Strategy is divided into five main components. I will just, for the sake of time, list them. These are:

1. Decentralization of health services providers;
2. Strengthening the skilled workforce and Human Resource systems;
3. Strengthening government capacity for sector leadership and regulations;
4. Strengthening sector financing and performance management systems; and
5. Strengthening strategic information.

I would like the Minister of Health to say to this nation what the successes and shortfalls in achieving those objectives as outlined in the NHSS are.

I have reviewed the 2010, 2011 and 2012 Budget presentations and compared them with the Budget presentation of 2013. What I found most amusing is that there have been no significant changes regarding the contents of those presentations, except to say that there have been significant increases in figures. The Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, alluded that Government remains committed to ensuring our citizens have access to high quality healthcare services and, in 2012, some \$17 billion was expended.

What is of concern to me is that the Government continues to boast of improved facilities within the Health Sector. However, the National Health Sector Strategy for 2008-2012 has been exhausted, yet none has been tabled in the National Assembly. This should have been given urgency since it was common knowledge that the life of the document was soon ending. However, we are to take a close examination of the improvements of this sector under discussion. One can see that year come and year pass, there is absolutely nothing significant to boast about since billions are given to infrastructure while our citizens continue to receive unprofessional service and treatment at the hospitals. They are forced to wait long hours before

they are seen by a medical practitioner. There are the issues of unavailability or, in some cases, limited supply of pharmaceutical drugs, continuous deaths of potential mothers and, in some cases, their unborn.

Citizens are given expired drugs. As I am on this point, Sir, it was reported to me that on 18th March, 2013, a drug which was manufactured on 13th January, 2011 and expired on 1st January, 2013 was administered to a patient at the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH).

I have my own experience. In December, 2012, I, personally, visited the Georgetown Public Hospital (GPH) when my grandmother took in that Sunday afternoon. I had to wait long hours. We got there at a quarter to three and she was admitted at a quarter to two on the Monday morning. She eventually succumbed. I just used my personal experience to show how our people are suffering whenever they visit the Public Hospital. The big question here is: are Guyanese truly getting value of service at these public health institutions when they contribute tremendously to our tax system? My answer is a simple no.

Examination of Estimates

Mr. Speaker, an examination and assessment of the Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal years 2012 and 2013 was done. It was established that in 2011, \$150 million as grants was budgeted for preparatory studies and designs of a 150-bed specialty hospital. It was reported in the Hon. Members' Budget speech of 2012, that in 2011:

“Furthermore, \$29 million was expended towards land preparation works for the construction of a new state-of-the-art specialty hospital.”

Mr. Speaker, I have before me the relevant facts to show that, to date, works have not commenced on that proposed site.

For fiscal year 2012, the sum of \$672.540 million was allocated for designs, construction and equipping of the 150-bed specialty hospital. In 2013, the Hon. Member, in his Budget presentation, stated that a total sum of \$1 billion was spent to expand, upgrade and maintain the infrastructural facilities of the sector, including funding a mobilisation payment for the state-of-the-art specialty surgical hospital at Liliendaal which will afford Guyanese the opportunity to

access specialised health care services; upgrade of the National Psychiatric Hospital and Georgetown School of Nursing; and construction of the Port Mourant Health Centre.

As I said before, \$1 billion was spent to expand works at the National Psychiatric Hospital. When we look out of the windows from this National Assembly, we would see mentally-challenged women and men roaming our streets. Our citizens have been attacked by these people and yet this Government keeps reporting that upgrade works were done at the National Psychiatric Hospital, and, to date, many of our mentally challenged people are left to roam the streets. What exactly is this Government saying to the people in this country? In which other area has the money gone?

I made reference to the specialty hospital. This is what the Hon. Minister of Health reported after an article was carried in the *Stabroek News* newspaper, dated 8th January, 2013, under the caption, “Hive of activity at specialty hospital site”. This is what the Minister said:

“Government is responsible for preparing the site before the building of the US\$18,180,000 (\$3,689,616,400) specialty hospital. Contracts worth \$98 million were awarded to G Bovell Construction Company back in January of last year to begin preparatory work. The duration given for the completion of the site preparation works was slated as three months.”

This is what the Hon. Minister of Health reported after the article was made public:

“Pre-construction work begins on the state-of-the-art specialty hospital.”

This was carried in *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 14th July.

“The land preparation process for construction of the multimillion specialty hospital at Liliendaal, East Coast Demerara has begun...”

These are the words which came out of the Hon. Minister’s mouth.

“...and works are moving apace, despite negative talks by some sections of society.”

But let me remind the Hon. Member that in his Budget speech last year when my Hon. Colleague, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, presented evidence to this House about the proposed site being more or less infested with grass. This is what the Minister of Health said:

“As of 15th March, it was reported that even before those pictures were taken, the Hon. Member, Mr. Nagamootoo, was bantering about some 10 per cent of the preparation of the site had been done. This preparation included the construction of fences, the digging and construction of drains, internal and external sturdy bridges, and so on and so forth.”

I would like to inform, through you, Mr. Speaker, that it is not becoming to impart misinformation on the nation, using this forum without knowing or unwillingly make oneself knowledge of the facts that, of course, those pictures are misrepresentations of.

I have news for you, Hon. Member, because, as of the week of 25th March, 2013, this is what the proposed site looks like.

[Ms. Ferguson displayed pictures of proposed site.]

There is a set of sand; there is a dragline. They talk about sturdy bridges being built. There is no evidence of bridges being built. They talk about drains being dug. There is nothing of that sort.

Mr. Speaker, this is taxpayers' money, people's hard earned moneys, deducted from their salaries, that are being used and this Minister would have made it public... **[Mr. G. Persaud: Hon. Minister.]** ...Hon. Minister. Thank you for correcting me.

Mr. Speaker, in the very article in 14th January newspaper, this is what the Hon. Minister of Health said:

“A \$97 million contract has been awarded to G. Bovell Construction Company Limited to drain, grade, and fill the land, construct a fence, bridges, gates, culverts and access roads and install utilities.”

Some \$97 million of taxpayers' money was utilised, according to the Minister.

This question must be answered: what was the \$97 million used for when, according to the Minister, these works were done based on the moneys awarded to G. Bovell Construction Company?

Mr. Speaker, I am eager to see what the responses would be like since these moneys are debited from the citizens' salaries and credited to the tax system. Anticipating that answers will be given, permit me to remind and inform Members of this National Assembly of the following. Well, I already showed the pictures of what the site looks like.

I am weary of how the people's money is being utilised. Therefore, I am calling on the Minister responsible to explain to this National Assembly why works have not commenced and what has become of the sums allocated in the last fiscal year's Budget.

Mr. Speaker, the President, in his Address to this National Assembly on the 10th February, 2012, said:

“Already we are investing in a new and modern hospital in Guyana. This will give us the ability to deliver certain services at a fraction of what it will cost elsewhere in the region and further afield. We hope to have this modern facility within the next five years. With these few words said in a positive tone, we can only hope that this is realised.”

From all angles, in my own judgment, another election will come and this project may still be an embryo.

What is even more surprising is that in the Auditor General's Report for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2011, no mention was made of the works to which I alluded earlier. As a legislative body, the onus is on us to ensure that systems, as per law, are enforced.

Regarding works at the Georgetown School of Nursing, it has been reported that works commenced sometime in the latter quarter of 2012 on the building. Hon. Members, I have news for you. What was brought to my attention... The existing building in East Street, Georgetown is a structure that is being added. This started sometime in the latter part of 2012 when we approved allocation to the tune of \$25 million. The work commenced in the latter part of the quarter in last year.

Mr. Speaker, what is interesting to note is that in the Estimates of Expenditure for the fiscal year 2012, the sum of \$25 million was budgeted and approved by this National Assembly for the following: payment of retention and rehabilitation of Georgetown School of Nursing to be done as per project reference 197. In contrast, for the current fiscal year, it has been recognised that the sum of \$25 million has been budgeted for allocation in order to effect the following. Remember, last year it was to pay retention fees, do rehabilitation works at the Georgetown School of Nursing.

In this year's Budget, there is another \$25 million to pay retention fees, extend the Nursing School at East Street, and rehabilitate the annexe at Kingston.

Therefore, the sum of \$25 million is being sought in fiscal year 2013 to defray expenditure in these three areas, while, on the other hand, the same amount was sought and approved, as alluded to earlier, in 2012. To reinforce my argument, this sum was for retention fee and rehabilitation work at the Georgetown School of Nursing.

In reviewing Capital Expenditure for fiscal year 2011, the sum of \$900 million was budgeted to procure generators for the Georgetown School of Nursing School, New Amsterdam and Linden. My investigations have revealed that this item - I can only account for the Georgetown School of Nursing - was never procured and installed at the Georgetown School of Nursing. The National Assembly should call on the relevant Ministers to state why the generator has not been installed as approved. Were generators purchased for the other areas? If not, what has become of the funds?

The Hon. Minister of Finance has reported that Government proposes to invest \$369 million for human resources development. This has been a projection of 4.6 per cent in reduction for training, as compared to the amount budgeted in 2012 which was \$387 million. Emphasis must be placed on training and development of our people within the health sector since Guyanese' expectations are that...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. You may have an extension of five minutes to conclude.

Mrs. Backer: I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Question put, and agreed to.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My other colleague, Dr. Norton, is going to cover what I missed.

In a letter carried in the 21st March edition of the *Kaieteur News* captioned “Wakenaam residents are receiving primitive treatment”, this is what the writer had to say:

“The Hospital has no proper equipment to provide health services. Many times patients are referred to West Demerara Regional Hospital, which has proven to be very costly, risky and fatiguing, notwithstanding the fact that no electricity is also a reason for such referrals.”

8.50 p.m.

As I said earlier, the budget presented under the Health sector is more or less a budget that deals with infrastructure works. I do not know how the Government sits and puts the budget together. Apparently, they do not take into account the other needs. Apart from buildings people want to ensure that whenever they turn up at public health institutions they must be treated properly.

In another article, *Three-year old heart patient - ‘a survivor’*, this is what is mom had to say, it was carried in *Kaieteur news* dated 21st March:

“Nonetheless Farada’s family was devastated, his surgery could not be facilitated here in Guyana, he needed to go to India. This is where the Three Rivers Kids Foundation, a Canadian based kids’ charity foundation, came into play”.

From what I gather here apparently, and I can be corrected, this Government did not contribute or stand the necessary expense to help three-year old Farada Ali.

In concluding, the only way Guyana can overcome challenges and have its gains accelerated is that political players should put aside partisan politics and work together towards the development of Guyana in order to improve the lives of its citizens. Government must embark on ensuring that goals set out in the Millennium Development Strategy are achieved by 2015. However within the health sector emphasis should be placed on goals 4 to 6 since the health sector continues to face challenges. In my opinion infrastructure should not negate the need for

adequate human resources to achieve given objectives. Therefore I am challenging the Government to ensure that focus should not only be placed on training but retention of suitably qualified staff. And that is a big thing in the health sector. The nurses are calling for better remuneration and incentives.

For Guyanese to enjoy a good life the APNU had outlined a number of measures towards the enhancement of the health sector. However, we continue to place on record that there is urgency to strengthen the delivery of primary health care services in general, more particularly to meet the needs of remote communities including environmental surveillance. The APNU would welcome the following: strengthening the procurement practices utilising objective scientific tools; increased oversight on the sufficiency and quality of the consumables; encourage the use of private medical insurance by providing tax rebates for medical care. I, therefore, challenge the Government to consider these measures since they will work in the interest of Guyanese especially those contributing to the tax system.

I rest my case. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Members we have two speeches to go, Dr. Persaud and Mr. Seeraj. Before you speak Dr. Persaud, Ms. Ferguson raised a series of probing questions and I do not consider them to be rhetorical questions and so I hope Minister, which I know you will provide the Members with answers to some of the questions. Only this afternoon I was reading about similar instances in the national assembly Of Ghana where last week that Assembly took a very dim view to moneys being voted not accounted for and sought again on successive occasions. I would expect that the Member's questions be not treated as rhetorical, but will be answered.

Dr. V. Persaud: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I am sure the Minister of Health will give detailed explanations as to the questions asked by the Hon. Member.

I rise to applaud and support a budget which caters to Guyanese of every strata in a holistic manner. Budget 2013 presented under the theme *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains For Guyana* espouses its theme through the provision of benefits and support starting from the family unit and weaving its way through the communities and country. It has responded to the changing dynamics of our society, the widening middle class, the increasing numbers of

young professionals, the accelerated expansion of communities through the highly successful housing drive, and works towards alleviating the burdens of the poor. Young people, working people, professionals, right across Guyana have been given the incentive to own their own homes through the innovative tax deductible scheme towards mortgages and the removal of property tax for homes below 40 million. They have been given the incentive to develop skills in information communication technology, a rapidly expanding sector. They have been given the incentive to have access to the world of information and the opportunities beyond the confines of Guyana through ownership of laptops and internet access. They have been given the incentive to recognise their inherent potential through the sound development of educational strategies, facilities and infrastructure, and not to mention the encouragement of microenterprise and business property ownership. This budget does not discriminate. It is a budget for all; it encourages every Guyanese not to simply dream big but to make that dream a reality, to live in a Guyana that is equipped to face the future. To slyly or unequivocally denounce this budget and the development which has ensured under this Government is to be like the emperor who paraded naked because he was ashamed to express what was.

Mr. Speaker, like all of you Honourable parliamentarians in this August Assembly, I came here to be an integral part of a productive process and a discussion which yields benefit to every Guyanese and hastens the progress of Guyana. I am confident that my colleagues on the other side of the House will approach this budget of the PPP/Civic Government with maturity and reason, with the goal of empowering and providing for all Guyanese a commitment, my colleagues and I share on this side of the House. And not with the heavy power of a one seat majority which will be wielded to carve and hack away at the benefits and relief offered by Budget 2013. To approach this debate with that mindset clouded with political partisanship, personal issues and agendas, is tantamount to impeding growth and starving the Nation; starving the nation's children, abandoning its people – some say to a black hole over there; that is what I was hearing – and neglecting our sugar workers. Black hole? What are we saying? I am certain that none of us want this Budget of 2013 to be a repeat of 2012 when cuts were made acrimoniously with little regard to the long term and far reaching impact that it has on lives of young people, women, children, the elderly, the indigenous people, every Guyanese. Because of those cuts programmes and projects were halted, people suffered. We are parliamentarians, yes, but we should be humanitarians first. We should be nationalistic. The welfare of our people must

be foremost in our mind. I know it is in my mind. Guyanese look at us and ask us when we meet here in this National Assembly, yes, at their expense. We talk about concerns for taxpayers' money. Have we shown any when we slash and negate bills and moneys because we want to illustrate that we can simply do so? Have we? We only do that and return again, we have our Ministers return again with supplementary and at that point we may condescendingly grant or not more sittings more taxpayers money. Do you really care about the tax payers? They are bearing the brunt of all of these sittings when we come back again and again; food is provided. And yet we say we care about taxpayers money.

The Budget and the Bills Government produce you say are fundamentally flawed because you see it as ours and not yours, you see it as theirs and not ours. That is the cry, yet we bring the same things on our side, that side, and it is fine. Ah, the power of that one seat, the power of that one seat should be used for the citizens not as a bragging right as I hear emanating from you people on the other side. Let Budget 2013 usher in change, change of that pasture, not look for holes and grasp at straws to deconstruct a good budget as the Hon. Mr. Greenidge did in his rambling discourse on many things which I floundered to comprehend. Minister Ali enlightened us all on the foundation that that Hon. Gentleman laid in the 1900s. My learned friends, Hon. Members, let this year be a year of change in the manner in which we approach the budget and, in fact, all matters in this Parliament. Let us do what we came here to do, serve and work in the interest of the Guyanese people. This is what I am here to do. This is why this Government has presented a budget that touches many lives and provides relief to so many. No one here will say the budget provides everything and answers every appeal or every request but we can all agree on – The Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Guyana (FITUG), the PSC agrees, I even saw Mr. Peter Ramsaroop agreeing and he was one of yours the other day – that it is a budget which has reached out and shown the Government's seriousness about reducing taxes, adding to the basket of the underprivileged and elderly. It shows the Government is conscious of the single parent who has to provide for her home and children; and knows that a young professional wants to own his or her own home and be unencumbered by tax, and none of us sitting here wants to pay higher electricity rates. I do not believe that for a second so do not say it. Let us be practical and be real and admit we can only spend what we have, prudent spending. The movement has been made by the Government each year to improve the living standards and cushion all Guyanese from the impact of the unpredictable global financial hardships which have caused

deficits in the growth of even developed countries, yet we in Guyana can speak of and project an increase in the domestic economy to 5.3 percent in 2013. This follows on the heels of real growth in 2012.

Hon. Member Mr. Greenidge I am sure you must be very happy to hear this. This tells you that there is progress, real progress. This year I will not quote anything from your 10 years because I want you to hear only the words growth, progress, new initiatives, housing for all, and opportunities for all. So I am not going to dwell on the dreary past and those words like deficit and failure; you know them well so let me stop.

The 2013 Budget, who can dismiss a budget like this? Please do not dismiss it like it you have been dismissing our sugar workers and sending them into a black abyss. This Budget has within its framework a reduction of personal income tax from 33½% to 30%. The tax payers who are taking home the collective sum of \$1.8 billion will not dismiss it, how can you? The young couple who wants to own a new home and were thinking of the huge mortgage they would encounter could own their own home now; not just any home. Why? Because now first time home owners who are holders of mortgage loans up to \$30 million granted to them by commercial banks or the building society will be permitted to deduct the interest they pay on such mortgages from the taxable income. None of the new homeowners will dismiss this; it is a saving. People who have homes below the value of \$40 million do not have to pay property tax; another saving. The Government feels the days of shacks are numbered. More and more Guyanese must own their own homes and not just dream of owning a home. From Crabwood Creek to the hinterland people are owning their own homes, beautiful homes. The housing sector has expended so much, \$3.1 billion caters for 5,000 more home owners. The turnkey initiative will cater for young professionals. They can own their own homes too and even gated homes. The future of all Guyanese is being catered for, and that too from the earliest age.

The education sector is the beneficiary of the largest allocation under this Budget. The Government is cognizant of the need to prepare young people from now to take the reign of the country in their hands with surety – with surety - that a solid foundation has been constructed. That is, if my Hon. Colleague Mr. Ramjattan who is so fond of wielding his scissors does not remove from their grasp any of the things they are entitled to through this Budget. From nursery to tertiary levels diverse needs have been addressed – new schools, new labs, continued school

feeding, uniform programmes, 500 more teachers, Information Communication Technology (ICT) laboratories. Not only will schools been upgraded but constructed in the hinterland to the coastland. The saying is equal access to education and not education if you are lucky or you had a godfather. All eyes will be on the University as 14 labs and science and technology faculties will be rehabilitated while full internet connectivity will be provided to all faculties and the library. University of Guyana (UG) students right across Guyana will benefit through \$50 million provided to allow access to online courses reducing cost of travel and other expenses incurred by having to move away from home. This is empowerment.

Education paves the way for empowerment and employment. We talk about providing employment. It pays the way to increase qualified and competent human resources. Youth are being encouraged to think beyond the traditional areas of employ but to utilise new avenues which crop up in each sector – sports, health and importantly to think about owning their own businesses with the measures offered in the budget. To counter unemployment young women and men and those who want to own their own business can be able to sustain those through the small business development fund at a cost of \$370 million. People are not going to be left to flounder. And these are not just figures I am conjuring up. However, they will be trained in business management, food handling, marketing, and Information Technology. This training will target 1,000 business owners. I believe that this Budget is all about real investment in people. This is encouraging people to work, create, develop, build, and see a future where they can earn and live comfortably and not look for handouts. In addition to all of this \$52 million has been provided to strengthen the central recruitment and manpower agency to ensure equal opportunity for all. Young people are challenged to become empowered and employed through the National Youth Empowerment and Apprenticeship Programmes. Young people are encouraged to pursue sports with equal fervor as their education with the over \$1 billion allocated to sports. We need more athletes, swimmers, cricketers, boxers. The development of countrywide sports centres and facilities and world class venues the track and Olympic swimming pool, ensures young athletes live their dreams of bringing home goals from the Olympics or becoming another Shivnarine Chanderpal. Budget 2013 empowers them to live that dream.

My friends on the other side, this Budget should not be scoffed at. Sure you may not agree with every aspect but be fair and acknowledge that it speaks to many issues, all strata and shows care to all.

Young women out there and single parents that benefitted from Women Of Worth (WOW) will continue to benefit under BIT Single Parent programme. Diverse community training programmes, private and public partnerships, especially through the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, will be able to provide women with training and the ability to set up cottage industries through public/private partnerships so their income could be sustained and they could have income generation for quite a while because we believe in empowering our women.

My good friend over there talked about injections and all those things. While I do not want to impinge on the turf of the Minister Health expiry dates are definitely not that short on injections. Also there are training programmes at the hospital, training/specialist programmes in emergency medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, surgery, just to name a few. And the wait time is long because there is a triad system; one is treated based on a need and not on a first come first come basis.

Health, water supply, electricity, sanitation, our homeless, our first people, our young women, professionals, working class, vulnerable, each of these groups benefit through the 2013 Budget.

Electricity is a sore point, is it not? We all cry out about rates yet we cut the subvention in the 2012 Budget and cried loudly that we care for people and we want them to spend less but in a louder voice we scream bailout for GPL and no more subvention. Mr. Nagamootoo flourishes his signature scissor-hand signal. Linden and Kwakwani alone will benefit from \$2.9 billion dollars.

All of GPL's customers and families will benefit from the 2013 Budget allocation. Cut away Messieurs, cut away. All of Guyana is waiting and watching. I was listening to the hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan speaking on television struggling to bash the 2013 Budget. Even there he needed help from the gentleman next to him to understand and make arguments against it. It was tough I imagine because Budget 2013 bolsters Guyanese people and enhances Guyana's infrastructure. Please do not wait tax payer's money by asking for supplementary for the same things you cut at budget time to prove magnanimous later on or refuse. Do not bring other's bills as your own because you have problems, personal issues with them. Shall I go on? If I was in the Opposition I too would have had the liberty to call for a large sum of everything under the sun but

Government has to act prudently and disburse moneys responsibly based on what the country can afford. We do not want to end up... okay, I promised not to say anything about that time. This Government leaves space for growth and building on foundations laid in previous budgets. The 2013 Budget is admirable.

I call on all the Honourable Members in this Parliament in 2013 to put our country first, put Guyanese first. Let us remove the taint of 2012 of being a Parliament which achieved more battles, more walkouts, spent too much on food and sittings, where the outcomes were decided long before the debate ensued; where hatchets and scissors were wielded willy-nilly. The Guyanese people expect more. Let us open our eyes and see what this Budget offers to all. The chance to save, to be sheltered, to be fed, to be well educated, to be empowered, and to live with dignity that in the past had been removed. My prayer is not for the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer to sit quietly while the Minister speaks – I think that will be a good prayer too – but for us to work together to overcome the challenges and refrain from negative shadows as we walk towards the horizon of accelerating gains which we all can enjoy. Budgets have come, budgets have gone, but Minister of Finance and my colleague I think you and your staff have created the dynamics for a refreshing and robust debate. While we have different perceptions, different points of view, while it should be robust, dynamic and vibrant, let this debate be guided by the best interest of the nation – free from rancor, free from divisiveness. Guyana is our pride. We are the people of Guyana. If we destroy our country, our homeland, then what is left for us to boast about? So let us make the 2013 Budget work for all. Acknowledge it; give it the commendation it deserves. Mr. Speaker I unhesitatingly support Budget 2013. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members we will now have Hon. Member Mr. Seeraj ending the debates for this evening.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Mr. Speaker. *[Shouts of radio]* Mr. Speaker, do I take it that I have until 10.00 p.m.?

Mr. Speaker: Please allow the Member to make his presentation.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, can I enquire how much time I have.

Mr. Speaker: You have 25 minutes and an additional five minutes if needed.

Mr. Seeraj: Is that per station or per all the stations.

Mr. Speaker: Touché; you may proceed. I was smiling because I was thinking about 99,102 but then that is too much. So it is 25 minutes and there are some extras if needed.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, I assure you I will not need more than that because Budget 2013 as presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh should see us winding up this debate within record time.

I want to join my other colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance and, of course, his staff who worked long beyond the call of duty in compiling this remarkable document. I doubt whether the Opposition, the joint Opposition, will have much substance, much foundation to stand on in terms of criticising and cutting. I also looked at the same television that my colleague mentioned. The only thing that stayed with me was the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan saying they are bringing a bigger budget so I am coming with a bigger scissors. Then Hon. Moses Nagamootoo saying we might not use the axe but we might use a knife this time. And Mr. Carl Greenidge, of course, talking about pension. I can see with the Hon. Gentleman, pension is, of course, close to all of our hearts and I think that is why we catered for a 25 percent increase in the pension for our old people.

We noted that based on the presentation by the Opposition chief spokesman on financial matters that indeed it lacks substance. There was a lot of rambling. For the want of a better word I can safely say that Mr. Carl Greenidge has agreed based on his presentation with most of what is contained in Budget 2013. There was some mention by the Honourable Member about VAT not having an impact on the poor. The Hon. Member quoted chowmein as being one of the items that attracts VAT. I sought to do some research on issues of VAT itself and what the Government had done to reduce the impact of VAT bearing in mind that VAT would have replaced I think 7 taxes among which was the consumption tax of 35 percent. I think it is 35 percent and not 30 percent. In recognising that there might be some impact on the poor the Government according to this list has zero rated more than 126 items including services of which essential food items are just about thirty-six. This is not chowmein, this is about real bread and butter, essential food items that comprise of wheat, bread, brown rice, white rice, cooking oil, baby formula, milk, fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, chickpeas, kidney beans, pigeon peas, black eye, barley flour, and I can go on and on. There are 36 or more of the items here. There are essential consumable items

locally produced – bed sheets, pillow cases, all the things that can be considered essential for livelihood as we know it. Also in the area of education there is a list that has no less than 30 items including text books, children’s story books, novels, dividers, compasses and all of the other accessories that go along with education; added to that there is electricity supply, machinery, equipment.

9.20 p.m.

In Agriculture there are 16 items listed here that are either zero-rated or exempted from VAT including fertilizer, pesticide, fungicide, vegetable seeds, ice for fishing, netting or twine for the fisher folk, fish hooks, machinery, equipment, components, hatching of eggs, animal medication, all-terrain vehicles and so on. I would, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, make a copy of this available to the Hon. Member, Mr. Carl Greenidge.

Of course, there are some items that are not captured under this list of items zero-rated or items that are exempted but suffice it to say that that has been a targeted response by the Government in the implementation of the Value Added Tax to ensure that its impact on the poor and the vulnerable will not be that harsh and the result, as we have seen it, budget after budget, has been continuous growth in all of the sectors and as my colleague, the Reverend, so eloquently put it, when one crafts a budget as a small developing country in the context of what is happening globally and one is able to achieve positive growth year after year when developed countries, number one economies of the world are either in the low, single digit or they are even making losses. Take, for example, as the Minister noted here, global growth is projected at 3.5%; we are projecting 5.3% for Guyana. They are talking about 1.4% in advanced economies and the Minister is even talking about a contraction in the Euro Zone, the United Kingdom, the growth rate is going to be in the zero point something percent so for Guyana to achieve a growth rate of 4.8% and to project a growth rate in 2013 of 5.3% against this global background is indeed, I would consider, remarkable. We as a country and the Minister of Finance need to be congratulated for providing the macroeconomic framework to ensure that our country and our people continue to benefit from prudent management of the economy itself.

Of particular note in our budget is also the emphasis being placed on Information and Communication Technology (ICT). We all know that even in the farming sector information and

communication technology are essential for agriculture, essential for fishing, essential for all aspects of learning and development. Indeed in some remote parts of India, for example, I have seen fishermen with the basic essentials for fishing gathering around the town square listening to a loud hailer and what was coming over that loud hailer was prediction about the weather and based on the weather prediction one has information about where fish are likely to be, what kind of fish would be moving and so on. This goes to show that even in remote areas what impact information and communication technology can have on the development of our people. Here in Guyana itself we are even talking about information and communication technology with technology transfer to our farmers and our farmer field school programme has been very successful with the use of information and communication technology. Indeed so successful has it been, especially in the rice sector, that we have seen year after year, for the past four years, this industry breaking records and I noticed that in his budget presentation the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh is targeting, I think, just over 440,000 tonnes of rice which will be a new record over the record of 2012 but I dare say, given the pace that we are going and the yields that we are recording currently, that that 440,000 tonnes we might very well surpass.

Along this line we have seen the Government of Guyana in 2012 allocate \$1.9 billion that went towards the development of ICT infrastructure, by and large, in the laying of 580 kilometers of the fiber optic cable. In 2013 provision is being made for \$2 billion to be spent to advance the work started in 2012 and also to construct what is called long term evolution advance towers so these will act as repeaters for the information and communication technology area.

Added to that, we all know about the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme in 2012. \$1.6 billion was spent to procure a total of 56,000 laptops and already 26,832 has been distributed and just over 18,000 persons have been trained. In 2013 \$2.5 billion is targeted to continue this programme and we looked in the Minister's presentation and we can see increases in critical areas of education, of health, housing, even allocation to the University of Guyana and water.

Here I want to speak briefly about the measures identified in the budget for the improvement of our water sector. We all know how critical this can be. I, based on personal experience, consider access to water even more crucial than that of energy and electricity having grown up in a home where this was foreign, that is electricity, but of course during those days one had to drag water

from half a kilometer away. Maybe that is why I am left a little bit stunted, dragging tonnes and tonnes of water over the course of my young days.

The Hon. Minister of Finance in his speech noted that the Government will continue to make significant investment in the water sector. Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) has a five-year strategic plan, 2012-2016, and over this period of time their main focus will be on reducing what is called 'nonrevenue water'. That is water that one does not get any revenue from, either through theft or through leaks or so on. That entity plans to bring down the nonrevenue water from 65% to 35%, to increase treated water coverage from the 49% that obtains currently, to increase access to potable water in the hinterland from 71% to 80%, the development of an integrated water resources management strategy, the improvement in energy efficiency, improvement of sewerage disposal efficiency, improvement of water quality and to increase the collection efficiency from 70% to more than 90%. Indeed what is need is just about \$32 billion over this five-year period and GWI has made remarkable progress in terms of getting their financials in place as much so that they have been able to lay their audited financial statement, current and up to date, to the Public Accounts Committee through, mostly, the implementation of the new Oracle Financial Software that has enhanced the integrity of the financial reporting system at GWI itself.

The investments that are required over the five-year period will be mostly in the area of water meter installation, pump station upgrades, drilling of new boreholes, rehabilitation of sewerage infrastructure, replacement and installation of transmission mains, distribution and mains replacement, construction of new water treatment plants over the course, as I said, which started in 2012 and to be concluded with the spending of just over \$32 billion in 2016.

The capital programme for 2013 will see a per capita investment of around \$15,000 per person. It is intended to have an impact on nearly 45,000 people who will benefit from the new service on the coast, Linden and hinterland communities. In excess of 170,000 persons will benefit from improved service in water quality and reliability. There will be the creation of 16,000 jobs and there will also be the demand for local and imported construction material; things like sand cement, timber, pipe, pipe fittings, couplings and all of that.

For the coastal programme, there is a budgeted allocation for \$1.1 billion and this will see a per capita investment of around \$16,000. For the outputs there is expected to be four new wells, 2,400 service connections upgrade, 15 kilometers of transmission and distribution mains installed, new service being available for in excess of 45,000 persons across the country. The impact will be on a 85,000 persons who will benefit from improved level of service, improvement in water quality, improvement in reliability or new services and 45,000 persons will be provided with new service.

The Linden programme has a budgeted allocation of \$107 million, local and \$812 million, specific. The per capita investment for this area will be in excess of \$30,000 per person. The outputs will be the upgrade of 1,500 service connections, continuation of construction of two new water treatment plants, installation of in excess of 30 kilometers of transmission and distribution mains, continuation of the nonrevenue water programme to reduce loss of water. Again, the impacts will be very positive; reduction of nonrevenue water, improvement in water quality improved level of service, improvement of system reliability, which is so important for our overall maintenance programme.

In the hinterland community there is a budgeted allocation of \$160 million which will see a per capita investment of just about \$10,600 per person. There will be an improvement or new service for an excess of 15,000 persons, water supply systems in four small town areas – Port Kaituma, Matthews Ridge, Mabaruma and Ituni; these areas will be significantly improved and it is targeted on reducing the dependency on surface water at Port Kaituma by use of medium depth boreholes or the supply of potable water; thereby reducing the risk of the population contracting any kind of disease that is related to contaminated water supply.

In Georgetown, the sanitation improvement programme is an allocation of \$600 million that will see the continuation of the rehabilitation of the sewage system in Georgetown. All of these measures and budgetary allocations will contribute significantly towards the overall wellbeing of our people and also will contribute significantly towards our gross domestic product.

In this area the local manufacturing sector will benefit because a lot of products will be sourced locally for use in the different areas. There will be the creation of 16,000 jobs, nearly 200,000 persons will benefit from these interventions in the improvement of levels of service, reliability

and water quality, itself. In the areas of infrastructure we will see the utilisation of materials – PVC pipes, the HDPE pipes and fittings and so on. The impact of the investment on the Guyanese economy will see the importation of over 7,000 sacks of cement and, again, local items like sand, stone, greenheart timber and pipes will be procured and thus give impetus to the economy, locally.

Similarly, in the housing area, the Minister of Finance has proposed in the budget, for the Ministry of Housing, an allocation for a number of key and critical sectors. In the area of infrastructural development and building there is a budgeted allocation of just about \$1.9 billion. Here again we will see a per capita investment of around \$54,000. The outputs will be 2,500 new lots developed, 1,430 existing lots serviced with upgraded roads and drains, 4,650 lots served with electricity, 15,574 kilometers of new roads constructed, 15,574 kilometers of transmission and distribution mains installed, 31,194 kilometers of roadside drains excavated. Again the impact will be on just about 10,476 persons who will benefit from the new lots that will be developed and there will also be 24,928 persons benefiting from the upgraded infrastructure.

In the second low income settlement programme there is a budgeted allocation of \$850 million. Again, one will have about 37,580 persons benefitting from improved infrastructure. 22,414 persons will be benefitting directly from four septic tank and home improvement subsidies and we are targeting also, in this area, young professionals; 100 police, teachers and nurses will have access to low cost homes. In the area right across the river, the Parfait Harmony Housing Scheme, which is a new housing scheme, there is currently being experienced some traffic congestion and having to go some distance and then coming back this way to come over the Demerara Harbour Bridge so in the budget we have put aside \$602 million which will see the construction of 5.2 kilometers of asphaltic concrete road constructed, creating a more direct link with this huge Parfait Harmony Housing Scheme so that will cut down on a lot of traveling time and the stress of people coming over to Georgetown.

About the East Coast/East Bank Highway, mention was made earlier about some congestion although not along the four-lane highway going up the East Bank; it goes way past the Demerara Harbour Bridge. I think that it ends just about Providence. We will see here a new link being created and the project is described as a major new highway that will link the two main corridors, that is the East Coast of Demerara with the East Bank of Demerara and there is a lot of

justification for this because a lot of traffic coming along the east bank is really targeting the East Coast but as it is now the existing infrastructure directs one to come into Georgetown itself and when one gets into Georgetown given the problem with traffic in these days, especially since we have seen the registration of over 10,000 vehicles within 11 months which give an indication of the amount of vehicles that are currently traversing our roadways. This new link will also increase the lifespan of our city roads since there will be a reduction of traffic that is targeting the East Coast and will not need to come through here. Approximately 15 kilometers of new road from Providence will be constructed to Ogle. This will comprise of two lanes of asphaltic concrete surface and there will be five connecting roads between the existing highway and the proposed highway. This will change the road network and the road landscape tremendously, as we see it. It is estimated to cost just about \$4.5 billion in the preliminary sense.

For the East Bank of Demerara development, the East Bank of Demerara development extends from Eccles to Great Diamond. It is more than 4,000 acres of cane lands for cane cultivation that are currently being transferred for residential, commercial and industrial development. So far more than \$15 billion has been extended towards the acquisition of this area and for the provision of infrastructure. To date, 144 kilometers of new road has been constructed, 121 kilometers of transmission and distribution mains have been installed and over 8,000 new lots developed. In 2013, \$2.1 billion is planned for the continued development of this area. Overall this sector will also contribute tremendously towards the gross domestic product and that is why Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, is so optimistic that we will achieve a growth rate in excess of 5% for the year 2013.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. You may have someone move...

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, may I wind up in 60 seconds?

Mr. Speaker: Okay, go ahead.

Question put, motion carried

Mr. Seeraj: I am just winding up, Mr. Speaker. Along with my other colleagues I want to take this opportunity in commending this remarkable document that is titled "Overcoming Challenges

Together Accelerating Gains for Guyana” for the overall approval of all Members of this Hon. House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, thank you all. That brings us to the end of our business for today and this evening so I invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move a motion for our adjournment.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I move the motion that the House be adjourned until tomorrow at 1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we stand adjourned until Wednesday, 3rd April, at 1.00 p.m. Thank you. Please be on time.

Assembly adjourned accordingly at 9.41 p.m.